

**May 17, 2009**  
**“Be a Blessing”**  
**Genesis 12:1-3 (NLT)**

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

Last week Pastor Nick spoke to us about being blessed. Today I want to speak about being a blessing. (Actually, I had been working on ideas for this message before I even knew what Pastor Nick was going to speak about. I love when the Lord does that! The two messages go together, but PN & I did not plan it that way). So, since he titled his message, “Be Blessed” I titled mine, “Be a Blessing.” They go together, be blessed and be a blessing. That is what it says in our text. The Lord spoke to Abram, told him to leave and go to where the Lord would lead him, and said, “I will bless you...and you will be a blessing to others.” As a matter of fact the Lord said, “All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

Do you know that we are not only a blessed people but a blessing people? We were called to bless others. We are called to bring joy into the life of others, not just to Christian people, but to all the people of the earth.

Jesus didn't say, “stay” He said, “Go!” I know I have said it before, I'm going to say it again. The church is not this building. You are the church. The Bible never speaks of the church as a what or an it, but as a who. This building is a place to come to worship God together, and to instruct and help you be the church. But you are the church. And Jesus did not say, “stay in the building; stay only among the members of the church.” Rather, He said, “Go into all the world, and bless people with my message.” You are the church and therefore, wherever you go you bring the church. That's the way it should be. The Lord told Abram, “leave...and go to the land I will show you.”

The church was never meant to be a private, exclusive club, meeting in our club house with a sign outside that says, “members only.” If we are called to be a blessing people, and bless all the families on earth, then we need to get out there, where the people are (so we can bless them). The church always seems to be trying to get people to come to them. The church plans events and welcomes all, but it doesn't working. People will usually only come to a church when they have been invited and brought by someone they have come to know and trust. We can't wait for people to come to us we must go to them. That's what the church does. The church is the people of God

going out into their communities, to neighbors, co-workers, and even strangers to bless them. That's what Jesus did. For example, remember when he met Levi the tax collectors at Levi's place of business and later Levi invited Him to his house for dinner, to meet his other friends?

Mark 2:15-16 (NCV)

**15** Later, as Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating there with Jesus and his followers. Many people like this followed Jesus. **16** When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw Jesus eating with the tax collectors and "sinners," they asked his followers, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Not only did Jesus not avoid disgraceful characters, He sought them out. He wasn't accused of merely being seen with "sinners" but of befriending "sinners". The religious leaders saw Him with those at Levi's party and said, what is He doing with those people, they are not in our club, they don't do what we do, think like we think, where the same robes we wear. Doesn't Jesus know He is only suppose to associate with club members.

Jesus didn't want to be a member of the Pharisee club. The religious leaders didn't want the people Jesus was befriending as members of their club. They wanted members who were perfect, who were in line with their core values... all 613 of them.

Come on, the church is not perfect, not with me in it. Reminds me of a quote by Groucho Marx:

I sent the club a wire stating, Please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member.~ Groucho Marx

The Pharisees called them "sinners." Do you know what that means? It means they were everyday, common people. No worse than anyone else ... except the tax collectors they were worse (just kidding). We need to bless people. And it isn't all that hard to do. Let me tell you a few stories so you will get what I mean when I say we are a blessing people:

I am on a Regional Alpha Team. I was asked to speak at a conference in New Jersey to present Alpha to those who attended. We got to NJ early enough to find a diner and to have breakfast before we went to the church hosting the conference. While we were saying grace over our meal the waitress had come to the table to re-fill coffee cups. She waited until we finished praying. Then, one in our group, Tony, asked her name and asked if he could pray a blessing over her. "Oh, no, I can't believe he asked her that. She is going to think we are weirdo Jesus freaks. Well, she will probably just

politely say no, but thanks, pour the coffee and get away from us as fast as she can.” Isn’t that the thoughts that might go through your head? But here is what happened. The waitress paused a few seconds and just stared at us, and then said, “Actually, I recently lost my son to cancer. He left behind a lovely wife, and a toddler, my grandson. Yes, I could use some prayer.” So, we prayed in that diner, the waitress stood there in tears and when the prayer was over she thanked us. Then, Tony told her he didn’t want her to think we were strange, and explained that most of us were pastors (then she knew we were strange!). He said that the Lord wanted to help her through this difficult time and told her to have faith and that we would continue to remember her in prayer.

She wasn’t going to be coming to any of our churches; she wasn’t going to join our club. But, it didn’t matter, we weren’t being a club, we were being the church... a blessing people.

#### Story #2:

Our vacuum cleaner at home stopped working. My wife can live without a lot of things, and has. But, she can’t live without a vacuum cleaner. So we went to Sears. I didn’t realize there were so many makes and models of vacuum cleaners to choose from. I mean do you want your vacuum to last one year or five years? Do you want one that makes a lot of noise or one you can hardly hear? Do you want your rugs clean, or really, really, deeply clean? Do you want a vacuum cleaner with headlights or without? Our salesman wasn’t much of a salesman, I asked what was the difference based on the prices and he asked us how many bells and whistles we wanted. We picked one out with moderate bells and whistles. Then the salesman told me I’d have to carry it to his register because he had a bad back. So, I’m carrying this box, holding our new “Binford 1000” deluxe, sports model vacuum, with headlights to the register that was further away than I was hoping for. When we finally arrived at the register I asked him how he hurt his back (hoping he wasn’t going to say lugging vacuum cleaners to this register!). As I continued to speak to him, I found that he, an older man, had recently lost his job, and took the job at Sears, because he couldn’t find anyone to hire him in his usual type of work. He was living alone, it seemed to me he was recently divorced. I asked him if I could pray for his back, and he said, “I guess I can always use prayer.” So, there we were, my wife and I, with my hand on the salesman’s shoulder, praying in the middle of Sears Department store. The salesman was blessed.

