

B L E S S

in living color



Begin with Prayer



Listen with Care



Eat together



Serve with love



Share Your Story

Sermon Series



The Evangelical Covenant Church

covchurch.org/bless

BLESSED

in living color

Genesis 12: 1-5 (Abraham); **Acts 1: 3-8** (Praying for Pentecost)

BIG IDEA:

God calls us not only to bless but to bless in living color—beginning with prayer.

Opening & Connection

Perhaps you have heard that we have been “blessed to be a blessing.” It’s a popular phrase.

What is being blessed really all about? If you do a simple search on Twitter for #blessed, you’ll see a lot of interesting things.

Media Option: Do a search for #blessed on social media or Google images and display some examples like this:



Several years ago, the hashtag #blessed was trending. After awhile, many began to identify the trend as annoying and slightly ridiculous.

In one article titled “Why #blessed is the most annoying hashtag on Instagram,” one author wrote, “#Blessed might as well read #bragging.” Celebrities were showcasing their luxurious lifestyles, but it wasn’t boasting—because they were #blessed!

But the Scriptures teach that rather than being self-centered, biblical blessing is both God-centered and others-centered.

- It is God-centered in that true blessing comes from God. To be blessed is to be the recipient of God’s divine and gracious favor.
- It is also others-centered in that God always blesses people so they can bless others.
- The foundational Scripture here is God’s blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12:2: *“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”*
- We are descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:29), and we have been blessed to be a blessing.

Maybe you’re on the opposite end of the spectrum and don’t feel particularly #blessed right now.

- We will not always feel blessed, of course.
- Yet the fact is that we have been blessed beyond measure in Christ, through his death and resurrection.

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- “God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).
- Being blessed is a joy indeed—but not because of happy feelings or circumstances. Being blessed gives us the great joy of extending God’s blessing to the world—making more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world. We have been blessed to be a blessing. As

we live this out together, we will reclaim the true meaning of being #blessed.

Story Options

- *Share about an occasion in which you experienced the joy of blessing someone else even when you weren’t feeling particularly #blessed yourself.*
- *Share a story from your own life about how you have blessed someone with the good news of Christ.*

POINT ONE: We Are Called to BLESS

Spider-Man’s Aunt May says, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

(In the older movies his Uncle Ben said this.) The Bible’s version is a little different: With great blessing comes great responsibility. Is this in scripture somewhere?

God wants us to enjoy our blessings, but God calls us to *be* a blessing. In the Evangelical Covenant Church, we do this through BLESS. At its heart, BLESS prompts us to bless the world for Christ in two simple ways.

- First, we pray by name for those we know who are not yet in a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Second, we commit to taking concrete steps to bless them.

That’s it!

Sharing the good news of Jesus is not about making a sale; it’s about making an invitation. Sharing the gospel is ultimately about blessing the world.

What does that look like? BLESS is an acronym of five simple missional practices (review each letter of BLESS) that teach us what blessing looks like.

- **Media Option:** review each letter of BLESS using [BLESS slides](#).
- We **Begin with prayer**, acknowledging that we need God’s power to successfully extend God’s blessing. We will deeply bless others to the extent that we consciously depend on the Holy Spirit.
- We **Listen with care**. Sometimes we associate “evangelism” with talking *at* people rather than hearing *from* people. But God calls us to practice engaging authentically with others and listen carefully to their stories. When we listen, people feel validated and loved—and they are also much more willing to listen to us.
- Next, the one which is perhaps the most fun: we **Eat together**. Think about this: many of Jesus’s most significant interactions with people involved some kind of food or drink. There is something about breaking bread together that creates meaningful and lasting connections.
- Once we understand people’s needs, we can **Serve with love**, imitating our Savior “who did not come to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28).

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- And finally, we take the risk to **Share the story** of how Jesus is transforming our lives and the world, culminating in an invitation to join that story. By God's grace, as we bless others in these tangible ways, they too will receive the blessing of eternal life in Christ.

OK, we understand that we've been blessed to be a blessing. But let's take this one step further. When you think about people in your life who you might be able to bless, how many of them look like you?

To bless our world in the way God envisioned, we must bless in living color.

- **Media Option:** show the *BLESS in Living Color* trailer video You may choose to introduce the 10-day *BLESS in Living Color* email devotional now, or revisit it again later in the sermon or the series.
youtube.com/watch?v=nArPV2mQR44w



POINT TWO: In Living Color

What do we mean by blessing “in living color”?

- It means blessing across boundaries of difference, boundaries that often serve to divide us rather than bring us together.
- These boundaries can include ethnicity, class, gender, age, ability, and more. Much could be said about each of these, but today let's focus on what it looks like for you to bless the world across boundaries of ethnicity and race.

