

How to use this Study Guide

The purpose of a study guide is not to increase what the reader knows. What needs to be known has already been presented in the book itself. The purpose of the study guide is to enable the reader to *do* what has been presented.

Of course, the study guide can be used to great advantage by a solitary individual, following the exercises for each chapter. However, there is great power in a group of friends working together to accomplish a worthwhile objective. They can encourage, support, and challenge each other to apply the principles presented in the book.

The intent of the author of this book was not to inform people about the meaning of blessings; it was to encourage them to become people of blessing, to adopt a lifestyle of blessing, to harness the power of words to lift the quality of life of other people, and to enable them to become channels of God's grace and uplift.

A good way to do this is to meet weekly to “spur one another on to love and good deeds.” (Hebrews 10:24) After reading each chapter in the book, work through the exercises in the study guide.

Follow these five steps each week:

- 1. Review.** This is a concise summary of what the author said. It may clarify or reinforce what has already been stated.
- 2. Reflect.** Match the statements and illustrations in the book with your own personal experience. Sift back through your memory bank until you can say, “Yes, I can identify with that. This is how I felt when I was blessed by someone.” Or, “Sure, I can remember the exact setting when _____ cursed me, called me a loser.” Recall your own emotions when you went through the same kind of experience the author was describing in that chapter. The purpose of Rolf Garborg’s sharing about blessing his children is not that you would say, “Wasn’t that interesting!” The goal of this step is to help you develop such a deep conviction to live a life of blessing that you will not only start, but continue to change your daily routine.

3. Respond. This is the critical step. What are you going to do about what you have come to believe as a result of reading this chapter? The learning is in the doing. If you are going to “reap a habit,” you must “sow an action.”

4. Reinforce. Each chapter contains a concept related to giving blessings to people. Once you make a personal identification with that concept by *reflection* and put it into practice by *response*, you will need to *reinforce* your new conviction with a solid undergirding of scripture. Daily Bible readings demonstrate that the concepts presented here are not just the opinion of the writer or even the collected endorsements of other Christians. They amplify what the Word of God consistently says about blessing and cursing. Some verses are so important they should be committed to memory.

5. Report. Next time you and your friends get together, share how you applied the ideas you discussed last week. What happened? What could you have done differently? How did the other person respond when you gave a blessing?

Chapter 1: “Blessing Beginnings”

Review:

- One key way to pass God’s favor and grace from generation to generation is by giving our children a blessing.

- One good model is Aaron's blessing in Numbers 6:24-26.
- Bedtime is a good time for blessing.
- Explain to your children why and what it means.
- Just as a pastor/priest gives a blessing (benediction) to the congregation at the end of worship, so parents should give a blessing to their small congregation at the end of the day.

Reflect:

- What are your childhood memories of bedtime?
- What were your feelings? Did you feel secure, frightened, happy, cold and hungry, angry, warm, abandoned? Did you feel blessed?

Respond:

- Pray for openness to a life of blessing.
- Talk to a friend about the value of blessing.
- Write down Aaron's blessing from Numbers 6:24-26 and practice by giving a blessing to a baby. The baby won't mind if your performance isn't perfect.

Reinforce:

- Memorize Numbers 6:24-26

Daily Bible readings: (blessings in the Bible)

1. Luke 2:25-35 (Simeon's blessing)

2. I Samuel 2:1-10 (Hannah's blessing)
3. Luke 2:36-38 (Anna's blessing)
4. Genesis 24:60-67 (the blessing of Bethuel's family)
5. Genesis 27:27-29 (Isaac blessing Jacob)
6. Leviticus 9:22-24 (Moses and Aaron blessing the people)
7. Ruth 4:11-12 (the elders blessing Ruth)

Report:

Chapter 2: "The Biblical Blessing"

Review:

- God prepared Abraham for an unclear future by giving him a blessing.
- Why? Because Abraham needed it and because God is a God of blessing.
- The Old Testament word for blessing is *berakah*, which means "to transmit, convey God's goodness to someone."
- The New Testament word is *eulogeo*, which is "to speak well of, to praise."
- Words have great power to change lives.
- There are four kinds of blessings in the Bible:

- God to His people
- People to God
- God over things
- One person to another

Reflect:

- Picture Abraham remembering God’s blessing at various places on his journey to the promised land. Remember that everywhere he stopped, “he pitched his tent and built an altar.” (Genesis 12)
- Now, think about your own unknown future. How will God’s blessing affect the way you think about the possible outcomes of the next days or years of your life?

