



Candlewood Church



The Measure of a Man

June 14, 2026

Glenn Garvin

BIG IDEA: God speaks your identity before you earn it. God isn't waiting for your performance to give it; it's already been spoken in Christ. His blessing isn't the reward at the end. It's the truth at the beginning.

Scripture Focus: After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." **Matthew 3:16-18 NLT**

Blurb: Culture saturates. Godly men mature.

In a world that billboards, broadcasts, and blitzes men with images of what they're supposed to be, the pressure to conform is relentless. But Scripture doesn't point men toward self-discovery; it points them toward self-denial.

The father's blessing, the spoken word of identity and destiny, is God's actual coming-of-age mechanism. Not a ceremony. Not a milestone. A voice. God speaks over men, then men speak over one another.

Continuing our series on MANHOOD.

Americans are saturated with ceremonies! To us they are sacred moments of initiation. We've got the:



Serious & Sacred:

- **Eagle Scout ceremony** - decades of work culminating in a formal court of honor, often with a parent pinning the badge. One of the few remaining male rites with genuine weight.
- **Military initiations** - the dress uniform, the parade ground, the family watching. There is also a tradition called "**blood wings**" in the Army and "**blood pinning**" in the Marines.
- **Police/Fire academy graduation** - badge pinned by a parent or spouse. People weep every single time.

Occupational & Professional

- **Passing the Bar exam** - lawyers swear an oath before a judge. The legal profession takes its threshold moment seriously.
- **Getting your union card** - in trades culture, this is real. You've been an apprentice; now you're a journeyman. The old guys shake your hand differently.

Athletic

- **Varsity letter jacket** - every suburban high school has this mythology. The first time you wear it in the hallway, something shifts.
- **Black belt ceremony** - years of discipline, a formal test, a new belt tied by the sensei. Quiet and serious and genuinely earned. Black belt is not the end of training but the beginning. **A martial artist can obtain 10 degrees of black belt in a lifetime of commitment.** The 5th degree is where the title "Master" is first earned, after roughly 17 years of total training. **The 10th degree is considered the highest and most prestigious rank, awarded to masters who have given a lifetime to the furtherance of the martial arts. It takes a minimum of 54 years as a black belt to attain. In some systems, the 9th and 10th degree belts are actually solid red, not black, and are purely honorary; they cannot be attained by applying for and passing an exam.** The image of a man who has trained for 54 years, whose belt is no longer even black but red, and who is so masterful the organization won't test him anymore but simply honors him, is a powerful picture of maturity.

Bad Boy

- **Gang** - jumped or beaten in, or required to commit an act. The wound is the credential.
- **Hazing** (fraternity, military units, sports teams) - endure enough humiliation and you earn the right to belong. Suffering as the price of acceptance.

Funny, weird and absurd - you know it's true!

- **First fishing trip where you have to KISS the fish** - in certain families, this is sacred. It's kissing the fish, not the fishing license, that marks the moment.
- **Your first Costco membership** - you are now an adult. You will buy seventeen pounds of mozzarella and feel good about it.
- **Receiving the grill tongs** - in American backyard culture, the tongs are not offered; they are conferred. Once you hold them, you hold them for life.
- **AARP card in the mail** - nobody asked, nobody warned you, it just arrives. Initiation by ambush.
- **First time your kid beats you at something** - chess, basketball, video games. The crown passes. No ceremony. Just a knowing look from your spouse.
- **Buying your first power equipment** – a lawnmower, specifically a riding mower, saws-all, **rotary hammer drill**. You have crossed a threshold no man returns from.
- **The first time a hardware store employee asks YOU for help** - no ceremony, no speech, just a stranger with a confused look, and suddenly you are the Elder.

The Bible is filled with ceremonies and sacred moments we may not even recognize as initiations or beginnings.

God has his own initiation! It's called **the blessing**.

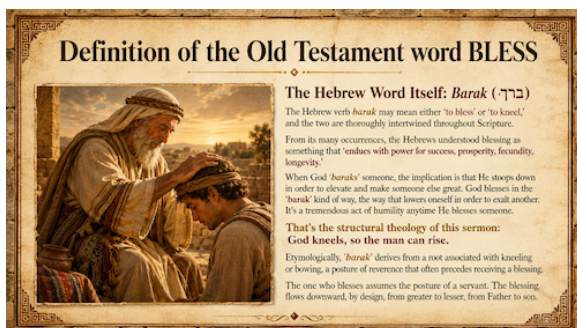
The father's blessing as a pre-performance act is one of the most countercultural ideas in all of Scripture.