We don't bless in living color because we want to be politically correct or because it's trendy—we do so because the Bible teaches it! Let's take a closer look at Genesis 12.

- “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3). This refers to all the diverse peoples on the earth.

We see a continuation of this commission to bless in the Great Commission of Jesus:

- “Therefore go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 18:19-20).

- The Greek word translated “nations” here is *ethne*. It's the root of our contemporary word “ethnicity.”
- The Great Commission is not just about making disciples of all “countries.” It's about making disciples of all ethnicities. The Great Commission is not just for global missionaries who are called to cross international boundaries. It's also a mandate for us all to cross ethnic and racial boundaries. It is a call to engage in multiethnic outreach wherever we are.

So we see that from the very beginning, we were meant not only to bless—but to bless in living color.

As we bless, let us especially consider how we



can *bless in living color*. We can do this both individually and as a congregation.

There's still one more important thing we must

do before we can bless in living color as Jesus taught us to do: We must begin with prayer.

Story Option: *Share about a time when you blessed someone else "in living color."*

POINT THREE: Begin with Prayer

Our second text takes us forward to the birth of the church in Acts, on the eve of Pentecost (Acts 1:3-8).

- In verse 4, Jesus literally tells the disciples to wait. "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised" (Acts 1:4).
- Only at this point can the rest of it come true: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus tells his disciples, "Go into all the world." But he also tells them, "First wait for the power of the Holy Spirit." Why does he say this?

- Acts 1:8 is literally about crossing boundaries of difference (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, etc.).
- We always need God's power to bless others, but this is especially true if we seek to bless in living color.

Sometimes the differences that divide us can seem overwhelming or impossible to bridge.

- In fact, studies have shown it's natural to associate with people who are not like us. It's called [sorting](#), or a "tendency to seek out and associate with people who are similar to us in any number of ways—religiously, politically, economically and, yes, racially, too."

- There's nothing wrong with connecting with people who are just like us—in fact, it's natural. Yet God calls us to a supernatural mission!
- That's why we pray for the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ has broken down the dividing walls, and he has empowered us to do the same through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- One of the [six affirmations](#) of the Evangelical Covenant Church is "a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit."

This is where prayer comes in—as we express our need to consciously depend on the Holy Spirit. The people prayed, and Pentecost happened. God filled them with the Holy Spirit and empowered them to bless in living color.

The rest of the Book of Acts is the story of how God's people blessed in living color across all boundaries of difference [Give examples].

- In fact, it's in the Book of Acts at Antioch that the believers are first called Christians (Acts 11:26).
- This is significant because of what it represents: Antioch was where the church took on a solidly multiethnic appearance, a unity in diversity that surprised everyone!

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- Christians are called to unity, *and* we are called to diversity—unity in diversity. It’s the combination that makes our movement so special. The kingdom of God will stun the world now, just as it did before, to the extent that the church embodies God’s intention of unity in diversity.
- The Scriptures also say that disciples have been given the ministry of reconciliation: “All this is from God, who reconciled us

to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

- The book of Acts doesn’t really have an “ending,” because we are still living in the age of the empowering Holy Spirit who calls us to bless all the peoples of the world in living color. It’s an incredible adventure.

Story Option: *Share about a time when prayer empowered your own ministry of reconciliation.*

Conclusion

We are called not only to bless, but to bless in living color.

We serve a God who delights in bringing people together, building bridges where there are none, and making broken things whole.

- What’s more, building bridges across ethnic boundaries of difference is just the beginning. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to the bridges he wants us to build wherever we find ourselves—in race, ethnicity, culture, ability, age, gender, class, and beyond.

Friends, this is not some kumbaya fantasy. With our own eyes, we will see history culminate in a colorful celebration beyond anything we have ever dreamed or imagined. Let us stay the course as we partner with Jesus to usher in the colorful kingdom of God.

Let us begin with prayer.

Media Option: *Display Michael Hyatt’s beautiful artwork, [Luke 14 Banquet](https://www.hyattmoore.com/painting/Luke_14_Banquet) by Hyatt Moore.*

https://www.hyattmoore.com/painting/Luke_14_Banquet



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CALL TO ACTION: BLESS Prayer Ceremony

Today, we also begin with prayer through a BLESS ceremony. And as we consider those we would like to pray for, let us make sure that they are not all just like us.

Invitation for Believers

- Consider especially ethnic diversity. If you can't come up with a multiethnic list, pray that God would help you build one over time.
- Another option is to make sure your list is colorful in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, ability, age, class—even politics.

Invitation for Not-Yet-Believers

- If you are not yet a believer, the invitation for you is to consider how you might bless those around you who are not like you in whatever way you feel most comfortable.

BLESS Ceremony Many churches have created beautiful BLESS displays.



CLOSING PRAYER

Benediction: Matthew 28:19-20 or Acts 1:8