

*The*  
LANGUAGE  
*of*  
BLESSING

*Discover your own gifts and talents . . .  
Learn how to pour them out to bless others*

JOSEPH CAVANAUGH III

*Foreword by George Barna*

Begin experiencing the power of blessing through this wonderfully well-written, page-by-page journey to becoming all God intends.

**RICH CARNEY**

Chief Operating Officer, Vision360, Orlando, Florida

Joe creatively connects the dots, aligns theology with real-life application, and shares stories as only a true communicator can. This book is more than a read; it is a journey to embracing the blessing of being human, unique, and a follower of Christ. Joe challenges without compromise, but in a way that is graceful and truly a blessing. You will be touched and changed by this book.

**DRIES LOMBAARD**

Founder and owner, Africanmosaic and Talentmosaic, South Africa

*The Language of Blessing* will lead to new self-understanding that is a solid starting place for a disciple of Jesus who is on the road to becoming more like him. After you journey through this process of becoming more self-aware, you can't help but grow into a better person.

**JAMES J. PUCHY**

Chaplain (colonel) US Army, retired; managing director, national and strategic ministries, American Bible Society

With his rich experience in strengths-based leadership as well as personal and spiritual formation, Joe artfully weaves together stories from his own journey and poignant insights from others to teach us the language of blessing—one he has learned, at times painfully, in the school of life.

**DR. SAM RIMA**

Author, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*; executive pastor, Tenth Church, Vancouver, British Columbia

Joe Cavanaugh has done a wonderful job of weaving in the concept of blessing and our own uniqueness into a format that lends itself to action. What an engaging book!

JOSEPH VALENTINE DWORAK

Director of Admissions, College of Adult and Professional Studies,  
Graduate School, and Seminary, Bethel University, St. Paul,  
Minnesota

As you'll discover in *The Language of Blessing*, Joe is encouraging, insightful, and passionate about helping people find their God-given strengths and unique calling. His ideas are just as relevant to any business or other organization as they have been to our church.

ANDY ROLLER

Executive pastor, Northwood Church, Keller, Texas

Joe teaches us how to make positive language a natural part of our daily conversations. His application exercises are simple and easy to apply. Every Christian and every parent will appreciate this book.

JOHN NORRIS

Director of pastoral ministry, Archdiocese of San Francisco

Drawing from personal experiences, Joe weaves together the biblical principle of blessing with important sociological research to teach us how to “speak” the language of self-awareness and mutual affirmation.

LARRY S. DOYLE

Director of Missions for the Piedmont Baptist Association,  
Greensboro, North Carolina

*The Language of Blessing* is written for immediate application and life-changing impact. Joe's book will enlighten and

encourage you, and it will give you practical steps and tools to walk in the power of blessing.

KATIE DRIVER

Trainer and Coach at CMA Resources and House2House Ministries

I highly recommend *The Language of Blessing* to all who want to speak into the lives of others with gracious impact.

JOSEPH H. HOLLOWAY

Lead Pastor, Valley View Church of the Nazarene  
Life Coach and Discipleship Trainer

*The Language of Blessing* offers a deeply profound look at who we are and how we have been uniquely created. I believe this book will touch many deeply.

STEPHANIE MOORE

Cofounder, Catholic Strengths and Engagement Community

Joseph helps you awaken to what you've been blind to—your precious interior gifts. Knowing and expressing these gifts will help you deepen your spirituality and offer more meaning to the lives of others.

RYAN M. NIEMIEC

Education Director, VIA Institute on Character; author of *Mindfulness and Character Strengths*; coauthor of *Positive Psychology at the Movies*

Joseph Cavanaugh helps us decipher the God-designed “spiritual code” embedded in every human soul—the gifts that make each one of us one in a trillion. *The Language of Blessing* is itself a blessing, visionary yet intimate, bold and humble.

MARK HERRINGSHAW

North American director, Youth with a Mission Associates

I was deeply moved by the message of love, hope, and grace expressed in Joe's book. He reminds us of the power of our words to build or destroy, as well as the amazing opportunities we have to inspire others to be all they were designed to be.

MIKE AND TESSA DODGE

Strengths Network—South Pacific

Five stars for wise insight, clear writing, and solid help.

