



## BACK TO THE SOURCE

Pastor Al Detter    Genesis 12:1-3, Psalm 103  
5:30, 9:15 & 11:00am    Grace Church    August 2-3, 2008

Welcome to our new series called "The Awakening". We're going to talk about how important it is to become aware of people around us and the incredible impact we can have in their lives.

The Moody chapel was filled with 1000 students. Mr. C. Sumner Wemp, a very charismatic faculty member, got up to lead us in a song. With every ounce of passion, the student body nearly raised the roof off Torrey-Gray Auditorium as we sang, "Out in the highways and by-ways of life, many are weary and sad. Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife, making the sorrowing glad. Make me a blessing, make me a blessing, out of my life, may Jesus shine. Make me a blessing, O Savior I pray, make me a blessing to someone today."

Mr. Wemp was also the director of the Practical Christian Work department. Every student had to go out twice a week to do ministry in the city of Chicago. Students went to prisons, hospitals, city missions, inner-city housing projects, release time Bible classes in schools, you name it. And as we went, guess what was on our hearts. The echoes of 1000 students singing, "Make me a blessing." We really believed we could bless Chicago.

That song and its intent never really left me. It was branded on the walls of my soul. But I'll be transparent with you. Sometimes the demands of ministry are such that you just try to keep up with all that's going on. And while I try to do the best I can, the idea of being a blessing sometimes fades to the background.

In May, I picked up a CD by a well-known church leader by the name of Reggie McNeil. I was on my way to Chautauqua Lake for some meetings so I tossed in the CD and started to listen. I thought to myself, "This guy has some really good stuff to say."

A few years ago, I heard psychologist Arch Hart advise, "When you listen to a guy with a lot of good stuff to say, listen for the 1 big takeaway. Otherwise it will all get diluted."

I got the takeaway from Reggie that impacted me. He said, "We, the church, need to live out the Abrahamic Covenant." Now I know what most of you are thinking, "Living out the Abrahamic Covenant is about as impacting as watching the grass grow." I know, it doesn't sound like anything but boring theology. But if you know anything about the Abrahamic Covenant, you'll know why what Reggie had to say changed me.

When I heard the Abrahamic Covenant part of Reggie's talk, I was profoundly awakened. I'm going to tell you why what Reggie said made a huge difference in my life. I hope it will have a similar impact on you. As I listened to the CD I thought, "Wow! This little CD could change our church!"

For you to get this, I need to take a few minutes to talk about the Abrahamic Covenant. Are you ready!? God made agreements with a variety of individuals and groups in the Old Testament and we call these agreements, covenants (berit meaning 'to cut').

A covenant is basically a binding agreement between 2 people or groups that involves promises on the part of each to the other. It's particularly serious when God is involved. When God initiates a covenant, He obligates Himself to show Himself merciful and mighty towards people. He also expects the person or the group to respond with faithfulness.

There are several covenants in the Bible. To mention a few—the Noahic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, the New Covenant. Today I want to highlight the Abrahamic Covenant.

There was this pagan by the name of Abram living to the east of Israel across the Fertile Crescent in Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:28) in approximately the 1800's B.C. God in His mercy spoke to Abram and told him to leave his country and extended family and move to a land that God would eventually show to him (Gen. 12:1). Genesis 12:4 simply says, "So Abram went." This was a pagan who didn't know the 1st thing about the 1 true God yet off he goes! I wonder how many of us would do that.

Here's why Abram went. It was the agreement, the covenant, that God made with him in Genesis 12:2-3. Five times God said "I will" in the promise He made to Abram.

**\*I will show you the land.**

**\*I will make of you a great nation.**

**\*I will make your name great.**

**\*I will deal appropriately with how others treat you.**

**\*I will bless all the families of the earth through you.**

If a supernatural Being spoke to you and made promises like that, would you go?

The covenant is restated in Genesis 17:1-8 (cf. Gen. 22:15-18). Everything was on God's back. All God was asking from Abram was the circumcision of all the males from then on through succeeding generations as the sign of the covenant. Not a bad deal. A little temporary pain for some real estate, a nationality, and a positive impact on the entire world. All God wanted was a channel through which He could bless the world. Abram stepped up. And God gave Abram his covenant name—Abraham.

How does the Abrahamic Covenant apply to us? Very directly in 2 respects. 1st, the Abrahamic Covenant is the 1st promise of God that someone from all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations would find a personal relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It would be through the seed of Abraham that Messiah would come.

And now, as the church shares the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth, all the families of the earth will eventually taste of the free gift of God's grace. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3:7-9 (cf. Acts 3:25-26), "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gen-tiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham."

Church, when the spiritual sons of Abraham share the good news of Christ and someone believes, that's how God blesses the world. That's the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. That's why we built this new church. We want to bless as many people in our community as we can by seeing them come to saving faith in God.

Here's the 2nd application of the Abrahamic Covenant and here's the part that jarred me. The Abrahamic Covenant tells Abraham and his offspring, of which we are, to be a blessing to everyone. In other words, we're to intentionally be a blessing to every single person we see every day.

