

Toxic Faith: Mixed-Up Theology
Success = Blessing
March 13, 2011

Let's pray together.

God I thank you for the truth that you know us through and through; you know the parts of us that we're afraid to reveal to others, and yet you choose to love us still. In Christ, you love and accept us with a love that is beyond human love.

So, I pray that during the message and the rest of our service we'd know more of what it means to be loved like that. I ask this in the name of Jesus and for the sake of His Kingdom on this earth. Amen.

Good morning everyone. Before we get into today' message, I have a few housekeeping items to take care of:

- First of all, thank you to everyone who helped in the cleanup of our building yesterday. It's really important to us that we have a nice clean facility.
- Today is CORE class day. We decided last fall that we would run four courses every second Sunday of the month because we felt it was very important that everyone have the opportunity to go through them. You can't do them all at once, you have to take one each time. So, today is the day. It's CORE class Sunday, from 4-6pm. There are four courses that will be of great benefit to you, if you have not already taken them. We want to make sure you know they are available. If you do plan to come to one of those classes

(and they're listed in the program), we sure would appreciate you letting us know by completing the sign-up card in the program or by signing up on The City. That just helps us make sure we have enough materials for you.

- Finally, today is the end of our "Toxic Faith" series (though I'm pretty sure we'll come back to this issue at some point in the future because there are other poisonous beliefs we've not talked about).

As for what comes next ... I'll be transparent with you and tell you that I'm not really sure how it's all supposed to fit together from here on. Easter is coming up so, obviously, we'll be moving in that direction. We've also been working behind the scenes on that little "project" I told you about in early January – the expansion of our auditorium so that we can reach more people so that we can

better fulfill the vision God gave us many years ago – and we'll be launching the first stages of that project very soon and there'll be a series that relates to that ... but ... right now, after today, we're kind of in a state of limbo.

So, as I was thinking about next week and what I should talk about I had this goofy idea. As I've mentioned on several occasions in recent months, we lost our trusty dog of seven years, Deuce, back in early November. Then, in early December, we got a new dog who we named Trey, because he is our third American Eskimo. (Deuce was our second). And, oddly enough, God has been using the experience of losing Deuce and getting Trey to illustrate and teach some biblical truths to me, and to Jetta as well, in a way that I don't think either of us had thought of before.

So I've been wondering if it would be useful for me to share a message about that and, unfortunately, I made the mistake of mentioning that to some folks in my small group and they will not let me forget that I said that!

So next week's message is "A Tale of Two Dogs." I think it's going to be good and I'm looking forward to it even though it might be a little bit emotional. But, if you have a friend or family member who is not a "church person" but is a dog-lover, next week would be an awesome time to invite them to find out what NHCC is all about.

Ok, those are the housekeeping announcements, so let's turn our attention to the final belief in this toxic faith series. And to illustrate it, I want to read three quotes to

you and see if you can figure out what this toxic belief is. (And I know you can look at the program and get the answer, but humor me, OK? It's still early in the morning.)

Here's the first quote.

"I can't be more blessed than to be part of a team like this. God was with us."

- Gene Chizik, Auburn football coach following his team's National Title victory over Oregon in January

Maybe some of you saw that on-the-field postgame interview.

Here's the second.

"We said a prayer before ... we pray a lot ... we expect a lot of things ... this just shows how powerful God is." - 20-year-old Trevor Bayne, after winning the Daytona 500 just a few weeks ago.

Maybe some of you saw that interview in the Winner's Circle, as well.

And here's the third quote.

"I PRAISE YOU 24/7!!!!!! AND THIS HOW YOU DO ME!!!! YOU EXPECT ME TO LEARN FROM THIS??? HOW???!!! ILL NEVER FORGET THIS!! EVER!!! THX THO..." – Tweet from Buffalo Bills receiver Steve Johnson after dropping what should have been a game-winning touchdown in the end zone against the Pittsburg Steelers at the end of last season.

I'm sure that even if you're not a football fan, you probably heard about this because it was so unusual in that Johnson took the logical opposite side of the coin of crediting God for the victory: blaming God for a loss.

... which lead one sports commentator to note that God has probably decided to “unfollow” Johnson on the Divine Twitter account.

