

Women's Ministries Emphasis Day

June 9, 2018

“Blessed to Be a Blessing”

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**Prepared by the Department of Women's Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
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Silver Spring, MD 20904
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Dear Sister-Leaders:

Joyful greetings. What a privilege it is to travel from country to country and have opportunity to be involved in the programs and visit the projects which you lead. God blesses your commitment, your dedication, your desire, your effort to serve Him and to encourage others into a relationship with Him. And in turn, you are a blessing to the women you shepherd.

Thanks to M. Dinorah Rivera, Inter-American Division Women's Ministries director, for demonstrating how the Shunammite woman blesses Elisha with four legacies of blessing-to-bless-others. You will be inspired by this example.

We are reminded that Abraham is blessed by the LORD in order to be a blessing to others: "... I will bless you ... and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3). What a legacy of blessing in Abraham! The same blessings pointed out for the Shunammite woman are seen for Abraham.

Abraham shows a legacy of *service and hospitality* to his three visitors. He shows a legacy of *contentment* with what is left of the land not chosen by Lot. He shows a legacy of *peace and trust* by his willingness to rescue his wayward nephew and to work with his political allies. He shows a legacy of *perseverance* in his intercession for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In turn, Abraham is blessed beyond measure with the promised son, Isaac, and countless descendants, even though he is certain he is too old. He is blessed with a much greater boundary of promised land, even though it seems he forfeited most of it when he gives Lot first choice. He is blessed by political allies who gift him with wealth, even though he deceives some of them. He is blessed by the saving work of his future descendant, Jesus, who will redeem the faithful heirs of the promise, even though Abraham works against God's plan for providing the heir.

We may not be a shining example of the blessing-to-bless legacy as demonstrated by the Shunammite woman, but Abraham's story gives us hope. The blessing is not about us; it is about God's greatness and His mercy.

May you be blessed to be a blessing to others,

GC Women's Ministries

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About the Author

M. Dinorah Rivera, “Blessed to Be a Blessing”

M. Dinorah Rivera serves as division director of women’s ministries and children’s ministries in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists and has more than twenty years’ experience in these ministries. She was named associate director of children’s and adolescent ministries in 2005, becoming director in 2010. She was elected director of women’s ministries in 2015. She is a commissioned minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Rivera has written widely for children. Among her writings are the books, *Kit for Eternal Beauty*, and *My Little Shoes are Tight* [Los zapatitos me aprietan]; programs for Vacation Bible School; stories for Children’s Corner, including “Building for Eternity,” “Growing Up Like Jesus,” “Step by Step with Jesus,” “A World of Colors”; and numerous articles and sermons.

Rivera’s studies include bilingual office administration, Bible studies, human resources, and organizational leadership.

Rivera enjoys writing, music, discovering cultural differences, watching sunsets and the grandeur of oceans. She is a lover of life, family, and the simplicity of humbleness. Above all else, she loves God, the giver of all that is good.

Born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and married to Edwin C. Rivera who is works in video graphics production, M. Dinorah Rivera is mother of four and grandmother of five.

Order of Divine Service

Divine Service **“Blessed to Be a Blessing”**

Moment of Reflection on God’s Blessing

Call to Worship

Bible Reading: Luke 1:28, 29, NIV.

*“The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’
Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.”*

Opening Hymn: #195 *“Showers of Blessing”*

Pastoral Prayer

Call for the Offering

Children’s Story: *“God Is with Me”*

Special Music: *“His Eye Is on the Sparrow”*

Sermon: *“Blessed to Be a Blessing”*

Closing Hymn: #334 *“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”*

Closing Prayer

Moment of Reflection on God's Blessings

Introductory Activity **“Moment of Reflection on God's Blessings”**

Today, as we begin our “Blessed to Be a Blessing” experience, I invite you to take a quiet moment to look at one of Christ's perfect and beautiful blessings to you.

In the next five minutes, choose just ONE of His blessings below. Then (a) read the brief accompanying Bible passage, (b) look at yourself honestly in the light of this blessing, and (c) silently share with Jesus your observations and personal needs.

Option 1: The blessing of orderliness. Jesus does things in an orderly manner (see Genesis 1:1-5).

For what disordered areas of your life would you like His help and blessing? What are you willing to let God help you change or adapt so you can live life with more order and organization?

