

INTRODUCTION

Well, hello and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We're having a conversation about the Word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sunday, as we encounter it in our everyday lives. My name is Jack, I'm joined by Tristan, Jono, and Ben.

How are you guys going?

Good, thank you.

Very well. Yeah, great.

Awesome. And today we are pondering Ben's sermon last night, which was about being a conduit of blessing.

SERMON RECAP

Ben, do you want to give us a quick recap of what that sermon was about?

Yeah, sure thing. So we're in May mission month at Northern Life. And what we're looking at this month is a series called Blessed to be a blessing.

Last week we looked at really that first word, the idea of that we are blessed, God's nature is to bless. And yesterday's sermon was on the second part, to be a blessing.

So we looked at this idea that God's heart and indeed God's plan throughout all of scripture is that he would bless the one in order that they might bless the many.

So we are invited to be people who are blessed by God in order to pass on that blessing. So we kind of looked at really quickly a theology of the entire Bible and the sense in which God blesses us to be a blessing.

And then we looked at what that might practically look like in our lives. And we compared a river and a reservoir. A reservoir receives water and doesn't give it away, but a river receives and gives away.

And so we're called to be river people, not reservoir people.

That was good.

Yeah, I love that analogy of the river and reservoir. It just illustrates the point so well. And Tristan, you were saying it reminded you of a team prep talk?

Yeah, it felt like we were in at half time, and we were just getting this great team talk, this motivational team talk to just go out into the field afterwards.

So it was pretty cool.

Yeah, it was awesome.

WHY DO WE NEED THEOLOGY, MODEL, AND PRACTICE?

So you used this model of theology, model and practice for how we can implement anything, I guess, in the Bible. Could you sort of explain why it's important to have that sort of structure when we approach something like this?

Yeah, sure. So that's John Wimber. I have to give full credit to him.

Just this idea that for anything to be lived in our life off the pages of scripture, you need a theology model and practice.

You need to search the scriptures and see what they actually say about this topic, about this subject, in order that we would be grounded in truth and we're not making it up ourselves.

And then you need to apply that to a model and see what that would practically look like in your context. And then you need practice.

So I think that's really important because without a good theology, our practice and our model gets warped and is not likely to be successful.

In fact, that was part of the sermon is kind of deconstructing these false beliefs we have, which is the reason why we so often are reservoirs, not rivers.

It's because kind of upstream, to continue the river metaphor, upstream, we believe these false ideas about who God is, about who we are. We believe that there's not enough to go around, so I have to hoard.

We believe that I've not been given much, so I won't give anything away.

But when you correct those ideas with good theology, and then that informs the model of life that we live, then you get to the point of practice, and we can actually be a people who are a blessing to the world.

I was thinking it will make more sense at the end of the series, I think, because the point of the practice is to prove that we're meant to be blessed to be a blessing that keeps getting blessed. It's in the giving away.

If you don't live through the practice of giving away the blessing, and then being blessed, it doesn't reinforce the model. But I think it's a really important thing to do it. That's what Wimber is on about.

I've not heard of those three words, but I know Wimber, the story. It's like he's backing up his healing ministry. The theology is backing the model of believing for the miraculous.

Go and do it, and that will reinforce the theology.

HOW DO I PRACTICE BLESSING PEOPLE?

Yeah, absolutely.

You kind of left off on this practice point on the sermon where you say, this is where the sermon ends and the practice starts.

There was one point in the sermon where you described practice as the process of you try and try, you fail, and you pick up again, and you learn, and you keep trying, you keep trying.

Now, we talk a lot about spiritual disciplines in this church and rightly so, but I wonder when it comes to the practice of blessing people, what does that look like?

I mean, you gave the example, I think, of blessing people with their words after the service. But in my day-to-day week, practically, what do I do to bless people, to practice blessing people?

I think you just do it. You do it and you learn how to do it.

That was sort of one of the points I made, that everything we have been given, God intends for us to give away from something as simple as our smile, smiling at another person or saying hi or dropping an encouraging word can be such a blessing.

And God can use that in his kind of providential way of changing somebody's life, where from our perspective, it seems like, oh, all I did was just say hi to this person and ask how they're doing.

