

An Unexpected Blessing:

Small Group Guide

Summary

This sermon from Genesis 48 explores how God is working even when we don't see it, focusing on Jacob's final days as he blesses Joseph's sons. Jacob, at 147 years old and near death, demonstrates what it means to have the right priorities at the end of life - focusing on blessing the next generation and pointing them toward God rather than worldly concerns. The passage shows how Joseph initially misunderstands his father's actions when Jacob crosses his hands to bless the younger son Ephraim over the older Manasseh, but Jacob knows God's plan. The sermon emphasizes that we are called to serve God daily regardless of our age or season of life, building intergenerational relationships that help us live differently than the world around us. As sojourners on earth, we must find contentment in God's plan even when we don't understand it, trusting that He has placed us where we are for a purpose - to reach others with the gospel.

Intro Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You this morning with grateful hearts, acknowledging that You are always at work even when we cannot see it. As we gather together to study Your Word and learn from Jacob's example in Genesis 48, we ask that You would open our hearts and minds to what You want to teach us today. Help us to set aside our own agendas and preconceptions, and make us receptive to Your Spirit's leading. Lord, we confess that sometimes we get so focused on our immediate circumstances that we miss the bigger picture of what You're doing in our lives. Give us eyes to see Your hand at work and hearts that are willing to trust You even when we don't understand. Prepare us now to receive what You have for us in this time together. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Ice Breaker

What's one family tradition or memory from your grandparents (or an older family member) that has stuck with you over the years?

Key Verses

- Genesis 48:3-4
- Genesis 48:11
- Genesis 48:15-16

- Genesis 48:19
- Psalm 90:12

Questions

- Jacob chose to spend his final days blessing his grandsons rather than giving practical advice about wealth or business. What does this tell us about what should be our priorities as we age?
- Joseph thought his father made a mistake when Jacob blessed the younger son over the older. How do you typically respond when God's ways don't align with your expectations or cultural norms?
- The sermon mentions that 'God is working even when we don't see it.' Can you share about a time when you later realized God was working in a situation where you initially couldn't see His hand?
- Jacob demonstrates contentment while still longing for his true home in Canaan. How can we balance being content with where God has placed us while still acknowledging this world isn't our permanent home?
- The passage emphasizes intergenerational relationships and discipleship. What barriers do you see that prevent different generations from connecting in meaningful ways today?
- Jacob's first response to seeing his grandsons was to give thanks and praise God. How can we cultivate a habit of gratitude and thanksgiving in our daily lives?
- The sermon challenges us to 'live differently' than the world around us. What are some practical ways we can demonstrate this difference in our current season of life?
- Jacob reminds Joseph that 'God will be with you' even after Jacob's death. How does knowing God's constant presence impact the way we face uncertainty or difficult transitions?

Life Application

This week, identify one person from a different generation than yourself (either older or younger) and intentionally build a relationship with them. This could be as simple as asking someone to lunch after church, starting a conversation with them, or asking them a question next Sunday. Use this as an opportunity to either share wisdom you've gained or learn from someone else's experience, always looking for ways to point each other toward God.

Key Takeaways

- We are called to serve God on a daily basis regardless of our age or season of life, and this requires us to live differently than the world around us

- When God blesses us, our first response should be to give thanks and praise to Him, acknowledging His role in every good thing we receive
- We don't always see what God is doing, and that's okay - we must be patient and trust that He is working even when we can't understand His plan
- God doesn't operate based on human appearances or traditions but cares about each person individually, and He doesn't make mistakes in how He created us
- As sojourners on earth, we will face adversity, but we are called to find contentment by relying on God and living as His ambassadors to reach others

Ending Prayer

Father God, thank You for the example of Jacob and his faithfulness even in his final days. Help us to have the same heart - one that prioritizes pointing others toward You above all else. We confess that we often get caught up in our immediate circumstances and lose sight of Your bigger plan. Give us patience to trust You when we can't see what You're doing, and help us to be quick to give thanks for Your many blessings. Lord, we commit to living differently as Your people, building relationships across generations, and serving You faithfully in whatever season of life we find ourselves. Make us content in where You've placed us while keeping our eyes fixed on our true home with You. Use us as Your ambassadors to reach those around us with the hope of the gospel. We ask all of this in the name of Jesus, our true and better Savior. Amen.

