

BAG Of Blessing 12-5-21

As you likely know, I enjoy, when I can, starting off with a little bit of humor. So, today, I begin with a set of bagel jokes. Yes – bagels. I told you about bagels last week. If you were here you have a leg up. Here we go – what kind of bagel can fly? – a plane bagel. How do you hold a bagel back? You put lox on it. Ha-ha. I don't even know what lox is, but I am pretty sure our Jewish friends in New York city eat it – right? Is it salmon? I think I prefer cream cheese. One more bagel joke - Why do seagulls fly over the sea? If they flew over the bay, they would be bagels!

Okay – what is my excuse for making you groan like that? Today I get to challenge us from the word about the B of PBJ – Pray Bless Jesus. And for the Bless portion we provide a little acrostic rich with ideas – B = Bless, A = Affirm. G = Give or giftings – E = Eat, L = Listen. S = Serve. Next week Ben is going to take us on a tour through eat, listen and serve but I get to cover today, the first three of these ways to practically bless another human being. The goal here is to become more consistent in following through on opportunities to enrich the lives of others for Jesus' sake. Clearly, this is part of what being a disciple is all about. Galatians 6:9-10 *Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.* Let's do good to all people – when? When we have opportunity. Most of our lives, it seems, we have opportunity. And Christmas time is especially rife with opportunities. But, we must be intentional about this; otherwise other things will pull us away from this calling of our Lord. And speaking of calling – we all share the same general calling, but our specific callings will differ, based upon how the Lord has equipped us to serve. We have different abilities and we have different motivations. Have you ever heard of love languages? This is a concept made famous by a Christian author named, Gary Chapman who argued that folks differ both in how they receive love and how they offer love. He proposed five love languages – can you remember these? They are: words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, gifts and touch. Most of us resonate with more than one, but generally we can identify what we prioritize. The love-languages concept suggests that, if you want to bless someone, it's good to find out their love language. Not everyone is looking for a hug today. Right? Gifts mean a lot to one person. Not so much to another. We taught these concepts to our kids when they were teenagers, and our daughter asked me what my love

language was and I said, “discipline.” That is a parental love language but did not make Chapman’s list.

Now, what we are giving you in BAGELS is a list of love languages, or ways you can express love in a practical way to someone you encounter. We did not include “touch” in our list because covid is still hanging around a bit. But the others are there in our BAGELS list. Do you see them? My quick summary of the six ways to love – love with your mouth, by what you say, that is bless and affirm. Then love with your wallet—via gifts. Then love by your hospitality – sharing a meal. Then love with your ears – by listening well. And finally, love with your hands – by serving someone.

As I said, my task is to focus us on the first three points – I got left holding the BAG. Thus my title – BAG of blessing.

We start today with the way we bless others through our words. The B in bagels sort of introduces the concept and then joins with affirm to lay out our first means of blessing. We affirm others. That means to offer emotional support or encouragement. To offer emotional support or encouragement. Yes, that can be done with a hug, but more often it is done with words, written or spoken words. Now, when you go back over your life, if you are older than twelve I expect you can think of some words spoken to you or about you that left an impact. Right? Sometimes that impact was entirely negative. Something was said that was devastating, hurtful, discouraging. Ugh! It may still rumble around your brain decades later. Words are powerful in that way. They destroy and tear down. But, on the other hand, they can do just the opposite, can’t they. Think of what was said to you by a teacher, a coach, a pastor, a parent or a friend that just drove the clouds out of the sky and emboldened you. Maybe something was said that changed the direction of your life toward God’s better purposes. I remember when I was around 13, we had a youth pastor, named Larry, who had been in our church for just a short time, then was moving on to seminary. We had a goodbye party for him and during the party he took me aside with his wife, looked me straight in the eye and told me that he and his wife were convinced that God had great plans for my life. Wow! That kind of stuck with me and shaped my sense of purpose.

So, Proverbs is packed with verses on the power of our words. Proverbs 12:18 (NLT) *Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.* And who doesn’t need that from time to time. 15:4 (NLT) *Gentle words are a tree of life.* Proverbs 18:21a *Death and life are in the power of the tongue.* The power of the tongue – or the pen – it can hardly be overstated. That is why Paul

wrote to us in Ephesians 4:29 *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.* See that? You can give grace to others by your speech. You believe in grace, right? In receiving it? In giving it out? I Thessalonians 5:11 *Encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.* I am glad I can say that to you, North Park Church. This is not new for most of you – the admonition is to stay constant and excel still more in encouraging each other, in building up each other. I know you do it for me. Thank you.