Well, what does the Hebrew word "bless (barak)" mean? (Some form of the word "bless" is used 479 times in the Old Testament.) The word "bless" means to convey a benefit to someone by an utterance concerning something that will actually occur in their life. The blessing was 1st spoken and then it was enacted. Usually the blessing was bestowed by the greater to the lesser. It was often some-thing material, but it could also be something spiritual.

The counterpart to "bless" is a negative statement with painful results which is called a "curse". The words "bless" and "curse" are frequently contrasted. Well, that's the essence of the word "bless" in the Old Testament, where most of the exhortations to bless God are. In the New Testament, the Greek word "bless (eulogeo)" has the idea of speaking well of a person, from which we get our English word "eulogy". So to speak well of God is to bless Him.

Reggie said that if every day you speak something positive to a person and do all you can to bring it to pass for every person you see, you'll be doing what God envisioned for Abraham and His children. And that will actually be the springboard for people around us to come to faith.

So I said to myself, "Self, does this mean that I'm supposed to say and do nice things to everyone I come in contact with every day?" And God seemed to say, "Yep, that's what that means." "You mean, my wife and my children and my staff and the people at Grace?" "Yep, that's what that means?"

"Do you mean a person I happen to meet at the mall or the bank teller or the waitress or my neighbor across the fence?" "Yep, that's what that means." "You mean even the lousy waitress or the person that puts me on hold for 20 minutes or the guy that flips me off on the road?" "Yep."

This is incredible! Every morning now, the 1st thing I think about after God is being a blessing to everyone in my path. Whenever I see someone, I'm thinking, "Lord, make me a blessing to that person." Get this. I'm even giving bigger tips to waitresses regardless of their service and talking nicer to frustrating agents on the phone. And of course, there are some great dividends when you bless your wife. A month or so ago, I stuck a \$20 bill in Marie's wallet so she'd find it unexpectedly, just to bless her. Let me tell you, she really likes that kind of blessing.

Friends, I've been changed. Every day I'm now on a mission to say and do beneficial things for everyone I meet. That's how this sermon series came to be. I talked to the Preach-ing Team about us all being a blessing and they bought in. Next week Derek will talk about blessing people in our lives like our neighbors, coworkers, and friends. Next, he'll also talk about blessing our enemies. I mean, how to bless the difficult people in our lives. Finally, Mike will talk about blessing those in our own household and family. That one can be pretty difficult at times.

Now that I've set up the series, my challenge today is to talk about how we bless God. Dozens of times in the Old Testament, we're told to bless God. I think we can easily understand how we can bless other people. But how do we as fallen and finite people bless the Creator of the universe who's perfect and complete and in need of nothing? How can we bless God!?

The picture that comes to my mind is a little baby who's finally starting to see and smile and reach. The parent has everything. The baby is helpless and not even really cogni-zant. But when the baby looks at us and smiles or reaches for us and cuddles, what are we? Blessed. The baby has blessed us even though he's virtually unable to do so. God is our Abba, our Daddy, and He's willing to allow Himself to be blessed by His children. That's absolutely amazing.

I've chosen a few verses in Psalm 103 as an example concerning blessing God. There are many other passages that I could use, but listen as I read:

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

I'm going to suggest 4 ways we can bless the Lord. The 1st is the primary way we bless God. It's the closest to the actual meaning of the word "bless" in the Old Testament. The other 3 are ways we can bless God that I've discover-ed in the Bible over the years. I'm going to use words that all start with "P" to make them easier to remember.

### **"P" #1—We bless God when we praise Him.**

This is without question the primary way we bless God. Blessing God in this way is an utterance from our mouths to God as an expression of internal gratitude for all the blessings that He has given us.

We must continually remind ourselves that every good thing we have, originated from God. There isn't 1 good thing we enjoy that didn't. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father." How many? Every!

The reality is—many people forget to praise God for all the good things we have. No civilization on earth has ever been as blessed as we are in America. But what do we tend to do? Complain over what we don't get or about what goes wrong. We didn't deserve 1 good gift in the 1st place yet God has showered us with so many blessings. If we could just remember that all the blessings we have are demonstrations of God's mercies, we'd be much more thankful.

Did you ever give someone a significant gift and they thanked you for it? You didn't do it for the thanks, but how did it feel? Good. Did you ever give a significant gift and you weren't thanked? Okay, so you justified it with some reasons, but it didn't feel as good as the thanks, did it?

The same thing is true for God. He loves to be praised and thanked for who He is and what He does. In fact, in the Bible, there's usually a divine blessing that prompts the praise and thanksgiving from us. So, we bless God when we praise Him for His many blessings. Psalm 34:1 says it well, "I will bless the Lord at all times and His praise shall be continually in my mouth." God loves to be praised. So to bless the Lord is to praise Him constantly.

### **"P" #2—We bless the Lord when we pursue Him.**

Many of us have been in a romantic relationship. When we really love someone, what do we hope they'll do? Ignore us. Talk to us when they feel like it. Date others. No! We want them to respond exclusively to our love. We want them to pursue us as we pursue them. And when they do, how do we feel? Blessed!

