

Blessing the Work

My sister Nancy Joy has been ministering to people for many years, but now that she has made the Maryville area her home, she is working to continue her efforts there. She has established the **Lifeline Counseling Center** to help people in their personal struggles. She has created a beautiful office complex by remodeling the house of a historical figure of Maryville, one Moses Houston Gamble. I was privileged to be a part of the house blessing ceremony by which we called on God to empower the work that would be pursued there.

What a great name to follow in a ministry of deliverance! The original Moses of the Bible was called by God to bring the people of Israel, his people, out of a terrible bondage. He was a tool of God to nurture them and take them into a land that they could call home, a land that promised peace, prosperity and safety.

Moses Gamble, in a similar way, pursued a goal of nurturing and educating his children. He also went beyond that to help people in the community: his people. He was respected to the extent that he could not go anywhere without being delayed for hours listening to people and trying to help them with their problems. I remember that the other Moses also had trouble finding time to solve the problems of all of his people.

We met to **continue the tradition that he established** in that house, that of helping other people. The house is only the tool, or the vessel through which this will be accomplished. We should all ask for God's blessing that no matter where we are, the facilities we use are spiritually rooted deeply in Christian principles. As Jesus told us in John 14 that He was preparing a place for us, we must ensure that our work is founded on the rock, and not in the sand (Matthew 7:26-27). We ask God's blessing on this building so that it will stand in spite of the storms that attack the people seeking help here.

The name of my sister's organization is very fitting, and reminds us of the song by Edwin S. Ufford:

*Throw out the lifeline across the dark wave;
There is a brother whom someone should save;
Somebody's brother! O who then will dare
To throw out the life line, his peril to share?*

*Throw out the lifeline to danger fraught men,
Sinking in anguish where you've never been;
Winds of temptation and billows of woe
Will soon hurl them out where the dark waters flow.*

*Soon will the season of rescue be o'er.....
Soon will they drift to eternity's shore.....
Haste then my brother....no time for delay.....
But throw out the Lifeline and save them today...*

There is a risk involved in trying to help people who are in trouble. But the joy of rescue makes it all worthwhile. An even more strongly worded commitment to rescue is given in the poem by C.T. Studd:

*Some wish to live within the sound
Of church and chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell.*

This shows to me an incredible spirit; a great love for the souls of men and courage to deal with those who are 'sinners'. The idea here is of being in the thick of the battle; of risking your own safety to save someone else. It reminds me of Raoul Wallenburg, the man who saved so many Jews during World War II simply by dressing as a high-ranking German officer and transferring prisoners from

their captors to his supervision and then escorting them out of the country. He lived his life a hair's breath from death in his devotion to the salvation of others.

What a fascinating attitude! Christ had it, too. He was not a general who directed from afar, but he came to the battlefield himself. He came to earth, to the thick of the battle for the sole purpose of saving souls. And he also was not afraid to work with 'sinners', even though his reputation suffered for it by those who accused him of being the friend and associate of sinners.

How about us? Are we interested in saving those who are saturated in 'sin'? Do we want to heal the sick, or just gather the healthy so that we can isolate them? I am afraid that we have lost the ability to work with real 'sinners'. We have lost confidence in the power of good over evil, and are afraid of being contaminated by sin. It is so much easier to 'abstain from the appearance of evil', like it is easier as a spectator to cheer our team on from the safety of the stands.

I count myself guilty as charged. Somehow we must strengthen our concern for healing, and our love for sinners. We must realize that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. The purpose of the church is to lead sinners to salvation, not to judge them unworthy. We must not be afraid to work that last yard to rescue the perishing. God's grace is offered to us all, no matter how dirty in sin that we are.

Oasis of Blessing

We must dedicate ourselves and our building to the goal of blessing our community and our world. I believe that God's purpose for us is to fill the world with Good. We should be able to flood it so much with Good that it washes out the evil and prevents it from being able to seep back in. The people who come here will be welcomed as part of our family, and we will share our strength with them.

When Solomon dedicated the temple (2 Chronicles 6 and 7), he asked God to accept His earthly dwelling place, and God responded by sending fire from heaven to light the altar for the sacrifices. His glory then filled the temple in an awesome manner. We want God to be just as present here, but perhaps without the fireworks. We want to bring **God's glory and Goodness** into this building so that others can benefit. I remember that Moses, when he had been in the presence of God, actually became radiant due to his closeness to His glory (Exodus 34). We ask that God be here to affect our hearts in a similar way.

We want to ask **God's blessing on this building so that we can use it to bless others**. The image here is a fountain or shower of blessing that continues to flow from this source. God especially blessed Abraham, and we find that through him all the nations of the earth were blessed (Genesis 18:18). What a great compliment to his faith and work! May God work here in the same way!

We want to ask for God's power to **bless all those who pass through here**. I think of those that sought healing by the mere touch of Jesus (Mark 5:26ff; 6:56) or the shadow of Paul (Acts 5:16), and I wish God would bless this house so that the work that goes on here could be an extension of that.

There are so many people in need of a shelter or haven. An ancient example which still applies today is found in Psalms 55:4-8:

My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest-- I would flee far away and stay in the desert... I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."

