



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

---

### Picturing A Special Future

June 21, 2009

Rev. Stephen G. Bringardner

~ Scripture: Genesis 27:28-29a ~

### INITIAL REMARKS

Happy Father's Day!

I love Father's and Mother's Day. It's an opportunity for children to turn around and bless their fathers & mothers. Not every home is perfect. Most are not. Most (all) of us come from dysfunctional families.

Recall cartoon on a t-shirt: It pictured a huge auditorium with a banner over the stage which read: "First International Congress of Functional Families". But only three people were present. ☺

We've been looking at "blessing" the last several weeks. By BLESSING:

- I mean giving our children a sense of being highly esteemed, highly valued.
- I mean giving one another (in our marriages, friendships, and relationships) genuine acceptance and unconditional love.
- I mean receiving from God His favor, His best, His approval. As we saw last week in the *Prayer of Jabez*, that includes taking back territory that was lost. . . increasing influence and responsibility. . . knowing God will always stay close and keep us under His protection.

Today we as children get to reverse the flow of blessing by honoring our fathers:

- Blessing them with a word of THANKS and a GIFT (e.g.: prepare their favorite meal).
- Maybe your father is no longer alive. So today has a touch of SADNESS; it is a day to GRIEVE, to REMEMBER.
- Maybe your father (and family) deprived you of the blessing. Maybe he belittled, put you down, neglected you. Perhaps he used his size and loudness to intimidate, to terrify—which made you feel like a mouse—helpless, useless, worthless. Today, may you take a step toward FORGIVENESS, toward LETTING GO of what might have been, or what ought to have been.

We all think we are "entitled" to a good childhood—and we are—but it doesn't always work out that way. There is nothing more powerful than a curse—except a more powerful blessing! And you have the possibility of the greatest blessing there is by being *in Christ* and being *part of His family*.

- ❖ By the way, that's why we're having a **STARTING POINT LUNCHEON next Sunday**. Come and get to know this family. Oh, we're a little odd, but so what? ☺ You'll find more love & acceptance in this family than you ever thought possible. People come to visit and check things out—and end up staying and really plugging in.

### SERMON

All of us want to pass along to our children more than we received. We want to pass along a legacy, a heritage. You know as well as I do that when we reach the end of the way, it's not going to be all the hours we spent doing whatever. . . or all the money we tried to earn. Oh, there may be lots of accomplishments well worth noting. But when you get to the end of your, what will be the finest thing you've ever done? What will your family & friends say as they're sitting around eating potato salad at your funeral luncheon? What legacy do you want to leave? Will it be:

- He was driven to achieve; in fact he was an overachiever. [Is that all?]
- He provided a big home for his family. . .put his kids through college. [That's admirable.]
- He was a good man. . .very upright morally. . .had a great view of life / sense of humor. [That's better.]
- He was a loving husband. [We're getting' warmer!]
- He was a good father—his children are doing well; they love their family and the Lord.

How do we get there? Matt has already taken us through two of the ELEMENTS OF BLESSING:

- 1) It begins with meaningful **touching**. Jesus took children into His arms. . .He hugged them. He touched people and they were healed.
- 2) It continues with a **spoken message** of high value. We all know the **power of words** to bless or hurt (curse).
- 3) Today I want to focus on one additional element of blessing: **picturing a special future**.

Remember Jacob? He's the one Isaac blessed back in Genesis. That's the passage that got us started on this whole quest for blessing. Isaac pictured a very special and specific future for Jacob. We read about it in **Genesis 27:28-29a**—

*<sup>28</sup>“May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine (grapes?). <sup>29</sup>May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother (your brothers) bow down to you.....”*

Keep in mind, in the Old Testament giving a blessing was a special occasion, a momentous event. It was not the everyday experience it is today. Also, because of Isaac's unique position as a patriarch (i.e.: a leader appointed by God and father of the nation of Israel), his words to Jacob carried the weight of Biblical prophecy.

As parents or loved ones today, we cannot predict another person's future with Biblical accuracy. We can, however, give them a push in the right direction. Picturing a special future for a child or a spouse or a friend can help bring out the best in their life. We are given that opportunity—as followers of Jesus Christ, as leaders, as parents, as agents of change in this world—to picture a special future to those within our sphere of intimacy / influence.

#### A. It's done in FORMAL ways.

For instance, in Orthodox Jewish homes, the wish for a special future for each child is a given. When parents take their children to the synagogue, the rabbi often says something like: *“May this little child grow to manhood. . .May he enter into the study of Torah, into the wedding canopy and into a life of good deeds.”*

We say something similar when we baptize a child. When one of us pastors asks you (the congregation): *“Do you accept the responsibility of assisting these parents in the fulfillment of the baptismal vows?”* Your response is: *“With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”* [I know it sounds “canned”, but we urge you to only speak it if you mean it.] In so speaking, you are picturing a special future for a particular child—that he/she will grow in the knowledge & love of God.