Respond:

- Talk with your family about why we pray a blessing over our food. This is a good starting point for extending blessings to other areas of our lives, especially our lives as a family.
- Figure out how to say “Goodbye!” with a blessing: like when you leave someone’s house, say, “Lord, bless this house and everyone who enters here.” Or say as you shake a friend’s hand or give a hug, “See you next time. Until then, may the Lord bless you. . .”

- Your calendar or datebook is a chart of your personal “journey.”

Pencil in some reminders of God’s promised blessings to you as well as your plans to bless the people you are scheduled to meet on that journey.

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (things that were blessed)

1. (Jesus blessing the food)
2. II John 2 (health and prosperity)
3. Ecclesiastes 2:24 (work)
4. Hebrews 6:7 (the land which produces food)
5. Genesis 2:3 (the day of rest)
6. Proverbs 10:7 (the memory of righteous people)
7. James 1:17 (every good and perfect gift)

Report:

Chapter 3: “Blessing the Family”

Review:

- In “Fiddler on the Roof,” Tevye prayed a Sabbath blessing on his family. One specific invocation was that they would be “deserving of praise.”

- Blessings can/should be personalized to match the family's needs.
- A good idea: sing blessings.
- One good definition of a blessing: "speaking into someone's life the grace of our Heavenly Father."
- The goal of our blessing: that they may "love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind." (Luke 10:25-26)
- One method to accomplish that goal: give blessings.

Reflect:

- Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7, which lists four regular family situations in which the Word of God (including blessings) is to be discussed. First, think about how those daily events are currently practiced in your family. Then, imagine how they would be changed by inserting even the tiniest of blessings. What would happen if those events were regular occasions for sharing the promises of God's blessing?

Respond:

- Ease into a pattern of giving your friends a blessing by starting one step back from a face-to-face blessing: send someone a blessing today by note, e-mail, or text message.
- Make a list of five people who would enjoy having you practice your blessing-giving habit on them. Who would especially appreciate a

blessing from you? Start with the easiest ones; there will be plenty of opportunity later to bless the difficult people.

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (Things to think about in the “night watches.)

1. Psalm 63:5-7
2. Isaiah 26:9
3. Psalm 42:8
4. Psalm 16:7
5. Psalm 119:55
6. Psalm 119:148
7. Psalm 1:2

Report:

Chapter 4: “Making It Work”

Review:

- Does blessing a child produce immediate results? Not necessarily.
- But does blessing *work*?
 - Influences attitudes
 - Enables openness and honesty
 - Makes it difficult to “let the sun go down on your wrath”

- Have patience, like the farmer who sows the seed—then waits.
- Give a blessing because it is the right thing to do, not because you expect certain results.
- Giving children a blessing *works* because
 - It gives them at least a few moments of undivided attention
 - Words mean something
 - It promotes openness and honesty
 - It prepares a child to establish his/her own relationship to God

Reflect:

- Who treated you as a treasure? Who saw potential in you that no one else seemed to see? Who praised your good qualities when you couldn't even see them yourself?
- Are there people around you, especially children, whose current behavior or attitudes make it difficult to imagine them becoming mature, responsible, and happy people? Try to visualize what those individuals *could* become by the grace of God. Remember: a blessing is a means of conveying God's power and love (grace) to someone.

Respond:

- When the Apostle Paul wrote to his friends, in every letter he pictured spiritual progress for them:
 - “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” (Ephesians 1:17)
 - “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (Ephesians 3:16)
- As you interact with people this week, add a “future growth” blessing to your conversation:
 - “Jerry, I just pray that the Lord will increase your knowledge of Himself in every aspect of your life.”
 - “Annette, I’m looking forward to seeing how God will use your wonderful talents to bless a lot of people.”
 - “Susan, may you have the courage to accept the big responsibilities that will be coming your way.”

