

MANAGING YOUR BLESSINGS

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“When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” [Jn 6:12]

Each time we read about God’s blessings in the Bible, it is always in superlative terms:

- *“ My cup runneth over” [Ps. 23:5]*
- *“ I will ... pour you a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it” [Mal. 3:10]*
- *“ They inclosed a great multitude of fishes and their net brake” [Lk 5:6]*
- *“ All the people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord and they shall be afraid of thee” [Deut. 28:10].*

We also know that, even though God may be generous with His blessings, He is not wasteful. In the wilderness, He fed the Israelites with manna from heaven for 40 years. “He that gathered much had nothing over and he that gathered little had no lack” [Ex. 16:18]. Seven baskets of leftover food were collected after Jesus had miraculously fed 4,000 men [Mk 8:1-9]. Similarly, after He had so fed 5,000 other men, He instructed His disciples, “gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” [Jn 6:12].

We immediately learn from the foregoing that God does not expect us to squander or misuse the blessings that He has showered on us. In the words of Jesus, “give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you” [Matt. 7:6]. Therefore, it is important that we learn how to effectively manage our blessings so that we don’t become like the Prodigal Son who returned to want just a few days after obtaining his inheritance [Lk 15:13]. That is the subject of today’s lesson.

1. God's Blessings

A blessing is an *unmerited* favour from God. Blessings are *gifts* that He showers on us, which we could never have achieved by our efforts. Some of such blessings may be supplies for our daily living (such as food, clothing and shelter) or provisions and requirements to do His work (such as material wealth, position, children, etc.). Some blessings may be ***physical/temporal***, that is, relating to our sojourn here on earth (such as material prosperity, good health, longevity, contentment, etc.). Others may be ***spiritual/eternal***, i.e., relating to our hereafter (such as forgiveness, salvation, etc.). Examples of the variety of God's blessings are summarized in the table below.

Examples of God's Blessings

	For our daily living	For His service
Physical/Temporal	<input type="checkbox"/> Food, clothing [Matt. 6:26, 30-33] <input type="checkbox"/> Children [Ps. 127:3-5] <input type="checkbox"/> Prosperity [Mal. 3:10-12] <input type="checkbox"/> Good health [3Jn 2] <input type="checkbox"/> Happiness, contentment [Ps. 128:2] <input type="checkbox"/> Longevity [Ex. 20:12]	<input type="checkbox"/> Prosperity [Deut. 8:18] <input type="checkbox"/> Promotion [Ps. 75:6-7] <input type="checkbox"/> Children [Ex. 28:1]
Spiritual/Eternal	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvation [Jn 3:16] <input type="checkbox"/> Forgiveness [Col. 1:14] <input type="checkbox"/> Holy Spirit [Jn 16:13]	<input type="checkbox"/> Holy Spirit [Acts 1:8]

Blessings begin with promises. God told Abraham long before he left his country, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing" [Gen. 12:2]. But, promises always have conditions attached to them: "And all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee *if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God*" [Deut. 28:2]. Therefore, here are the key principles to master:

- (a) cooperate with God to bring His promises to pass;
- (b) when the blessings come, use them to honour Him.

In the case studies that we are now going to examine, we shall be guided by those principles.

2. Case Studies

The table above suggests that God's blessings are innumerable and we shall not pretend to be able to adequately treat them in this short lesson. However, let us find examples to illustrate the following situations:

- (a) Material Prosperity (Solomon)
- (b) Promotion (Joseph)
- (c) Longevity (Hezekiah)

Material Prosperity

Before Solomon was born, God had promised his father, David, the following:

Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days.
[1 Chron. 22:9]

To achieve such a lofty purpose, capped with building God's temple, there is no doubt that material prosperity would be necessary.

On ascending the throne, Solomon asked God (in a dream) for wisdom so as to be able to rule "so great a people" **[1 Kgs 3:9]**. Immediately, we recognize Solomon's cooperation with God's plan and promise to make him a successful ruler. The Bible says that "the speech pleased the Lord" because he "hast not asked for thyself long life, neither has asked riches for thyself, nor asked the life of thy enemies, ... Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee" **[1 Kgs 3:10-12]**. In addition, God gave Solomon what he did not ask for: riches and honour. Then, He put a condition: "if thou wilt walk in My ways... as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days" **[1 Kgs 3:12-13]**.

With the blessings of wisdom, honour and material prosperity, Solomon achieved the following feats (among others):

- ❑ He ruled with justice as in the settlement of the dispute between two women over one living child **[1 Kgs 3:16-28]**
- ❑ "He had peace on all sides round about him" **[1 Kgs 4:24]** and kings and a queen came from other domains to pay tribute and to drink from his deep well of wisdom **[1 Kgs 10:1-7, 23-24]**
- ❑ He wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs, a tiny fraction of which are published today in the books of **Proverbs, Ecclesiastes** and **Song of Solomon**
- ❑ He built the house of God before his personal house **[1 Kgs 6:38- 1 Kgs 7:1]**
- ❑ His offerings to God "could not be told or numbered for multitude" **2 Chron. 5:6]**
- ❑ He treated his servants and ministers with dignity **[1 Kgs 10:4-5]**, and made the fear of God a national value **[2 Chron. 7:1-4]**

In the evening of his life, his zeal for God waned after he had succumbed to idolatry engendered by his marriage to foreign wives who did not know the true God. With 700 wives and 300 concubines [1 Kgs 11:3-4], he had neither the energy nor the time to worship as he used to do. As a result, his wisdom, honour and fame failed and his empire fell. At the time he died, the empire broke into tiny, lukewarm Judah and large, idolatrous Israel [1 Kgs 12:1-33].

