

How to Get the Blessing

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, January 31, 2016
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2016 Real Truth Matters

Genesis 27:18-19

So he went to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me."

Every person has a mechanism within them that hunts after blessing. What is blessing? What do you mean when you say, "May the Lord bless you"? What does it mean to have a blessed life? To be blessed or blessed means you have a good life; it's the bestowment of goodness upon someone. So when you say, "The Lord bless you," you're saying, "The Lord intervene in a your life and bestow goodness on you." When Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" He means, "Favored with goodness from God are the poor in spirit." Therefore they are happy. That's why the word *blessed* in the New Testament carries the connotation of joy or happiness because you are living a life favored with God's goodness.

Since the entire human race was cursed when man rebelled against God, then everyone of us have this deep longing to come out from under the curse and be reinstated to the blessing. However, the curse is that you want the blessings without God. That's how we are apart from God's saving work in our lives. We want blessings, we don't want curses. We want goodness, the blessings of life, but we want it without God. We don't want this infringement or entanglement by God Himself. That is part of the curse. Every non-Christian wants the blessing, the good life, but they want it without God. And every Christian has something still cursed about them that also wants the good life without God. There is still something cursed about you that still wants the good life without God, just like our unbelieving friends and family. It is called the flesh or fallen human nature. That is why you pursue "goodness" sometimes in your way only to discover that what you thought to be good wasn't so good after all.

How many times have I experienced that myself? I pursued something, and it's good—it wasn't sinful—but I wanted it on my terms. As Sophie shared a few moments ago, when you apprehend and attain what you think will make you happy, apart from Christ, you are eventually disappointed because it didn't bring the blessing you thought it would.

How then do we get blessing into our lives? I want every one of you to experience goodness and blessings, especially the blessing of God, but how do you get that blessing in your life? What is necessary for the good life to be yours?

Before I answer that, I want us to examine two instances of how not to pursue blessing.

I. Don't Seek Blessing Your Way

This whole event of Jacob deceiving his father, Isaac, and trying to convince his father that he wasn't Jacob but his older brother Esau, started not with Jacob but his mother, Rebekah. She overheard a conversation with Isaac and their oldest son. Isaac had said, "Son, I'm blind, I'm old, I know my death is about to happen, and since you're the oldest son and my favorite I want to give you the blessing." That doesn't mean a whole lot to you and I because our culture doesn't practice that kind of custom. But what it meant was that Isaac was going to prophetically pass on to Esau the blessing of the covenant of Abraham.

God had made a covenant, a contract, an agreement, with Abraham and said, "I'm going to make you a father of many nations and through your lineage the Messiah will come. Not only that, I'm going to give you this land." That blessing passed from Abraham to Isaac, not to any other descendants of Abraham, and Isaac was intending to give that blessing to Esau and Rebekah heard him.

In order to understand Rebekah's reaction you have to go back even further. Rebekah is one of those few human beings privileged to hear the very audible voice of God. Rebekah and Isaac couldn't have children, so Isaac prayed to God that God would allow Rebekah to conceive and God answered. Shortly after she conceived she was alarmed because there was great consternation, agitation, and trouble within her. She felt like there was a war going on inside her stomach and she didn't know what was wrong. Like any modern mother, she was greatly alarmed and fearful for the pregnancy. But unlike modern mothers, she didn't have a physician with ultrasound to be able to do proper tests and give her an answer. So she prayed and the Lord answered her audibly.

*And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."
(Genesis 25:23)*

Not only had God given her the ability to conceive, she had twins! And from the moment of their conception strife existed between the two brothers, even striving in the womb of their mother. That's what she was feeling. In fact, when they were born, the Bible tells us they were still fighting at birth. Esau was the first coming out of the womb but Jacob didn't want it that way. Jacob grabbed Esau's heel and tried to pull him back in so he could be born first. This is the schism and the hostility between these two brothers.