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (on the value of patience)

1. II Peter 3:9
2. Galatians 5:22-23

3. Colossians 3:12-13
4. Ephesians 4:1-3
5. Romans 8:24-25
6. James 5:7-8
7. Galatians 6:9

Report:

Chapter 5: “Getting Started”

Review:

- The most important step is getting started.
- The only mistake you can make is doing nothing.
- There is no right way or wrong way; any blessing will do.
- Questions and Answers:
 - At what age should we start? Any age. When do you want the benefits to start and how long do you want them to continue?
 - Is bedtime the only time of day to bless my children? God is always ready to bless, so we should be, too. Mealtimes are good opportunities, or when kids go off to school. (Ask the kids when they would like to have a blessing.)

- Must blessings be given daily? Any time is OK, but regular is best.
- What should I say? Start with the models in scripture, then add your own personal touches.
- Should blessings be always the same? Whatever.
- Who should provide the family blessing? The spiritual head of the household, if possible.
- Does blessing replace prayer? No. Pray with and for your kids, and bless them, too.
- Guidelines:
 - Explain the concept of blessing to your children.
 - Hold them in your arms when blessing them.
 - Place your hands on their heads.
 - Bless them in God's name.
 - Teach them to bless themselves.

Reflect:

- What keeps you from getting started? What are the barriers?
- Think about how things can be different if you implement this one key practice with your family.

Respond:

- Start today if you haven't already.
- Thank God for the opportunity to become a "blessing person."
- Write a "to do" plan for blessing, just as you would for any other major project, like building a house or planning a vacation. (And which is more valuable to your family—a house, a vacation, or your blessing?)

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (people Jesus touched)

1. Mark 10:13-16 (children)
2. Mark 9:36 (children)
3. Matthew 8:11-14, Mark 1:40-45, Luke 5:12-16 (a man with leprosy)
4. Matthew 9:29-31 (two blind men)
5. Matthew 17:5-8 (fearful disciples)
6. Luke 13:10-17 (a woman who couldn't stand up)
7. Mark 7:31-37 (a deaf man)

Report:

Chapter Six: "A Positive Covering"

Review:

- Blessing: “invoking the goodness of God into the life of another person through the spoken word.”
- God’s people are to become a “people of blessing.”
- He has delegated to us the role of conveying His grace to others—through our daily words, especially in our own families.
- The tongue creates the atmosphere in the home, positively or negatively
- Proverbs 18:21 The tongue speaks “life or death.”
- Blessing breaks the bonds of “curses” or “cursing.”
- *Eulogeo*: “to speak well of. . .”
- Conditions for a blessing to be well-received:
 - It must be warranted
 - It must be sincere

Reflect:

- Not to stir up old wounds, but see if you can recall the specific words of someone who spoke “death” into your life.

Respond:

- The application assignment for this chapter is practicing “speaking well of” other people. Start by giving a word of appreciation to

someone every day this week, mentioning one specific action that person has done which is worthy of praise.

- For “extra credit,” write a note to someone who has made a positive contribution to your life. That person will cherish your written affirmation.

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (about the power of words)

1. Ephesians 4:29
2. Matthew 12:35-37
3. James 3:1-11
4. Proverbs 25:11
5. Psalm 19:14
6. Ecclesiastes 10:12, 12:9-12
7. Colossians 4:6

Report:

Chapter 7: “Blessing in a Name”

Review:

- Our name distinguishes us from everyone else

- A “good name” is a valued possession.
- The first gift a parent gives a child is her/his name.
- Jesus was given the name “Savior” before he was born.
- Our family name is a link to our heritage.
- “Name” = “reputation.” More valuable than gold.
- Children tend to live up to their parents’ nickname for them.

Reflect:

- Did you have a nickname? Or several? How did (or do) you feel about that name? How has that nickname affected the way people treat you or act toward you?
- If you were to give yourself a nickname (or a new name entirely), what would you like to be called? Why?
- The resurrection became real to Mary when Jesus spoke her name. Do you have memories of times when you felt God was calling you by your name? Do you sense that God knows you “by name?”

Respond:

- Introduce one of your friends with a new name: “This is Elizabeth, one of the most thoughtful people I know.” “I’d like you to meet Tom. He’s a great encourager.”