This feeling of shelter is something that is very important to us. We all know the feeling of being inside safe and warm while we hear the rain and wind of a storm beating against the house, or the feeling of being protected and bundled up when the temperature is cold. As the philosopher Pascal said, "There is pleasure in being in a ship beaten about by a storm, when we are sure that it will not founder." We want this house to give this sense of shelter in the same way because we know that Jesus overcomes the problems of the world. And we know that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

But sometimes we cannot accomplish the necessary healing in the church environment; there may be no balm in Gilead (Jeremiah 8:22). But as the kingdom of God is within us (Luke 17:21), we work to heal wherever we can.

Charles Swindoll wrote, "Churches need to be less like national shrines and more like local bars... less like untouchable cathedrals and more like well-used hospitals, places to bleed in rather than monuments to look at..." This is not a condemnation of the church, but a realization that some of those who hurt so badly are not motivated to go there. We pray that this house will be a place they can come to for help.

Comfort is a word that simply means "with strength". William Barclay translates the idea of God's comfort as "far more than soothing sympathy... it is the help which not only puts an arm around a man but sends him out to face the world..." This is the true healing power that we seek. We want those who emerge from this house to be strong, as we find in Isaiah 32:2:

Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

We want this building to be a **blessing to this community**. It should be an **oasis** in the desert, a shining light along the foggy seashore. It should radiate Good, and significantly increase the amount of Good in the world. It should be a continual source of blessing, like a garden taking over a barren land, as we find in Isaiah 35:5-10:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs... Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Projection of Power

It is a totally awesome thing to be able to touch the infinite nature of God through prayer. Of course, we usually think of praying to God for something that we want personally. But what if this power was concentrated on those around us, on every one we come in contact in our daily lives? Have you ever seen someone that was suffering, perhaps someone that you didn't even know, and ask God to bless them? I remember reading this idea in a book, and I've tried it a few times. It gives you a blessing, too.

It feels like you are "projecting" the power of God. If you have read Tom Clancy's books, you may know that he speaks of the aircraft carrier as essential to the Navy because it can project power over large distances in any direction. This may sound presumptuous of us, but what if that is all it takes to cause God to bless someone? We talk about praying for each other; we have to believe that God responds in His own way. It just seems even better when it is someone we don't know and who doesn't know who loves them.

Jesus projected power to the centurion's servant in Matthew 8:5-10,

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

You may remember the "church lady" on Saturday Night Live when she got mad at someone she "prayed against" them. We cannot do this and be like Christ. We must project blessings instead of insults. Jesus said in Luke 6:28, "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." This is echoed a couple of times by Paul as well. If we truly have the spirit of Christ then we will want to make everyone's life a little better, even people that we are not close to.

It should invoke in each of us the urgent need to be a blessing to others, as in the song by Larry Giddings:

Be a Blessing to someone today
Take the light, push the darkness away
Let the Jesus in you be the one that shines through
Be a blessing to someone today

Be a Blessing to someone today
Take a hand in your hand, show the way
You can start it today, give your whole self away
Be a blessing to someone today

We must try to be a blessing to someone every day! We must try to make other people feel good!

Reaching out to Touch Someone

I think that everybody has a box or file where we keep things that are special to us. Especially cards we have received from other people. I was reading through them trying to reduce the bulk of them the other day, and I was especially caught by the words in one of them. The sender was thanking me merely for stopping a moment to talk to her and her mother. It is something to see how touched other people are by a seemingly significant thing. It shows how powerful our everyday actions are, and how important it is to keep in the "blessing" frame of mind. It is interesting to see how others might remember something special about you (in a good way).

I have a friend named Keith who is a paraplegic, his saintly mother Roberta takes care of him and works with him virtually every minute of the day. We were at a dinner meeting with him a few years ago, and I watched my friend David help him eat, as Roberta was being given a break. It made me realize how isolated Keith is, a great mind and emotional being trapped in an uncooperative body. I'm afraid that most people have trouble dealing with him in this situation. The other day we were in a meeting and he carted in on his wheelchair table a box of doughnuts. We all grabbed one, and I offered to help him with a doughnut. He said no thanks, but later I got an email from him that reads as follows:

Thanks for offering to help me yesterday with a doughnut. Not too many people think to offer, much less offer. I really appreciated it. Thanks, Keith.

I have never known a doughnut that meant so much. I was really touched by his gratitude for such a simple thing, and realized how much we need to think about the feelings of others. I watch Keith and Roberta embrace life without a single trace of bitterness whatsoever about their "condition." And it shows me that to experience this kind of love is the greatest blessing in the world. We can all be a part of it.

One of the greatest notes that I have at home is from a true friend who sent it at perhaps the lowest point in my entire life. I was hiding most of the effects of my problem, and I wasn't talking to anyone about it. I'm sure others noticed, and some encouraged me, but this note still chokes me up:

Dear Heard,

I just wanted to let you know that I am concerned about you. I don't know what to say or do. All I do know is you are my friend and always will be.
(Tommy)

Some times a humorous note is pretty effective, too. Here's one from another friend:

I am not really sure why, but this card reminds me of you. Hope you have a great birthday. (Ruth)

The idea of blessing each other is an extremely important one that we should nurture in our hearts. We must inject as much Good in the world as we can to squeeze out the Bad. This should be our purpose, as Paul wrote in Galatians 6:10:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

And in Romans 12:14 he writes:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and not curse.

God wants us to be a projector of blessings to all those around us. And the measure we use in giving will be the measure that will be used in return (Luke 6:38).