I could add many other similar quotes – this kind of thing has been going on for decades (and I’m pretty sure it will continue for years), but I think you get the idea.

Have you ever wondered about that? Have you ever wondered if God *really is* choosing the winner or the loser in football game or a NASCAR race or any other kind of contest? Most people would say, “Seriously? Doesn’t God have more important things to worry about, like maybe those folks over in Japan whose whole world just got turned upside down – literally – by an earthquake?”

Of course, many who are skeptical about

God's interest in a sporting event will also say things about their own lives like ...

- "Our kids turned out so well. I guess God was with us in our parenting efforts."
- "I'm so thankful that God blessed me with this great new job!" (or new house or spouse or fill-in-the-blank).
- "The report came back and it's not cancer. Thank you, Jesus."
- "God is been so good to me. We signed the contract today."
- "Sales are up. God is really blessing my business" (and the ministry version of that statement, which is, "People are coming to Christ. The church is growing. God is really blessing.")

While it doesn't seem as blatant as it does when an athlete says it, those thoughts and statements come from the same root – the

same belief. And that belief is the final element of toxic faith that we're going to look at in this series, which is that ...

“Success (or victory) is a sign of God’s favor and blessing.”

Have you ever heard anyone say that? Have you ever said it or thought it? “If I’m successful or victorious, it must mean that God is looking favorably on me; it must mean that God is blessing me.”

I’ve thought that. Actually, I’ve also wondered the opposite and I’m sure you have, too: “Business is down. My kids aren’t turning out like I’d hoped. The doctor’s report isn’t good. Why isn’t God blessing me? Aren’t success, health, and victory the signs that He is?”

Now, this belief sounds reasonable and, frankly, there are some elements of truth to

it, but like everything else we've looked at in this series, it's not the whole truth. And if we think it is and we *live* as if it is, we're going to poison ourselves spiritually. We're going to end up discouraged and disillusioned with God.

Why We Believe It

So, where do we get this idea in the first place? Let's take a quick look. First of all, we have to say, it comes from the Bible ...

1. The Bible itself promises blessing for following God's plan for living.

Back when I was in my early 20s, Jetta and I got involved in a program of memorizing scriptures. We had little flash cards with key verses written on them and one of the very first ones we memorized (which I think was intended to be a motivation to stick with the

program of memorizing the other ones) was this one:

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. [And, here's the payoff] Then you will be prosperous and successful. Joshua 1:8 (NIV)

And the version that we memorized was the King James verse, which said, "then you will prosper and you will have good success."

And this scripture was recorded right before Moses died, this is what he said to encourage Joshua as he led the nation of Israel into the Promised Land. "Know what God says (Moses said) ... obey it ... and it will go well with you."

Fast forward to the book of Proverbs and you'll find that it also says something similar, repeatedly, in one form or another that the wise obey God and are blessed for it; fools ignore God and are cursed for it. And there's a reason God tells us this over and over – there's truth in it – and so we should pay attention.

I think a second reason why we believe that success is a sign of God's favor and blessing traces back to ...

2. A misunderstanding of God's sovereignty (sovereignty means everything that happens is under God's control) ... specifically, "everything that happens is somehow God's will."

A lot of people believe that God is somehow behind the scenes pulling all the strings like a Divine Puppet Master. He manipulates every situation so that you and I and everyone else does exactly what He wants –

from what we decided to wear to church this morning to making us drop the winning touchdown pass. God is behind the scenes, doing it all.

And since God *does* manipulate everything, then the only conclusion, if you are successful in a given situation, is that He *chose* for you to be successful – He arranged it even – and, therefore, He must be showing his approval and blessing in so doing.

Now, we talked about this belief, this misunderstanding, in the third message of this series so I won't go into it other than to say "God does not work like that" and it's a misunderstanding to believe that He does. (And if you missed that particular message, it would be worth getting the CD of it at The Well or listening to it online at our website).

One more reason why I think a lot of people, especially sincere Christians, believe that success or victory is a sign of God's blessing and favor is ...

3. The desire we have to give glory to God.

The Bible tells us again and again to be humble; to acknowledge God's hand in our lives (even if that hand doesn't pull all the little strings behind the scenes). It tells us to not be so arrogant as to think that it's all up to us; that we are self-made men and women. So, whenever we experience some kind of success or victory, it's natural for us to want to deflect some of the credit, some of the glory to God.

