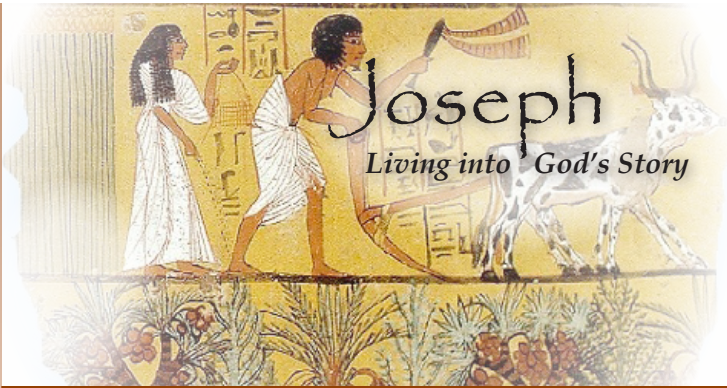


Weekly
Discussion
Guide

May 9,
2010

Genesis 48-49
Bestowing a
Blessing



Where we start . . .

Have you ever said, “God bless you” to someone? It’s likely that you have. What, if anything, do you think happens when you do that?

What we read . . .

Although we might not think much about “blessing,” apparently people in Bible times did. Read Genesis 48 and 49, paying particular attention to what Jacob/Israel did.

Why was Joseph upset with what Jacob did when he laid his hands on Manasseh and Ephraim?

What did Jacob and Joseph think happened when Jacob prayed for those boys?

Why did Jacob “bless” Joseph’s sons? What did he, apparently, think he was doing?

Why this matters . . .

Clearly, both Jacob and Joseph understood that God intended to move and work and bless through their prayers, through the “blessing” of others. Do you pray for others with a real awareness that God does intend to bring particular and specific grace into their lives through your praying?

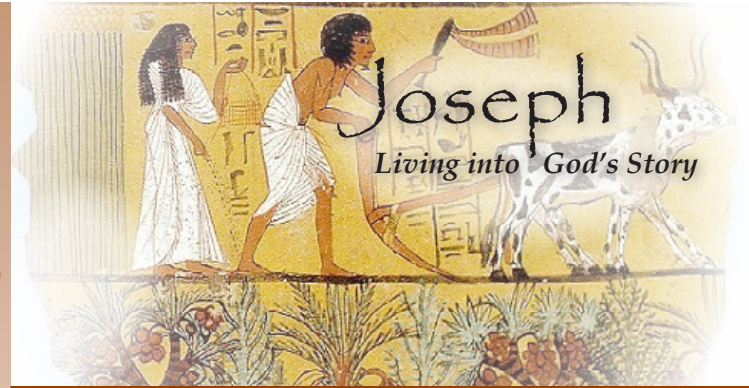
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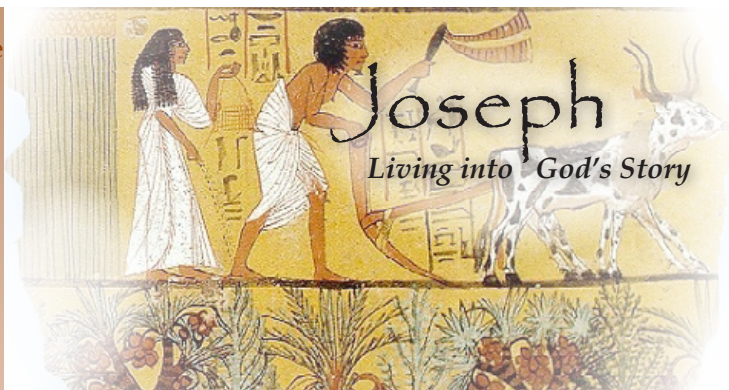
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What are we focusing on?

This week, we watch and listen as Jacob “blesses” Joseph’s sons and prays or bestows a blessing on his own sons. For many Christians, this might seem almost like a “magical” thing. (Like a genie granting “three wishes” to the person who rubs the lamp.) But there is something very different going on here.

When Jacob blesses his sons and Joseph’s two boys, he is partnering with God in what God is doing. This is not “wishful thinking,” but strategic partnership. Jacob’s praying grows out of his relationship with God and when he prays it really makes a difference. And that is an important insight for all those who pray for others!

What will we be discussing?

We so casually say it, we might not even give much thought to what we really are saying. That is what the opening question tries to highlight. We can so easily say to someone, “God bless you,” without much thought of what that means, or what blessing we think He might bestow, or even what we might really want God to do. And, all too often, our praying for one another tends toward that direction as well.

This is in stark contrast to what we see with Jacob in Genesis 48 and 49. When he lays his hands on Joseph’s sons’ heads, both he and Joseph really think something happens. That is why Joseph was so troubled by his father’s “crossed hand” blessing. Joseph intended his eldest to receive the fuller blessing and that would have typically been signified by using the right hand. What Jacob prays, he really believes will come to pass. And, seeing as he prayed as he did, it

would be reasonable to conclude that he thought his praying mattered.

When we turn to his blessing of his own sons, it is evident that Jacob is not merely reminiscing about the boys. Although he speaks of what he knows about their respective pasts (at times), he also speaks to their futures. In praying the specific and significant things he does pray for each one, it seems clear that Jacob understands that these prayers really do matter and that God will be moving in line with these prayers.

From what we know about Jacob (and what we know about God from our study of Genesis), he does not believe that God is at his beck and call. God is not some celestial genie waiting to do Jacob’s bidding. Clearly—as we have seen in Joseph’s story—God is sovereign, working out His plan according to His own purposes. But God does involve others in what He is doing and uses them to fulfill those purposes.

Joseph is integral to God’s intention to make the sons of Israel into a great nation. And God utilizes Joseph, drawing him into His plan, to achieve that end. Joseph is actively involved, even though God is the one who is acting according to His will and purposes. It is similar to what happens in Jacob’s praying. God intends to make the sons of Jacob into a mighty nation and through them to bless the nations; and God will utilize Jacob’s praying to that end. Just like Joseph’s living mattered to the plan of God, Jacob’s praying matters. And, so do ours.

Paul helps us see this in the way he prays, as recorded in many of his epistles. For example, you might look at the prayer captured in chapter three of his letter to the Ephesians. In 3:14-21, Paul prays for some very specific things for the Christians in that city. He is not praying for the kind of “generic” things Christians often pray for one another, but he is inviting and asking God to do a few very particular, and very needed, things in the lives of the Ephesian followers of Jesus. Paul must actually think that his praying will make a difference in the lives of these fellow-believers. He is praying in such a way that indicates he thinks that his praying will bring blessing—very similar to what we witness in Jacob’s blessing of his sons.

The giving of a blessing (like what Jacob did) is like a pronounced prayer over the one being blessed. And, knowing that God can and does answer our prayers for one another, there can be real power in a blessing or a prayer. And this is reflected in both Old and New Testament passages, in both the life of Jacob and the writings of Paul. The only question is whether such awareness of how our praying for blessing might genuinely impact the lives of those for whom we pray.

What would have to happen in the way you thought about praying for others for you to begin to pray like Jacob or like Paul?