The Biblical Rite: The Father's Blessing

Scripture's actual coming-of-age mechanism is not a ceremony; it is the father's blessing, the spoken word that confers identity and destiny.

The weight it carries is enormous.

Let's look at the word itself: BLESSING



1. The Hebrew Word Itself: *Barak* (ברך)

The Hebrew verb *barak* may mean either "to bless" or "to kneel," and the two are thoroughly intertwined throughout Scripture.

From its many occurrences, the **Hebrews understood blessing as something that "endues with power for success, prosperity, fecundity, longevity."**

When God *baraks* someone, the implication is that He stoops down in order to elevate and make someone else great. God blesses in the *barak* kind of way, the way that lowers oneself in order to exalt another. It's a tremendous act of humility anytime He blesses someone. That's the structural theology of the whole sermon in one sentence. **God kneels, so the man can rise.**

Etymologically, *barak* derives from a root associated with kneeling or bowing, a posture of reverence that often precedes receiving a blessing.

The one who blesses assumes **the posture of a servant. The blessing flows downward, by design, from greater to lesser, from Father to son.**

2. The Blessing Threads Through Genesis



Adam (Genesis 1:28)

The theme of blessing begins in Genesis 1. On day 5, God blesses the sea creatures and birds. On day 6, he blesses humanity: "Be fruitful and multiply, and have dominion." **The first word spoken over man is not a command to perform; it is a blessing that empowers him to do so.**

Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) "Blessed to be a blessing"

God's covenantal blessing of Abram is both a divine gift and a conduit for spiritual authority: **"I will bless you, and you will be a blessing."** The **bles-to-be-a-blessing** pattern becomes **foundational for understanding Israel's vocation.** God blesses Abraham before Abraham has done anything to earn it. He is called out of obscurity, out of Ur, and the blessing precedes the journey, not the other way around.

Joseph (Genesis 39, 49)

One of the most striking pre-performance blessing patterns in all of Scripture:

The Lord was with Joseph through many difficulties, and Joseph was with the Lord, seeking to walk rightly before Him. Furthermore, the Lord made him successful within the difficult situations of slavery and prison before placing him in an exalted and obviously blessed position. **Joseph received God's blessing as a slave and a prisoner long before he received it as a government official.**

The blessing didn't arrive after the throne. It was present in the pit.

Jacob's final words over Joseph in Genesis 49 are worth extended attention: the words "bless" or "blessing" occur six times in just two verses (49:25-26). The most full blessing is reserved for Joseph, the beloved son.

Esau's Cry (Genesis 27)



Esau anguished over losing his father's blessing (Genesis 27:38), and one whole chapter of Genesis describes the blessing Jacob gave to his twelve sons (Genesis 49). **Esau's grief is one of the most raw moments in all of Scripture, and it tells us everything: the blessing was not merely ceremonial. It was identity. It was destiny. To lose it was to lose yourself.**

Esau, cheated of it, cries out, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" and weeps (Genesis 27:34-38).

When Esau heard his father's words, **he let out a loud and bitter cry. "Oh my father, what about me? Bless me, too!" he begged.** But Isaac said, "Your brother was here, and he tricked me. He has taken away your blessing." Esau exclaimed, "No wonder his name is Jacob, for now he has cheated me twice. First he took my rights as the firstborn, and now he has stolen my blessing. **Oh, haven't you saved even one blessing for me?**" Isaac said to Esau, "I have made Jacob your master and have declared that all his brothers will be his servants. I have guaranteed him an abundance of grain and wine—what is left for me to give you, my son?" Esau pleaded, **"But do you have only one blessing? Oh my father, bless me, too!"** **Then Esau broke down and wept. Genesis 27:34-38 NLT**

Jacob Over Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48)

Jacob's blessing of Joseph includes the two sons. God is the one before whom Abraham and Isaac walked. God is the one who has been Jacob's shepherd all his life. God is the one who has redeemed him from all harm. The story of God's activity on behalf of Jacob's family is now to include the stories of Joseph's sons, who receive the promises given to the chosen family.

