



BLESS THE CHILDREN

By Marilyn Sharpe

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

"Achoo!" "Bless you." It is a virtually automatic response for most of us. Unfortunately, this may be the only time we bless one another.

God has something bigger and more pervasive in mind. God spoke to Abraham, and said this: *"I will bless you ... so that you will be a blessing... and in you all of the families of the earth will be blessed."* Genesis 12:2-3 Blessed to be a blessing. This is the way that God will bless your children ... first by blessing you, to bless them, so that all will be blessed.

Remember the anguish of Esau, when his brother Jacob stole their father's blessing and his birthright? *"Esau said this to his father, 'Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me also, father!' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept."* Genesis 27:38 All of our children need our blessings.

How and where and with what shall we begin? Begin when you first know you are pregnant or fill out all of the paperwork for an adoption or know you will become a foster family or a blended family. Pray for the child. Thank God for the gift of the child in your life. Begin to collect children's Bibles or storybooks that will help you tell the story of God's love to the child. When the child arrives, plan the baptism. From that day, or if your child is already baptized, begin celebrating the baptism birthday, the day God splashed your child with promise and claimed this beloved as God's own. Use the sign of the cross as a daily reminder of baptism with your child. Build and fill a FaithChest with all of the mementos of faith, the baptism candle, gown, certificate, cards, baby Bible, songs of faith, Bible story books. Keep filling it. Use it as a home altar or a faith treasure chest that helps you tell the story of faith for your child. Get a copy of *For Everything a Season: 75 Blessings for Everyday Life* by the Nilsen family.

The last words of the Christian Old Testament point to the coming of the Messiah. We will know the coming of the Christ, by these signs: *"Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah... He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse."*

Malachi 4:5-6

In every generation, God prepares the way for Jesus to come into the lives of children and their parents by turning their hearts to one another. This is not a God who sits on high with a thunderbolt, but one who knows that if hearts are not turned toward one another in love and blessing, the land is already cursed.

Begin each day or end each day or say goodbye with the words of the benediction

*The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

Numbers 6:24-26

And God bless you and your family.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. At bedtime, make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads. You may choose to use the words of the Baptismal service: " (Call them by name), child of God, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever," adding, or simply saying, "Jesus loves you and so do I."
2. In the morning, before your children leave for the day, remind them, "God goes with you to bless you and keep you."
3. At dinner or in the car, ask, "Who has blessed you today? For whom have you been a blessing?"
4. Whenever you have Sabbath time with your child, lay your hand on that beloved head (even if you have to stand on tiptoe to do it), and give a blessing. "God bless you and keep you today."
5. In a birthday card or note or email to your child or friend, make sure you tell them that they have been God's blessing to you and that you thank God for them.
6. Count your blessings. Literally. Make a list. Let it be your prayer of thanksgiving. Share it with your family or create a family list. Post it where you will all see it and be reminded.