It only got worse, because mom and dad played favorites. Daddy loved Esau a little better than Jacob and mama loved Jacob because God had promised Rebekah that he would get the Abrahamic covenant. So when Rebekah heard what was happening she panicked, and why wouldn't she? God had promised her that Jacob was the one to receive the blessing. Not the oldest, but the younger should rule over the elder. So instead of trusting God she was like us today. She had to help God a little bit. So she came up with a plan.

She told Jacob to go get two kid goats, little baby goats, and she took some of the hide from two of those goats and put it on the top of Jacob's hands and arms and around his neck. Esau must have been extremely hairy. To put the skin of a goat on and the father say, "Yep, that's my son." She took one of those animals and prepared the meat like Esau would prepare the wild game he caught in the woods and sent Jacob in. "Tell your dad you're Esau."

Now, you're thinking, *What if his dad finds out?* Jacob thought the same thing. "I'll get a curse instead of a blessing!" And Rebekah said, "Let the curse fall on me." Again, we don't understand these curses and blessings, we don't follow these kinds of customs, but whatever the blessing was it was irrevocable. You couldn't take it back. Although Isaac finally realized that Jacob has deceived him he did not say to Esau, "Well, that's okay, I'll revoke whatever I said to Jacob because he deceived me and I'll give you the blessing." Isaac said it couldn't be reversed. So, because of Rebekah, who knew the will of God but could not trust God to bring it to pass, she pursued the blessing of God her own way.

She's not so different. There are a lot of examples of that in the Bible. Abraham did the very same thing, did he not? He and his wife, Sarah, couldn't have children either so they came up with a plan. "Here, here's Hagar. She can have a child as my surrogate and she will bear a child and it will be just like my child," said Sarah. But all that did was bring a curse instead of blessing.

Every time you and I try to bring about God's will, God's goodness, and God's blessing our way it will never work. It doesn't bring blessing, it brings curse. *Well, it worked for Jacob. He got the blessing.* Yes, he did, but he paid a terrible price. Twenty years as a fugitive from his own family. When Esau saw what happened that day, he vowed he would kill his younger brother. Mom and dad believed it so they sent Jacob away to a land in which he had never been where he was a stranger. There he eventually landed with his uncle, Rebekah's brother, and he served a cheat just like him for 20 years. He cheated Jacob time and time again. He changed his wages 10 different times. He got the blessing but it came at a terrible cost.

You can't get God's goodness your way. How do you get the blessings of God? The man who lives the good life is the man who is able to completely trust the Lord. Listen to Psalm 34:8

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;"

Amen! Right? We've got that verse. Wait. That's not the whole verse.

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8)

The person who is blessed is the person who is absolutely resigned to God's will because he trusts God's will is good and a blessing no matter what it is.

That's not easy. I'm confessing to you, I wish my ministry here for the last 22 years would have been a lot different than it is. I'm learning God had a purpose and it has been good for me. There

has been a lot of struggle and a lot of difficulty, much to my own responsibility trying to bring the blessing of God my way; trying to do God's work my way. I'm telling you, it doesn't work. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him. Don't seek the blessings of God your way.

II. Don't Seek the Blessing By Pretense

Go back to our text. This is a powerful lesson. In our text we read that Jacob went to his father claiming to be somebody that he wasn't, his older brother Esau. When Isaac asked, "Who are you?" Jacob answered, "I'm Esau. I'm somebody else." Because he believed if he could be like his brother he would get the blessing. If he could be somebody else he could get the blessing.

Psychologists tell us an amazing fact about every one of you, that within you is a seed, a desire that you want to be like somebody else. It's manifested in children all the time. Little kids always pretend to be someone other than themselves, right? Little girls pretend to be a princess or a Hollywood movie actress. And for boys, well, I remember playing Superman and taking one of mama's towels, hoping she didn't catch me, and wrapping it around my neck providing me a cape. When I was a child the Lone Ranger was hip, not Ironman, it was the Lone Ranger. He had a daily television show and we would come home and watch it in black and white and we thought it was cool. I would get my mask, my cap gun, my stick horse, which I called Silver, and hi-ho away we went. Why? I wanted to be like the Lone Ranger.