Option 2: The blessing of appropriate boundary-setting. Jesus set personal boundaries for Himself so that He would (a) always be within His Father's will and also (b) make sure His own needs were met so that He had adequate energy to be a blessing to others (see Luke 4:42, 43).

What is one area in your life for which you need God's blessing to help you set healthy personal boundaries so that you can be a greater blessing to others? How could you set appropriate boundaries to ensure your ministry energies are protected?

Option 3: The blessing of compassion. Jesus' compassion for others influenced Him to meet their needs (see Matthew 14:14).

You are a direct influence on (and can be a special blessing to) the five people closest to you. Write the names of those individuals and note just one way that you can be a blessing to each within the next month. Tell Jesus about them and ask Him to guide and then bless your efforts.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Option 4: The blessing of perseverance. Jesus persevered until He had accomplished the Father's purpose for His life (see John 17:14).

Tell Jesus through prayer about the areas and situations of your life right now where you need His help in persevering in order to accomplish the work He has given you to do.

Sermon: Blessed to Be a Blessing

“Blessed to Be a Blessing”

By M. Dinorah Rivera

Introduction

The book, *The Girl with No Name*, tells the fascinating story of Marina Chapman, who faced enormous challenges when she was kidnapped from her home and later abandoned in the jungles of Colombia. At only four or five years of age, Marina lived with—and learned from—capuchin monkeys in the jungle. She learned to eat and act like them. Having no connection with other people, Marina lost the ability to speak as well as her identity as a human being, for she was assuming the family dynamics of the capuchins. Somehow she survived this ordeal.

Five years after being abandoned in the jungle, Marina was “rescued” by hunters who sold her to some unscrupulous individuals in a large city. Used, abused, and impoverished for several more years, Marina was finally and truly rescued by a neighboring family who correctly identified her plight. Sometime later the entire family relocated to England, taking the now adopted Marina with them.

Marina experienced a great blessing when she was rescued by a loving family. Now, instead of learning the ways of small jungle monkeys, Marina could experience, observe, and learn the ways of the truly caring family that had come to her rescue. The blessings which this family brought into Marina’s life eventually equipped her to pass them on to others. Today Marina is the loving wife of a retired scientist, the supportive mother of two adult children, and a doting grandmother to three grandchildren. She used her great blessing to become a blessing to others.

In a sense, Marina’s blessed-to-be-a-blessing story resembles that of many women. Throughout the centuries, nameless women have faced great challenges. Yet those who experienced and identified blessings in their lives, *despite* their ordeals, emerged from their challenges stronger and with a clearer sense of who they really were.

Of course, the greatest victories are experienced by those who have met Jesus personally and are imitating Him. Since they have gratefully received His blessings into their lives, they now determine how their own blessings can benefit others.

This morning we're going to look at two women, one from the New Testament and the other from the Old Testament. The lives of these women exemplify the ultimate blessed-to-be-a-blessing experience.

New Testament woman of blessing

The scripture reading for today's sermon message takes us into the humble abode and heart of a young peasant girl. She had no aspirations to do anything great. In fact, the patriarchal culture in which she was being raised had no great expectations for women—especially for young peasant girls growing up in impoverished circumstances. Yet this young girl, Mary by name, had a deep, trusting, and obedient love for God.

According to Luke, an “angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:28, 29, NIV). What a special moment in young Mary's life! God was with her and was choosing to bless *her* in a special way!

Let's notice again the words of the angel. “The Lord is with you; *blessed* are you among all women” (Luke 1:28, NKJV, italics supplied).

Though astounding to Mary, God Himself had selected her for a special purpose. If not, why would He have sent an angel to tell her of this special blessing? God had chosen *her!*

Furthermore, we notice that Mary was disturbed by the words of the angel. She was greatly troubled. To me that indicates that she did not expect to be blessed in this manner. She had never suspected that *she* would be chosen by God—out of all the other young women in Israel—for a most important mission.

Imagine . . . Mary was already engaged to a carpenter by trade. She had probably assumed she would one day be a mother. Yet she had never dreamed she would be the mother of God's Son!

In her great humility, Mary did not feel worthy for such an assignment. Nor did she fully understand all that this blessing would entail. Yet, because she loved God and wanted to obey Him, she agreed to let Him use her faith and her body to help accomplish His will for the salvation of mankind.