Personally speaking, when I look at my life, I just know there's no way I would be anything like what I am or like who I am without God's intervention and direction and favor in my

life. If there's anything good in me, well, then, glory to God.

I think this is the intention of many athletes when they make those post-game "God did it" kinds of statements. Unfortunately, because most interviews happen *immediately* following the game - they're out of breath and they've just been through intense conflict - they don't have time to really think through what they are saying.

Why It's Toxic

Of course, as always, the question is "so what?" So what if they – or more importantly, we – believe that success and victory are the signs of God's favor and blessing?

To answer that question, I think we need to understand why and how this belief is so toxic. As I go through this list, see if any of

these poisons are seeping into your heart and mind.

1. This belief can produce unwarranted feelings of rejection (by God) and jealousy (towards others).

What happens is, you look at someone else and you wonder, "So, why is God blessing them more than me? Why did she get the promotion instead of me? I know for a fact she doesn't give anything to God while I've been struggling to tithe off this pittance of a salary they pay me. Why does God seem to love her more than me? Is there some sin in my life that I'm unaware of?"

Can you hear the rejection and jealousy in that kind of thinking?

On the flip side ... if you're the person getting the promotion and you believe this ...

2. Your success can deceive you into thinking that God approves of what you are doing ... when He doesn't.

And that's another reason why this belief is toxic.

"Well, since I got the promotion, God must be OK with how I'm handling my money. He must be OK with me spending it all on myself and my inner circle."

But that's a dangerous assumption because God often uses success as a means of judgment. Most people think what God does when He wants to judge is to send a bolt of lightning or something dramatic, but a lot of times, the Bible says that God simply lets us succeed in our schemes. For example, the Pharisees of Jesus' day "succeeded". They were all about the show of religion; they were all about putting on the act so everyone would think they were so spiritual and Godly.

And, as a result, they got the praise of everyone, and that's what they wanted ... and Jesus said *that* was their reward. They lost *God's reward* as a result, but they got what they were after and that was their judgment.¹

In a similar fashion, just to continue the analogy, if you make a lot of money and you spend all of it on yourself and your inner circle, then whatever you enjoy from that strategy, well, that's your reward. By not contributing to the work of God's Kingdom, you never store up any treasure in Heaven, Jesus said, and so, you won't have any. In that case, God simply allows your "financial success" to be your judgement ... which is why success can sometimes be deceptive. The measuring stick in the scripture isn't success; it's obedience and faithfulness to what God has told us to do.

Another reason why this belief that “success equals blessing” is so toxic is that it ...

3. It devalues the potential benefits of failure and loss.

Reality is that God uses failure and loss in our lives as much as (or maybe even more) than he does success and victory. In fact, the Bible says that God forms our character through suffering ... not success. It's *persevering through failure not reaching the pinnacle of success* that develops character.

But if you believe that God is only in success and victory, then what do you want to do? You want to escape from failure and you want to escape from loss as quickly as possible, instead of letting God use those experiences to mold you and shape you and make you more like Christ. That's another reason why this belief is so toxic to us.

And there's one more ... and this is probably the most significant.

4. It leads us to embrace an immature and incomplete understanding of what it means to be "blessed."

As I said earlier, the Bible – especially in the OT – *does* say that God's blessing leads to prosperity. But because you and I are not Hebrew scholars, we don't read the Hebrew version of the OT, we don't realize that in almost every case where we read the word "prosper" or "prosperity" the original language says "shalom." God's blessing and approval lead to shalom ... and shalom means prosperity in *every sense* – not just materially in the physical realm, but spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

And that means that it's possible to be blessed – and, more importantly, to rejoice in being blessed – even when things aren't

going “well” in the material or physical realm.

This is why the OT prophet Habakkuk, in the midst of a famine, could write:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food ...

*... though there are no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior.
Habakkuk 3:17-19 (NIV)*

You see, when we're unable to rejoice and unable to give thanks in all things, it's a sign that maybe we have an immature and incomplete understanding of what it means to be “blessed” and maybe we've been sucked in to this toxic belief.

