

Message: Mirror Your Blessing

Do you ever feel like you're out of control?

I love meeting with people who are new to teams at church, like the worship team. No matter whether they've been with the church a few months or ten years, they always anxiously say the same thing: “Just tell me what I'm supposed to do!” The idea of God working through them in unexpected ways is a foreign concept. That is, until it happens. Let me let you in on some good news: it always happens!

No matter how seasoned we are, we'll be faced with the unexpected, often at the most inappropriate time. No matter whether we're at church, visiting someone, serving in the community or going through a time of change, the unexpected may throw us for a loop.

Several years ago, I was blessed to be appointed to my first church.

To make the schedule work, the congregation made some changes, including a shift in the Sunday morning service time. I'll never forget my first Sunday! I was halfway through the sermon when a man sitting in the front row got up, walked out and left. To say I didn't know what to think is an understatement. Adding to the mystery, no one in the congregation knew why he left, either. There were a few anxious moments that week as I reflected on the message, service and situation.

On my second Sunday, the man came in late, came to the front and sat down. Halfway through the sermon, he got up and left – again! At this point, it was clear something was up. We weren't able to contact him during the week, but I was prepared the following Sunday. We made arrangements and so, when he came in, I was ready and waiting in the back. I asked him if he had a moment to speak with me.

During our brief conversation, I learned three things: first, Richard lived in a group home and every Sunday he took the bus to the store and then walked over to the church. Second, the reason he left mid-way through the service was because that's when the local bus left to take him home. Third, and most important, Richard was 95% deaf. He came and participated in the services, even though he could hardly understand anything we said or sang. Richard came because of the fellowship and connection he felt with the church.

It was a humbling moment. Here I was, concerned about how the congregation (actually I) was reacting when, in reality, I needed to praise God for the lesson on faith we were blessed to receive. Have you ever found yourself faced with the unexpected? You bet! You’ve been challenged by a situation at home, in your neighborhood or in church where you felt uncertain or angry, but weren’t sure how to respond. Today’s Scripture readings offer a good lesson on what to do.

Abraham was faced with the unexpected. His story starts around 1900 BC, long before Moses, the ten commandments, Jesus, Buddha or Muhammed. Abraham was a person of wealth and influence with land, cattle and servants. Sarah and he were comfortable. It must have been a surprise when God spoke to him.

Why did God do so? God had a choice to make. When God’s relationship with humanity was broken by intentional wrongdoing – our sin, God had a choice to make: destroy the world and start over, or roll up the sleeves and go to work fixing it. Instead of walking away, God waded in to restore creation. If you’ve ever knocked over a gallon of paint in your living room or dropped a two-quart glass container of salsa on your kitchen floor, you get the idea. You were probably tempted to move. You didn’t. You just picked a starting point and began cleaning.

God did the same thing. But instead of starting at a particular place, God started with a particular person. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all agree. God began the cleanup process with Abraham. Abraham and Sarah weren’t perfect, far from it. Genesis tells us he lied and cheated. Sometimes their faith in God was shaky. We’ll never know why God chose Abraham as the first step in reconnecting with humanity, but God did. God didn’t wait for a perfect person to come along. The same is true today. God doesn’t wait for perfect people. God works through us.

God spoke a great promise to Abraham, *“Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, those who curse you I will curse; all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you.”*

God had a purpose for calling Abraham, just as God has a purpose for calling us. God called Abraham to give him a blessing and to make his family a blessing to all the families of the world. Wow! That’s an amazing offer. Guess what? The offer still stands today. God wants to bless your life, your family, this valley and community. God is blessing you and your loved ones every day. Even better, God made us for a reason: to be a blessing to the people we meet every day.

Here are a couple of points to keep in mind. God’s call has no age limit. Abraham heard God’s call, picked up his family and moved – at the ripe, young age of 75! The work of the Lord isn’t just for the young and energetic. It’s for all who have ears to hear. Also, God’s call takes precedence over everything else. God called Abraham to leave his country, people and family behind, traveling to a place he’d never been, trusting God every step of the way. No home, no church, only God’s promise to rely on. Abraham’s willingness and faith was a sure sign of deep love and commitment.