- If you don't know the meaning of your children's names (or grandchildren's), look them up and share your findings with them.

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (about names)

1. Proverbs 22:1
2. Isaiah 61:1-5
3. Ecclesiastes 7:1
4. Matthew 16:17-19
5. Luke 1:31, 2:21
6. Revelation 20:11-15
7. Isaiah 62:2

Report:

Chapter 8: "Blessings that Heal"

Review:

- Our speech can be a blessing or a curse
 - "blessing" = "calling down God's grace"
 - "curse" = "sending injury or harm"
- A curse contributes to the destruction of a person

- *Kakologeio* = “to speak ill of, to revile”
- A curse also injures the one who speaks it.
- A curse can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Hurts and wounds can be healed.
- Resentment/bitterness can be replaced by words of blessing.
- Clear away the “garbage” by seeking forgiveness
 - You cannot control other people’s responses--only your own.
 - When you forgive, God forgives you.
- Jesus forgave the people who crucified him.
- Once we know God’s forgiveness, we can begin blessing our families.

Reflect:

- OK, it’s time to get down to personal work. Ask the Holy Spirit to shine His spotlight on any issue that has “cursed” you: caused you to have bitterness, resentment, hurt, embarrassment, hatred.
- Replay in your mind the incident which caused you pain. Be careful here! The purpose of this reflection is not to reinforce “curses” but to heal them. Don’t stop here: continue with the *Respond* step.

Respond:

- *If appropriate*, go to the person who has “cursed” you and ask forgiveness for your part of the conflict. Don’t say, “If I have

offended you . . .” Say instead, “The Lord has convicted me that I was wrong when I _____. Will you forgive me?” Make sure you ask, “Will you forgive me?”

- Remember, you are not responsible for the other person’s reaction or response. Once you have asked forgiveness for your part of the problem, your conscience is clear.

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (on healing and forgiveness)

1. Matthew 9:1-8
2. James 5:13-16
3. Luke 4:14-21
4. Hebrews 12:14-17
5. Isaiah 53:1-6
6. Matthew 11:28-30
7. I Peter 2:24-25

Report:

Chapter 9: “You Can’t Saw Sawdust”

Review:

How should we deal with past mistakes?

- Follow the example of the Apostle Paul: “But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind . . . I press on. . .”
 - Put the past behind you
 - Learn from it
 - Use past mistakes as inspiration for the future
- Make “particleboard” out of “sawdust”
 - Bonded leather out of scraps
 - Sculpture out of sawdust and resin
- God can take the “scraps” of our personal history and create a work of art
 - His Holy Spirit is the “resin”
 - Our experiences are the material
- Hurts and wounds can be healed
 - Forgiveness and blessing go hand in hand
 - Jesus set the example: “Father forgive them . . .”
 - The Spirit which raised Jesus from death is the same Spirit which enables us to forgive
 - We can forgive others when we experience God’s forgiveness

- Ask your parents (if they're living) to bless you. Then as your children to allow you to bless them.

Reflect:

1. St. Paul found spiritual life and health by maintaining two perspectives: forgetting the past and pressing on toward the goal.
Let's start with the goal: What is your personal life purpose? What would you like to be like in five or ten years? What are you "pressing toward?"
2. Forgetting the past. Not being bound or restricted by what has happened. Name three or four things you would like to forget, negative things that keep coming up in your memory. Now, picture Jesus on the cross, surrounded by people who did wrong things to him: the religious leaders who sentenced him to death, his friends who ran away when he needed them most, and the Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross. Listen as he says to each one of them, "Father, forgive them!" Now picture yourself standing there with the soldiers, remembering all the things you have done which displeased or disappointed him. Listen as he says, concerning *you*, "Father, forgive him/her. . ."

Respond:

We need to learn how to turn negative experiences into positive qualities in our lives, or as Rolf Garborg says, “turning sawdust into something useful or even beautiful.” One way to do that is through thanksgiving. We can not only that God *in* all things (I Thessalonians 5:18), but *for* all things (Ephesians 5:20). Pick one painful experience from your memory bank. Now, make a list (on paper) of ten reasons you can give thanks for that bad situation. For example, “I can give thanks to God for my father’s unfair expectations of me because. . .”