What the Bible Really Says

So, the question is, what does a more mature and complete understanding of God's favor and blessing look like?

Well, I want to share three statements with you that I think summarize what the Bible says as a whole. And I'll give you all of them at once so you can see how they fit together then I'll break them down individually. And I just hope for some of you that by hearing this, you'll get some freedom that maybe you've never had in your life, especially if you're in a situation right now and you're looking at your circumstances and you're feeling rejected, and you're thinking "where is God? Does God even know that I'm here? Does God love me? Does He care for me?" And you are looking at those circumstances in your life, I hope these will give you some

freedom from that.

Okay. Here's what the Bible says as a whole on the subject.

Some of God's blessing and favor is a result of our **behavior**; but **most** of it is a result of **belonging**. Some of God's blessing is **material**; but **most** of it is **spiritual**. Some of God's blessing comes **now**; but **most** of it comes **later**.

And, obviously, the implication is that for our own good we would be better served to focus on the "mosts" in those sentences rather than the "somes."

Ok, let's break it down and see what that looks like.

1. *Some of God's blessing and favor is a result of **behavior; but **most** of God's blessing and favor in our lives is a result of **belonging**.***

Again, the Bible makes it very clear that there are blessings that will come to us because we do something that God tells us to do. They are conditional blessings; they're based on our actions or on our behavior.

For instance – and this is just one of many examples ...

We read in Luke 6 that Jesus once said:

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.

For with the measure you use [with other people and with God], that's what will be

*measured back to you." Luke
6:37-38 (NIV)*

What's he saying? He's saying, if you want to experience a life where people are gracious towards you instead of being critical and condemning, then behave that way yourself. If you want to be a person who gets a lot, then be a person who gives a lot. Those blessings *in general* are dependent on how well you obey what God says ... your behavior.

And that's important to understand and important to apply (especially as you read the scripture and you see those kinds of conditions on things) ... but what's *most* important is the blessing that comes simply from "belonging because we believe."

See, there is a favor with God that cannot be earned. It's unconditional. It doesn't depend

on your behavior or mine. It depends on the behavior of Jesus, who lived the perfect life that you and I should have lived and then died the death on the cross that you and I should have died as payment for our sin. This blessing that we're talking about is ours when we put our faith in Jesus and become part of his family. It's what we get simply because we belong to Christ, simply because God has chosen to love us and bless us in Christ. It's what we are chosen for. It's ours *no matter what*. That's the blessing.

That's what the Apostle Paul is talking about in his letter to the Ephesians ...

... when he writes ...

God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward

us [i.e., his favor, his blessing], as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:7 (NLT)

All these things God is going to do for us because we're united with Christ Jesus, not because of what we do, not because of our behavior but because we belong.

An interesting example of this, at least it is to me (I can see it very vividly), ever since Jetta and I have been married, probably all but five years of our life together we have gone to Lufkin, TX for Thanksgiving. And some of you know where Lufkin is, it's a little east-Texas town. Her family has this really cool farm. It's kind of like, well, if you've ever seen the Walton's, it's out there, up on this little hill. It's just the coolest thing. And, we go there every Thanksgiving, and there's food, there's family, and there's such harmony.

We play volleyball and we watch football and some of us go play golf. It's the most wonderful experience – it's one of the highlights of my year. I look forward to this every year. But, you know what? Do you know why I get to be involved, why I get to receive the favor? Not because of my behavior. It's because I married her. It's because I belong. That's what I mean by blessing because you belong.

Some of God's blessing comes because of behavior but *most* of it comes because of belonging. And we would do well to remember that whenever we try to interpret the circumstances of our lives.

Let's look at the second truth.

2. Some of God's blessing and favor is material; but most of it is spiritual.

Some is material, but *most* is spiritual. And

again, God does promise material blessings. And actually nowhere more directly than in the third chapter of the OT prophet Malachi where the people are challenged to trust God financially by a giving a tenth of what they had earned.

"Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

Malachi 3:10 (NIV)

And there is no way to spiritualize what he is saying here because in the very next verse, he says ...

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD

Almighty. Malachi 3:11 (NIV)

"Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty. Malachi 3:12 (NIV)

Totally materially blessing that he is talking about here.

