

Online Study for *The Blessing* by John Trent, Ph.D.

Why *The Blessing* study guide?

*The Blessing* offers a fresh, updated look at the life-changing gift the Bible calls “the blessing.” Many of us—perhaps unknowingly—spend a lifetime striving for this acceptance. The unconditional love and approval that comes with the blessing is an important element of our self-esteem and emotional well-being. In *The Blessing*, Dr. John Trent tells of his search to receive the blessing from his father and the new insight—and deeper blessing—he received from God as he sought to pick up the pieces of his shattered dream. And Gary Smalley expands the concept of the blessing to include eight ways to bless adult children. “I never realized how powerful—and how necessary—the blessing has become to my older children until now. So if you have older children who have moved away from home, they’re never out-of-reach of the blessing.”

*The Blessing* is a powerful book no family should be without. Readers find solid, practical advice on how to be a blessing as well as how to insure that your parents, spouse, and children all feel the security of family approval.

Reading is a solitary experience and this study guide gives you the tool set to dig deeper into the content. Now individuals, families or small groups can personalize the contents of *The Blessing* and probe the contents with honest answers and accountability.

First, commit yourself to learn to give the blessing and to completing all the exercises in this guide. Most people achieve such a commitment by setting a specific time and place to work. You might choose to work half an hour a day, five days a week, or an hour or two one day a week. Determine the time that fits best into your schedule and keep it clear to work on *The Blessing Online Study*. Be realistic when you put down the amount of time you know you can free up for this project. Speed is not as important as achieving your goal of being able to give the blessing.

Start at the beginning of the study and work through each chapter, each step, until you reach the end. Begin each session with prayer, and complete each exercise thoughtfully. The act of writing an answer isn’t important: arriving at the truth is. The exercises have been designed to lead you step by step...to your goal.

When you are working through this study, ideally you can name one person to report your work on this study and have accountability for making progress and completion. If this person is also working through *The Blessing Online Study* then you both gain more than if only one participates. Working with a support or counseling or study group is another possibility. Whether you work with one person or a group, you will be able to discuss your findings and feelings to get the most out of what you are learning.

If you are working alone, choose someone who will care about your progress and listen to your reports. Perhaps your spouse is the best choice. Perhaps a close friend will be most

helpful to you if you are not married. The advice in this section will help you gain the greatest possible benefits from this study.

**If you don't have *The Blessing* to go with this study guide:**

For the maximum benefit from this free study guide, you need to have a copy of *The Blessing*. This study guide is a companion to the best-selling book. You can immediately purchase the book at: [www.theblessing.com](http://www.theblessing.com)

The Journey toward the Blessing

Diane shook her head in disbelief. Her mind refused to accept what she'd heard. "Tell me exactly what my son said."

Her father-in-law replied, "We were talking about what day you'd return and how glad the two of you would be to see him. His little eyes looked down and he said, "Dad will be glad to see me...but Mom won't. *She doesn't love me.*"

Diane couldn't believe her eight-year-old Jerry felt that way. If anything, she was afraid she loved him *too* much. She shared the problem with her husband, Don, and he suggested they read *The Blessing*.

Shortly after they had gone through the book together, Diane went into her son's room to pray with him one night. She asked, "Honey, do you know what I really like about you?"

Without hesitation, Jerry said, "*Sure...nothing.*"

Perhaps you are like Diane—you love your child or children dearly, but don't seem to be able to convince them you care. Perhaps it's your spouse or your friend or parents who need your affirmation.

Perhaps you are like Jerry—even as an adult, you honestly believe one or both parents don't, or didn't, love you. Possibly they didn't; they were abusive, critical, had too-high expectations, or even abandoned you. It's possible that they, like Diane, simply didn't know how to express the love and acceptance necessary for you to feel loved and accepted.

Whether you've missed out on the blessing or need to learn to give it to those around you, this workbook is a tool for you to use to walk toward wholeness and positive relationships. The exercises are designed to help you learn and use the steps of the blessing, to provide the blessing to others, and to find the blessing for yourself.

Working through the workbook will take time, commitment, persistence, and perhaps some soul-searching. But, if you master these principles, you'll find the effort well worthwhile. Diane did.

When her son, Jerry, admitted he couldn't think of anything about himself that she loved, Diane choked back tears. She said the first positive thing that popped into her mind, "Sweetheart, I do love the way you have such a good imagination and are able to make up such neat stories. I like that in your Daddy, too."

After that first night, Diane mentioned something she liked about Jerry every day. It became almost a ritual at bedtime. She reported, "Within months, he was sitting on my knee again and letting me kiss him goodnight. It was overwhelming to see him become a child again."

For nearly eight months, Diane had the joy of winning back her son's love and affection, and then it happened: every mother's worst nightmare. While Jerry was delivering papers on his bicycle only a few blocks from their home; he was struck by a drunk driver and killed instantly.

In the midst of her grief, Diane brushed away tears and said, "I look back over those months preceding his death and thank God over and over that I was able to see my mistakes. God was gracious in giving me those special months. Jerry died knowing I loved him. I thank God for that."

You too, may want to praise God for what you learn in this workbook as relationships with your family and friends grow.

In addition to strengthening or rebuilding your family relationships and producing a sense of self-worth in children, the blessing also helps ensure closer, happier social ties with others as the children grow up.

In a thirty-six-year study reported in the April *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, psychologists Carol Franz, David C. McClelland, and Joel Weinberg found that children who receive physical affection and warmth are apt to have closer marriages and friendships, better mental health, and greater work success.

Affection from Dad is as influential and lasting as affection from Mom, according to the study. But warm affection from both parents is most likely to result in a well-adjusted adult with a strong sense of internal security. Completing the exercises and assignments in this study guide will help you give your children, spouse, friends and others this advantage.

As you begin your journey toward the blessing, we want to give you our blessing. Without knowing who you are, we know you are special in God's eyes. He cares for you, and we care too. We know that, if you diligently give yourself to learning and practicing the steps in this online study, you will become a person of blessing.

## 1. Understand the Blessing

In the Azores, it is common for a younger person to greet an older relative with the phrase, “Bless me, my uncle [or aunt or father, and so on].” The uncle responds, “I bless you, Sally. Do you have a particular problem?”

If Sally does have a problem, she can lay it on her uncle’s shoulders and he can give her assurance, advice, or affirmation. Sally’s request for a blessing may just be a request for affirmation—Sally’s need to feel her older relative’s acceptance.

We all long to be accepted by others. While we may say out loud, “I don’t care what other people think about me,” on the inside we all yearn for intimacy and affection. This yearning is especially important in our relationship with our parents. Gaining or missing out on parental approval has a tremendous effect on us, even if it has been years since we have had any regular contact with them.

### The Missing Blessing

This first study supplements the material in Chapters 1-3 of *The Blessing*. A study showed that children who received affirmation from at least one parent were more apt to have closer marriages and friendships, better mental health, and more work success. That same study showed the opposite to be true of children who didn’t receive warmth and affection from their parents. These children will more likely lack personal acceptance, which in turn leads to difficulty in making decisions and relating well to people.

Without the blessing, some people carry a huge reservoir of unreleased anger that eventually explodes and spreads hurt over everyone around.

Others are bound by a paralyzing fear that keeps them from functioning at their full capacity—fear of what people think, fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of not measuring up, fear of fear itself.

Pessimism, another result of missing the blessing, actually threatens life. Peterson and Bossio, in their book, *Health and Optimism* established a medical link between a patient’s optimism or pessimism and his or her health. Their examination of study after study on cancer patients revealed the destructive potential of pessimism.

People who have never heard affirming words or who were never encouraged often lacked communication skills. In a study reported in *USA Today*, 92 percent of people turned down for a job or a promotion were not turned down due to lack of job skill, but to lack of communication skills.

The lack of the blessing has often devastating effects in every area of our lives and at all stages of our lives.

Everyone needs to receive the blessing.

Rachel didn't. Now in her mid-50s, Rachel will not invite friends for coffee or lunch. Her self-esteem is so low that she would rather be lonely than risk their saying no and thus feeling rejected. While growing up, Rachel believed that her mother favored her younger brother. Instead of affirming Rachel's value, her mother taught her to stay in the background and consider everyone else better and more important. Rachel never felt cherished. As a result, she failed to find the blessing, and her sense of inferiority became so strong that no amount of affirmation has been able to change her negative self-perception.

Geoffrey can't remember either of his parents ever saying, "I love you" or giving him a hug or a pat on the back. They met his physical needs, but he never felt they gave him the blessing. In rebellion, he did the opposite of what his parents wanted. He tried to hurt them as deeply as he was hurt. Today, thirty years after his parents' death, he still yearns for their acceptance he never felt as a boy, and he grieves over the damage his anger caused them all.