Jacob, dying, lays hands on his sons and on Ephraim and Manasseh and speaks their futures (Genesis 48-49). Jacob spoke to Joseph and said,

“Now I am claiming as my own sons these two boys of yours, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born here in the land of Egypt before I arrived. They will be my sons, just as Reuben and Simeon are.”

Jacob asked Joseph to bring the boys to him.



Then Jacob looked over at the two boys. “Are these your sons?” he asked. “Yes,” Joseph told him, “these are the sons God has given me here in Egypt.” And Jacob said, **“Bring them closer to me, so I can bless them.”** Jacob was half blind because of his age and could hardly see. **So Joseph brought the boys close to him, and Jacob kissed and embraced them.** Then Jacob said to Joseph, “I never thought I would see your face again, but now God has let me see your children, too!” **Joseph moved the boys, who were at their grandfather’s knees, and he bowed with his face to the ground. Then he positioned the boys in front of Jacob.** With his right hand he directed Ephraim toward Jacob’s left hand, and with his left hand he put Manasseh at Jacob’s right hand. But Jacob crossed his arms as he reached out to lay his hands on the boys’ heads. He put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, though he was the younger boy, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, though he was the firstborn. **Then he blessed Joseph and said, “May the God before whom my grandfather Abraham and my father, Isaac, walked—the God who has been my shepherd all my life, to this very day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm— may he bless these boys. May they preserve my name and the names of Abraham and Isaac. And may their descendants multiply greatly throughout the earth.”** Genesis 48:8-16 NLT

The gospel pattern. Put the Father’s voice at Jesus’ baptism beside all this: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

The detail that breaks people open is the timing. That blessing comes before a single miracle, sermon, or convert. The affirmation precedes the performance; it is not earned. Then immediately the Spirit drives him into the wilderness for forty days of testing (Mark 1:12-13), and he returns “in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14). The initiation structure is right there in the gospel: blessing, then ordeal, then return in power.

The world measures by stature and performance; the Father measures by belovedness given in advance, and by maturity toward the fullness of Christ.

The generational rupture and its healing are the last words of the Old Testament: hearts of fathers turned to children and children to fathers (Malachi 4:5-6).

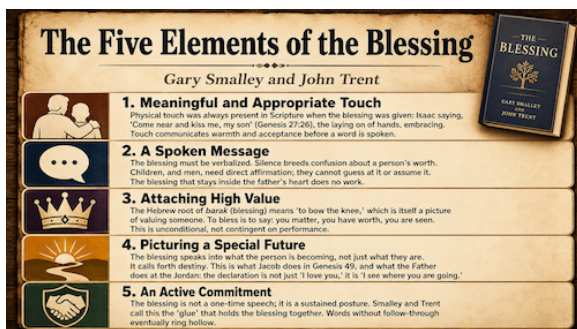
The one time I saw my father step in and up to protect me. Neighbor boys prank at Freddy's backdoor – a BB in the back.

Notice the pattern: the blessing carries forward the story of God's faithfulness across generations. It is not just an emotional act; it is a theological handoff.

3. The Blessing as Identity Architecture

In the Old Testament, a father's blessing to his son symbolized approval, purpose, and a spoken legacy. This blessing wasn't just a formality but a spiritual act through which a father called down God's favor upon his child.

The word "blessing" is one of the most important words in the story of the Bible. It connotes special favor from a greater to a lesser being. God's intention in the Bible is to bless humanity, and the way a father blesses his children was meant to echo this.



The five elements from Smalley and Trent (*The Blessing*, 1986) remain useful structural material here:

- meaningful touch,
- a spoken word,
- attaching high value,
- picturing a special future, and
- an active commitment to follow through. These aren't a program; they're a pattern Scripture keeps repeating.

4. The Reluctant Men: God's Blessing Precedes Qualification

A recurring biblical motif worth developing: **God blesses men into callings they feel entirely unqualified for.**



Gideon (Judges 6)

The angel of the Lord finds Gideon hiding in a winepress, threshing wheat in secret to hide it from the Midianites, and greets him: "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." Gideon's response is essentially, "Have you got the right address?" But God's greeting is the blessing itself. The identity is spoken before the deeds are done.

Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-10)

God says: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah objects: "I do not know how to speak; I am too young." God's response is to touch his mouth and say: "I have put my words in your mouth." Jeremiah's excuse about being too young was true but irrelevant; God called him anyway and doesn't accept age as a barrier to His service. The power came from God's presence, not Jeremiah's ability. The blessing, and the call, are issued before the resume exists.

Moses (Exodus 3-4)

Burning bush. Forty years of obscurity in the backside of the desert. God announces: "I have seen the misery of my people. I am sending you." Moses runs through every possible disqualification. God's answer every time is essentially the same: "I will be with you." The blessing precedes competence.

David (1 Samuel 16:7, 13)

Samuel is about to bless the wrong son. God corrects him: "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." David is anointed in the field, before a single giant is felled, before a single psalm is written. The Spirit comes on various biblical figures to equip them for divine service, for example Gideon (Judges 6:34), the Davidic king (Isaiah 11:1), and God's servant (Isaiah 42:1; 61:1).

5. Matthew 3:17 as the Master Pattern

The order matters: belovedness precedes achievement.



Matthew 3:16-18 NLT

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

The blessing at the beginning: "This is my Son, the Beloved." Before any ministry, before any teaching, before any miracle, belovedness is already declared.

The climax of the baptism scene is not the baptism itself but the vision and audition Jesus encounters **as he comes up from the water. God reciprocates Jesus' expression of commitment by equipping Jesus for ministry. In his baptism, Jesus, in his first action as an adult, affirms his identity and commission. God bears witness in verbalizing Jesus' identity as God's son.**

The structure we identified in previous research holds:

- **blessing (Matthew 3:17),**
- **ordeal (Matthew 4:1-11),**
- **return in power (Luke 4:14).**

It is the ancient initiation pattern, but God provides both the blessing at the threshold and the presence through the test.

The Father's voice echoes **Psalm 2:7 ("You are my Son")** and **Isaiah 42:1 ("my chosen one in whom I delight")**.

- "The king proclaims the Lord's decree: "The Lord said to me, 'You are my son. Today I have become your Father.'" [Psalm 2:7 NLT](#)
- "Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations." [Isaiah 42:1 NLT](#)

6. The Blessing Continues in the New Testament



There are two words for “bless” in the New Testament

1. *Eulogeo* (εὐλογέω)

This is where we get the English word "eulogy." It literally means "to speak well of" or "to give a good report." It is more similar in meaning to the Hebrew *barak*, used to give a good report or say a good word. The word is used more than 400 times in the Greek version of the Old Testament, and the power to bless in this sense was considered irrevocable, as with a father's blessing over a son.

This is the word used in Matthew 3:17 and throughout the Gospels when Jesus blesses the children, blesses the bread, and when Paul opens Ephesians 1:3 with "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ." All *eulogeo*. It is an active, spoken, declarative word.

2. *Makarios* (μακάριος)

This means "happy or fortunate, truly well off," referring to those for whom everything is good. **Makarios speaks of life in the kingdom of God and never refers to material or physical benefits.** To be *makarios* is equivalent to having God's kingdom within one's heart. It differs from the word "happy" in that happiness depends on favorable circumstances, while ***makarios* describes the one who is in the world yet independent of the world, whose satisfaction comes from God rather than from circumstances.**

This is the word Jesus uses to open every Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek." It is a declaration of status, not a transaction.

- ***Eulogeo* is what the Father does at the Jordan: He speaks a good word over His Son. It is verbal, intentional, and directed.**
- ***Makarios* is the resulting condition of the one who has been blessed:** deeply settled, internally prosperous, independent of circumstances.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11)

The Beatitudes are often read as ethical instructions. **They are actually declarations of blessing over people the world would not bless:**

- the poor in spirit,
- the mourner,
- the meek,

- the hungry,
- the peacemaker.

Jesus is doing in the Sermon on the Mount what the **Father did at the Jordan**: speaking **belovedness over the unlikely**.

[Ephesians 1:3-14 NLT](#)

Paul opens his letter not with instructions but with a burst of blessing: "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.**" The tense is past. The blessing has already been given. Everything that follows in Ephesians is lived from that foundation, not toward it.