So some blessing comes materially; but most of it comes spiritually. And this is clear all through the NT (and some of the OT) but especially when you consider the part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount known as The Beatitudes. And I'm sure some of you have heard this before, Jesus said ...

*3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit (blessed are the people who know they really need God),
for theirs is the kingdom of*

heaven (It's spiritual).

4 *Blessed are those who
mourn,*

*for they will be comforted
(emotional, relational).*

5 *Blessed are the meek,*

*for they will inherit the
earth (when Christ comes
back and renews and
regenerates everything) .*

6 *Blessed are those who
hunger and thirst for
righteousness,*

*for they will be filled
(spiritual).*

7 *Blessed are the merciful,*

*for they will be shown
mercy (relational, spiritual).*

8 *Blessed are the pure in
heart,*

*for they will see God
(spiritual).*

9 *Blessed are the
peacemakers,*

*for they will be called
children of God (spiritual).*

10 *Blessed are those who are*

*persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven (all of those, spiritual,
physical, emotional).*

*11 "Blessed are you when
people insult you, persecute
you and falsely say all kinds
of evil against you because of
me. 12 Rejoice and be glad,
because great is your reward
in heaven, for in the same
way they persecuted the
prophets who were before
you.*

Some of God's blessing is material but *most* of it is spiritual. It changes the way we think; it changes what we believe; it changes how we relate, not only to people around us, but to God. It changes our eternal destiny from one of destruction to one of deliverance.

And we would do well to remember that

when trying to interpret the circumstances of our lives.

3. Finally, *some of God's blessing and favor comes now; but most of it comes later.*

Jesus once told his disciples that "those who seem least important now (the people who seem to be getting the short end of the stick now) will be the greatest later"ⁱⁱ referring to when He returns and sets all things right in this world.

So the implication is ... don't gauge your "blessedness" by what you're experiencing now because "now" is not all there is if you belong to Christ.

Unfortunately however, a lot of us forget that and we're tempted to see life in the now, life in this world as the entirety of our life.

A while back I made this little diagram that illustrates how we tend to look at things.

We have a narrow vision. Many of us think of "life" as being from the day we're born in this flesh until the day we die in this flesh. We go through phases in this "flesh life" where it looks like, from our circumstances, we're blessed, or it's just so-so, or maybe it's just downright hard right now and we're not being blessed ... and then, when we hit 80+ (I'm thinking positive, in my case), then that's it.

Whatever happened in this life – that's how we measure if we were blessed or not by God.

But life in this world for Christ-followers isn't the entirety of life.

So, a more accurate diagram would look like this.

Notice that the days in this current sin-cursed world are just a sliver of the entirety of the life we've been promised by God. When Jesus returns and there is no more curse of sin, there will be no more "hard" or even "so-so." Now, there will still be creative challenges because God has created us to be creative people and we're always going to face challenges whenever we try to create, but there is never going to be a time in the world to come when we are going to doubt whether or not we are blessed.

So ... and here's the point: if I am not feeling blessed this week or this month or this year, if I'm not feeling blessed right now, what is "now" in relation to eternity? It's almost nothing when I consider the entirety of what my life really is.

Just because I don't feel blessed today, or

this week, or this year, doesn't mean that I won't feel that way. Just because I don't see signs of God's favor now, doesn't mean I won't. It doesn't mean that I am not favored because only some of God's blessing comes now; most comes later.

That's why the Apostle Paul could write:

Our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NLT)

Friend, right now, you and I can't see the line past our current life that runs into eternity. But it's there. Don't forget that, Paul is saying. That's where most of the blessing will be.

A Blessing

So, bottom line of what we're saying here, success and victory are not the best indications that God is blessing you because *some* of God's blessing comes *now* but *most* of it comes *later*. Some of God's blessing is *material* but *most* of it is *spiritual*. And *some* of God's blessing is a result of *behavior*; but *most* of it comes from *belonging*, belonging to Christ.