As we grow up, that tendency to mimicry doesn't depart, it doesn't leave us, we don't grow out of that. We become adolescents and now our heroes change. Maybe now it's a sports figure. Man, I always wanted to be like Willie Mays or Stan Musial. Now, Stan Musial was a lot before my time, I don't want anyone to make any mistakes, but my dad would talk about Stan Musial and I read biographies about him and I loved Stan the Man. When it came time to get a uniform and we could request our number, guess what number I picked? Stan the Man's number.

And Willie Mays—I still remember watching the Say Hey kid, he was on the tail end of his career. I remember seeing him do those amazing feats in the outfield. I remember him running and catching that ball over his shoulder. I would work on that very thing. Why? Because I wanted to be like Willie Mays!

As we get older, young ladies look at a girlfriend and think, "Boy, I wish I had her smile." "I wish I had her figure." Guys wish they had the athletic abilities somebody else has, thinking, *If I could just have that, I could live the good life.* And as we get older we watch people ascend and climb the ladder of success, trying to accumulate as much as possible, and we think, if I could just be like him or her or that couple then I could have the blessing.

There is something always in us that's never content with who we really are.

A. The Desire to be Like Someone Else to Gain the Blessing.

William Shakespeare said, “God has given you one face, and you make yourself another.”

The narcissistic but capable writer Oscar Wilde said, “Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.”

We’re just thinking that if we could be just a little different, if we could just have something that somebody else has, then we would have success, blessing, the good life.

B. This Desire Motivates Us.

It motivates us to imitate. Even in the spiritual realm or in the church.

We think, *You know, if I could just pray like George Muller...* so we read about George Muller or some great man of faith and prayer and we try to pray and live our lives just like him or her, thinking that’s the secret to the blessing.

Some of us think the blessing is in the knowledge of God’s Word and doctrine; therefore I’ve got to learn more knowledge. I have to be careful here because there’s a very important point that needs to be made but I don’t want to be misunderstood. The Bible does not encourage the pursuit of knowledge; it commands it. It commands to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we have so intellectualized Christianity and church that we make the super Christians the ones that know more theology and doctrine than the others. Therefore we think if we could just learn and accumulate more information about the Bible we would have what they have, the blessings. We, too, would be spiritual.

Knowledge is not the key to the blessing. It’s not. Some of us think if we had the knowledge of a Calvin or a Whitefield or an Edwards or a Wesley *then* we would have more of God’s favor on our lives. We would be greater Christians, more fruitful Christians if we knew more about the Bible, but the accumulation of knowledge is not the way you get the blessing because you’re trying to be like someone else. You’re acquiring knowledge for the wrong reason.

God tells us to acquire knowledge of the Scriptures so we will be drawn closer to Him. But we make knowledge and information the end itself. So, many of us are pursuing knowledge because we think it’s the way to God. No, it’s not!

Some preachers try to preach like other men, thinking if they had that kind of preaching they would have that kind of ministry. I know what I’m talking about. You all know one of my heroes. For years, I would read one of his sermons every day, thinking if i could just turn phrases like Charles Spurgeon and make word pictures like he did that I could be successful. God has gifted me with some public speaking abilities but I’ll never forget one Monday when Karen and I were reading a book by Jim Cymbala. And in this little short book, he told about how he always wanted to preach and talk like his hero, D. L. Moody. He said God convicted him that He didn’t make him to be a D. L. Moody, He made him to be a Jim Cymbala.

That stuck like an arrow in my heart. It's been many years ago now but it stuck and it's still there. I was reading just yesterday that when Chuck Swindoll was a young preacher he had a model preacher that he tried to mimic himself after. I thought that very funny. Here young preachers are probably trying to imitate Chuck Swindoll today and he had that same problem.

There is just something in us that says, "If I was just like *him* God would be as good to me as He is to him." No! That's what Jacob did. Jacob was trying to get the blessing of God by trying and pretending to be somebody he wasn't. God made you just the way you are. We'll talk more about that in just a few moments.