Suddenly—because of this blessing from God—Mary had to “unlearn” life as she had known it—sort of like Marina Chapman had had to do. Now Mary had to exercise more faith than ever before so that she could learn what it would mean to be the mother of God on earth.

She knew she would face great difficulties. But did she know if she followed God's leading, He would use this unexpected blessing in her life to bless countless others?

In any case, God had reserved a unique role for Mary with the ultimate purpose of her becoming a blessing through the blessing He bestowed upon her. Mary was completely submissive to God and His ways.

Would you and I have accepted this blessing from Heaven if we had been in Mary's shoes? What are we willing to submit to God so that He can use us beyond our most far-reaching thoughts?

Often blessings come with responsibilities and those responsibilities are not always easy to carry. Are you and I willing not only to receive God's blessings but also to take the risk of carrying them—in His strength—to the point of becoming a blessing to those around us?

Mary's legacy to us

As we see in the experience of Mary, God will definitely use His blessings in our lives to bless others, even when we can't clearly see how He is doing so. Women—and men—can learn so much from the experience and humble response of Mary to God and His blessings. Mary leaves us a legacy of *submission* to the will of God—even in the face of great uncertainty.

Old Testament woman of blessing

Now let's look at a woman in the Old Testament who had a blessed-to-be-a-blessing experience. Turn with me to the book of 2 Kings, chapter 4. In verses eight through thirty-seven, we find there a story of another woman. We do not even know her name. Yet God also used her for the purpose of being a blessing to others.

The prophet Elisha referred to this young woman as the Shunammite because she was from the city of Shunem. The Bible does not speak of external beauty, heroic acts, or position. She is identified—as was Mary—as a humble woman who was open to God's leading in her life. She was also the childless wife of a prosperous farmer.

Let us read the story, starting in verse eight.

⁸ One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. ⁹ She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. ¹⁰ Let's make a small room

on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us.”

¹¹ One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. ¹² He said to his servant Gehazi, “Call the Shunammite.” So he called her, and she stood before him. ¹³ Elisha said to him, “Tell her, ‘You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?’”

She replied, “I have a home among my own people.”

¹⁴ “What can be done for her?” Elisha asked.

Gehazi said, “She has no son, and her husband is old.”

¹⁵ Then Elisha said, “Call her.” So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶ “About this time next year,” Elisha said, “you will hold a son in your arms.”

“No, my lord!” she objected. “Please, man of God, don’t mislead your servant!”

¹⁷ But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

¹⁸ The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. ¹⁹ He said to his father, “My head! My head!”

His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.” ²⁰ After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. ²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.

²² She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.”

²³ “Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.”

“That’s all right,” she said.

²⁴ She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.” ²⁵ So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite! ²⁶ Run to meet her and ask her, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?’”

“Everything is all right,” she said.

²⁷ When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why.”

²⁸ “Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes?’”

²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. Don’t greet anyone you meet, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.”

³⁰ But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got up and followed her.

³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.”

³² When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³ He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy’s body grew warm. ³⁵ Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

³⁶ Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.” ³⁷ She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

What an amazing story! Let’s look at what personal qualities stand out in the character of the Shunammite?

The Shunammite had a spirit of selfless service, as shown through her hospitality to the prophet (verses 9 and 10). This woman wanted to provide a place where the “pastor” could rest when he arrived in her town. She recognized the ministry of Elisha and, without fanfare—and after consulting her husband, offered such a place to Elisha. She did not bring her proposal to the church board so that all would know of her generosity. Her offering of service went unnoticed by man but not by God. So with the consent and help of her husband, she built a private room for Elisha.

So here’s a question for each one of us. What act of selfless service—simply because we love God—are we willing to do for Him? These selfless acts may never be listed on the church report list, but they are written on God’s great scroll in heaven.

The Shunammite’s legacy to us

As with Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, the Shunammite woman also leaves us a legacy.

First, as we have already seen, she leaves us a legacy of service and hospitality. “Elisha often came to this retreat. God took notice of the woman’s kindness. She had been childless, and now the Lord rewarded her hospitality by the gift of a son” (Ellen G. White. *Patriarchs and Kings*, p. 237).

Second, she leaves us a legacy of contentment with what she already has. When, by way of gratitude, Elisha offered the woman government intervention, she stated that she was already content with her lot in life.