Betsy reacted to missing the blessing in yet another way. Nothing she did seemed good enough. If she got an A, only an A+ was acceptable; if she won a part in the school play, she felt bad that she didn't get the starring role; if she made the team, she wondered why she wasn't captain. In an effort to please, she always tried harder. Acceptance was always just out of reach.

As an adult, Betsy's striving evolved into a common American quality: workaholicism. She often worked twelve- to sixteen-hour days, six and seven days a week, in order to gain approval. She projected her need to please her parents onto her work situation and her employer. Regardless of how many accolades she received as a result of her work, she never felt quite made the grade.

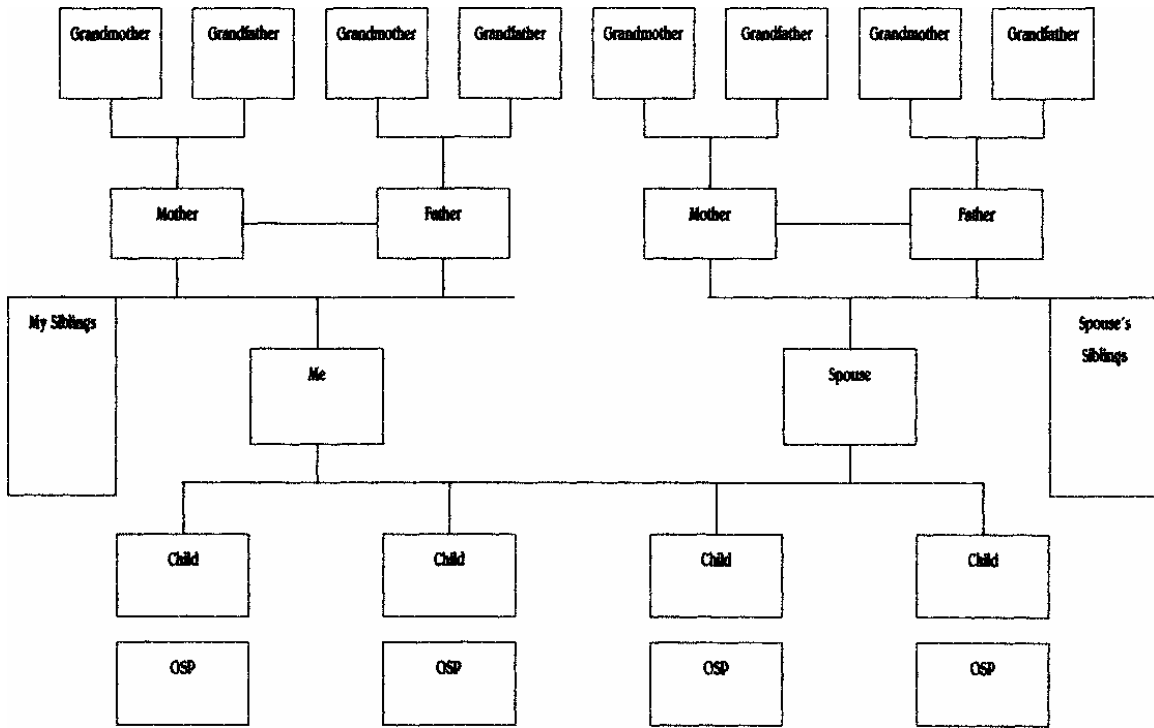
Others who miss the blessing may struggle vainly to sustain or attain close relationships—with a spouse, children, friends, or even with their heavenly Father.

### **Family Snapshots**

Take a look at your family by filling in the names of your parents and grandparents on the diagram below. This may look complicated, but it's really quite manageable. Called a "genogram," this is simply a tool to allow you to see the dynamics of a family that can affect you and future generations.

Do it step by step. Write in the names of your brothers and sisters in birth order. Add boxes if necessary.

If there are other important people in your life—an aunt, a teacher, a neighbor—put their names in the boxes marked OSP (other significant people).



Put a check by the names of the people who lived in your home when you were a child.

Describe your family when you were six or eight years old. To help you get started, think back to a typical mealtime. Who was there? What was the conversation about? What was the atmosphere (happy, at odds, silent)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Now look at individual family members.

Do you feel that your father generally approved or disapproved of you? \_\_\_\_\_

What did he like about you? \_\_\_\_\_

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What did he dislike? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did he show approval or disapproval? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did you feel about your father when you were a child? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

When you were a teen? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

As an adult? \_\_\_\_\_

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Did your mother generally approve or disapprove of you? \_\_\_\_\_

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What did she like about you? \_\_\_\_\_

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What did she dislike? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did she show approval or disapproval? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did you feel about your mother when you were a child? \_\_\_\_\_

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When you were a teen? \_\_\_\_\_

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As an adult? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe the relationship you had with your brothers and sisters when you were a child.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is your current relationship with your siblings?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Did you feel another child was favored above yourself? \_\_\_\_\_  
If your answer is yes, what made you think so? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How did what you perceived as favoritism affect your relationship with that sibling?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How did it affect the relationship between you and the parent who showed favoritism?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Record how other significant people, if any, affected your life.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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What is your perception of yourself today? Are you successful? A failure? Happy? Depressed? Yearning? All “together” emotionally?

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To help you understand your current relationships, examine your family groupings as you were growing up. The space around the figure below represents the whole of your universe. The figure in the center is you; write your name on it. Use stick figures, draw in and name the other members of your family as they related to you in your earliest memories of family life.

Did Dad dominate? Make him a little bigger and put him at the top. If Mom was submissive, but you felt she was in close relationship with Dad, draw her somewhat smaller, a little lower, but close to Dad. Was Mom the driving force? Put her higher. Were Mom and Dad repressed? Affectionate? Touching? Or far away?

Where were each of the kids—close to Dad? Mom? You? Each other? Away from everyone?

Were certain family members always close, bonded together? Connect them with a solid line (\_\_\_\_\_). Were there family members who were sometimes close and sometimes distant? Connect them with a broken line ( \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ ).

If one of the children acted as part-time or substitute parent, draw a circle around him or her. \_\_\_\_\_

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If there were other significant people in your family, put them in place. To whom did you confide your doubts, rejoice over triumphs, reveal your deepest feelings? \_\_\_\_\_

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Think about your placement of family members in the space above and what it reveals about family relationships. Did you put anyone completely out of your universe—because they were emotionally or physically beyond your emotional reach? Were you closely clustered or widely spread? \_\_\_\_\_

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If your family grouping changed drastically (due to a move, loss of job, birth, divorce, remarriage, or death) when you were growing up, draw another universe and show the new relationships.

Describe the extent to which you received affirmation from your family.

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Did it come from one parent? \_\_\_\_\_ Which one? \_\_\_\_\_  
Both? \_\_\_\_\_ Neither? \_\_\_\_\_ Another significant person? \_\_\_\_\_  
Record how that person affirmed you. \_\_\_\_\_

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If you feel neither parent blessed you, write how you would have liked them to behave.

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In the next study, we will take a close look at the blessing and the first element of it.

## 2. The Blessing and the Importance of Meaningful Touch

What is this “blessing,” this important act that no one can live well without?

Here’s one way to explain it: “words and actions that provide an indelible picture of affirmation in a person’s mind and memory.” To bless is to honor, praise, and salute. To be blessed is to be given power for success, prosperity, and longevity.

It is crucial to adapt the five-step pattern of the blessing from the Old Testament into a daily assurance of worth and acceptance for our children, spouse, family, and friends. Though we are presenting the steps one by one, all five are required to give a blessing.

A blessing is powerful. In Old Testament thought, it could surround a person with God’s protection. It was given any time a person was going beyond sight, over the horizon. Normally, a parental blessing was irrevocable. It kept on giving throughout the child’s life.

Though a curse was a major catastrophe, *it could be removed by the stronger power of a blessing*. This idea is important to remember as you begin to deal with our memories and hurts from the past.

When God blessed, nothing could intervene. In Numbers 22, when Balak attempted to bribe Balaam to curse the Israelites, we learn that “you must not put a curse on the Israelites, we are blessed” (v. 12). In Numbers 23, God said through Balaam, “How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? / How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced? / . . . I have received a command to bless; / he has blessed, and I cannot change it” (Num. 23:8, 20). God has the final say on our blessing.

We can give our children, spouse, parents, or friends the benefits of daily blessing. It doesn’t have to be a big production; it can be something simple. How often have you done the following things?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Really listened when others talk
- \_\_\_\_\_ Let a child spend a day with you at work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Admitted you make mistakes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Left a plate of cookies with an “I love you” note
- \_\_\_\_\_ Used any one of hundreds of other ways of saying, “You’re special; I care.”

Parents can bless children, spouse can bless spouse, friend can bless friend, child can bless parent, and church workers can bless their members. It only takes a knowledge of how to do it, the desire, and a commitment to express love and caring.