But God desires to use me to bless that person through my words. So it's really, I think we could get up in our heads about how do we do this perfectly. God's heart is just get out there and do it.

Practice, go be a blessing. Ask someone how they're doing. Give your life away.

Give away the comfort that you have received to other people. So it's almost so obvious and practical that it's hard to even talk about because it's just, just go do it. Bless the world because we have been blessed.

And bouncing off of that, we talk about having Christ in the forefront of our minds.

And yes, it's not always the easiest thing to be kingdom minded. 100% of the time, we're not perfect.

But I think a big factor of how we can live on a day to day as being a blessing to others, is having a great understanding and a humble approach to God's grace.

And I think once we get ourselves in the way and look into how we present ourselves and how we like just make it all us centered, like me centered, I think once you have a good understanding of God's grace over you, you just, it's exactly what you

said, you just do it. And you just be a blessing to others.

I think that's helpful, like bouncing off that this, this need we have to keep God before our minds, to know that there's no place that we go where the Spirit of God does not also go, because the Spirit of God lives in us.

And so every conversation you find yourself in, God is in that conversation because God is in you, and God desires to bless the other person.

So I guess the fundamental kind of heart of the practice is being aware that God is with you right now and God desires to use this conversation to bless another person.

So having, I talked about one ear open to the Spirit of God and one ear open to the person in front of you, and trying to be a conduit of the blessing of God, trying to steward Christ in that moment.

But it starts with this awareness of the presence of God with us at all times.

And we're called to be agents of reconciliation, which is agents of what light, love, grace, encouragement, we're co-stewards of creation with Jesus. So we're doing what he would do. And you imagine, Jesus is just serving people.

He's taking up a towel, he's washing feet. He's just always that conduit of blessing. The light of the world.

It's crazy, isn't it? That Matthew 5, Jesus says, you are the light of the world. I don't think it's, you could get much better than that picture.

The light brings light into the darkness through words and actions, through love. We are to love the world.

ARE WE FAILING TO BLESS ENOUGH?

How can we tell or know if we are failing to bless or if we're failing to bless enough?

Do you think there's a way of noticing that?

I think we've talked about before, I know Tristan mentioned Tim Keller and his idea of think about yourself less. The true art of conversation in humility. And I think that's a check, you know, it's always helpful to listen to your body.

And it's like, what is your soul telling you about your affections? Is it your affections mainly about yourself? Like I'm just thinking about myself in this conversation.

I think that's a check. So a person who is a conduit of blessing is just aware they're thinking about the other person because they've given a whole ear to the other person. They're wanting to know the story so they can be that blessing.

So I think it's listening to your own heart and soul.

I was talking to Ian last night. This is a shout out to Ian, if he's listening. He had this great point that we want to be conduits of blessing as like a pipe, this image of a pipe that goes straight from God to the other person.

But sometimes our pipe metaphorically gets cloggy and a bit rusty, and it's not just purely clean blessing that flows through us.

Because the reality is that we are broken and sinful and we're works in progress as the Lord does his gracious work in us.

The blessing is not perfectly, purely, cleanly passed through us as a conduit, but it gets little flecks of brokenness and little gross stuff from inside the pipe, which passes on to the other person.

That's a great fit.

And so there is failure involved in our life of being a blessing to others. But there is also the grace of God that works even in broken people, like two Corinthians. Paul talks about God keeping his treasure in a jar of clay.

God knows that we're broken, but that's the very vessel that he wants to put his glory in and that he wants to bless the world through. Even broken as we are, he's gracious enough to use us. I thought that was a great point for him, for sure.

Absolutely.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A RIVER NOT A RESERVOIR?

So Ben outlined, sort of we had this image of river and reservoir, as we've said, and you outlined what looks like to be a reservoir with emptiness, suffering, selfishness, waiting, and fear. Tristan, I'm going to direct this question to you.

If we've seen the characteristics of a reservoir, what are the characteristics of a river?

I think it's one that receives. So, it's one that receives first the blessings of God, and what that looks like outwardly is having that freedom of self-forgetfulness. It's being open to conversation.

And just practically, what I found at Youth is having a level of understanding of who you're talking to and what context, I found very helpful. So, if you're talking to teenagers, they're populated with a certain sort of message and narrative.