What would you and I have asked Elisha for, had we had the opportunity? Financial aid? A bigger house or prettier clothes? A high-paying government job or school tuition? But the Shunammite was content in her recognition of what God had provided for her in life.

How many of us have that same spirit? Or we are governed by the desire to have everything that others have—and more? My neighbor has a very expensive car. My car is small and relatively inexpensive. I am content because God has provided for *my* needs. I can use the blessing of my little car to bless others who need transportation.

Though the size of my house is adequate, my friend recently moved to the city and bought a much larger house with a swimming pool. Yet I cannot be envious because God has provided for *my* needs. I can use the blessing of my smaller house to bless others who need hospitality and shelter.

Even if my husband has worked for years but isn’t making as much money as workers much younger than he, I do not allow this situation to bring bitterness into my life. God has provided employment for him, and we can use the income we do have as a blessing for our family and our church.

Someone once said that “contentment is not having everything we want, but instead appreciating everything that we have.” If we are not happy with the things we already have, we will never be happy with the new things we receive. God cannot bless us with more than we can handle.

For whatever she might have lacked, the Shunammite was rich in gratitude and that “wealth” governed her spirit.

Third, the Shunammite leaves us a legacy of peace and trust. Not only did she manifest God’s spirit of peace within, but she also offered it to those around her. Despite the great tragedy in her life and uncertainty surrounding the sudden illness and death of her child, she reassured her husband. In that moment of quiet anguish and loss, she let her trust in God bring her peace.

As a result, God helped her think clearly and take the necessary and confident steps toward getting help.

Do you and I have the same trust and power of God that will bring peace to our hearts as well? Even when sickness and loss knocks at our door? Will we, like this young woman of old, still choose to believe that God is in control?

Fourth, the Shunammite leaves us a legacy of perseverance. She believed Elisha was a man of God. She trusted that God could work a miracle through the faithful prophet. Faith and hope in God's power fueled her perseverance. In spirit and proximity, she clung to the prophet Elisha as Jacob had clung to the Angel with Whom he wrestled throughout his darkest night (Genesis 32:22-31). And as Jesus *commended* people He healed in New Testament times for their persevering faith, God *rewarded* the faithful perseverance of the Shunammite. Through Elisha He raised her son back to life. The Shunammite knew God loved her.

As the apostle Paul wrote centuries later, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:37-39, NIV).

Like the Shunammite, we can have the certainty that nothing that befalls us can separate us from the love of God. God has a purpose for each of our lives. And He pours blessings into our lives. What we do with these blessings and opportunities is our responsibility. One Bible commentary contributor wrote, "Not giving up something we believe in is a sign of determination." We've all been tempted to give up when the going got difficult. Yet each of us must ask God for the determined perseverance of the Shunammite woman. He will answer our prayers!

Conclusion

As we close, let me remind you of something. As with Marina Chapman being rescued by a loving family . . . as with submissive Mary being chosen to carry in her body the Son of God . . . as with the trusting, determined Shunammite woman who received her son again . . . we too have received blessings from God.

Great blessings!

Amazing blessings!

And now God purposes that we use our blessings *from* Him to be a blessing *to* others.

That is what the women in our three stories today have done. Marina continues to bless her own family and inspire others. The death and resurrection power of Mary's Child, Jesus, continues to save—for eternity—all those who believe on Him. The story of the Shunammite woman is an ongoing testimony of God's comfort and faithfulness. (Before her death, she even shared her testimony with a king, and God blessed her yet again! See 2 Kings 8:1-6).

Right where we are, God chooses us, redeems us, blesses us, and changes us into new creatures in Him. He gives us a new name: daughter of God! Then He equips us—we, who have been so unspeakably blessed—to become a blessing to others. Amazing, incomprehensible grace!

My friends, I invite you today to accept God's call on your life. If you have done so already, right now would be the perfect time to renew your commitment to His personal call to you. He will bless your humility, faith, and determination. Furthermore, through each of us, amazing as that seems, God will bless our families, our churches, our communities, and even our nations. His Spirit will be manifest in our lives, and from them will flow abundant blessings of His grace to this dark world.

May God anoint each of us as a chosen vessel to share His love and truth and *blessings* with everyone around us!

My dear friends, may God *bless* you!