[Romans 8:16-17 NLT](#)

"**The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs.**" Again, identity precedes performance. Sonship is the premise, not the prize.

We've got to quit tearing each other **down**. I'm not talking about the fun poking, ribbing jokes that men **love** to gleefully share. I'm talking about the gossip, the crass, coarse joking Paul spoke about in [Ephesians 5:3-4 NLT](#).

The Wound of Withheld Blessing

The opposite of the blessing in Scripture is not the curse alone; it is the silence of the father. Esau's anguish was not just about inheritance; it was about not being acknowledged by his father. Even if Esau's own choices led him to that disappointment.

The wound of withheld blessing is one of the most common wounds in any gathering of men. Stan declaring the words to me "you do that well" is theologically precise: four words from a neighbor did what no achievement, no credential, and no performance had managed to do.

That is the exact shape of Matthew 3:17. The voice didn't arrive after the miracles. It arrived before them.

Many men in our circles are still trying to earn a blessing their father never gave them, from achievement, from wealth, from status, from acclaim.

The gospel says the blessing has been spoken over you in Christ.

- The question is whether you've heard it.
- Have you believed it.
- Have you acted on it.

REFLECTIONS

- **The blessing was never meant to be withheld.** From Adam in the garden to Jesus at the Jordan, God's posture has always been toward His sons, not away from them. The silence of the father is the wound. The voice of the Father is the healing.
- **Belovedness is the premise, not the prize.** Every man in Scripture that God used significantly received the blessing before the battle. Gideon was called "mighty warrior" in a winepress. David was anointed in a field. Jesus was declared "beloved" before a single miracle. You are not working toward God's approval. In Christ, you are working from it.
- **The blessing you never received isn't the final word.** Esau's cry is the cry of a generation of men: "Haven't you saved even one blessing for me?" If that's your story, there is a Father who crossed His arms on purpose, who bypassed the expected order, and spoke your name anyway. But the good news is that God bestows a Father blessing on us through Jesus.
- **The blessing was always meant to move.** Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. Jacob didn't keep the blessing; he passed it. The Aaronic priests spoke it over the whole community repeatedly. The blessing flows, from Father to son, from generation to generation. It was never meant to stop with you.

APPLICATION

Action steps to take

- **Receive the blessing that has already been spoken.** Ephesians 1:3 is past tense: God "has blessed us" with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Stop performing for what has already been given. This week, read Ephesians 1:3-14 slowly and out loud. Let it land.
- **Say it out loud to someone who needs to hear it.** The blessing requires a spoken word. Eulogeo. Think of one man in your life, a son, a brother, a friend, a guy at work, and say something specific and true about who they are. Not flattery. A word of identity. "You are good at this." "I see what you're carrying." "I'm proud of who you're becoming." Four words changed Glenn's life. You have four words.
- **If you are a father, break the silence.** The wound of withheld blessing is one of the most common wounds in any congregation. If your children, sons or daughters, have never heard you say it clearly, this week is the week. Call them. Write it. Say it face to face. The blessing that stays inside your heart does no work.
- **Stop tearing down what God is trying to build up.** Paul's word in Ephesians 5:4 is about more than coarse joking. It's about the habit of men diminishing one another. If the Father speaks belovedness over the unlikely, we have no business speaking otherwise over each other. Let your words move people toward their identity, not away from it.
- **Let the ordeal be part of the process, not proof that the blessing failed.** Jesus was blessed at the Jordan, then immediately driven into the wilderness. The blessing didn't protect him from the ordeal; it prepared him for it. If you are in a hard season right now, you are not outside the blessing. You may be right in the middle of it.

BENEDICTION: The Aaronic Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26)

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

This was spoken by the priests over Israel as a regular liturgical act. It was not occasional or earned; it was declared repeatedly, over the whole community, by designated voices. The priests functioned as the voice of the Father over the people. That function matters for your application: who is speaking the blessing over the men in your church right now?