And through trial and error and lots of grace, you really press into those issues practically.

Yeah, those five words that I spoke about what it is to be a reservoir, selfishness, emptiness, fear, pain and waiting. I kind of thought about what's the opposite of those five words.

And what I came to is generosity, abundance, faith, grace and readiness. Those kind of five words outline part of what it is to be a river. To be ready to give away the blessing that God has given us.

And that's the difference between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. That was kind of an image, which I thought was helpful. That in the Dead Sea, nothing lives.

That's why it's called the Dead Sea. Only little tiny bacteria live because it receives and does not give away. In contrast, the Sea of Galilee receives the same water from the Jordan River, but it gives it away.

And so the Sea of Galilee is full of life. And that's kind of this interesting idea that in the Kingdom of God, you find life when you give it away.

Jesus said that the one who wants to save their life will lose it, but the one who loses their life for me and the Gospel will find it.

And so really, the best life that we could live is the life of giving ourselves away for the sake of God and His Kingdom. And in doing so, we find the life that is truly life. Kind of this paradox of kingdom living.

The problem with the Dead Sea is it's really salty.

And salty people are bitter people. They don't forgive. They've got a lack of joy, half empty vibe about them.

And I think that's where it starts. The river heart is an attitude that is really grateful for the blessing of God. And it's almost like the Sea of Galilee is like, oh goody, thank you for some more fresh water.

Look at it go. It's going down the Jordan. And I mean, that sounds like a Sunday School lesson, but it is the essence of it, you know, for the joy set before you.

Jesus endured the cross, but I was thinking of 1 Peter 1 where it says, you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls, and you have a joy unspeakable.

That's probably pretty linked, joy and blessing, just feeling the goodness of God and the favour of God pouring over your life. And the Dead Sea is salty.

HOW DOES THE CHURCH DECIDE WHO TO BLESS?

Jono, we, in the service today, we looked at all the different missions we support as a church and all the different causes.

And it just sort of raised for me this question of, what is a process we can use to determine how we use the blessings we're given? So, God may have given, blessed me financially, He may bless me in something else.

I may have a range of options like we have with our various organisations that I could use that for. What's a process for us determining how we can best use that blessing?

There are different approaches you can take. And I think they most obviously are between, with mission giving, do you support people or projects? It's sort of one or the other, like it's something that's less personal, doing good work.

And so we've always tried to look at different times, trying to have a balanced portfolio, as it were, of giving, to issues of justice, the types of justice issues in the world that we could give to.

We have budget money that's been put aside for disaster relief, to sort of an knee-jerk reaction to what is going on. And we have long-term people and we try to have a balanced style of cross-cultural global mission work through those people.

But having said all that, I've always just tried to believe that it's the with-God life we're living. And if you're a leader of a church or you're a congregation of the church, you're believing the Spirit is guiding you.

And so, when opportunities come across your desk, you think about them in light of the fact that this could be God. That's not to say we don't say no over the years to probably more things than we say yes to.

But I think it's trusting the Holy Spirit is part of the process and really trying to lean into a belief that we are guided by the Spirit.

So that collectively, like so as a leader in the church, I try to ask people, not just on the leadership team, what do you think? What do you think God is saying to us? So I try to press that way.

There's strategy for sure, written down on a page, what makes sense. But it's also like, Lord, what are you saying?

I've found it a helpful idea to think of church as a managed fund. As an individual, I could survey all of the charities and not-for-profits in the world and decide who to give my money to.

But when you give to a church, and this is part of our Thanksgiving offering in the month of May, you're giving to a group of wise and godly people who are stewarding that money for the sake of the gospel around the world.

And that's why it was so encouraging yesterday, looking at all of our partners and mobilization and building projects around the world, that when you give to church, you are giving to all of these things, like a managed fund.

So I don't necessarily have to do the work of surveying every single not-for-profit in the world.

By giving to God's work in the local church, I'm contributing to gospel ministry on this street corner and to really significant justice and aid and poverty and disaster relief work around the world. Really encouraging.

And the key in the logistics of running that is we normally say no to most requests until our budget year comes around, which is October to September. And so we take all those things into consideration, all the options, and then we re-budget.