Recall one specific instance in which you received your parents’ or your spouse’s or a friend’s blessing. \_\_\_\_\_

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In our book *The Blessing*, we explored five elements necessary to giving a blessing, as given in the Old Testament. These five elements or steps, were

- Giving meaningful touch
- Speaking words of blessing
- Expressing high value
- Picturing a special future
- Making a commitment to seeing the blessing come to pass

The book provides a detailed explanation of *The Blessing*. Read chapters 4 and 5 in *The Blessing* for additional insight. The remainder of this second study will explore the first element or the Importance of Touch. You will want to read chapters 6 and 7 in *The Blessing* about the first element before you move ahead and complete the following study guide questions.

### **The Importance of Touch**

When the renowned concert pianist Andor Foldes was sixteen, Emil von Sauer, Liszt's last surviving pupil, came to Budapest and asked Foldes to play. He listened intently as Foldes played Bach's Tocatta in C Major and then asked to hear more. Foldes put all his heart into playing two more pieces.

When he finished, von Sauer rose and kissed him on the forehead. "My son," he said, "when I was your age, I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, 'Take good care of this kiss—it comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play.' I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it."

Nothing Foldes experienced afterward meant quite as much as the touch of "Beethoven's kiss." it encouraged him to become one of the world's greatest pianists.

If you've experienced a special meaningful touch, record the circumstances. \_\_\_\_\_

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What results did it have in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Meaningful Touch — What is it?

Researchers describe meaningful touch as a gentle touch, stroke, kiss, or hug given by significant people in our lives. Touch becomes meaningful when the one touching desires to bless the one touched and reaches out for his or her benefit, not one's own.

Meaningful touch is appropriate touch. You can hug your own children, but not every child on the block or in the Sunday school. Even if your intent is to bless, the touch must be fitting to your relationship with that person.

In today's society, with abuse, particularly sexual abuse, so rampant, we need to limit touch to what is meaningful, but appropriate. You can tousle every child's hair or give him a pat on the shoulder. You can spontaneously hug a friend or clasp hands with an acquaintance. Some people are comfortable with a close hug, while others prefer to maintain space around themselves.

What meaningful touch are you comfortable or uncomfortable receiving? (Example: *I hate being patted on the top of my head, but a hand on my arm is welcome.*)

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### Meaningful Touch — What does it Symbolize?

In the Old Testament, touch graphically represented the transferal of power or blessing from one person to another. For example, during the Day of Atonement, the high priest placed his hands on the head of a goat that was then sent into the wilderness. By this touch, the sins of Israel were transferred to the goat.

When Elijah called Elisha, he threw his cloak over him, conferring blessing and anointing him to become a prophet.

Touch still carries symbolism. What message would you assume from the following scenes:

- A young woman holding hands with a boyfriend  
(Example: *I'm taken. Don't ask me for a date.*)

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- Two businessmen shaking hands

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- A father with his hand resting on his son's shoulder in front of a broken window
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- A father with one arm across his son's shoulder drawing him close and the other holding an umbrella while they wait for the school bus door in a downpour
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- Sisters embracing at the airport with tears on their cheeks
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- A father walking his young daughter to school, carrying her lunch box. At the school grounds, he hands her the lunch box, stoops with one hand on her shoulder, and gives her a good-bye kiss.
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Above all, touch symbolizes acceptance. Read the account of Jesus healing the leper in Mark 1:40-41. "A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing you can make me clean.'

"Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'"

The first thing Jesus did was \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think this was special? (Note: in Luke's account, he says, "a man came along who was covered with leprosy" [5:12].) \_\_\_\_\_

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What was the second thing Jesus did? \_\_\_\_\_

What does the willingness to shake your hand, to put an arm around your shoulder, or to reach out and draw you close say to you? (Example: *They like me; I'm OK.*)

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How do you feel if someone refuses to shake hands or touch you?

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### Meaningful Touch in Your Life

On a scale from 0 to 10, how would you rate the amount of appropriate touching you received as a child? As a juvenile? As a young adult? As an adult? Put a C, J, Y, and A at those spots. (0 on the scale is no touch, and 10 is a total fulfilling amount of meaningful touch.)



Let's consider the way the amount of touch in your life has affected you.

Write down the circumstances surrounding the first instance of meaningful touch from your parents or another significant person that you can remember.

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How did that touch make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why did you remember it? (Example: *because it was the first time I realized my mom loved me.*) \_\_\_\_\_

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If you felt the lack of touch, record a circumstance where you would have liked to have had a meaningful touch and no one provided it. \_\_\_\_\_

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What feelings or inhibitions do you have that you relate to a lack of touch? (Example: *Mom made me feel touch was dirty, so I flinch away from touch.*) \_\_\_\_\_

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The need for meaningful touch does not disappear when we become teenagers or young adults. Often through these years, we may say we don't want to be touched, but deep down, we long for meaningful touch from our parents.

How did your parents carry meaningful touch into your teen and young adult years?

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Did touch become easier or more difficult as a teen and young adult? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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How comfortable / uncomfortable are you at family gatherings where everyone hugs everyone? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does your comfort level change if you hug or are hugged by someone of the opposite sex versus someone of the same sex?

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How comfortable are you with people—not necessarily family—who hug or touch at the slightest provocation? \_\_\_\_\_

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List ways people touch you that let you know they care.

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Circle the one type of touch from the above list that is the most meaningful to you. What is meaningful about that type of touch? \_\_\_\_\_

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Write a summary statement of how you feel about the touch you have experienced.

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Complete the following chart to evaluate what kinds of meaningful touch you have experienced now.

If you have discovered that you lack meaningful touch as a child; don't give up. You will find that giving meaningful touch fills some of the need of receiving touch. Meanwhile, let's look at ways to give meaningful touch to those we want to bless.

### Meaningful Touch

Parents	
Spouse	
Children	
Christian family	
All people	

### Passing On the Blessing with Meaningful Touch

Alice couldn't stand her preschool son. It wasn't because of anything he'd done, but because he looked so much like his father, who had deserted her before Tommy was born. To Alice, little Tommy represented the biggest mistake of her life.

Alice's rage at Tommy's father all fell on Tommy. When the daycare center where Tommy spent a lot of time was closed, she took care of his physical needs, but she rejected him emotionally. The only time she touched Tommy was in anger.

While studying *The Blessing* in a single parent’s class at our church, Alice was confronted with the reality of how she treated her son. She decided to start hugging Tommy.

At home that evening, she held out her arms and said, “Come, Tommy. Mommy wants to hug you.”

Tommy ran. His experience was that when Mom reached for him, it was in anger. So *he ran*. Alice didn’t give up. She chased him around the house until she finally corralled him and gave him a hug.

Alice persisted in giving Tommy meaningful touch. She stood by the door each morning and insisted on hugging him before he went out to play. It took over three-and-a-half months for Tommy to recognize that the hugs were there to stay. One day, Alice held out her arms to him from across the room, and he ran into her arms. For the first time, he hugged her and she could hug him back.

Little Tommy was afraid of the outstretched hands because they’d dealt blows, not hugs, in the past. Others shy away from touch because physical closeness makes them uncomfortable.

How comfortable do you think your children are with your touch? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why do they feel this way? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are your children’s opinions? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What do their actions or reactions show? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If your children are growing up in a home where touching isn’t done, hugs are nonexistent, and physical closeness is taboo, they will feel distinctly uncomfortable when people get too close even though they will earnestly desire that closeness. If your children

or one child or any member of your inner circle doesn't feel touched enough or doesn't want to be touched, what do you do?

Begin with safe touch. Which of these non-threatening or intimidating touches have you used?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Touching the elbow, the least threatening or intimidating spot on the body
- \_\_\_\_\_ A ten-second back rub
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pat on shoulder
- \_\_\_\_\_ Smoothing a hand over his or her hair
- \_\_\_\_\_ High-fives

What other non-intimidating ways to touch someone meaningfully can you think of?

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With safe touch, you're making contact, but not so close that you make the other person uneasy. When your inner circle members feel comfortable with safe, non-threatening touch, take the next step.

List ten different ways you can provide meaningful touch to the people in your inner circle. These should be non-sexual expressions of tenderness, love, and affection.

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Don't be discouraged if your efforts meet with resistance. It will take time, as with Alice and Tommy, but the daily effort is well worthwhile.

As children grow into junior high and high school age, they may not want their friends to see them hugging their mom or dad. But the child will miss the hug if you don't offer it. I (John) can testify to this fact. When my twin brother Jeff and I were young, our mom dropped us off at school every day. When we got out of the car, she insisted on a hug. We thought we hated it. Year by year, my brother and I asked her to drop us off a little farther from school so our friends wouldn't see the daily ritual.