An Unexpected Blessing:

Blog Post

Life has a way of making us feel like we're missing something important. We get caught up in daily routines, focused on immediate concerns, and sometimes lose sight of the bigger picture. In Genesis 48, we discover a powerful truth that can transform how we view our circumstances: God is working even when we don't see it.

What Does It Mean to Serve God Daily?

Jacob, at 147 years old and confined to his deathbed, shows us what truly matters in life. When Joseph brings his two sons to visit their grandfather, Jacob doesn't spend his final moments giving business advice or sharing life hacks. Instead, he focuses on blessing his grandsons and pointing them toward God.

This passage reveals that we never age out of serving God. Whether you're a student, starting a career, at the peak of your profession, or retired, every season of life calls us to serve God daily. This means living differently from the world around us - our priorities, time, and interactions with people should reflect our faith.

How Do We Live Differently?

Living differently as followers of Christ means building intergenerational relationships where we help each other follow God more closely. Just as Paul instructed the Cretans to stand out through self-control and strong families, we're called to demonstrate a different way of life.

Practical steps include:

- Building new relationships with people from different generations
- Mature believers being approachable and seeking out younger believers
- Younger people asking questions like "How have you handled this situation?" or "What advice would you give?"

Why Should We Give Thanks First?

When Jacob sees Joseph's sons, his immediate response is gratitude and praise to God. He acknowledges God as his shepherd who has redeemed him from harm. This teaches us that

when we encounter blessings, our first response should always be thanksgiving.

Gratitude shouldn't be reserved for Thanksgiving Day - it should be part of our daily rhythm. Whether we're experiencing the best of times or clinging to hope in our darkest moments, we always have the ultimate reason for gratitude: Jesus Christ's sacrifice and resurrection that secured our salvation.

What About Our Requests to God?

Jacob doesn't just give thanks; he also brings specific requests to God for his grandsons. He asks God to bless them, make them numerous, and identify them as followers of the same God. This shows us it's healthy and good to bring our requests to God.

However, like Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer, our ultimate request should be "Your kingdom come, your will be done." We bring our needs to God while trusting His perfect will and timing.

What Happens When We Don't See God's Plan?

Joseph genuinely believes his father has made a mistake when Jacob places his right hand on the younger grandson instead of the older one. This moment illustrates how often we miss what God is actually doing because we're focused on human traditions and expectations.

Jacob responds with patience and wisdom: "I know, my son. I know." He understands something Joseph doesn't see yet - God doesn't operate based on outward appearances or human traditions. Throughout Scripture, God consistently chooses the younger, the overlooked, the unexpected.

Why Does God Work This Way?

God's pattern of choosing the unexpected teaches us that He doesn't make mistakes in how He made us or chose us. Whether you feel impressive or inadequate in the world's eyes, God has a specific plan for your life. You are not an accident or afterthought in God's story.

What Does It Mean to Be a Sojourner?

Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years but never considered it home. Even in his contentment with God's plan, he wanted to be buried in Canaan. This reminds us that we too are sojourners on earth - this world is not our permanent home.

Being a sojourner isn't easy or comfortable. We face adversity and hardship, but God uses these experiences to grow us and form us into who He wants us to be. The key is finding contentment not in our circumstances, but in relying on God.

Why Are We Sojourners?

God has placed us as sojourners for a purpose - to be His ambassadors and bring the truth of Jesus to the world around us. There's a reason for every neighborhood, dorm, or apartment building where you live. God has strategically positioned you to reach the people in your sphere of influence.

This requires living differently and relying on God, because it's impossible to fulfill this calling in our own strength.

Life Application

This week, commit to sojourning with your eyes on Jesus. Choose to live differently than the world around you by serving God daily, giving thanks first in every situation, and trusting His plan even when you can't see it.

Consider these questions as you apply this message:

- What specific ways can you live differently this week to reflect your faith?
- Who from a different generation could you build a relationship with?
- What situation in your life requires you to trust that God is working even though you can't see it?
- How can you view your current circumstances as an opportunity to be God's ambassador?

Remember, God is always working, even when we don't see it. As you live as a sojourner with contentment in God's plan, you'll discover unexpected blessings along the way, just as Jacob did throughout his journey.