And that's where I want to close this service this morning. I want us to focus on the reality that, if we belong to Jesus – if we have come to the point in our life where we say, "the

truth about me is that I'm a sinner. I have failed. I've disobeyed God. I need a savior. I understand what Jesus did for me on the cross. I'm going to stop trying to pretend with God that I'm good enough, that I'm better than so-and-so, and that God grades on a curve. I'm going to get rid of all of that crap inside of my head and say "Jesus, you are my savior" – if we've come to that point in our life, we belong to Christ, then God loves us and has called us for good things. We have been chosen at that point for prosperity – shalom – and all that it means. We are not called at that point to doom and gloom and fear and negativity. We've got to get this clear in our minds, friend, that if we belong to Christ, then *God is on our side*; God is for us and not against us; God is committed to doing whatever it takes for us, spiritually, physically, relationally, temporally (in this life) and eternally (in the life to come). God is for us. God's favor rests on us simply

because we belong. This is what we were chosen by Him to receive.

And, sometimes though, I think we just need to have people tell us that and remind us of that. Sometimes we just need to have that blessing (that God has said is just yours because you belong) spoken over us ... and that's what we're going to do this morning. And some of you will remember this. We did it this exact same weekend last year and again last summer.

But it's important to, because as we read in the OT, right after delivering the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt, God spoke to Moses and told him that every so often, he was supposed to call all the people of Israel together and speak a word of blessing over them. Even though they had experienced a miracle in their escape from Egypt, they had to walk through a lonely desert for a long

time, longer than any of them had ever expected, in order to get to the Promised Land. And, I think God knew that it would be easy for them to forget that, even though life in the desert might be hard, the desert was only a part of the journey for them as a people.

And so, to help them see beyond the immediate ...

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing:

The Lord bless you, and keep you;

The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace [and in the

Hebrew, again that word is shalom]

Numbers 6:24-26 (NASB)

Whenever Aaron and his sons bless the people of Israel in my name, I myself will bless them." Numbers 6:27 (NLT)

In other words, God is saying to Moses and Aaron, "I'm waiting for you to speak the words of blessing over my people. They need it, so would you please do it."

So that's what we're going to do here in a minute. We're going to speak this word of blessing over anyone who wants to receive it.

And before that, I do think we should explain this a little bit more. And I've chosen a little picture, and some people will remember this because we did it this way last year. There's

a little picture that goes along with each phrase in my mind and here's what it says.

The Lord bless you, and keep you;

I think what God is trying to say to us through that is, "Don't forget that my intention for you is good and not evil (that's what "keep you" means; it's a way of referring to God's ultimate protection over the entirety of our lives).

**The Lord make His face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;**

I think God is saying, "Look, don't forget, that even though you are in the desert right now, I'm crazy about you. My face lights up at the thought of you."

**The Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace [shalom].**

God is holding us up like his cherished

children, lifting up his face to us, because we are so special to him. And his plan for us is shalom – peace and prosperity in every form there can be.

Isn't that a cool, to know that that is what God wants for you, just because you belong to Christ?

Well guess what ... that's what we're going to do as we close the service this morning because those things are true for all of us who are in Christ. This is what God has promised us not because of how we behave, but simply because of what we believe and to whom we belong, Jesus, the Son of God.

So, I have three other folks who are going to help me with this blessing, so, if you are part of my "blessors," would you please get in

place like we do at our communion stations?

When the music starts, if you want to be blessed, don't be bashful, just come to one of the people here, and we're just going to say the words (and there is no magic in those words but they express the heart of God toward you because you belong to Christ) the words that God told Moses and Aaron to say over the people of Israel. And I know some of you may be thinking, "Oh man, I just don't feel like I am worthy of being blessed."

Well, guess what? You're not. That's the point! – get that. None of us are. So, let's get over ourselves here and come to God and say, "God, for some unknown reason, you've chosen me. You love me and you want to bless me." So take a step of faith here. Be bold, and let God bless you through these words.

We are blessed friends. Believe it.

But, you know, God never blesses us just for ourselves. We are blessed so that we can turn around and become a blessing to others.

There are lots of ways to do that but one of those ways is through financial generosity. That's one reason why we receive an offering every week – it gives us a very tangible way to become a blessing. So, as you head out this morning, you'll see the ushers out there with an offering basket but you're also seeing an opportunity to be a blessing to the people who are impacted by this church. Just want to make sure you understand that's part of what we're doing. With that - God bless you. Shalom. Go!

Endnotes

ⁱ See <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20618173/Success-Acording-to-Jesus>

ⁱⁱ Mark 10:31