It will motivate you to try and get the blessing or it will motivate you to not try at all. You say, "I don't have that skill set or abilities." "I'm not knowledgeable." "I don't have a mind like they do." "Prayer is hard for me." There are some of you who, if you believed praying for eight hours a day and fasting seven days a week would get you the blessing, would do it. You have that kind of determination and resolute will. But I'm telling you, that's not the way to the blessing.

How do you get the blessing?

III. How to Receive the Blessing

I want to refer you to a later chapter in Jacob's life. It's 20 years later and Jacob is married. Because of his father-in-law's deception, he has two wives, and two concubines, 12 sons, and one daughter. God was good to him because he was the blessed child. God's favor was with him. He was chosen by God to fulfill a great purpose but his father-in-law's deception and treachery made he afraid. He feared for his life and he flees again. God, in a dream, tells him to go back home.

On his way home, he received word that Esau his brother had discovered his caravan and has heard about his trip home and has come out to meet him with 400 soldiers. He remembered the vow, the oath Esau made in anger, that he would kill him so Jacob feared. He devised a plan; he would divide his entire company, one wife with her children, his favorite wife with her children, and divide his flocks and servants in two different caravans and try to appease, assuage Esau's anger with material goods. His plan was to bribe his older brother.

But Jacob stays behind, not out of fear, but thinking he needed to pray. Therefore he prays alone at the river. Let's begin praying at verse 24 of chapter 32.

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

Who is this man? If your Bible is like mine, the word *Man* is capitalized which means this is God. I don't think Jacob realizes that at this precise moment.

Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. 26 And He said, "Let Me go, for the

day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” 27 So He said to him, “What is your name?” He said, “Jacob.” 28 And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.” (Genesis 32:24-28)

Let me break down this little event for you. Jacob was surprise attacked by God. Here you're praying to God and all of the sudden-WHAM! You talk about world wrestling champ, more like universal wrestling champ and He slams you but you hold on for dear life. Jacob held on and wouldn't turn loose. God told him to turn Him loose and Jacob said no. When God saw Jacob meant business He touched his hip and immediately he was lame. I think at that moment Jacob realized, *This is not a man. This is more than a man.* And his next concern was, “I want this God to bless me.” That's what he prayed for.

Twenty years earlier the whole thing started with Jacob seeking the blessing. He's still concerned about the blessing of God. He knows the last 20 years have been a sham based upon deceit. Now he has God and his only concern was that God would bless him. What does God ask him? A simple question. “What is your name?” This is a strategic question. You know the Lord, it can't just be chit chat or passing the time of day socializing. God asked that question on purpose. *Twenty years ago, Jacob, you were asked that question and you said you were someone else. I want to know, tell Me man, tell me exactly who you are.*

This time there was no deception, no treachery, no manipulation, just the honest truth, “I'm Jacob.” Notice the response of God. He says, “No, it's not. It's Israel.” You know what Israel means? Prince with God. One who strives with God and God let's him win. You talk about the blessed life. You can go to God and contend with Him and He says, “I give up, you win.” That's what the word *Israel* means. *Prince with God.*

God blessed Jacob. I want to cite two things here that answers our question, “How do you get the blessing?”

A. You Must Acknowledge Who You Are.

You can't be somebody else. Listen carefully. God didn't make you to be the next Billy Graham or Charles Spurgeon or Greg Ramage or Jeff Guill. He didn't make you to be Whitt or Bobby or Michael. He didn't make you to be a Marilyn or a Jennifer or a Sophie. He made you you and He did it on purpose. He's the creator! You can never get the blessing of God until you acknowledge who you are.

Here's why. As long as you try to live off the blessing of another or try to be like them in order to gain God's blessings, you are not blessing the Lord; rather, you are attacking God's creative wisdom. You are saying, in effect, “God, You made a mistake when You made me. You can't use me the way I am; You only use people like the pastor or the Sunday school teacher or like so *and so.*” You are literally accusing God of failure and you're ultimately saying, “The reason I am the way I am, flawed and failed, is because this is the way You have made me. But if You would help me be

like so and so then You will give me Your blessing.” God says, “No, not at all. You’ve missed it. If I wanted another Charles Spurgeon then I would have made him with all the same attributes and abilities. Charles Spurgeon was My tool at that time at that specific place, *you* are My tool at this time in this specific place. Trust Me! Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.”