On Friday, Marie and I celebrated 38 years of marriage. I remember dating her like it was yesterday. Yes, Marie pursued me. She couldn't help herself. And do you know what? It felt good! The same is true with God. God has an incredible love for us. But many people ignore Him. Many only give Him a little attention. Many pursue the loves of this world. That hurts God!

But when we pursue Him, when we chase after Him with a daily passion, God is blessed. Listen to Psalm 40:16, "Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let those who love Your salvation say continually, 'The Lord be magnified' (Ps. 70:4)!" And Psalm 63:1-4, "O God, You are my God. I will seek You earnestly. My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have beheld You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live."

When we pursue God, we bless Him. He loves to be sought with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

### **"P" #3—We bless God when we please Him.**

The Bible has 3 major purposes—to reveal God more specifically than nature does, to explain how we can come into a personal relationship with Him, and to tell us how to live in order to please Him. In fact, He even supplies the power to please Him in the person of the Holy Spirit.

I've got 2 questions for you. 1st question—if we do what God tells us to do, will He love us more? Answer—no. There's nothing we can do to make God love us more or less. God isn't going to love us more 10 years from now if we're real good or less if we're not where we should be.

2nd question—can we tick God off? Answer—yes. We can disappoint God and make Him angry. By the same token, we can make God feel good when we please Him. If you've ever had kids, you know what I mean. They can tick you off for not doing what they should. And they can please you very much when they do what's right. But you never stop loving them.

God wants us to please Him in all that we do every day. Jesus said, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him (Jn. 8:29)." Seems to me that if we want to be followers of Christ, we should have the same mindset. Paul prayed that we might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects (Col. 1:10). In I Thessalonians 4:1, Paul says, "You received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God." The author of Hebrews says, "Do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (13:16)".

God loves to be pleased. When we keep His command-ments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight (I Jn. 3:22), we make God feel good. He has emotions. When we make God feel good, we bless Him. One of my goals in life is to make God feel good more and more and feel bad less and less. I want to bless Him with the way I live my life. I hope you do too.

#### **"P" # 4—We bless God when we promote Him.**

The word "promote" has several meanings. I'm talking about "promote" in the sense of advancing the name and cause of God, exalting Him, and trumpeting His great deeds. God is an incredible Being without peer. He's someone to talk about. He's someone to share with others.

God is not an egomaniac. But He loves to be glorified. He loves to be magnified. He loves to be made much of. He's the only Being in the universe that actually deserves glory.

The Bible is a book that promotes God and His glory. It's loaded with miracles. God loves for us to boast about Him, to tell the stories of His mighty acts in the Bible and in our own lives. He wants us to tell others about His works often.

Isaiah 12:4 says, "Make known His deeds among the peoples, make them remember that His name is exalted. Praise the Lord in song, for He has done excellent things. Let this be known throughout the earth". Verses in Psalm 145 say, "I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You. One generation shall praise Your works to another and shall declare Your mighty acts. People will speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness". God loves us to brag on Him. It blesses Him.

What is all this promotion of God meant to do? Actually 2 things. 1st, as I just said, it blesses God. He loves His glory and will not give it to another. But 2nd, it's by pro-moting God that people come to know Him in a personal way. When we tell the mighty deeds of God, (especially those of redemption, not only of Israel through the Red Sea, which is the central story that glorifies God in the Old Testa-ment, but the story of the mighty work of God in the cross to redeem humanity,) that's what draws people to God!

And guess where this takes us? Right back to the Abrahamic Covenant and God's plan to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's descendants. The major way we bless the peoples of the earth is to promote God to the point where they give their lives to Him. When we bless people that way, God is blessed as well! He loves to see people blessed, not just with salvation, but with the many good things that go with it.

What we don't want to do is mess this up. We don't want to live in such a way that we fail to talk about God's great-ness. And we don't want to live in such a way that when people look at our lives, they don't want our God. We who claim to be Christ-followers are God's representatives on earth. Let's not screw it up! Let's promote Him!

Conclusion  
The awakening we're talking about this month is the realization that every day, we're called upon to bless everyone we see. Everyone. It needs to be a conscious, daily pursuit. That's living out the Abrahamic Covenant.

And of all things, the 1st person to bless every day is God Himself, the source of all things. So every day,

- \*Praise Him,
- \*Pursue Him,
- \*Please Him, and
- \*Promote Him.

Church, let's be awakened to the fact that this is the highest privilege of human beings and the greatest fulfillment in life. As St. Augustine said in the 4th century, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." That's how we give God His greatest blessing.

I'd like many of you to take an action step today. If you want to awaken more to the realization that we're to bless God every day through the 4 "P's" I just spoke about, I mean, a daily intention when you awaken every morning; if you need to significantly improve upon blessing God every day, I want you to declare your intention to God right now. That's what I did in the car on the way to Chautauqua. It's made a huge difference in my life and it can for you as well!