One day, Mom was headed for a major business meeting with a thousand details on her mind. She forgot to hug us when she dropped us off. Immediately, I, a typical otter,

panicked, I was sure she didn't hug us because she'd found one of many things we'd done that we didn't want her to know about. I worried all day.

At dinner that night, Mom didn't say anything. My brother Jeff, an all-American beaver, wasn't bothered. He could wait forever, but after about five minutes, I couldn't take the suspense, so I blurted out, "Mom, I'm so sorry. Will you forgive me? I don't know how you found out, but..."

Mom broke in, "What on earth are you talking about?"

"Well, this morning you didn't hug us. You never made us hug you. I figured you found out."

"I'm sorry, John. I was just up to my earlobes in details for the meeting, but—found out about *what*?"

I was not only in trouble with my mom, but my brother was angry with me too—all over a forgotten hug.

Even if we think we hate it, we don't want to do without that daily touch that says, "You're OK. I love you." Neither do any of the members of our families. Who are the family members in your inner circle? Write one name on the first line of each of the sections below. If your family is large, then use separate sheets of paper. If your family is small, just leave some charts blank. Don't get bogged down and discouraged.

Once you've written in the names, answer the questions for each person, being sure the activity fits that individual.

**Name 1** \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you (i.e., son, spouse, parent). \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Where does this person live (your home, his or her own home, same town, across the country)? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your current relationship with this person (i.e. close, distant, not speaking).  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is your emotional attitude toward this person (i.e. good, estranged)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is his or her attitude toward you? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about the relationship (i.e. hopeful, discouraged)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

How long has it been since you meaningfully touched this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In what way could meaningful touch improve the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What steps will you have to take to make meaningful touch a part of this relationship?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How long do you think it may take? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

When will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

**Name 2** \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you (i.e., son, spouse, parent). \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Where does this person live (your home, his or her own home, same town, across the country)? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your current relationship with this person (i.e. close, distant, not speaking). \_\_\_\_\_

What is your emotional attitude toward this person (i.e. good, estranged)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is his or her attitude toward you? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about the relationship (i.e. hopeful, discouraged)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

How long has it been since you meaningfully touched this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In what way could meaningful touch improve the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What steps will you have to take to make meaningful touch a part of this relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

How long do you think it may take? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

When will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

**Name 3** \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you (i.e., son, spouse, parent). \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Where does this person live (your home, his or her own home, same town, across the country)? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your current relationship with this person (i.e. close, distant, not speaking). \_\_\_\_\_

What is your emotional attitude toward this person (i.e. good, estranged)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is his or her attitude toward you? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about the relationship (i.e. hopeful, discouraged)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

How long has it been since you meaningfully touched this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In what way could meaningful touch improve the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What steps will you have to take to make meaningful touch a part of this relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

How long do you think it may take? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

When will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

**Name 4** \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you (i.e., son, spouse, parent). \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Where does this person live (your home, his or her own home, same town, across the country)? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your current relationship with this person (i.e. close, distant, not speaking).  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is your emotional attitude toward this person (i.e. good, estranged)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is his or her attitude toward you? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about the relationship (i.e. hopeful, discouraged)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

How long has it been since you meaningfully touched this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In what way could meaningful touch improve the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What steps will you have to take to make meaningful touch a part of this relationship?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How long do you think it may take? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

When will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

**Name 5** \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you (i.e., son, spouse, parent). \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Where does this person live (your home, his or her own home, same town, across the country)? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your current relationship with this person (i.e. close, distant, not speaking). \_\_\_\_\_

What is your emotional attitude toward this person (i.e. good, estranged)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is his or her attitude toward you? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about the relationship (i.e. hopeful, discouraged)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

How long has it been since you meaningfully touched this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In what way could meaningful touch improve the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What steps will you have to take to make meaningful touch a part of this relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

How long do you think it may take? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

When will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

**Name 6** \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you (i.e., son, spouse, parent). \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Where does this person live (your home, his or her own home, same town, across the country)? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your current relationship with this person (i.e. close, distant, not speaking). \_\_\_\_\_

What is your emotional attitude toward this person (i.e. good, estranged)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is his or her attitude toward you? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about the relationship (i.e. hopeful, discouraged)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

How long has it been since you meaningfully touched this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In what way could meaningful touch improve the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What steps will you have to take to make meaningful touch a part of this relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

How long do you think it may take? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

When will you start? \_\_\_\_\_

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May God bless you as you seek to put meaningful touch into the lives of your immediate family.

### **3. The Blessing and the Power of Words**

Meaningful touch is more powerful than words, but without the right words, the blessing circuit is never closed and the message of the blessing doesn't get through.

The power of words comes from God. In the beginning, God spoke and all creation came into being. In John 1, we discover that the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.

Our words also have an effect. They may not always do what we intend, but they're mighty in affecting the lives of those we speak to. Positive words bless; negative words demolish. Silence can destroy someone who looks to us for a blessing. Both people and relationships suffer in the absence of spoken words of love, encouragement and support—words of blessing.

Unless a person hears, "I love you. You're special," he or she will never feel completely blessed. Though a parent may shower gifts and material goods on a child and do everything for the best of the child, the child will experience a void that results in incredible heartache and hurt unless the parent's actions are accompanied by accepting, acknowledging words. Children desperately need to hear a spoken blessing from their parents; husbands and wives need to hear words of love and acceptance on a regular basis from their spouses. Friends need to hear the blessing from friends; parents need to hear it from children.

This third study in the online study is coordinated with Chapters 8 and 9 in *The Blessing*.

**Powerful words**

How have words affected your life? Do you remember a special event? Think back through the years to a time when you felt blessed or cursed. Record that memory in the chart below.

Event	
Place the words were spoken	
How long you have remembered	
Person who said the words	
Relationship of that person to you	
The words that were said	
Actions that accompanied the words	
How the words affected you—how you felt	

What did your answers tell you about yourself and words of blessing? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What can you learn from the exercise about how your words affect the people around you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
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How might the use of words affect the relationships within your family? (Example: *If we don't use words of blessing, no wonder we're at odds with each other.*) \_\_\_\_\_

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If doing this chart reopened some old wounds, what do you think it will take to heal them? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Words that Harm**

If a parent gives a child meaningful touch and says the right words, the child will feel blessed. If a parent gives a child meaningful touch but says the wrong words or no words, the child feels a void and will always search for the blessing. The same is true of spouses or friends.

Why? Because words have incredible power to build us up or tear us down emotionally. A parent, spouse, or friend can use the power of the tongue for good. He or she can steer a child away from trouble or provide guidance to a friend who is making an important decision. He or she can minister words of encouragement or lift up words of praise.

But this power is also misused, sometimes with tragic results. The destructive power of either fiery words or cold silence can affect us for the rest of our lives. Negative words can come from parents who don't care about their children or from parents or spouses who missed the blessing themselves and so don't know how to pass it on. Most of the time, negative words are spoken by loving parents without thought to the consequences.

### **Demeaning Words**

Demeaning words make a person feel less intelligent, less able, less capable, less worthy, less loved, less lovely, less wanted, and less of a person. These words destroy. For each of the demeaning phrases below, picture a scene where they might be said. Then write some words of blessing that would encourage instead of demean. The first one is done as an example.

*Clumsy idiot*—someone may have tripped or stumbled over something, perhaps banged into something, or knocked a glass full of milk over the table.

“That’s OK, Bobby. Everyone has accidents from time to time. I remember when I was your age. I did [the same thing].”

*Dumdum*

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*Why try? You can't do it.*

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*Messed up again, didn't you?*

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*Can't you do anything right?*

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*You're just a bum.*

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People who hear demeaning words tend to believe them after a time and almost always live down to them.

**Harsh Words**

Some people hear mostly words spoken in anger—words of abuse. These people are yelled at and sworn at. The Wilson family was like that. Neither Dad nor George, the oldest son, spoke under a roar. Whenever a family member did something to irritate, the whole neighborhood heard about it.

Some families communicate only when they are upset. They develop a volcano-like pattern. Silence is the norm. When they do have to talk about something serious, there is a big blow-up. This is followed by a period of distance and then another blow-up.

Harsh words hurt. For all their lives, children may stumble over the hurtful words spoken to them. The words come to memory time and again.

What harsh words do you remember?

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Why do you remember them so well? \_\_\_\_\_

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What blessing words would have been more effective in the situation? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Empty Words**

Some children hear words of blessing, but there is no follow-up. Promises aren't kept, actions don't fit the words, or lack of meaningful touch denies the message. The words lose all meaning, and the child is left unfulfilled. He or she learns distrust.

Which, if any, of these kinds of incidents happened to you?