1. I realize how my own expectations can trap even the people I love most.
2. It has helped me understand my father’s own needs and weaknesses.
3. I have come to realize that if I have God’s blessing, I don’t need to depend on other people’s approval, even my own parents.
4. Etc.

Or, “I thank God for the pain caused by . . .”

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (who we were; who we are becoming)

1. II Corinthians 5:17
2. Philippians 3:14

3. Ephesians 2:10
4. I Peter 2:9-10
5. Romans 12:1-2
6. I John 4:4
7. I Thessalonians 5:5

Report:

Chapter 10: “Cherish Every Moment”

Review:

- We can’t know how long our children will be with us, or us with them, so treasure every opportunity to bless them.
- Cherish every moment.

Reflect:

What if you learned today that you have only one year to live? What would you want to say to your children that would have an impact on the rest of their lives? We have several examples from scripture about people who knew their lives would soon end. Here’s what they did:

- Jacob blessed each of his sons with a specific blessing, as well as two of his grandsons. (Genesis 48 and 49)
- Elisha asked Elijah to give him a blessing. (II Kings 2)

- As his earthly life neared its end, Jesus gave his friends the ultimate blessing: the presence of his Holy Spirit.

If this were your last opportunity to give a specific blessing, to which people would you address your blessing, and what would you say?

Respond:

This is a big step: Write out the blessing you would give to the ten people about whom you care the most. Choose your words carefully. Then, ask God to provide the opportunity to present those blessings—before it is too late.

Reinforce:

Daily Bible Readings: (life is short, so use time wisely)

1. James 4:13-15
2. Psalm 39:4-5
3. Proverbs 27:1
4. Ecclesiastes 11:1-11
5. Job 14:1-22
6. Psalm 118:24-29
7. Jeremiah 29:11

Report:

Chapter 11: “Expanding the Circle”

Review:

- Jesus is our example of blessing OPKs (Other People’s Kids)
- Grandparents have an important role to play in the development of their grandkids’ lives.
 - Two important qualities: time and patience
- Adult Christians can become “blessing activists” by giving an encouraging word to other people’s children.
- Everyone needs to receive expressions of God’s power and favor.
- The child within each of us is still looking for a blessing.

Reflect:

Remember a situation when someone outside your family, someone from whom you didn’t expect to receive a blessing, gave you a word of encouragement or an affirmation of God’s favor toward you. How was that “blessing” expressed—in a note, a phone call, a personal conversation, or what?

Now, think of random people in your wider circle of acquaintances: neighbors, people at work, the lady at the counter in the post office or

grocery store, etc. Picture that person as a child who needed a blessing.

Think of other people you know and imagine them as children, waiting for someone to come along and express God's love to them.

Respond:

Now, picture yourself standing before God as your commanding officer, giving you your orders for the day. Here's what He assigns you to do: "Go about your normal activities today, but in the process, give a blessing to ten individual people. Let them know I love them."

Reinforce: (Bible readings on giving people an encouraging word)

1. II Timothy 4:2
2. Hebrews 3:13
3. Hebrews 10:25
4. I Thessalonians 5:14
5. Romans 12:8
6. Colossians 3:12
7. II Peter 1:6-7

Report:

Chapter 12: "Blessing as a Way of Life"

Review:

- King David lived a life of blessing:
 - He blessed God
 - He blessed all the people around him.
 - He blessed his family.
 - He was called “a man after God’s own heart.”
- The practice of regularly blessing our own kids can extend to all our other relationships.
- The process of heart cleansing begins with a simple step—one step.
 - Start where you are, and do what you sense is God’s leading.
 - Don’t worry about making mistakes—just do it.
- “Keep short accounts with God,” as Rolf’s father always said.

A family blessing is a commitment to our children’s highest good—that they might know and love God with all their hearts.

Respond:

How to start:

- Start now.
- Find a convenient time.
- Ask God to show you the right blessing.
- Explain blessings to your children.
- Add prayer to blessing.

- Become a “blessing activist.”
- Involve your pastor in your blessing mission.
- Look for ways to bless others.
- Share this book with others.