You see, it’s easy to bless people, and people need to be blessed and most times people want to be blessed.

I have one more story, a story I’ve told before. It is a story from Tony Campolo, and I am going to let Tony tell it himself:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWIMV-UmueM>

Go, and be the church, a blessing people. You are blessed, bless others.

A few years ago Tony flew to Hawaii to speak at a conference. The way he tells it, he checks into his hotel and tries to get some sleep. Unfortunately, his internal clock wakes him at 3:00 a.m. The night is dark, the streets are silent, the world is asleep, but Tony is wide awake and his stomach is growling.

He gets up and prowls the streets looking for a place to get some bacon and eggs for an early breakfast. Everything is closed except for a grungy dive in an alley. He goes in and sits down at the counter. The fat guy behind the counter comes over and asks, "What d'ya want?"

Well, Tony isn't so hungry anymore so eying some donuts under a plastic cover he says, "I'll have a donut and black coffee."

As he sits there munching on his donut and sipping his coffee at 3:30, in walk eight or nine provocative, loud prostitutes just finished with their night's work. They plop down at the counter and Tony finds himself uncomfortably surrounded by this group of smoking, swearing hookers. He gulps his coffee, planning to make a quick getaway. Then the woman next to him says to her friend, "You know what? Tomorrow's my birthday. I'm gonna be 39." To which her friend nastily replies, "So what d'ya want from me? A birthday party? Huh? You want me to get a cake, and sing happy birthday to you?"

The first woman says, "Aw, come on, why do you have to be so mean? Why do you have to put me down? I'm just sayin' it's my birthday. I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should I have a birthday party? I've never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?"

Well, when Tony Campolo heard that, he said he made a decision. He sat and waited until the women left, and then he asked the fat guy at the counter, "Do they come in here every night?"

"Yeah," he answered.

"The one right next to me," he asked, "she comes in every night?"

"Yeah," he said, "that's Agnes. Yeah, she's here every night. She's been comin' here for years. Why do you want to know?"

"Because she just said that tomorrow is her birthday. What do you think? Do you think we could maybe throw a little birthday party for her right here in the diner?"

A cute kind of smile crept over the fat man's chubby cheeks. "That's great," he says, "yeah, that's great. I like it." He turns to the kitchen and shouts to his wife, "Hey, come on out here. This guy's got a great idea. Tomorrow is Agnes' birthday and he wants to throw a party for her right here."

His wife comes out. "That's terrific," she says. "You know, Agnes is really nice. She's always trying to help other people and nobody does anything nice for her."

So they make their plans. Tony says he'll be back at 2:30 the next morning with some decorations and the man, whose name turns out to be Harry, says he'll make a cake.

At 2:30 the next morning, Tony is back. He has crepe paper and other decorations and a sign made of big pieces of cardboard that says, "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" They decorate the place from one end to the other and get it looking great. Harry had gotten the word out on the streets about the party and by 3:15 it seemed that every prostitute in Honolulu was in the place. There were hookers wall to wall.

At 3:30 on the dot, the door swings open and in walks Agnes and her friend. Tony has everybody ready. They all shout and scream "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" Agnes is absolutely flabbergasted. She's stunned, her mouth falls open, her knees started to buckle, and she almost falls over.

And when the birthday cake with all the candles is carried out, that's when she totally loses it. Now she's sobbing and crying. Harry, who's not used to seeing a prostitute cry, gruffly mumbles, "Blow out the candles, Agnes. Cut the cake."

So she pulls herself together and blows them out. Everyone cheers and yells, "Cut the cake, Agnes, cut the cake!"

But Agnes looks down at the cake and, without taking her eyes off it, slowly and softly says, "Look, Harry, is it all right with you if...I mean, if I don't...I mean, what I want to ask, is it OK if I keep the cake a little while? Is it all right if we don't eat it right away?"

Harry doesn't know what to say so he shrugs and says, "Sure, if that's what you want to do. Keep the cake. Take it home if you want."

"Oh, could I?" she asks. Looking at Tony she says, "I live just down the street a couple of doors; I want to take the cake home, is that okay? I'll be right back, honest."

She gets off her stool, picks up the cake, and carries it high in front of her like it was the Holy Grail. Everybody watches in stunned silence and when the door closes behind her, nobody seems to know what to do. They look at each other. They look at Tony.

So Tony gets up on a chair and says, "What do you say that we pray together?"

And there they are in a hole-in-the-wall greasy spoon, half the prostitutes in Honolulu, at 3:30 a.m. listening to Tony Campolo as he prays for Agnes, for her life, her health, and her salvation. Tony recalls, "I prayed that her life would be changed, and that God would be good to her."

When he's finished, Harry leans over, and with a trace of hostility in his voice, he says, "Hey, you never told me you was a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to anyway?"

In one of those moments when just the right words came, Tony answers him quietly, "I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning."

Harry thinks for a moment, and in a mocking way says, "No you don't. There ain't no church like that. If there was, I'd join it. Yep, I'd join a church like that."