An Unexpected Blessing:

Daily Devotions

Day 1:

Every Day Matters

Devotional: Have you ever felt like your days are just blending together, wondering if what you're doing really makes a difference? Maybe you're a student grinding through another semester, a parent in the thick of raising kids, or someone approaching retirement wondering what's next. Here's a truth that can transform how you see today: your life has profound meaning, no matter what stage you're in. Jacob understood this at 147 years old. Instead of spending his final days reminiscing about the past or complaining about his circumstances, he invested his remaining time blessing his grandsons and pointing them toward God. He didn't see his advanced age as a limitation but as an opportunity to make an eternal impact. This challenges us to view our daily lives differently. Whether you're in junior high dealing with friendship drama, in your thirties juggling career and family, or in your golden years wondering if you still matter - God has work for you to do today. Your current season isn't a waiting room for something better; it's your mission field. The beautiful truth is that faithful living isn't about achieving certain milestones or reaching a particular age. It's about recognizing that today - this very day - is a gift from God with purpose woven into it. When we grasp this, our priorities shift. We start looking for ways to serve others, to encourage someone who's struggling, or to simply live with the kind of love that points people toward Jesus. Your age doesn't disqualify you from God's purposes. Your circumstances don't limit His plans. Today matters because God is working through ordinary people in ordinary moments to accomplish His extraordinary purposes.

Bible Verse: "Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts." - Psalm 90:12

Reflection Question: How might your perspective on today change if you truly believed that God has a specific purpose for you in this exact season of life?

Quote: Every single day of our lives matters, and it has meaning. Whether you're in junior high or in your mid-90s, every day of your life has meaning.

Prayer: Lord, help me see today through Your eyes. Show me how to live with purpose and meaning, regardless of my age or circumstances. Give me wisdom to make each day count for Your kingdom. Amen.

Day 2:

Living Differently

Devotional: What does it look like to live as a follower of Jesus in a world that operates by completely different values? This isn't just a Sunday question - it's a Monday through Saturday reality that shapes how we spend our time, treat people, and make decisions. Jacob's example shows us what different living looks like in practice. At 147, he could have focused on his comfort, his legacy, or his regrets. Instead, he chose to invest in the next generation, blessing his grandsons and teaching them about God. His priorities were radically different from what the world would expect from someone his age. Living differently as Christians means our daily choices reflect eternal values. It means choosing patience over retaliation when someone cuts us off in traffic. It means prioritizing relationships over achievements, generosity over accumulation, and service over self-promotion. These aren't dramatic, headline-grabbing changes - they're the quiet, consistent choices that reveal whose kingdom we truly serve. This kind of living requires intentionality. We don't accidentally live differently; we must choose it daily. It means asking ourselves: How am I spending my time? How am I treating the people around me? What am I prioritizing? Are my choices reflecting God's values or the world's values? The goal isn't perfection but transformation. As we follow Jesus more closely, our lives naturally begin to look different from those around us. People notice when someone consistently chooses kindness, practices forgiveness, and lives with genuine joy despite circumstances. This different way of living becomes a powerful testimony to God's transforming power.

Bible Verse: “Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” - Ephesians 5:15-16

Reflection Question: In what specific area of your life do you sense God calling you to live more differently from the world around you?

Quote: We are called to serve God on a daily basis. And fundamentally, that means that we need to live differently. Our priorities need to be different. The way that we spend our time needs to be different. The way that we interact with people needs to be different. We need to live differently.

Prayer: Father, transform my heart so that my life reflects Your values. Help me make choices that honor You and point others to Your love. Give me courage to live differently even when it's difficult. Amen.

Day 3:

Gratitude First

Devotional: When good things happen in your life, what's your first reaction? Do you immediately think about how you earned it, worry about when it might end, or rush to share it on social media? There's a better way - one that transforms not just how we receive blessings, but how we experience life itself. When Jacob saw Joseph's sons - grandsons he never expected to meet - his immediate response was gratitude and praise to God. This wasn't just polite religious behavior; it was a heart posture that recognized God as the source of every good gift. Jacob understood that this reunion was a divine blessing, not a lucky coincidence. Making gratitude our first response changes everything. It shifts our focus from what we lack to what we've been given. It reminds us that we're not self-made but God-blessed. It turns ordinary moments into opportunities for worship. When we get the job, pass the test, enjoy a beautiful sunset, or simply wake up healthy, our first instinct can be thanksgiving. This practice is especially powerful during difficult seasons. When we train ourselves to look for God's goodness first, we develop spiritual eyes that can spot His faithfulness even in challenging circumstances. We begin to see His hand in small mercies, unexpected encouragements, and daily provisions we might otherwise overlook. Gratitude isn't just about big moments either. It's about recognizing God's presence in the mundane - the morning coffee, the friend's text, the safe commute home. When thanksgiving becomes our default response, we discover that every day is filled with reasons to praise God, regardless of our circumstances.