God didn’t make you with a mind that remembers everything you read, *on purpose*.

Some of you didn’t do very well in school. You would never be able to make the Dean’s List no matter how hard you tried and that was absolutely cool with God. That’s the way He made you.

Some of you could never hit a ball, even if it was on a tee! That’s okay because that’s the way God made you.

Some of you, like me, would never make the face of *GQ Magazine* but that’s okay because that’s the way He’s made me. And if I really trust Him, that He knows what He’s doing with me, I will understand that I have a purpose. If I am just faithful in trusting Him, then my purpose will be fulfilled and I will be just as faithful as Charles Spurgeon was at his post.

You have to acknowledge who you are. That’s part of the problem, isn’t it? Because when I acknowledge who I am I don’t see a lot of things that attract me or that I think would make God attracted to me. I’m flawed. I am sinful. *It almost sounds like you’re making God a co-conspirator in my sin*. No, you know that’s not it at all.

But God has, at this moment in the human race, chosen to work within certain perimeters. Do you know what those perimeters are? That He works with no perfect people. Those are His perimeters and guidelines. “I will only use imperfect, flawed, and fallible people.” There’s only one Person He’s ever used who was perfect and that was His Son. And He was able to use His perfect Son so therefore He could use flawed and sinful people. He doesn’t need any more perfect people. He’s already had one and that one was good enough for you! His perfection was so good and so wonderful that God said, “I will share My Son’s perfection with you, if you’ll simply trust Him with the purpose for which you were made.”

It doesn’t mean becoming religious or learning Christian terminology or wearing Christian jewelry. It doesn’t mean becoming a tee-totaler. It doesn’t mean stopping the drug addiction. It doesn’t mean stopping your porn addiction. It doesn’t mean stopping cursing. You have to acknowledge who you are and then what you are.

B. You Must Acknowledge What You Are.

What are you? Jacob answers, “I’m a supplanter.” That’s what the name *Jacob* meant. Back then names often represented the character of a person and, boy, it did with Jacob. A *supplanter* means one that undermines, one who is a trickster, a cheat. “Who are you?” “I’m a cheat, God. I’ve lived by my wits for these 20 years and here I am facing my greatest nemesis and I don’t know if I’ll

live to see the day after tomorrow. I'm a cheat, God." God says, "No, you're not. You're a man who prevails with Me and whatever you need and want, I'll say yes to. I'll let you win. That's who you are."

Do you see how you get the blessing? It's not by you trying to be something that you're not. It's by being yourself, acknowledging that apart from God there is nothing good about you or me and you need His goodness. You need His blessing. When you do that, you get His blessing.

I'm trying to get you to understand that you can come to church every day, whether I'm here or not, and sit in that pew for two hours and pray and sing hymns and if I'm around I probably would preach to you, and you could listen to sermons and God's not going to say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." He's not going to do it. That breaks His code and mode of operation.

What is His mode of operation? That He is good without you being good. That He's gracious to the undeserving. That's the Gospel. That Jesus Christ came into this world loving us just the way we were, flawed and failed and wicked and abominable, and He died in our place, suffering our sins, so that when He was raised from the dead God could come to you and say, "If you only trust My Son I'll give you His resurrection power. I will give you new life. I will make you into an Israel who will be a prince with Me."

You can't make yourself a prince with God, but He can make you that. He made you and therefore you have a purpose today. What is it? I don't know. But He knows. And if you will just trust Him you'll find out. And when you get to the end of your life and stand in His presence and you see the plan unfold, because I don't think you'll see the plan unfold before you get to heaven, then He says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; you trusted Me and that blessed Me and so I blessed you." Amen.