- \_\_\_\_\_ “Let’s go swimming after dinner tonight. It’ll be a treat for the whole family.” Then when the dishes are done and you’re ready to go, you hear, “No. Not tonight. Dad’s tired. We’ll do it next week.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ “She’s [or he’s] my little jewel. I don’t know what I’d do without [her/him].” But as soon as the company leaves, you hear, “Get out of my sight. What are you hanging around for?”

\_\_\_\_\_ “Of course I love you. You’re my child [or wife/ husband], aren’t you?”  
\_\_\_\_\_ “Look, Daddy, see my new haircut!” “Yes, love, it’s really neat”—but Dad never looks up from the paper.

What common message does each of these vignettes convey?

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### **Absence of Words**

Though the one being silent doesn’t necessarily mean to convey these thoughts, his or her silence says, “You’re not worth speaking to; you aren’t loved.” Absence of words causes suffering. Unmet needs for security and acceptance act like sulfuric acid and eat away at relationships: between parent and child, between spouses, between friends. The relationships disintegrate.

Perhaps most destructive is the parent who is always home, but never says words of acceptance. This parent sends out a double message: “I’m here, but you can never come to me.” By their silence and their actions, such people put a vast emotional distance between themselves and their children. They’re in the home, but unavailable.

If you were given the “silent treatment,” why do you think your parents withheld words of blessing? \_\_\_\_\_

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How well are you able to express your feelings to others? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Applying Spoken Words**

We put spoken words of blessing into practice in our homes and relationships by deciding to speak up rather than clam up. Good words are needed to bestow the blessing on a child, spouse, or friend.

Everyone of every age—from the delivery room to the mortuary—needs words of blessing. It’s up to us to learn to say them to the people closest to us.

### **Giving The Blessing Through Spoken Words**

How often do we need to say, “I love you”?

### Daily

Like hugs and other meaningful touch, we all need daily doses of hearing words of blessing. At least once a day, we need to lubricate our tongue, clear out our voice box, take courage in hand, and say, "I want you to know I think you're great."

How could you give spoken words of blessing? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When would be a good time? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Celebrations

Spoken blessings can also be given for special occasions, such as a birthday, anniversary, graduation, or wedding. You may want to write the words for these blessings so the recipient can keep them as a remembrance. You want to bolster the ones you bless with pictures of the event and store them in an album or scrapbook.

Whether you choose to celebrate with a large project or just a letter to a grown son or daughter who lives across the country, your written blessings pass on a message of love and acceptance.

Who in your family might need a special blessing celebration? \_\_\_\_\_

Who might help you do it? \_\_\_\_\_

Suggest one idea of what you might do. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Borrowing Blessing Words

If you have trouble coming up with your own words, greeting cards help you say, "You're special." One card reads, "I don't think about celebrating you only on your birthday or on the holidays of the year. I hold my thoughts of you within my heart all the time. And do you know what? I think you're wonderful. Today I'm going to tell that to you." Of course, the words aren't enough. We have to mean them. They must be said with sincerity. They must fit the person we're giving them to.

### Giving Words of Blessing

Take time to plan a strategy. First to speak or write or sing words of blessing on a daily basis to those loved ones who live in your home. Perhaps you'll choose to write or call

once a week to those who live far away from your home. And you may want to plan a once-a-year blessing celebration for each member of your “inner circle” of immediate family.

List again the names of those in your inner circle. Then fill in the other information. There may be more forms than you need. Don’t feel compelled to fill them up. Don’t bog yourself down to too much to do, but figure out a word of blessing for each person in your inner circle.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
I see (name) \_\_\_\_\_ every day \_\_\_\_\_ once a week \_\_\_\_\_  
once a month \_\_\_\_\_ what interval \_\_\_\_\_  
I think (name) \_\_\_\_\_ would most like to hear the following from me: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is a sample of words I can say or sing or write to him/ her on a regular basis:

\_\_\_\_\_

The best time for me to do this is (bedtime, mealtime, weekly phone call, monthly letter, other)  
\_\_\_\_\_

<p>“I will bless _____ with spoken or written words on a regular basis: daily _____ weekly _____ monthly _____ other _____.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____ Signature</p>
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Name \_\_\_\_\_  
I see (name) \_\_\_\_\_ every day \_\_\_\_\_ once a week \_\_\_\_\_  
once a month \_\_\_\_\_ what interval \_\_\_\_\_  
I think (name) \_\_\_\_\_ would most like to hear the following from me: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is a sample of words I can say or sing or write to him/ her on a regular basis:

\_\_\_\_\_  
The best time for me to do this is (bedtime, mealtime, weekly phone call, monthly letter, other)  
\_\_\_\_\_

“I will bless \_\_\_\_\_ with spoken or  
written words on a regular basis: daily \_\_\_\_\_ weekly \_\_\_\_\_ monthly \_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_.”

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
I see (name) \_\_\_\_\_ every day \_\_\_\_\_ once a week \_\_\_\_\_  
once a month \_\_\_\_\_ what interval \_\_\_\_\_  
I think (name) \_\_\_\_\_ would most like to hear the following from me: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is a sample of words I can say or sing or write to him/ her on a regular basis:

\_\_\_\_\_  
The best time for me to do this is (bedtime, mealtime, weekly phone call, monthly letter, other)  
\_\_\_\_\_

“I will bless \_\_\_\_\_ with spoken or  
written words on a regular basis: daily \_\_\_\_\_ weekly \_\_\_\_\_ monthly \_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_.”

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
I see (name) \_\_\_\_\_ every day \_\_\_\_\_ once a week \_\_\_\_\_  
once a month \_\_\_\_\_ what interval \_\_\_\_\_  
I think (name) \_\_\_\_\_ would most like to hear the following from me: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is a sample of words I can say or sing or write to him/ her on a regular basis:

\_\_\_\_\_

The best time for me to do this is (bedtime, mealtime, weekly phone call, monthly letter, other)

\_\_\_\_\_

“I will bless \_\_\_\_\_ with spoken or written words on a regular basis: daily \_\_\_\_\_ weekly \_\_\_\_\_ monthly \_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_.”

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

When you feel comfortable with the basics of saying words of blessing go on to the next lesson of the study where we'll look at another element that needs to be a part of our spoken blessing.

#### 4. The Blessing and Expressing High Value

Every person needs someone to attach a high value to him or her in order to feel loved and secure. Solomon, the wealthiest king of Israel, said, “To be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (Prov. 22:1).

This fourth lesson is designed to be coordinated with chapters 10 and 11 from *The Blessing*. For the greatest value from this study, read and review these chapters before completing the exercises. Some of the words in the exercise below are synonymous with “to value.” Others reflect recognition of achievement or good behavior. Circle the words or phrases that mean valuing a person for who he or she is (i.e., character, attitude, personality):

Rate high	Attach importance
Esteem	Appreciation for doing well
Praise for obedience	Reward for accomplishment
Prize highly	Praise for character quality
Treat with honor	Acceptance

Place a check mark before the words or phrases that recognize accomplishment.

What is the difference between valuing and recognizing accomplishment? \_\_\_\_\_

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What effect did valuing words have versus recognizing words—which made you feel good or made you feel you had to do more to get words of praise? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### **What do you have to say after you say, “I love you?”**

We have learned that the blessing must contain meaningful touch and a spoken message that expresses high value. What words express high value?

God, the Father, expressed high esteem for Jesus on two different occasions. When Jesus was baptized, Luke recorded, “The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’” (Luke 3:22).

On the mountain when Peter, James, and John saw Jesus change into a glorified being and talk with Moses and Elijah, “God spoke again, “A voice came from the cloud: This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”” (Mark 9:7). In recalling the event years later,

Peter said, “For he received honor [a synonym for blessing and value] and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”” (2 Peter 1:17).

Which of God’s words showed how highly He valued Jesus?

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A word, a simple phrase, a pat on the back—it takes little effort but great awareness, to show people you value them. Betty shows high valuation of her sister with notes at the end of a letter, such as, “You’re special. I’m glad you’re my sister!”

Other words of value might be, “You’re important to me,” “You mean so much to me,” “You made my day!” or “I’m so excited to hear from you.”

What words or actions have you used to make the following people feel highly valued?

Your mom \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your dad \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

A grandparent \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

A stepparent \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

A sibling \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

A teacher \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your spouse \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your children \_\_\_\_\_

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Other \_\_\_\_\_

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Have you used devaluing words with these people? Think back over the past week. What have you said or done that may make one of the above people feel that you don't value them highly? (Example: ignoring one of these people when they wanted some of your time.)

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In general, how do the people in your family respond to valuing words and actions?

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How do they respond to devaluing words and actions? \_\_\_\_\_

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On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate the self-esteem of your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

Of your children? \_\_\_\_\_

Of friends (if you don't have spouse or children)?

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How do you influence that self-esteem with what you say and do?