Let us pray.

Children's Story: God Is with Me

“God Is with Me”

Bible Verse: “I sought the Lord and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4).

Good morning! How many of you enjoy music? sing? play an instrument? listen to an instrument being played or someone singing? *Wait for answers.* I enjoy music. One of my favorite songs is “His Eye Is on the Sparrow.” The chorus goes like this, “I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free. His eye is on the sparrow, I know he watches me.”

How many of you have felt fear? *Wait for answers.* I know children who are afraid of the dark, and others who are afraid of being left alone. Some children are afraid of an animal, and others are afraid of person who has hurt them.

I’m already an adult, but I also have my fears. Can you guess what makes me a little bit afraid? *Wait for answers.* Let me tell you: something as simple as going to the doctor can me feel afraid, because I do not like injections. Which one of you likes to have an injection given to you? *Wait for them to raise their hands.* It doesn’t look like any of you likes getting a needle poked into you!

Another thing that scares me a little bit is having to be in a small, enclosed space, particularly, if I cannot move for a long time. Some medical tests, like the CT scan and MRI, work only when you are lying very still inside a small chamber for a long time. The way to calm my fear in a situation like that is through singing, even if the singing is only in my mind.

Sometimes we feel alone or abandoned, but a song in the heart helps us to overcome our fears. Did you know that part of the Pathfinder pledge is to “*keep a song in my heart*”? How do we keep a song in our hearts? When we know we are being blessed by God, we want to bless Him by praising Him. The more we praise God, the more it becomes part of our lives.

But what does praising God mean? In English the word **praising** sounds like *pray* and *sing* combined together. Praying to Jesus and singing about His love helps us to overcome our fears.

The Bible verse, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34: 4), should be in our memories. We are praying scripture when we repeat these words from Psalm 34:4.

The song, “His Eye Is on the Sparrow,” tells us about the blessing of God’s protection even for a tiny bird. Children are also small, but Jesus watches over each one of us. We can feel fear of getting hit or falling while playing a sport. We can feel fearful when we are not chosen to play, or when we are mocked and ridiculed. We can feel afraid when we are scolded, or when we do not learn as fast as others learn. On those occasions, we can ask Jesus to be with us, and then sing our song. Singing will help us feel the peace of God by our side. God knows our fears, and He cares about what happens to us. He gives His angels as guardians to take care of us, and He promises to be with us always.

The next time you feel scared, remember that God takes care of the tiniest birds, and He will take care of you, even more diligently.

Have a young girl sing the first verse or simply repeat the words to the chorus.

“I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.”

Let us pray: Dear Father, thank you for taking care of me. Help me not to feel afraid by knowing that you will be with me wherever I may go. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Seminar: Jars of Fragrance

“Jars of Fragrance” (Releasing Our Praise into Blessings)

Good afternoon and welcome to our “Jars of Fragrance” afternoon program.

Someone once said, “When we lift our hands in praise and worship, we break spiritual jars of perfume over Jesus. The fragrance of our praise fills the whole earth and touches the heart of God.”¹ I would add that our praise to God results in blessings from God that we can then share with others. Then everyone can share in the fragrance of praise.

In this session we will do three things. First, we will explore reasons to praise God. Second, we will look how the results of our praise to God can become blessings over our lives that we can pass on to others. After all, remember that we are “Blessed to Be a Blessing.” During this precious time together, we will have an opportunity to learn, interact, discuss, and be blessed!

Let’s first invite the Holy Spirit, however, to be with us before we open the Word of God.

Prayer

We’ll begin our time together by reading Revelation 5:11-14. This is a beautiful picture of what praise to God looks like in heaven. After we read it, let’s talk about it for a bit.

[Note to facilitator: you can certainly invite a number of individuals to participate in the reading of this scriptural passage.)

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying:

¹ Dennis Ignatius

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped (NIV)

In this Bible passage, who is releasing their jars of praise-fragrance to God? [the heavenly hosts of angels]

Why are they praising Him? [because He is worthy of their praise]

God is also worthy of praise coming from His human family. Therefore, focusing on who God is, what are some aspects of His character for which we can praise Him?

[Discussion: Allow time for answers which might include that God is our Creator, the Beginning and the End, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is Provider, Healer, Redeemer, the Law Giver, Judge, High Priest and Intercessor, our Protector, our Strength, the Rock of our salvation, and so much more.]