So we just try to, I just mentioned that we do knee-joke reactions to disaster relief, but that's a strategic thing that we've decided to do. But most of the time, we just go, that's a great idea.

We'll give it some prayerful thought at the one time in the year leading up to the new budget.

HOW DO WE CHOOSE WHO TO BLESS?

And just thinking specifically about individuals and listeners and probably what they're thinking about how they bless people in their week.

What about, sort of, I guess, non-financial ways of blessing people? Maybe it's about how I spend my time. We talked about blessing people with our words and our conversations.

Maybe I work, I mean, I've had this conversation, I've had this situation if I'm ever up on the tech box, and I come down after church and I walk into the auditorium and I see all these conversations around, I'm like, okay, who should I invest my

time in? How should I use my time to bless? Who should I prioritize a conversation with? How do we determine how we bless people in that way?

I think the main thing you have to do is make a choice.

A lot of people struggle with choice. If you walk into a room, be intentional and make a choice about who you're going to talk to. That's the main thing.

Once you make a choice, you find out if that was a good choice.

And I think to answer the second part of your question, I think, like when we think of mission and being how, in terms of how we can be a conduit of blessing, that looks like in the local church to serve. It's a call to serve.

Like that's my view of it, because not every mission that you give to or your time is going to be some remote place in Africa. It starts at your local church on this corner.

And I think that's why I said at the beginning, it sounds like a little team talk, because you're really trying to rally the local church into being a blessing to your local community first.

And then once you establish that strong base, it's so much easier to go out into the world, to plant churches, to support other mission. So I think it starts here. That's your building blocks.

Yeah, I think it starts right where I am.

You know, should I bless that person or that person? God says either one. Just bless people wherever you find yourself.

And so that idea of making a choice is helpful. Just any place you find yourself, that is the place that God has put you. That is the place where the Spirit of God is right now, longing to bless the world through you.

And so probably over-spiritualizing it and thinking God has a very narrow will for me in this room of conversations is unhelpful.

In contrast, the idea that God has put an open field for me, that I can run in and choose and bless people, that might be more helpful.

Yeah, any choice is better than no choice when it comes to blessing.

But I also think you could come back a step before making the choice. And I think of one of my heroes of the faith, my wife, Leanne, she often will be doing something like making a meal.

It's quite a big task of making the meal or whatever it is, like being down here yesterday for Mother's Day, on Saturday, setting up the tables and doing all the shopping and make it all this stuff.

But I've heard her often say, I've decided the type of person I want to be. And I think that's a really helpful thing to choose, to say, I'm going to be the sort of person that does this. I'm the sort of person that makes the meal, drops it off.

I'm the sort of person that makes the phone call, that does that thing that other people wouldn't do. And in fact, it's just, I'm the sort of person that picks up the towel and serves. So it's this step back from making the choice.

It's sort of a self-driven, what type of person am I going to be before I turn up in the car park of the church? And then that sort of sets you up for making those choices, because it's like, I already made the decision.

Amen.

That's powerful. Yeah.

And the scones are good.

They're very good.

They're really good.

So let me sort of flip that question a little bit. And you touched a little bit on this in the sermon, Ben, but I just wanted to open it up for conversation.

What about when we receive blessings that don't have an obvious way when we can bless someone else? You mentioned the idea of suffering and you're like, oh, how can I suffer?

But then you said, you know, it can be a way which you can help other sufferers. But I think there are other categories where God's blessed us.

Maybe he's given me a really awesome holiday, or I've been given a really cool gift or something like that that is enjoyable for me, but I can't see an obvious way in which I can bless other people. Why would you, how would you respond to that?

I think it produces a heart of praise and thankfulness at that point, because you receive whatever blessing that you have.

And if it's not remotely obvious in how you can exercise it to be a blessing to someone else, I think it brings out a heart of thankfulness, because I think it's weary waters where if you can't discern, if this is the right thing to do, and I think,

yeah, you should just have a heart of thankfulness. You still being a blessing in thought.

ON BLESSING & INTIMACY

What you're describing, as you say it to me, is intimacy.

Like, intimacy is all about being blessed, isn't it? But it's just like, it's an interesting way to think about blessing. Intimacy doesn't give it away sometimes.