Of course, we have GRADUATION / CONFIRMATION / BIRTHDAYS / ANNIVERSARIES—other great opportunities to picture a special future for those under our care.

#### B. But you also picture a special future in a myriad of INFORMAL ways. . .in a million little daily interactions.

Let me start with the NEGATIVE. When we use put downs, negative humor, language that depicts what we DON'T want for our children (even if we are trying to motivate them to do better), we are picturing a future that may send a child in an entirely wrong direction. Listen to some examples (a bit extreme, but to get the point across):

- *“Look at you! Who’s going to want to date you? You’re a mess.”* A mom may be trying to motivate an overweight child to eat less, but wow...
- *“You’re not the sharpest knife in the drawer. I wouldn’t take advanced math; that’s for smart kids.”* A father may not mean it, maybe even trying to protect from failure, yet...
- *“You’d better hope you find someone who can take care of you when you’re older. You’re so irresponsible...”* May be said by a frustrated parent, but again...
- *“How could anyone dumb and ugly as you have such a good-looking child”* (so said a grandfather I knew). Just kidding, but oh the damage!

When kids (or anybody) hear words that highlight a personal inadequacy or predict a problem down the way, they’re receiving a “picture of a special future” alright—but one that sets them up to go down a negative or hurtful path. They are facing the future knowing and thinking they are dumb-ugly-unappealing. It can’t help but erode their self-confidence.

These negative pictures of the future tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. Maybe you heard one when you were younger. . .and stopped paying attention to appearance (*“cause the boys wouldn’t be interested anyway”*). Or, maybe you went to the other extreme, and became an overachiever (to counter-balance the negative message). Maybe now you’re a workaholic, driven by the need to be successful.

Whatever, here’s the bottom line: What you say about a current reality carries weight into the future. In other words, TODAY’S WORD IS TOMORROW’S REALITY!!!

So, let me ask you:      WHAT KIND OF FUTURE DO (DO YOU WANT) YOUR WORDS PICTURE?

Children are literalists. They take what we say at face value. We want to give them something to look forward to—a future that is hopeful (not bleak).

Here’s a word picture: Think of a *campfire* on a dark night. It can either draw you toward the light & warmth OR it can head you off into the dark unknown. Words are like that. *They can drive a person forward to fulfill his/her potential. They can illuminate a pathway lined with hope and purpose. Or they can head a person into a dark unknown.* [cf. Trent & Smalley, p. 104]

How about some POSITIVE affirmations like this:

- *“God has given you such a sensitive heart. I wouldn’t be surprised if you end up helping a great many people when you get older.”*
- *“You are such a good helper. When you grow up and get married, I just know you’re going to be a great help to your wife (or husband) and family.”*

DISCLAIMER: Picturing a special future shouldn’t go to the extreme of setting up unreachable goals or unrealistic expectations in which you can never please a parent or spouse.

On the other hand, your words of encouragement can help a child begin to work on a special talent. . .try out for an athletic team. . .run for a school office. . .even share his/her faith with other kids (i.e.: do things they didn’t think possible).

ILLUSTRATION> I remember my daughter (Kirsten) starting out in piano—which I was partial to—then switching to running. I threw the weight of my support behind her. She became one of PHS’s star runners. [BTW, she ran with Todd Snyder in high school.]

ILLUSTRATION> I remember in my own experience how my mother pictured a special future for me. When I took piano lessons, she said I was going to be the next LIBERACE (that dates me). ☺ When I indicated my desire and calling to move toward the ministry, she said I was going to be the next BILLY GRAHAM. She overdid it a little. But, she instilled a confidence in me:

- A drive, desire to excel (e.g.: I played a piano concerto and a solo recital in college, and have a great love for music to this day).
- Because she believed in me, I could have confidence to pursue my dreams.

If you want to picture a bright future for your children and loved ones (including your spouse), here’s what you have to do:

- 1) Be consistent. . .prove yourself reliable (not one way today, another tomorrow).
- 2) Build up a “past”—by honoring your commitments. That way your children will believe you when you speak of their futures.
- 3) Be predictable.

ILLUSTRATION> I read of a husband & wife who were constantly arguing. . .went in for counseling. . . counselor brought in the children (boy 11, girl 6). He asked, “What bothers you most about your parents’ arguing?” It wasn’t the loud voices or even what they said. It was that daddy every time he got mad would take off his wedding ring and throw it away—a “dramatic gesture” on the part of the husband. But for the little girl, every time he “threw away” his wed-ding ring, she saw her future with her parents (her greatest security!) go sailing right along with it.

Our children need safety, security, consistency. They need to see commitments honored; they need things to be predictable (as much as is humanly possible). We all do, don’t we?

It’s difficult for kids who have lost a parent due to divorce or death to feel blessed + secure + like there’s a great future out there. But you single parents can help correct this. And for those of you who are married, I can’t emphasize enough the importance of keeping your commitment to each other strong and intact. That’s one very good way of picturing a special future for your children.

Remember, in the middle of the fray, **today’s words are tomorrow’s reality!**