Reasons to release our jars of fragrance to God

Now let’s look at some important reasons why God deserves our praise and why we owe Him an offering of fragrant praise.

First, as we have already established in the Bible passage, **He alone is worthy of our praise**. Yet sadly, sometimes our praise to Him rises and falls with the blessings we see—or don’t see—in our lives. When we see the answers to prayer that we had hoped for, we praise God. But if we don’t receive the answers we wish for, or receive them when we want them, we forget or neglect to praise God.

My prayer is that we be mindful that God is worthy of our praise—all the time! What are some ways we can do this?

[Note to facilitator: allow a few minutes for suggestions and thoughts from congregation]

A **second** reason to praise God is simply **because He invites us to**. The psalmist wrote, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6, NIV). Even as human beings, we understand how gratifying it is to receive a sincere word of gratitude from someone we have helped. Our fragrant praise cheers the heart of Jesus as well.

A **third** reason to praise God is that doing so **facilitates a closer relationship with Him**. The psalmist wrote of God, “But You *are* holy, Enthroned in the *praises* of Israel” (Psalm 22:3, NKJV, italics supplied). Praise invites God’s presence more deeply into our lives as we draw closer to Him. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you,” says the apostle James (James 4:8, NKJV). The heavenly Father also loves to have personal interaction with us. When, in obedience, we praise Him, that act helps restore us to the right relationship with Him that sin originally broke.

A **fourth** reason to praise God is that it is **good practice now for a worship lifestyle in heaven**. The apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11, NKJV).

Ellen White wrote that “Every heavenly intelligence is interested in the assemblies of the saints who on earth meet to worship God. In the inner court of heaven they listen to the testimony of the witnesses for Christ in the outer court on earth, and the praise and thanksgiving from the worshipers below is taken up in the heavenly anthem, and praise and rejoicing sound through the heavenly courts because Christ has not died in vain”²

One **final** reason to praise God is that **He gives us the assurance of additional blessings when we praise Him** (see 2 Samuel 22:47-51). These blessings God gives us, not only for ourselves but also to share with others as we witness to God’s great love for them. After all, our Women’s Ministries Emphasis theme today reminds us that we are “Blessed to Be a Blessing.”

Group Activity: Bible situations in which releasing jars of praise resulted in blessings

² Ellen G. White. *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 6, p. 632.

We are going to quickly look at three situations where praise to God resulted in the fragrance of blessings being poured out not only on those who offered praise to God but also to those around them.

I will ask you to divide in three informal groups. I will give each group a brief passage of scripture to read. Please read it together, summarize it, and then prepare to give a simple presentation to the rest of us concerning how praise in these situations resulted in blessings.

Group 1: Second Chronicles 20:20-22—“So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood. . . . And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: ‘Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever.’ Now when they began to sing and to *praise*, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.”

What happened in this situation and how did the praise result in blessing? [Possible conclusion for facilitator’s use: God uses our praise to defeat His enemies—and ours.]

Group 2: First Peter 2:9—“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the *praises* of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

What happened in this situation and how did the praise result in blessing? [Possible conclusion for facilitator’s use: Our praise encourages others to let God call them out of darkness and into Heaven’s light.]

Group 3: Acts 16:25, 26—“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.”

In this story, who was most blessed by the praise-fragrance ascending to God from out of that prison cell? [Possible conclusion for facilitator’s use: The jailer and his family who were saved. Our praise moves the arm of God, bringing blessings of salvation to others.]

Final thoughts about praise becoming blessings

When we open jars of fragrant praise to God, it does something special for each of us.

First, our praise helps us focus on God and not ourselves.

Once an elderly woman continued nursing her lifelong habit of complaining. In doing so, she had exhausted her morale, her faith, her friendships, and her physical health. In an act of desperation, the woman's grown children absolutely insisted that she go see one more doctor for some possible health cure. After the doctor listened to the woman complain for a few minutes, he asked, "Is there anything that you actually enjoy doing?"

"Yes," the woman, "I like to grow little flower plants. I have dozens and dozens of them."

"Then I have a prescription for you," said the doctor. "And I guarantee that if you follow my prescription, you will soon feel much better."

"I doubt that," said the lady. "But what is your prescription?"