Encouraging each other is huge – but what I need to be reminded, and maybe you too, to be on the alert for how we can do that for those outside the church. Colossians 4:5-6 (NLT) *Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.* Isn't that great? We want to seize the day, step into the opportunities God gives us with the unchurched world. It is not easy to know what that always means, but part of it is verse six – to speak graciously. To offer words that affirm and bless and point the way to our gracious Lord. Jesus, by the way, was awesome at this in the years he lived among us and, at the end of his earthly ministry, guess what he did? On his way up even – Luke 24:50-51 *He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.* Jesus was a BAGELS Savior. He blessed his disciples on his way up to glory – and guess what we now get to do in his name? Bless. Affirm. Make your words gracious and truthful and life-giving as Jesus did.

Alrighty then – we have time today to cover gift-giving as well. Just in time for your Christmas shopping huh? But Christmas, of course, is about giving – not only within families, but the ultimate gift from God to the human race – the gift of Jesus Christ as our Savior and King. II Corinthians 9:15 *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!* So, as those called to be imitators of our God, giving is just something we will do. We give time, we give service, we give gifts. Hebrews 13:15 *Do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.* Now, clearly the only persons who can do good in this way, who can share, are those who have acquired some resources. So, our work – what we do to earn our provisions, has this end in view, that we would be givers of a certain portion of our wealth. Ephesians 4:28 (ESV) *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share*

with anyone in need. God doesn't despise material wealth. He doesn't glorify poverty. Instead, he admonishes us to be fruitful, productive – but with the end in mind that we might follow Jesus as givers, as those who minister to others in their times of need.

Now, it is likely worthwhile to note that there are two types of gifts we offer. There are gifts of encouragement and gifts of mercy. Encouragement and mercy. The mercy gifts are those you provide to someone who is out of work or experiencing some crisis. They are in need in some particular way. But, there are also gifts of encouragement – gifts that say, “I am thinking of you, I care about you, I value you.” Most Christmas gifts, by far, are of this variety. Women, by and large, are much more wired for these kinds of gifts than are the guys. But, we can all understand that, for some people gifts are an important love language. Most of us could become more fluent in this language. One of my personal PBJ stories over the last year involved the manager at my gym. When the gym opened up after the second covid shut-down I noticed how there were fewer employees there. And, among the things I missed during the lockdowns – the gym was high on my list. So, the Lord spoke to me about a gift for the manager of the gym. I bought two gift cards and went to her with a thank-you note and an offer of the card of her choice. She chose Chipotle. That was not a big deal but I would never have thought of it before we got into PBJ. With Christmas coming up, perhaps there are things you can do of like nature. Some of you are very good at giving gifts to your neighbors. Perhaps there are things you do along these lines that you can share with the rest of us – and I will give you opportunity in a few minutes.

But, let's finish with a quick review of our motivation for blessing, affirming, gifting. First, we do this to follow Jesus, to be close to him relationally and practically. Peter says this in Acts 10:38 *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good.* So, let's you and I go around doing good – like our Lord.

Secondly, we bless, affirm and give to glorify God. You may know Matthew 5:16 *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.* Jesus was very clear that we are not to seek our own glory – but he is very keen on our doing good deeds that bring glory and praise to God. This is ultimately what we pray will happen as we PBJ.

Thirdly, we bless, affirm, give in order to confirm gospel truth – to give weight to our claim that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. One of the

reasons the early church grew so mightily was that their societies saw them caring for others. One example was that they routinely rescued babies that were left to die by those in Roman society. They will know, said Jesus, they will know we are Christians by our love. Our faith is often spoke against. Has been for two millennia, but Peter wrote this - I Peter 2:15 *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.* Is that a motive some of you can relate to? The shutting of some mouths? Brothers and sisters, please understand that the silencing is not done via our witty retorts and comebacks. It is done by consistently doing good, walking in love and in purity. But the ultimate goal, of course, is wrapped up in the J of PBJ. We want folks to see Jesus, honor him and come to love him as we have. For their good, for his glory, for our joy. All of that is in our BAG of blessings this day.