

SERVANT LEADERS



Blessings by Sara Tusek

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One of the big "selling points" of Christianity is the concept of blessings. Often people understand blessings as a "quid pro quo": I do this, God does that. I obey God and follow his commandments, He blesses me.

In this concept, blessings are like rewards in operant conditioning. When you train a dog by operant conditioning, you reward "good" (desired) behavior with a treat and try to extinguish "bad" (undesired) behavior with a mild punishment. If we're the dog and God is our trainer, He rewards our good behavior by giving us blessings, and He tries to end our bad behavior by giving us disappointments, disease, poverty, sadness, etc. This is a cause-and-effect relationship, what people call "common sense." You get what you deserve.

Blessings are good things!

So blessings are good rewards for good behavior. Blessings are wealth, health, children (if we want them) and a comfortable life.

The Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, turning this reasoning around, taught that you could tell who was pleasing God, doing the right thing, by the quality and quantity of that person's blessings. The unfortunate person, whose lot was poverty, sickness, and failure of crops, was not being blessed and must therefore not be pleasing to God.

When the community suffered a lack of blessings, the Puritans looked for the people who were not pleasing God and expelled or executed them, as in the famous Salem witch trials.



My human mind agrees that blessings are good things. Of course, I'd rather be blessed with pleasant things, and the unpleasant things in my life don't, at first glance, seem to be blessings.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said in his last speech before being assassinated, "**Like anybody, I would like to live a long life.**" I agree; I would like my blessings to be things that increase my comfort and pleasure.

Blessings don't always look so good

But this has not been the case for me.

My greatest blessings have had very rough edges. They have always involved loss, pain and an abrupt need to completely reconstruct my life and my view of God.

They have not looked one little bit like blessings at the time.

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~*~ Tell me not ~*~

By: H. W. Longfellow

Tell me not in mournful numbers,
"Life is but an empty dream!"
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
"Dust thou art, to dust returnest,"
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us further than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act -- act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait.

Blessings are a mystery

As Samuel Johnson wrote, "'Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Boswell: Life

In other words, Johnson implies that too much pleasure and comfort makes people scattered and ineffective. Is this a blessing? And a serious hardship or unchangeable ill fate makes people focused. Is this a blessing?

I think that God blesses people in all kinds of ways. A blessing is not a reward for good behavior; it's not a treat, or extra goodie. A blessing is God's way of communicating to us that we need to change, or that we could be doing more for other people, or simply that life is not a game, not a walk in a garden.

Blessings are mysterious messages from God. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who had a number of personal tragedies in his life, wrote the poem to the left. He makes the point that life is a serious business and

that we're expected to continue to act with courage and compassion, whatever happens to us,

Perhaps the best way to look at blessings is to echo Longfellow, who says that "things are not what they seem." Blessings are surely from God, but they're not like valentine candy hearts, to be popped into the mouth and savored.

God sends blessings as He knows best, whatever they may look like to us.

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