The doctor instructed, "The next time you want to complain—instead of being grateful for your blessings—find someone who is worse off than you. Take them one of your little flowering plants and remind them that they now have at least one thing to praise God for."

The elderly woman was doubtful. However, she soon learned that a neighbor's husband had just died. She took a flowering plant to the widow and said, "Now you have at least one thing to praise God for."

The widow was so grateful that she shed tears of appreciation. At that moment, when the elderly woman became a blessing to someone else, something happened inside of her heart. So when she learned that another neighbor's child had been hospitalized, she took another flowering plant to that family. They thanked her for bringing them a ray of hope. And so it continued—for years.

A number of years later, the elderly woman herself died. But a local newspaper headline said it all: "The Flower Lady Has Passed Away. She Will Be Missed by Hundreds!"

One of the beautiful things about praising God is that it takes the focus off of ourselves and puts it back on Him. Praise doesn't change God. Rather, it changes our hearts. Perhaps that is why David wrote, "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with

love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:2-5, NIV).

Second, praise opens the doorway of blessing as we come into God's presence to present our jars of fragrance. "*Praise* be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms *with every spiritual blessing in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3, NIV, italics supplied).

And finally—because we are blessed to be a blessing—our praise will result in bringing others to Christ.

[Note to facilitator: If time allows, permit congregants to share their praises with the assembly.]

Let us finish with this beautiful promise: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, NIV, italics supplied).

Let us pray.

Activity: Eight Blessings to Share

“Eight Blessings to Share”

Praise God for the blessing of His grace and share the blessing!

1. Understand your purpose.

As a daughter of God seek His direction to find your divine purpose. Your purpose is essential for your mission. You have a mission yourself, your children, your husband, your parents, your family, the church, but above all else, your God. Fulfill your purpose! Become God’s blessing for others!

2. Serve with love.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 – “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

Everything we do with a sense of responsibility, but without the ingredient of love, does not meet the divine purpose and can cause irreplaceable damage. So that our service can be a blessing to others, serve with love!

3. Be slow to anger and great in kindness.

Psalms 86:15 – “But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.” Let us practice this attribute of God to be a blessing to others.

Ephesians 4:26 – In your anger, do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

What a blessing it bestows to others when we are slow to anger and great in kindness!

4. Do the right thing and don't look at anyone else.

James 2:9 – “But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.”

Loving our neighbor as ourselves is not only a commandment, but its consequences have far reaching effects. Let's not fall into the sin of ruining the lives of our children and of those that surround us by practicing discrimination. There are people, even very close to us, that either by custom or lack of knowledge, fall on the list of those we despise. He who practices the love of Christ cannot fall into this temptation. In other words, even though the temptation may be present, we should not give into that way of corrupted thinking. Be a blessing to all alike!

5. Develop your faith.

Romans 10:17 – “Consequently, faith comes from hearing, and the message is heard through the Word of God.”

The way we develop our faith is by studying the Word of God and by listening, seeing and testing God's interventions in our lives. Read, testify, visit the needy, attend the house of God, fill your heart with songs of salvation and not only will your faith grow, but you'll be blessed and become a blessing.

6. Obey.

1 Samuel 15:22 – “But Samuel replied: Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

A life of obedience goes beyond the rituals and sacrifices with which we live and that we believe to be of importance. If our motivation for apparent obedience is fear, culture or false judgment, try to soak up the Word of God in such a way that the light of the Spirit clarifies your way and leads you to understanding. An obedient person is one who is blessed and blesses.

7. Be happy.

We have heard that a Christian must be the happiest person on earth. Why? Because she has hope, she has Christ that gives her grace and forgiveness, she is not alone, she has *timely relief*.

Hebrews 4:16 – “Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our *time of need*.” (emphasis supplied)

If you are living a life that is bitter and without joy, put your life in the hand of God to fill your heart with happiness and the realization of the blessing of being His daughter. Receive the blessing of God and bless others with your happiness.

8. Consult with God.

“Whisper a prayer in the morning, whisper a prayer at noon, whisper a prayer in the evening, to keep your heart in tune.” (song lyrics—in public domain)

Joshua 1:8 – “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything that is written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

Only with a life in constant communication with God can you be the blessing God has proposed for your life.

Blessed woman, be blessed and bless!

THE END