Intimacy stores it up and enjoys it, and that's okay. It's interesting. Paul says, I know a guy who had these crazy spiritual experiences.

He's probably talking about himself. And he says, caught up in the third heaven or something, and he says, I'm not going to talk about that. Yeah.

And it's like, I think the frame of intimacy is the perfect container for describing what you just said, blessed without giving it away. And, but that's building you up in the most important connection, you and your Father in heaven.

I think that's what Jesus did, didn't he?

Like, in the parables.

But he, you know, he hung out with his dad. And we don't know what was stored up. He gave away a lot, but just...

One thing's about Mary, actually, also storing things up in her heart.

Absolutely.

Blessed, how would you call it? Blessed for the sake of intimacy. Blessed to know God.

Because, interestingly, we talk about blessed to be a blessing, but really, here's the end and not the means to an end.

So there has to be an aspect of Christ and me is enough if I was just by myself and I didn't have the opportunity to give anything away. I could still be fulfilled in knowing God. This is eternal life, to know Him.

And also, I mean, you talk about, Jono, the idea that God is an end onto Himself.

In some ways, when we act as a river and when we do have the opportunity to bless others, we're working towards that end, to His end, right? And hopefully, enabling Him at some point to be intimate with them as well.

And so, there's a sense where we are blessed and He is blessed just by the blessing He gives us. But then also, we kind of get to share that blessing with others when we do have the opportunity to pass it on. Does that make sense at all?

Yeah.

Really comes back to the salt, doesn't it? What type of salt are you? Blessed to be salt, not salty.

Yeah, there's that interesting part of the Gospels where Jesus says that if you give a cup of water to the least of these, you're doing it to me.

So when we bless the world, we are blessing God.

I think sometimes we're tempted to recoil at the idea of blessing God, like, oh, what could we possibly give to God?

But that is how Jesus frames it, like that Matthew 25 image of, if you bless another person, whatever you do for them, you do for God.

REFLECTING ON OUR MOTHERS

All right. Well, I think it's time for our fun question to finish us off. So obviously, it was Mother's Day last Sunday.

So I thought I'd ask, what is a fun story or memory you guys have of your mom or a mom in your life or a spiritual mom? What comes to mind?

Yeah, I'll start. I have a six month old daughter, and so I've watched my wife become a mother this year. And it's been really just insane watching what a mother does up close.

And I have a new appreciation for my mom and the love and sacrifice and the blessing that she was to me and my siblings. That's not a memory. It's just a comment.

It's a praise of motherhood.

Yeah.

I think it's funny as I'm getting older, the more funny quirks that I'm getting from my mom that I never had when I was younger, it's like a newfound appreciation of tea.

And it's listening to Andrea Bocelli, to Italian music, and it's sitting down and watching some UK dramedy type of thing. So, yeah, as I'm getting older, I'm picking up all those things from mom. So, thanks, mom.

One thing I appreciate about my mom, who's gone home to glory now, is she was very prayerful, and she would come out with these statements that were really quite prophetic.

I remember calling when we had our first child, Josiah, and calling mom and dad, and I was talking to mom, and I said, we've had a boy, Josiah David Shanks.

And the first thing she says, she ended up having eight grandchildren, and she never said this to anyone else. She said, Dr. Josiah David Shanks.

That is a really nice ring about it. And he's become a doctor, the only one out of the eight kids that went down a medical path. But she had a number of times where she'd come out with something like that.

But that was a cool little prophecy over his life. Like something Simeon would say at the temple.

Yes.

What about you, Jack?

When I think of my mom, the things coming to mind are like these little sayings that she would impart to me, or that she used to just say around the house.

Or I mean, one of them pertinent for Mother's Day is she would always say, when they're in the mud of the battlefield, they don't cry for their dads.

The other one that I always like to think about is, what's right is right, even if no one's doing it. And what's wrong is wrong, even if everyone's doing it. And that's something.

There's a bunch of other little phrases. They're not all particularly like, rhymey or witty, but they, they stuck with me.

Your mom's a legend.

I tend to agree. All right, well, thank you for listening. Thank you guys for joining us on the pod this weekend.

I hope you all have a blessed week.