SCRIPTURES

Genesis 27:34-38 NLT

When Esau heard his father's words, **he let out a loud and bitter cry. "Oh my father, what about me? Bless me, too!" he begged.** But Isaac said, "Your brother was here, and he tricked me. He has taken away your blessing." Esau exclaimed, "No wonder his name is Jacob, for now he has cheated me twice. First he took my rights as the firstborn, and now he has stolen my blessing. **Oh, haven't you saved even one blessing for me?"** Isaac said to Esau, "I have made Jacob your master and have declared that all his brothers will be his servants. I have guaranteed him an abundance of grain and wine—what is left for me to give you, my son?" Esau pleaded, **"But do you have only one blessing? Oh my father, bless me, too!"** **Then Esau broke down and wept.**

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Psalm 2:7 NLT

"The king proclaims the Lord's decree: "The Lord said to me, 'You are my son. Today I have become your Father.'"

Isaiah 42:1 NLT

"Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations."

Numbers 6:24-26

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."



DIG DEEPER NOTES



The Initiation

The Serious & Sacred:

- **Eagle Scout ceremony** - decades of work culminating in a formal court of honor, often with a parent pinning the badge. One of the few remaining male rites with genuine weight.
- **Bar/Bat Mitzvah** - the gold standard of Western initiation; you read Torah publicly and the community declares you responsible. Then everyone dances the Hora and eats brisket.
- **Military boot camp graduation** - the dress uniform, the parade ground, the family watching. The Marine dress blues moment is its own theology.
- **Police/Fire academy graduation** - badge pinned by a parent or spouse. People weep every single time.

The Occupational & Professional

- **Doctors "Match Day"** - med students open envelopes simultaneously to find out where they'll do residency. Grown adults openly sobbing in hospital lobbies.
- **Passing the Bar exam** - lawyers swear an oath before a judge. The legal profession takes its threshold moment seriously.
- **Getting your union card** - in trades culture, this is real. You've been an apprentice; now you're a journeyman. The old guys shake your hand differently.

THE ATHLETIC

- **Varsity letter jacket** - every suburban high school has this mythology. The first time you wear it in the hallway, something shifts.
 - **Black belt ceremony** - years of discipline, a formal test, a new belt tied by the sensei. Quiet and serious and genuinely earned. Black belt is not the end of training but the beginning. **A martial artist can obtain 10 degrees of black belt in a lifetime of commitment.** The 5th degree is where the title "Master" is first earned, after roughly 17 years of total training. **The 10th degree is considered the highest and most prestigious rank, awarded to masters who have given a lifetime to the furtherance of the martial arts. It takes a minimum of 54 years as a black belt to attain. In some systems, the 9th and 10th degree belts are actually solid red,** not black, and are purely honorary; they cannot be attained by applying for and passing an exam. The image of a man who has trained for 54 years, whose belt is no longer even black but red, and who is so masterful the organization won't test him anymore but simply honors him, is a powerful picture of maturity.
 - **NFL/NBA draft** - the commissioner calls your name, you put on the hat, you hug your mother on national television. Forty million people watch young men get blessed.
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THE FUNNY / ABSURD

- **Weddings "Jumping the broom,"** followed immediately by unsolicited marriage advice from every relative in the parking lot. Initiation into the tribe of the Opinionated In-Laws.
 - **First fishing trip where you have to KISS the fish** - in certain Southern families, this is sacred. It's kissing the fish, not the fishing license, that marks the moment.
 - **Getting your first Costco membership** - you are now an adult. You will buy seventeen pounds of mozzarella and feel good about it.
 - **The first time a hardware store employee asks YOU for help** - no ceremony, no speech, just a stranger with a confused look, and suddenly you are the Elder.
 - **Being handed the grill tongs** - in American backyard culture, the tongs are not offered; they are conferred. Once you hold them, you hold them for life.
 - **AARP card in the mail** - nobody asked, nobody warned you, it just arrives. Initiation by ambush.
 - **First time your kid beats you at something** - chess, basketball, video games. The crown passes. No ceremony. Just a knowing look from your spouse.
 - **Buying your first lawnmower** - specifically a riding mower. You have crossed a threshold no man returns from.
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THE UNDERWORLD / COUNTERFEIT

These are the ones that carry your theological point most directly, because they show what happens when the legitimate blessing is absent and young men manufacture their own threshold:

- **Gang initiation** - beaten in, or required to commit an act. The wound is the credential.

