



The Privilege of Blessing

Father's Day, June 15, 2025

Rev. Dr. David R. Schultz

Old Testament Lesson, Genesis 48:8-20

⁸ When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, “Who are these?”

⁹ “They are the sons God has given me here,” Joseph said to his father.

Then Israel said, “Bring them to me so I may bless them.”

¹⁰ Now Israel’s eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.

¹¹ Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.”

¹² Then Joseph removed them from Israel’s knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. ¹³ And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel’s left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them close to him. ¹⁴ But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh’s head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

¹⁵ Then he blessed Joseph and said, “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, ¹⁶ the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth.”

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¹⁷ When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." ²⁰ He blessed them that day and said,

"In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'"

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Sermon, "The Privilege of Blessing"

The other day I sat down in one of our local eating establishments when some old guy started showing off pictures of his grandchildren to strangers who were trying to enjoy their meals. It's kind of obnoxious. Oh, wait a minute. That was me! I was the old man showing off pictures of his grandchildren.

6:30 Wednesday morning I went to our men's Bible study for a slice of breakfast pizza and several slices of the Word of God.

By 9 o'clock, I was on the road, headed to Elk Grove to meet my newborn grandson, Beau Stephen Schultz. Beau is our sixth grandchild—three boys and three girls—and the firstborn child of our youngest son Justin and his wife Cortney. Beau took his first breath at 4:18 pm Tuesday, weighing 7 lbs. 5 oz. and 21 inches long.

The next day, I met the little guy, and Justin asked if I would say a prayer, and I was more than happy to do so. I hadn't planned out a prayer in advance, so my prayer was rather spontaneous, and as I prayed, I realized that my prayer was not about Beau's immediate needs or situation, but it looked far into the future to a time when he would be a blessing to his family and even his community.

There's the other five—Beau's cousins Jack, Owen, Emma, Ella, and Ava. Jonathan and Molly are the parents of Ava, Emma, and Owen; Jordan and Robyn are the parents of Jack and Ella.

Five days before Beau was born, Candice and I went to see the Broadway show, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, at the Music Guild, and the Guild did an excellent job of presenting it.

In scripture and in the show, Joseph was so hated by his brothers that they sold him into slavery in Egypt, deceiving their father Jacob into believing that wild animals had killed him. Of course, we know that despite multiple setbacks in Egypt, Joseph rose to power in that foreign land and eventually became his country's and his family's savior. Subsequently, they were all brought to Egypt to live in peace with plenty.

When Joseph came to power in Egypt, Pharaoh gave him an Egyptian wife, Asenath, and the couple had two children, Manasseh and Ephraim. When father Jacob was brought to Egypt, he met his two half-Egyptian grandchildren and blessed them. This was truly a miracle

because, as we read in verse 11, Jacob said, “I never expected to see your face again, Joseph, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.”

It's a sentiment that is later expressed in Proverbs 17:6, “Children's children are a crown to the aged.” Jacob went on to bless and affirm the sons of Joseph. There's not a hint of racism toward his grandsons, even though their mother was an Egyptian.

In the Old Testament, blessings served two purposes. First, and most obviously, they affirmed another person, most often a child or even a grandchild. Secondly, there was a prophetic element to the blessings. That's why years before it was so important for Jacob to trick his father Isaac from blessing him rather than his twin brother Esau.

My prayer for Beau was prophetic only in the sense that I wanted the best for him, just as I want the best for all three of our sons and all six of our grandchildren. And I want their family lives to be different from mine.

My father died when he was 43; I was 19 and newly married. I can't say that I ever received my father's approval, and by age 19, he certainly had the opportunity to do so.

Sociologists tell us that one of the most important things in a child's life is to receive the father's approval. It's that moment when a father passes on his confidence and his unconditional love to one of his children. It's that moment when he says, “You have what it takes to be a young man or woman in this world. I believe in you.”¹

It took me years, but I now have enough self-awareness that I recognize that over the course of my adult life, there were a handful of men that I have subconsciously looked to as father figures, seeking their approval.

In our Tuesday morning Bible study, we're studying *Words of Life* by Adam Hamilton. And on page 102, he writes about love languages, adding that his “primary love language is words of affirmation.”² Elsewhere in the book, he mentions his stepdad and implies that his mother's second marriage ended in divorce.³ And I just wonder if Adam Hamilton never really felt that he had the approval of his biological father.

I wanted our boys to know that they had my approval. When each of our sons turned 18, I gave them a card with a long note inside telling them how very proud I was of them. We are faced with so many doubts in the world; I never wanted my sons to doubt my love and respect for them. It's not the only time I've affirmed them, but it was the most intentional.

Fathers have an inherent authority over their children. That means they have the power—and the privilege—to bless their children. We have that power, and that privilege, but I don't know if we use that power. Even if our children are rebellious or wayward, we can find something in them that is worth affirming. Also, a father's approval just might help bring them back from their wayward ways.

When we bless and affirm our children, we are following the example of God the Father who blessed and affirmed his Son Jesus. Matthew 3:17 tells us that as soon as Jesus was

¹ <https://ministryspark.com/fathers-approval-impacts-child/>. Accessed June 13, 2025.

² Adam Hamilton, *Words of Life*, pg. 103.

³ Ibid, pg. 101.

baptized, “A voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

God the Father was not only affirming his Son; God was also giving us an example of how to affirm our children. It’s an example for us as parents in general and for fathers specifically: we are to bless and affirm our children.

Affirming one another is not limited to the father/child relationship. As Christians—as humans—we are called to affirm one another.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul writes, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” But are we really doing it?

In Proverbs 16:24 we read, **“Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”**

In 2017, I enrolled in a Doctor of Ministry program at Dubuque Theological Seminary. For the next three years, I spent two weeks in what we called a “ministry intensive” in which we met in person with the other members of our cohort. There were eight of us plus two professors, and we came from the Carolinas to the East and Seattle to the West. For two weeks each year, we took over a bed and breakfast and we spent nearly every waking moment of every day together.

At the end of our third year together, Christopher James, our professor, had us go around and say a few words of affirmation about each other. What were the positive things we had learned about each other over the past three years? It was a practice in blessing one another. And it was humbling and affirming and edifying. And it was a truly holy moment.

You can create holy moments like that by thoughtfully and prayerfully affirming your child or neighbor regardless of age. Let us all be in the business of building up one another.