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When we realize how strongly words affect us, it becomes increasingly clear how important it is to express high value to those we want to bless—and to everyone God puts in our sphere of influence.

### Learning to Express High Value

Suppose you're not a visually-oriented person. If word pictures come a little hard for you, what words would you use to describe your self-esteem today?

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Expand on your description by writing a word picture to describe yourself. Here's an example:

Six years ago, I was an acorn clinging to an oak tree. The oak tree released (divorced) me. That fall was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. I crashed to the earth and died in the dirt. Soon though, my shell broke open and roots of my own began reaching for solid ground. My stem stretched upward toward the "Son." Today, I am a young oak no longer emotionally dependent on people, but on God.

Write a word picture of yourself. \_\_\_\_\_

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How does the way you feel about yourself affect your desire to bless others (Example: *I've had low self-esteem, but I want to give my family better, so I do what I would have liked others to have done to me.*)

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Even if you feel empty yourself, determining to bless others is possible with God's support and brings blessing back to you.

### Whom Do You Value Most?

As you recall, you need to attach priority to those you value the most. By placing certain people in your inner circle, we put them at higher priority than the extended family in the second circle, the spiritual family in the next circle, and all people in the outer circle.

Underscore or highlight the words in these verses that show some guidelines for who we are responsible to bless:

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

“In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:28).

“The wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2).

List your inner circle people in their priority ranking. Who appears at the top of your list? Where does God *actually* rank? Who comes second, third? Are some people valued equally? If so, put a bracket around their names:

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If it would help you, jot a brief note in the right margin to explain why you rated each person as you did. (Example: *Since I have no children, my niece or mother or cousin ranks high.*)

By deliberate decisions, we attach value to family, neighbors, and people in our church or our workplace. We must value everyone God puts into our lives and treat them with respect. However, God gives us certain people who need more of our time and energy. For them, we have to plan more specific, in-depth ways to show we value them. Thus, we set the priority rating—who ranks high, who ranks low, who ranks in between—all on a scale of high value.

Attaching a high value isn't always easy. The people we need to honor may seem unworthy of our esteem—a mother who deserted us, a child who disobeys and dishonors us, or a father who abused us. If judged by performance, these people may not rate higher than a "1.3" on the 1 to 10 scale. Regardless of how these family members treat us, we need to honor them—to respond not by how we feel but according to God's command.

Attaching high value is based on who a person is, not on what he or she does. We must determine to value them just as parents love their children unconditionally, regardless of what they do.

### **Expressing High Value to Others**

Young children learn by repetition. When the Proverb encourages, "train up a child in the way he should go," the Greek word for "train" indicates repeated training. You can tell a child simply and clearly and often, "You're a great son. I love you." "I'm glad God gave you to me to be my very own daughter. He blessed me with you."

From your inner circle, list the names of any that are younger than thirteen. Beneath the name write in word pictures of high value that would make that particular child feel esteemed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
High value \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
High value \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
High value \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
High value \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
High value \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Practice these word pictures, and then use them consistently with your younger family members—perhaps as a bedtime ritual or on waking up in the morning or at a meal.

What about the older child? Simply telling, as you do a young child, no longer gets through. It sounds too much like a lecture. Emotional events and ideas combined with action reach young adults and adults. In other words, this is when word pictures become one of the best means of communicating high value.

It takes only a little practice to develop skill to use word pictures to attach high value to any member of your family or circle of friends.

Complete this exercise for practice:

1. List your inner-circle people in the blanks below.
2. After you've recorded their names, thoughtfully consider what character trait or quality (i.e., integrity, generosity, trustworthiness) you could focus on to make that person feel highly esteemed. Write in that trait.
3. Write in that person's interests or enthusiasms—something that will give you a direct line to his or her attention.
4. Next, think of an everyday or nature object that demonstrates their good quality. The object is most effective if it relates to the person's special interest or enthusiasm.
5. Write a word picture.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Quality/ trait \_\_\_\_\_  
Interest/ enthusiasm \_\_\_\_\_  
Object \_\_\_\_\_  
Word picture \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Quality/ trait \_\_\_\_\_  
Interest/ enthusiasm \_\_\_\_\_  
Object \_\_\_\_\_  
Word picture \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Quality/ trait \_\_\_\_\_

Interest/ enthusiasm \_\_\_\_\_

Object \_\_\_\_\_

Word picture \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Quality/ trait \_\_\_\_\_

Interest/ enthusiasm \_\_\_\_\_

Object \_\_\_\_\_

Word picture \_\_\_\_\_

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6. When you've made these preparations, rehearse your story. Make sure you have it well in mind, so that it comes out smooth and clear.

7. Pick a convenient time. If your child or spouse is chomping at the bit to dash out of the house to a ballgame or a party, you've chosen the wrong time. Give yourself some space to talk. Don't jump in when you're angry or upset.

What would be an ideal time? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Choose a place without distractions so you won't be interrupted. If the television is on or a person is listening to a loud radio, you'll never keep his or her attention long enough to get your word picture across. Where will you talk to him or her? \_\_\_\_\_

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If possible, sit close to the one you're blessing so you can touch his or her hand or shoulder. Remember that a meaningful touch is a powerful part of giving the blessing.

9. Tell the person your word picture. Be willing to listen to his or her response—perhaps a word picture of his or her own to share feelings.

How did this person react? What happened when you carried through on this exercise?

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If you're working with someone hard to reach, someone who has built self-protecting barriers against all attempts to get inside his or her feelings, don't give up. Try and try again. Take every opportunity to enlarge on your word pictures to give them more emotional impact.

Again, a word of caution: word pictures are wonderful to use as motivation to self-esteem. They're also effective at manipulating people to do what you want them to do, but that's an illicit use of this powerful tool. Be careful that your motives are right when you use word pictures to value someone.

### 5. The Blessing and Picturing a Special Future

Did you receive more positive word pictures of your future or more negative word pictures? \_\_\_\_\_

The material in this section should be used as an online study to the contents in the book, *The Blessing*, chapters 12 and 13.

What did your parents' or significant person's actions tell you about their interest in your future success? (Example: *Mom's willingness to work to be able to afford ice time showed she wanted me to succeed as a world-class skater.*) \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Picturing a Prescribed Future

Picturing a positive future has a negative side. A parent forcing a child into an activity or career of the parent's choosing is not picturing a special future for that child. Such a parent is prescribing a set future for the benefit of his or her own needs, not the child's. Our true task is to help our children envision the best possible future they can achieve, not direct them into the career we had or wanted to have.

If your parents planned your future for you down to the specific college and career, did you follow it? \_\_\_\_\_

How well suited are you for that career? \_\_\_\_\_

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How successful are you? \_\_\_\_\_

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How much do you enjoy your life? \_\_\_\_\_

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If your parents did not plan a specific future for you, but rather encouraged you to do what your bent led you to do, how well are you suited to the career you chose? \_\_\_\_\_

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How successful are you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How much do you enjoy your life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If your parents tried to plan your career for you and you resisted their plan and did your own thing, how well are you suited for the career you chose? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How successful are you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How much do you enjoy your life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Which of the three options do you think most blessed a person? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Pictures In Our Heads**

The mental pictures that our parents or guardians paint for us—whether negative or positive—stay with us, especially if they’re repeated over and over. Normally, we do all in our power to make them come true. Pictures of the future can be career or life ambition, or they can be of what’s ahead tomorrow and your ability to handle it. When a parents says, “You can do it” about all of the small, daily things in your life, it builds confidence for the whole future.

Check the statements that most fit your upbringing.

The future my parents (or other significant person) pictured for me was

- \_\_\_\_\_ You can do anything you set your mind to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Of course you can pass the test next week. Let’s study together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you’d only try, you could make something of yourself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You’re so lazy, you’ll never amount to anything.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I know you’re scared, but you can do it. I believe in you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ We’ve always had at least one [doctor, lawyer, preacher, teacher] in our

- \_\_\_\_\_ family. I guess you're it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ That's a great goal. Go for it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Okay, the training wheels are off. I'll be right beside you, but you can ride the bike alone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It's our family business. Of course, you're going to take over when I retire.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The way you're going, you don't need to worry about a career. They'll keep you in the State Pen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ With your [musical, sports] talent, you could be a [concert pianist, pro athlete] if you put your heart into it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Honey, that's a great picture. I'll put it on the fridge door so everyone can see it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ That's too hard. Better go for something you know you can handle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ No child of mine is going into such a risky profession. You can be an [electrician, dock worker, teacher, accountant] like your dad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You're too dumb to have such high aspirations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If that's what you really want to do, keep plugging away and you'll succeed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Don't worry about getting through high school now, just concentrate on doing your best in the third grade.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Your Special Future

How have you done with regard to your parents' pictures of a future for you? Put a check beside the statements that apply.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I fulfilled my parents' positive word pictures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I fulfilled my parents' negative word pictures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I made a successful career despite my parents' negative pictures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I rejected my parents' design for my future.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I failed in my choice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I succeeded in my choice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I did not live up to my parents' word pictures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about your parents' influence on what you have become?

- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm angry that their words kept me from reaching my potential.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm grateful for their encouragement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can't forgive the low value they gave me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ "I guess I showed you" attitude
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because you succeeded beyond their words.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because you failed as they predicted.

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Changing the pictures in our mental albums isn't easy, but it can be done. The mental pictures we've taken of ways to fill specific needs can be replaced only by something that is reasonably close to the same satisfaction level. It also depends on the intensity with which the parent painted the picture.

Record an incident when someone, other than your parents, made a positive comment about your future that you appreciated. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name three of your strengths. (Example: detailed, persistent, resourceful.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How do you think each of these three strengths could help others in the future? (Example: helpful—I could help someone finish an important project.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Finding the Right Special Future to Give**

Security in Jesus Christ is the basis for picturing a special future. Be sure those you want to bless have heard the gospel. Pray for them. Take them to church and Sunday school. Teach them to spend time daily in Bible reading and prayer, keeping a journal of what they learn. After this groundwork is laid, you can go further in picturing a special future for each one.

### The Basics

Picturing a special future begins today. The far future will never be bright if we don't instill a sense of confidence and assurance that they have what it takes to accomplish anything they set their hearts on. If, for example, Patti wants to become a doctor, how will she attain the goal if we don't encourage her today in the traits and strengths needed by a doctor, if we don't instill confidence in her ability? We need to work each day to build that special future. We can do this by affirming each one as a person—giving confidence through acknowledgment of that person's worth—by encouraging him or her to develop God-given strengths and talents.

### Practice Session

If your child had one of the following qualities, what immediate encouragement to develop the quality can you give? What long-term future might you project for him or her?

- A bent for mathematics or science (Example: 1. *You know that math better than I do. I think that's great. You'll pass tomorrow's test with flying colors.* 2. *You may become an astronaut or a research scientist or a chemist—and maybe change the course of the world.*)

Name	To Say	To Do
Agnes	God loves you and you are His. He does all things well.	Hug often and listen to her concerns

## 6. The Blessing And An Active Commitment

Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give” (Proverbs 25:14). We have learned much about giving the blessing. It is time to look at ways to do what we’ve learned so that we are not unproductive.

If we received the blessing from our parents, it’s much easier to give the blessing. We have a good example to follow. If we didn’t receive the blessing, we may do as I (John) do: I bless my children by giving them all that I would have liked to receive from my father and didn’t. Others follow their “natural patterning,” the inner voice that tells them to parent as their parents did and end up not giving the blessing.

This fifth element of the Blessing is covered in Chapters 14 and 15 of *The Blessing*.

### Our Natural Patterning

Because so much of our behavioral learning is by example, we develop an inner sense of how things should be done by watching what our parents did. Our reaction to any given situation comes from an automatic inner response developed by our past experience. These inner responses are our “natural” patterning.” If our parenting example did not include giving the blessing, if we grew up in a hurtful or dysfunctional home, we may have been imprinted with a faulty patterning on parenting—or on being a wife or husband or friend.

Our natural patterning affects all we do. If experience taught us the right response to a situation, our inner voice tells us the right thing to do. If what it taught us was wrong, we must use conscious effort to say no to our inner voice and do the right thing, retraining that inner voice.

As you respond to the following questions, it may be helpful to have one specific person in mind.

How does your natural patterning affect you in the following areas:

Giving meaningful touch: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Speaking a message of blessing: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Expressing high value: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Picturing a special future: \_\_\_\_\_

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How do you rate on having a patterning that tells you the right thing to do according to what you've learned in this online study? (Example: *I'm about in the middle. I score high on meaningful touch, but low on verbal expression.*)

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How willing—on a scale of 1 to 10—are you to work at changing that patterning so that you more easily do the right thing? \_\_\_\_\_

You can commit to work at changing the patterning, and, in doing so, begin to offer the blessing to those you love. There are several steps that will help you in making this active commitment to bless others.

### **Becoming A Student of Those We Wish To Bless**

#### **Persisting in Communication**

Too often, we give up too soon. Particularly if we have struggled in our relationships with our children or we haven't been close to them in the past, we must be lovingly persistent in encouraging them to talk.

Think of three things you could do to open communications with those you want to bless. (Example: take them to breakfast—just the two of you.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Answer the following questions with particular loved ones in mind. Fill in the blank number between 1 and 4, indicating your answer to each question. (1 = never; 2 = seldom; 3 = often; 4 = always.)

With your loved ones, which of the following do you do?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Give them the freedom to ask you questions without reacting or becoming defensive.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freely express your own inner feelings and thoughts
- \_\_\_\_\_ Say "I love you" regularly and without conditions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Share your personal problems and victories
- \_\_\_\_\_ Laugh together regularly
- \_\_\_\_\_ Watch your tone of voice

### Sharing Activities

Sharing activities with our children or others we want to bless gives us an opportunity to know them better. We find out what they like and dislike, what interests them, what turns them off.

On our scale of 1 to 4 (1 = never; 2 = seldom; 3 = often; 4 = always), mark your score as to whether you do these things with those you want to bless.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Attend church together regularly
- \_\_\_\_\_ Show an honest interest in their friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Practice a sport, hobby, or talent with them
- \_\_\_\_\_ Show up at parent/ teacher meetings
- \_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer at your children's schools
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor a club activity such as Scouts
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teach them how to bake cookies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read together

Think of one thing each of those you want to bless would like to do with you. (Use a line for each person you are blessing.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ask each one what one thing he or she would like to do with you in the next week.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Which of these activities will you work into your schedule this week? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The need to keep your word is extremely important. It is worse to schedule an activity and not do it than not to schedule it at all. Don't let this discourage you from planning activities, but let it be a reminder to schedule only what you know you have time to do.

### **Taking the Initiative in Asking Questions**

We ask questions to get to know those we bless well. We may think we know what they're thinking and dreaming; we may think we know their interests and enthusiasms. But keeping up with the changes requires constant attention.

To see how well you know your family or loved ones, answer the following questions for each person with a yes or no. If you answer yes, write in your idea. Do you know what each person:

1. Daydreams about most often

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Would like to be doing when he or she is twenty to thirty years old

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Thinks God would like him or her to do for humanity

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4. Finds attractive in a boyfriend or girlfriend

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5. Likes most and least about school

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6. Would answer if asked, "What Bible character would you like to be like and why"

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If you answered no to any questions, you need to begin asking questions to discover who your child(ren), spouse, parent, or friend is. If you answered yes, check with the person to see how accurate you are.

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You may need to make opportunities to ask more questions. This exercise will help you determine how well you know your spouse:

1. My wife's/ husband's favorite men's/ women's cologne is

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2. His/ her favorite food(s) is (are)

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3. His/ her favorite music is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. His/ her idea of a perfect romantic night out is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. His/ her idea of a perfect vacation is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. His/ her favorite subject in school \_\_\_\_\_

7. His/ her least favorite subject \_\_\_\_\_

8. What did he/ she want to be growing up? \_\_\_\_\_

9. His/ her biggest frustration with the kids is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. The household job he/ she absolutely cannot stand is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. The qualities my husband/ wife most appreciates in me are \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have your husband/ wife complete the answers and compare them with your answers. If your answers are dissimilar, you may not know your spouse as well as you thought. Record what you think you can do. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Listening With Full Attention**

Put down your newspaper, turn off the TV, lay aside the book, set aside your handwork, and give all your attention to those you want to bless have to say. Anything less tells them they are of less importance to you.

Using the same scale (1 = never; 2 = seldom; 3 = often; 4 = always) do you:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Seek to hear their inner feelings without ridiculing them
- \_\_\_\_\_ “Light up” when they come into the room
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seek and value their opinions on family issues
- \_\_\_\_\_ Actively listen to them

Our purpose in listening with full attention is not just to make people feel good. We listen actively in order to be able to take what they share and weave it into words and stories that each new truths and communicate not only the blessing, but also principles for godly living. We listen in order to understand them and so do those things that will bless.

Our children, spouses, parents, and friends are incredibly complicated people. If we would begin today to list all their wishes, opinions, goals, and dreams, it would take us a lifetime to complete the task. That is just the right amount of time needed to finish the course entitled, “Becoming a Student of Your Loved Ones,” a class men and women will enroll in if they are serious about bestowing an appropriate blessing on each person in their lives. All it takes is a decision to actively commit ourselves to others.

