

Focusing In . . . by Faye Reynolds

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor . . ." Mk 10:21

In spite of the book of Job being the oldest piece of Scripture known to the Jewish people, they still managed to equate God's blessing with their material well-being and physical health. We do not do much better. How often over this Thanksgiving season will we feel "blessed" because of the good things that we have – the bountiful harvest, the beautiful homes that shelter our heads, our good health and the love of family and friends?

When Jesus challenged the man who had youth, wealth and outstanding moral character to give it all up, he wasn't just asking him to give up money. He was challenging him to give up power and prestige and the consequent community that wealth afforded him. He was challenged to give up everything that gave him control over his own life and independence. Yet even more strikingly, Jesus challenged this young man to give up the very thing that defined him as a "good person"; that defined himself as blessed by God. In every way that the man could finish this sentence, "I have been so blessed with . . .", God was asking him to relinquish.

This has caused me to wrestle with how I consider what it truly means to be blessed by God. My mother dislikes the word "lucky" and so I was taught to say "blessed". That kind of thinking is starting to mess with my mind. Am I blessed by God because I somehow deserve it or have been graced by it and others have not been so blessed? Why me? With the way life goes and the seemingly unfairness of it all, I believe I'm more comfortable with the term "luck" than "blessing".

I met a girl named Suzanah Raffield at our North American Baptist Women's Union meetings back in April. This young woman is incredibly passionate about the unsafe birth practices around the world and has single-handedly orchestrated the procuring of many birthing kits for women in poverty. In sharing about her work she made the statement that we must be grateful not for what we have, but for what we are able to give. That thought has continued to challenge me but has also given me hope. Anything in my life that I might deem a "blessing" is only of true value as it blesses others. I've begun seeing it like God trying to pour water down a plugged pipe – if it stops with me, what good is it?

I continue to come back Mark 10. "Jesus looked at him and loved him". That is the only blessing that the young man needed. If he opened his heart to receive that blessing of love – what need did he have for anything else? It could all be easily released to bless others. The same must be true in your life and mine.

In this season of Thanksgiving, I shall try to live Suzanah's words and offer my prayers of gratitude for all the opportunities that I am given to bless others. I do this with a trembling hand that God might call me to give beyond my means, but that is what trust is all about – to release the control and open those trembling hands - for we've been told that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35) and that includes what we receive from God.

By grace alone,

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