Promotion

At 17, God had revealed to Joseph that he would be the leader of his brethren, in spite of the fact that he was the 11th son by age. On top of that, he was also his father, Jacob's favourite. His brothers envied him and sought to destroy him and his dreams [Gen. 37:1-20]. When his father sent him to deliver provisions to his brothers who were tending the family's flock some 50 miles from home, they sold him into slavery in Egypt where he providentially became the servant of Potiphar, a high-ranking military officer in Pharaoh's army [Gen. 37:36].

The blessing of upliftment and promotion promised Joseph did not materialize until he was 30 years old [Gen. 41:46]. Let's see how he managed the process:

- ❑ By the spiritual fruits that he showed, Potiphar knew that God was with Joseph. So, he left Joseph completely in charge of his household [Gen. 39:2-4]
- ❑ Temptation came by way of Potiphar's wife but Joseph resisted the devil saying, "how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" [Gen. 39:9]
- ❑ In prison for an offence he did not commit, Joseph continued to demonstrate the fruits of the true child of God. The chief prison officer knew this and put him in charge of the other prisoners! [Gen. 39:20-23]
- ❑ In prison, he ministered to the spiritual needs of Pharaoh's top kitchen staff: the chief baker and the chief butler, using his blessing as an interpreter of dreams [Gen. 40:8]
- ❑ Two years later, at God's appropriate time, he was released from prison as the only person who could help Pharaoh to resolve a major national crisis! [Gen. 41:1-14]. Again, using God's blessing, he not only correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dream, he also prescribed a 7-year economic plan to deal with the impending food crisis in the then known world! [Gen. 41: 39-42]. There and then, Pharaoh appointed Joseph the Governor of Egypt, second in command only to Pharaoh himself, to implement the economic recovery plan.
- ❑ Joseph used his new position to save his own people from famine and to provide them with the fertile environment to multiply as the sands of the seashore promised to Abraham several hundreds of years earlier [Gen. 22:17]
- ❑ Joseph completely forgave his brothers the wrongs against him some 23 years earlier, focussing instead on the purpose of God's blessing for him: "be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life [Gen. 45:5]. In deed, promotion comes from God [Ps. 75:6].

Long Life

Long life is God's blessing for those who honour their parents [Ex. 20:12] or those who live by His word [Josh. 1:8]. Moses lived up to 120 and yet "his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated" [Deut. 34:7]. At 85, Caleb (one of the 12 spies sent by Moses to spy on the Promised Land and one of the only two to bring back a faith-

filled report – **Num. 14:20-24**) was still jumping around, claiming “as yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day {45 years earlier!} that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in” [**Josh. 14:11**]. But, what of King Hezekiah?

The king was “sick unto death” and God sent Prophet Isaiah to tell him to prepare for death [**Is. 38:1**]. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for an extension. God heard his prayer and gave him a 15-year grace. Let’s see what followed:

- ❑ He thanked God for his healing, and promised that “we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord” [**Is. 38:20**]. However, when he became fully recovered, he did quite a different thing!
- ❑ The son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent messengers on a sympathy visit with a letter and gifts. Instead of giving the pagan visitors a testimony of his miraculous healing, his vanity took over. “All that is in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them” [**Is. 39:4**].

Does that remind you of the Parable of the Rich Fool? [**Lk 12:13-21**]. In that story, the rich man broke down his barn and rebuilt it. Then, he put his abundant harvest there and decided it was time to take it easy, “eat, drink and be merry.” But, God said to him, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee” [**Lk 12:19-20**]. In like manner, Hezekiah would be stripped of his wealth and family who would be carried into exile in Babylon where his children would serve as eunuchs [**Is. 39:6-7**]. So, for not using his blessing to glorify God, the 15-year extension became a nightmare.

3. Conclusion

What has come out clearly from the cases we have examined above can be summarized as follows:

- ❑ *The blessings that we receive from God are not meant for our self-aggrandizement but for His work.*
- ❑ *As long as we use them for His purpose, He will take care of our earthly needs even in ways that we can hardly imagine* [**Matt. 6:33**].
- ❑ *Therefore, our concern should be how to use the sound mind [2 Tim. 1:7] that God has given us to effectively use our blessings to serve Him and to help our neighbours.*

When we are able to manage our blessings as the Lord wants, He will be able to say to us *everyday*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things” [**Matt. 25:21**].