- **Prison tattoos** - marking the body to signal belonging and rank. A wordless attempt at identity.
- **Hazing** (fraternity, military units, sports teams) - endure enough humiliation and you earn the right to belong. Suffering as the price of acceptance.
- **First arrest in certain subcultures** - treated as a badge. When no one offers a blessing, the mug shot becomes the rite of passage.

THE COMEDIC GOLDMINE (if you want a laugh before the turn)

- **The first time you're carded AND told you look too young** followed ten years later by **the first time you're NOT carded** and have to decide how to feel about it.
- **Getting a "World's Best Dad" mug** - initiated into fatherhood by a gas station gift. No ritual, no elder, just a ceramic mug with a questionable claim.
- **Youth group lock-ins** - if you survived one of those, you've been through something. That's not fellowship, that's ordeal.

The comedic sequence that might land best for your opening: start with the gang initiation and the Marine medal (serious, everyone nods), pivot to the grill tongs and the Costco membership (laughter), then ask the question: "Why do we keep inventing these moments? Because something in us knows, we need someone to tell us we've arrived." Then land on Matthew 3:17.

The laughter softens the room right before you break their hearts with what the Father said at the Jordan.



What is backbiting and the effects it has on relationships?



1868 allegory of backbiting based on Psalms, "the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart" (11:2) and "their tongue a sharp sword" (57:4)^[1]

It's the act of talebearing, slandering or verbally stabbing someone in their absence! To bite them from behind (behind their back).



Bear-baiting was a historical blood sport in which a chained bear and one or more dogs were forced to fight one another. It also sometimes involved pitting a bear against another animal. Until the 19th century, it was commonly performed in Great Britain, Sweden, India, Pakistan, and Mexico ^[1]

It originally referred to the unsportsmanlike attack from the rear in the blood sport of bearbaiting.

What are the psychological effects of backbiting on individuals and relationships?

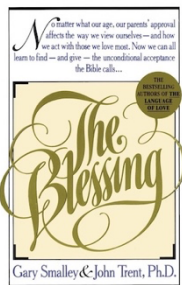
Backbiting can lead to anxiety, depression, and a decline in self-esteem for the victim, creating feelings of insecurity and social isolation. For the person engaging in backbiting, it

can result in guilt, shame, and a negative self-image, ultimately **straining relationships and damaging trust**.

The Apostle Paul lists similar among the “**STOP DOING THIS**,” list in Ephesians 5:3-4 NLT “Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and **coarse jokes**—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.” Paul uses the word, “eutrapelia,” which literally means witty vulgar jesting. It may be “funny,” but it’s crude and uncalled for!



Gary Smalley and John Trent. [The Blessing](#).



The five elements of the blessing:

1. Meaningful and Appropriate Touch: Physical touch was always present in Scripture when the blessing was given: Isaac saying "come near and kiss me, my son" (Genesis 27:26), **the laying on of hands, embracing. Touch communicates warmth and acceptance before a word is spoken.**

2. A Spoken Message: The blessing must be verbalized. Silence breeds confusion about a person's worth. Children, and men, need direct affirmation;

they cannot guess at it or assume it. The blessing that stays inside the father's heart does no work.

3. Attaching High Value: The Hebrew root of *barak* (blessing) means "to bow the knee," which is itself a picture of valuing someone. To bless is to say: **you matter, you have worth, you are seen. This is unconditional, not contingent on performance.**

4. Picturing a Special Future: The blessing speaks into what the person is becoming, not just what they are. It calls forth destiny. This is exactly what Jacob does in Genesis 49, and what the Father does at the Jordan: the declaration isn't just "I love you," it is "I see where you are going."

5. An Active Commitment: The blessing isn't a one-time speech; it is a **sustained posture**. Smalley and Trent call this the "glue" that holds the blessing together. Words without follow-through eventually ring hollow.

Matthew 3:17 God Blessing the Son

- The Spirit descending is meaningful touch.
- "This is my beloved Son" is the spoken message.
- "In whom I am well pleased" is high value attached before performance.
- The subsequent **wilderness test and public ministry** is the special future being called forth. And the entire arc of the gospel, culminating at the cross and resurrection, is the Father's active commitment to see it through.

It is also diagnostic: most men will know, without being told, which of the five they never received.