### **Be Accountable to Someone Who Will Help You Continue Blessing Others**

There’s one last key to an active commitment to bless our loved ones: making ourselves accountable to someone who will help us continue what we begin. Genuine commitment to provide the blessing to our loved ones grows best in small groups. If you can meet regularly with two or three other parents, siblings, or friends who will ask how you did in terms of providing meaningful touch for your spouse or children or parents that week; what encouraging words you spoke that attached high value; or even asking on a 1 to 10 scale how high your commitment was to bless your family this week, you’re well on the road to a continued commitment.

With this same group, you can admit your struggles and learn from other people’s insights and mistakes. All it takes is the courage to ask honest questions and a loving spirit to share God’s truth and your own personal insights.

If you can’t find a small group, ask your spouse or a close friend how well you are doing in being a source of blessing to them. You can even ask your children if they’re old enough.

The input others give us is a tremendous way to evaluate where we are at the present and give us an incentive to work on areas we are at the present and give us an incentive to



## The Rewards Of Commitment

Commitment is costly. Expect to pay a price in

- *Hard work*—to provide the blessing to another person
- *Time*—to meaningfully touch and hug those we bless
- *Courage*—to put into a spoken message those words of love that have been on the tip of our tongue
- *Wisdom and boldness*—to highly value those we love
- *Creativity*—to picture a future for them filled with home and with God's best for their lives.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews records:

By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regards to their future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying blessed each of Joseph's son's and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff (vv. 20:21).

Underscore the words that show why God honored these two men in this chapter on faith.

What will God record about you? What will your children say of you? Will they be so blessed, that like the children of the woman in Proverbs 31, they will rise up and call you blessed?

### 7. The Missing Blessing

It's hard to heal old wounds. What do you do when you have to live without the Blessing? This final lesson in the study guide helps you explore this question. It should be used with the final chapters of *The Blessing* (especially chapters 16-19).

The sooner we come to grips with the fact that we may never get the blessing from those who seem not to have it to give, the sooner we can turn our energies to other pursuits. We need to deal with our pain and grief and get on with our lives.

#### Face Up to the Problem

First, we need to examine our feelings and memories to see how much we perceived we were blessed or missed the blessing. Regardless of the fact, the perception of having been blessed or not blessed is the reality we feel.

Answering the following questions will help you determine how much you felt you were blessed.

What family members should have given you the blessing? List as many as you feel were responsible to accept and love you.

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How much blessing did you get? Mark the initials of each person you named above on the scale.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Abuse</b>	<b>Curse</b>		<b>Nothing</b>			<b>Some</b>		<b>Fair</b>		<b>Lots</b>		<b>All</b>

(Remember to curse is to dishonor, to value lightly or below worth.)

How was the blessing given? Which of the five steps of the blessing were used or left out? (Example: *Dad never said he loved me (spoke message), but he always took me to ballgames with him.*) \_\_\_\_\_

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Did anyone else—a teacher, coach, friend, employer—bless you in a way? Record an incident you remember.

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Record an incident in which those responsible to bless you withheld the blessing or abused you instead.

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Though it may be painful to dredge up hurtful memories, only in facing them can we begin the healing process. For some, understanding why we feel as they do is enough to set them on the track to healing.

How have you reacted to a lack of blessing? Check any statements that apply to you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel that I just exist, my life is not significant.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I'm afraid of being disloyal and so hold my hurt inside, refusing to admit it.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Most relationships in my life are negative.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ I have a deep sense of inferiority.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I'm angry and refuse to forgive.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Like my parents, I did not give my children the blessing, so I've messed up their lives, too.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I usually give my kids what I wanted and didn't get.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ I hope my spouse, my job, my possessions, or a move to a new place will fill the gap I sense in my heart.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I expect God to supply my needs.

Which of these responses do you think are positive and lead to healing?

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Which will only dig you deeper into lack of self-esteem and anger?

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### **Forgive Our Parents**

Our healing is dependent on our willingness to forgive those who have hurt us. If you choose not to forgive, then you'll spend the rest of your life fighting the results of having missed the blessing. Healing cannot take place. On the other hand, if you forgive, the hurt feelings can be put behind, and you can find a fulfilling life.

Healing comes with forgiveness. The following Bible verses deal with forgiveness.

Underscore or highlight the words that reveal God's standard of forgiveness, then write, in your own words, what the verse says about your need to forgive others. The first verse is done as a sample for you to follow.

*"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you"* (Matt. 6:14 [italics added for emphasis]). (*My forgiveness from God depends on my forgiving others.*)

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"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother [father, mother] when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you not seven times, but seventy-seven times [or seventy times seven]" (Matt. 18:21-22)

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"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

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"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

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"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:13).

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Forgiveness, like love, is a decision we make. It's not impossible if we pray for God's enabling and determine we're going to do it. It will most likely be painful, for forgiveness is accepting the hurt that was given and freeing the one who hurt us from all blame. List in order of difficulty, the things you find the hardest to forgive. (Change the headings to other persons who had responsibility for raising you if you didn't know either your father or mother.)

Mother	Father

Why are these things so difficult to forgive? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you have sisters or brothers who also feel the lack of blessing ask them what is most difficult for them to forgive and why. How do their answers compare with yours?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What have you decided about forgiving your father or mother?  
\_\_\_\_\_

If your parents are living, how will you contact them to talk with them to tell them you forgive them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Write out what you need to say.

Father, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mother, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When will you do this? \_\_\_\_\_

If your parents are no longer living, use the space above to write out your statement of forgiveness anyway. Give a copy to your spouse or a friend to read. This will give you a feeling of having completed the task.

Why is forgiving your parents so important? Highlight the answer in the following verses:

“Each of you must respect his mother and father...I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19:3).

“Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or mother” (Deut. 27:16).

“Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth’” (Eph. 6:2).

### **Honoring Our Parents**

Forgiving is the first step in honoring our parents. But it is only the first step. We must go on to give them the honor that God demands.

Circle **T** or **F** beside the following statements:

- T** or **F**      On a scale of 1 to 100, I value my mother at 50 or below.
- T** or **F**      On a scale of 1 to 100, I value my father at 50 or below.

- T or F** I keep my parent(s) at arm’s length, never letting them get close to me emotionally.
- T or F** I don’t pay much attention to what my parent(s) says.
- T or F** I never discuss issues that matter with my parent(s), only small talk.
- T or F** I let weeks and months go by without seeking out my parent(s).
- T or F** I never talk to my parent(s) about the hurts I felt as a child.
- T or F** I feel anger bubbling just below the surface any time I am with my parent(s), but never express it.
- T or F** I often say negative things about my parent(s) to my spouse or children.
- T or F** I blame my parent(s) for failures in my life.
- T or F** I’d be glad if something awful happened to my parent(s).

How many of the statements did you mark true? \_\_\_\_\_

Even one true statement indicates you hold your parents in lower esteem than God’s standard. Proverbs 20:20 states, “If a man curses his father or mother, / his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.”

Though our dishonoring actions may cause pain to our parents, they cause far deeper, longer lasting problems for us. They keep us from being free to be the people God designed us to be. To help you give honor to your parents, write down one specific incident of their withholding the blessing that makes you angriest or hurts the most, one you remember most vividly.

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In what ways has this incident increased your awareness of others’ needs and pain?

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What benefits, if any, can you see that have come from this incident?

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Has this incident drawn members of your family together? If so, how?

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How has this incident drawn you closer to God's love?

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What insights does this exercise give you about honoring your parents? (Example: Even though what they did hurt terribly, in the long run, I learned much from what happened to me and that good did come from the bad.) \_\_\_\_\_

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How does this make you feel about giving honor to your parents?

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What would it take to change your true answers to false so you could honor your parents?

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When will you begin? \_\_\_\_\_

We need to begin now, but don't expect the process to be over in a day or two. Healing may take months, even years, to complete. We weren't hurt in a single instant, and neither will healing happen that fast.

If your hurts are deep, you may need to go beyond the scope of this online study and seek professional counseling. In Proverbs 1:5, it is written, "A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel" (NASB). Don't let anything keep you from doing what is necessary to find the healing you need.

### **Changing A Curse To A Blessing**

We define a curse as valuing lightly, below actual worth, to dishonor or despise. If your perception of your parents is that they dishonored you, three Bible verses may help you on the way to healing.

Underscore meaningful words in the following verses.

“However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you” (Deut. 23:5).

“It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today” (2 Sam. 16:12).

“Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest” (Prov. 26:2).

### **Some Final Thoughts**

We come to the end of our journey together. It is our sincere prayer that in working through this online study, you have found blessing in learning to give meaningful touch, a spoken message of high value and special future, and have committed yourself to bless those God has given you to bless.

We pray that you have gained the blessing for yourself, that you have strengthened the bonds of your family and friendships by giving each one a full portion of the blessing, and that you are reaching out to members of God’s family to bless them.

May God bless you and keep you, and may His face always shine upon you.