Bible Verse: "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Reflection Question: What blessing in your life have you received recently that you haven't yet thanked God for?

Quote: "Give thanks and praise God first. When we encounter blessings in life, our first response, like Jacob, who this is a huge blessing to him, right? He's getting to see Joseph and his lost son's sons. These are grandsons he never thought would have existed. It's a huge blessing. We should always be quick to give thanks to God and to praise God."

Prayer: God, forgive me for the times I've taken Your blessings for granted. Help me develop a heart of gratitude that sees Your goodness in both big and small moments. Make thanksgiving my first response to every blessing. Amen.

Day 4:

God's Unexpected Ways

Devotional: Have you ever been certain about how something should work out, only to watch God do the complete opposite? It's frustrating when our expectations don't align with God's actions, but these moments often reveal the most about His character and our need to trust His wisdom. When Joseph brought his sons to Jacob for a blessing, he positioned them according to tradition - the older son to receive the greater blessing. But Jacob crossed his hands, blessing the younger grandson instead. Joseph thought his elderly father had made a mistake and tried to correct him. Jacob's response was patient but firm: "I know, my son, I know." This scene captures a profound truth about how God works. Throughout Scripture, He consistently chooses the unexpected - David over his older brothers, Mary over more "qualified" women, fishermen over religious scholars. God doesn't operate according to human logic, social status, or traditional expectations. He sees what we cannot see and values what we often overlook. This should encourage anyone who feels overlooked, underqualified, or behind in life. Maybe you're the younger sibling who feels overshadowed, the student who struggles academically, or the person who doesn't fit the typical mold of success. God's pattern is to use the unexpected, the humble, and the willing. When we don't understand God's ways, we can trust His heart. His plans are always good, even when they don't make sense to us initially. Instead of fighting against His unexpected methods, we can learn to say with Jacob, "I know" - trusting that God's wisdom far exceeds our understanding.

Bible Verse: "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart." - 1 Samuel 16:7

Reflection Question: In what area of your life do you need to trust God's unexpected ways rather than insisting on your own understanding?

Quote: "God doesn't operate based on outward human appearances or human traditions. God cares about each and every person in the world, regardless of the "value" that they may bring to the table."

Prayer: Lord, help me trust Your ways even when they don't match my expectations. Give me patience to see Your plan unfold and faith to believe that Your wisdom is perfect, even when I don't understand it. Amen.

Day 5:

Sojourners with Purpose

Devotional: Do you ever feel like you don't quite fit in this world? Like you're living between two realities - the temporary one around you and the eternal one you're heading toward? That feeling isn't a problem to solve; it's actually evidence of your true identity as a sojourner. Jacob

lived his entire life as a sojourner, never fully settling in any one place. Even at 147, he understood that earth wasn't his permanent home. This perspective shaped how he lived - not clinging too tightly to temporary things but investing in eternal purposes. His final acts weren't about securing earthly comfort but about blessing the next generation and pointing them toward God. Being a sojourner means accepting that life will include hardship, uncertainty, and moments when we feel out of place. But here's the beautiful truth: God uses these very experiences to shape us into who He wants us to be. The difficulties aren't random; they're part of His refining process. As sojourners, we're also ambassadors. God has strategically placed us in this time and place to represent His kingdom. Every interaction is an opportunity to show His love, every challenge a chance to demonstrate His faithfulness, every blessing a moment to point others toward Him. This perspective brings incredible freedom. We don't have to find our identity in temporary things like career success, social status, or material possessions. We can hold these lightly, knowing our true citizenship is in heaven. We can face hardship with hope, knowing it's not our final destination. We can love others sacrificially, knowing our reward isn't found in their response but in God's approval.

Bible Verse: “Israel said to Joseph, ‘I never expected to see your face again, but now God has even let me see your offspring.’” - Genesis 48:11

Reflection Question: How might viewing yourself as a sojourner and ambassador change the way you approach the challenges and opportunities in your current circumstances?

Quote: “God has brought us here as exiles so that we can be his ambassadors, so that we can bring the truth of Jesus to the world all around us.”

Prayer: Father, help me live as a faithful sojourner and ambassador for Your kingdom. Give me contentment that comes from You alone and courage to represent You well in every situation. Use my life to point others to Your love. Amen.