That may sound like it’s impossible, but it’s not for those who love God. Today, missionaries travel to other countries, pastors itinerate, people plant new churches and congregations change. Those who love and care for God find a way to say “yes” to the prompting of God’s Spirit. It’s not about opinions, positions, politics, the style of music or having it our way. It’s what we feel deep down in our soul. It’s not a passing emotion, but a transforming conviction.

Rick Warren says, “Trusting God completely means having faith that God knows what is best for your life.”¹

At the age of seventy-five, God called Abraham to leave everything he knew and go to an unknown land for an uncertain purpose. At a time when most of us are, or hope to be, retired and wondering how to balance our leisure activities, Abraham was on a camel, headed out into the desert. Talk about stepping outside the comfort zone!

How is the Holy Spirit prompting you to step outside of your comfort zone to follow Jesus? This congregation is in a time of transition. You will need to take steps by faith. There’s a reason...

¹ Andy Stanley, *Starting Point*, Zondervan, 2014, p. 43

Do you hear the biggest part of the promise? The world is blessed through Abraham and his family. Literally, the world is better off because of Abraham. Every Jewish man, woman and child, past and present, are better off because of Abraham. Muslims hold Abraham in high regard and trace their lineage to him. Christians from every generation believe they are better off because of him. Now imagine all of the people who have been touched by those groups in a positive way. That’s a lot of people. It may be everybody. That can be you.

God called Abraham and all of his spiritual descendents to be a blessing to the world. We’re Abram’s spiritual descendents. God calls us to hear and accept Jesus as our Savior. When we’re born again, we’re doubly blessed. Not only are we washed clean in God’s eyes, we’re made new, beginning with a heart transplant. God transforms selfish, stone hearts into living, spirit-filled hearts. A person with a heart for God can’t help themselves. They can’t keep from sharing God’s blessing with others. Nothing can hold them back, even their own fear and timidity. God wants to bless us to make us fruitful. The best way to receive God’s abundant blessing is this: empty yourselves by pouring God’s love into others, blessing them. When you’re empty, you’re a cup waiting for God’s grace to fill to overflowing...so you can do it again!

Some of us get it. Others aren’t so sure.

What do we do when we’re uncertain, angry or filled with doubt?

The words of James 1:22-25 challenge us to take a closer look at ourselves: *“You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. Those who hear but don’t do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like. But there are those who study the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continue to do it. They don’t listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do.”* We can be God’s mirror, reflecting love and blessing so others see God in us, rather than our imperfections. That’s what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

Do you want others to be better off because you’re in their lives?

Pastor Carlson does. Rev. Wiley does. I do. I expect you do to. That’s what it means to follow Jesus, loving others, no matter what.

The problem is that we can lose our way. Our self-interest leads us to focus inside the walls of the church and forget that we are made to share God’s love with the people outside the church in an open, inviting way.

Mike Breem writes in his book Building a Discipling Culture:

“If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.”

Some of us have lost our way. Many congregations have forgotten how to share God’s love with other people. The simplest way is to begin with those gathered here and then go from there.

So I invite you to share God’s blessing this week. Do it at home, your small groups, the market, everywhere you go. At this point, you may be thinking “Okay, I’m willing, but how?” There’s no better way to learn than the present. Please turn to a person seated near to you and ask:

“How may I pray for God to bless you?”

Please pray for God to bless them (*as you choose – silently or aloud*).

Thank you for sharing with each other. I know it was uncomfortable. We either never learned how to do it or we’re out of practice. I can tell you blessing others gets easier the more you do it. After all, God made us to do so. I invite you to start now. Be an example.

In the weeks ahead, I encourage you to make time to gather and share the blessings you gave and received. These are times when God is present. When we share our experiences of God with others, we begin to anticipate and look forward to new ways God’s Spirit is working in and through us. That’s a blessing. It gives us hope. It’s the way to a life of faith. And it’s the way to truly know: **God loves you!**

Let us pray...

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn’t be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to be transformed by your love so I may bless others. Bless us when we live generously, sharing your love with others. We commit ourselves to you by faith and in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Genesis 12:1-4 (CEB)

The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of the earth
will be blessed because of you.”

Abram left just as the LORD told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.

James 1:22-25 (CEB)

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