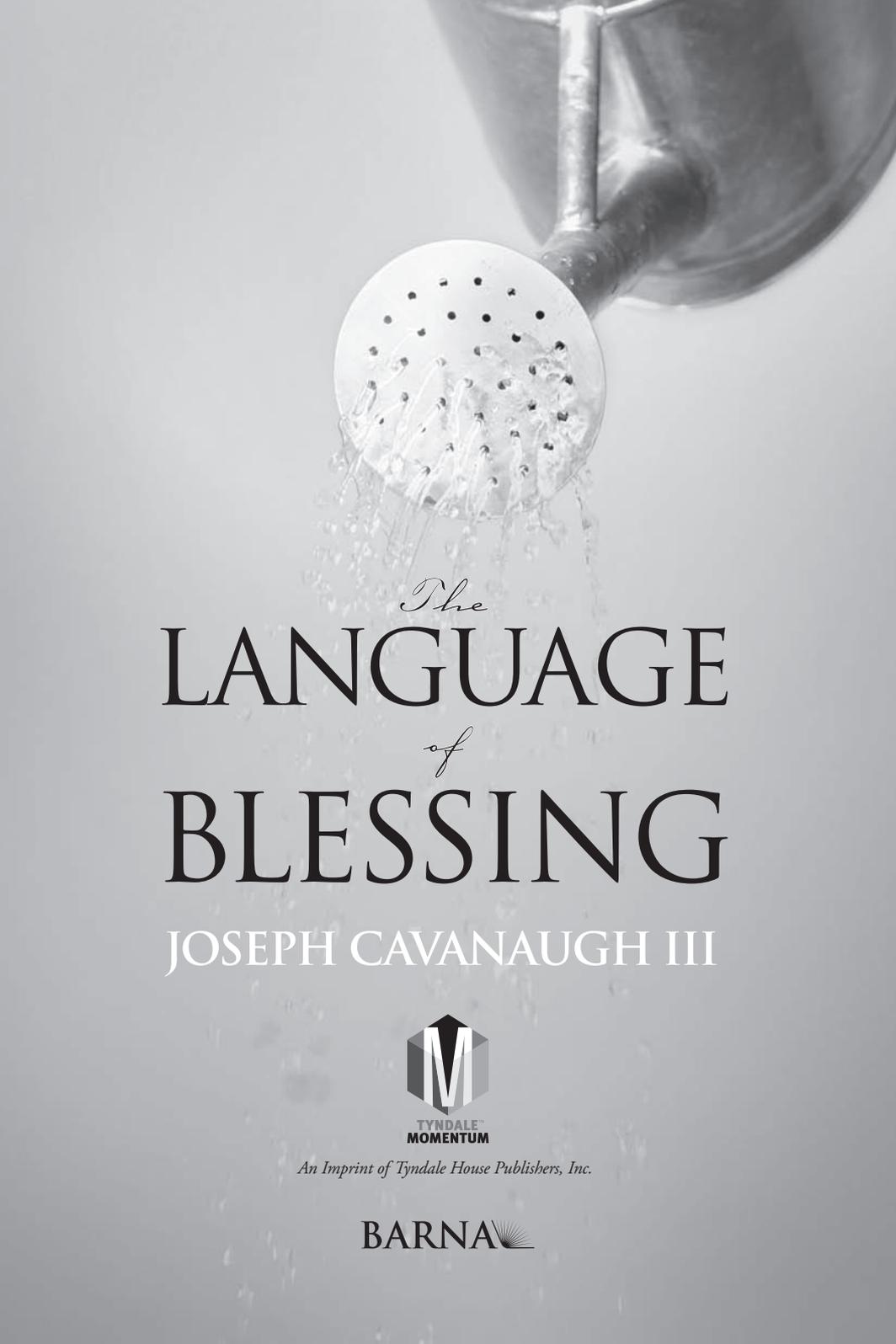
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*The Language of Blessing* will not only bless you, but it will provide you with the insight to bless others!

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*The*  
LANGUAGE  
*of*  
BLESSING

JOSEPH CAVANAUGH III



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*The Language of Blessing: Discover Your Own Gifts and Talents . . . Learn How to Pour Them Out to Bless Others*

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## Foreword

Joe Cavanaugh is an interesting guy. As you'll discover in the pages of this book, he has had a variety of fascinating experiences in life.

I first met him in Germany a few years ago at a conference where we were both speaking. He was working with Gallup at the time, helping organizations (including numerous churches and parachurch entities) use Gallup's StrengthsFinder self-assessment, a heavily researched diagnostic tool designed to help users recognize their strongest talents. Through his work with that resource, he was able to engage in a lot of executive coaching related to the insights generated from that strengths inventory. As we got to know each other, I found him to be a kindred spirit and a man with a fertile and curious mind. Such people are usually energetic, fun, and stimulating, and Joe was no exception.

In *The Language of Blessing*, Joe shares with you some of the insights that he has developed over the years through a combination of scientific research, personal experience,

biblical education, and professional development. Joe will also introduce you to some self-assessment inventories, which will enable you to invest yourself more heavily in using your strengths rather than inefficiently striving to overcome your weaknesses.

With his intimate knowledge of these inventories, Joe will encourage you to embrace and capitalize upon your uniqueness, talents, and potential. The more you become aware of those special qualities, the more you will be capable of accepting blessings and giving them to others.

At the core of Joe's perspective is the notion that life is all about relationships: with God, the church, family, friends, and all the others we encounter in our daily excursions. The critical aspect of those relationships is not simply having them; it's how we cultivate them that matters.

With that challenge in mind, prepare to reconsider your understanding of the concept and practice of blessing. God has intentionally and lovingly blessed us in many ways. Other people have blessed you throughout your life as well. What is your obligation with those blessings? Do you know how to recognize and receive them? How to share a blessing with others? How to express gratitude for blessings? Joe will not only challenge you with such questions; he will guide your thinking about these issues and help you respond in ways that are consistent with God's plan for your life.

In fact, receiving and giving the blessing is a skill that needs to be developed and refined, just like any other skill. And that's why Joe has written this book: to aid you in the

development of the abilities, character traits, and perspectives that will enable you to be blessed and to bless others. This is the essence of life. After all, God underscored to Abraham that we are blessed so that we can be a blessing—to Him and to others (Genesis 12:1-3).

You are unique and talented. That's a truth that deserves to be celebrated—and shared. *The Language of Blessing* will help you do it.

George Barna  
Ventura, California  
October 2012



# *Introduction*

Do you realize that you are unique? Do you understand that you are unrepeatable, that there has never been anyone like you before and there will never be again? Do you know that you have been given a unique gift to offer to the world?

As a leadership coach, I often ask clients these very questions. If you are like most of them, your answer is probably, “Uh, no, that is not how I think of myself.” Most people do not believe they are “gifted” or possess the stuff of genius. Most people see themselves as pretty average, and this assessment forms the foundation of their self-identity.

I want to convince you that what you offer is so rare that it has never been given before and it will never be given again. Your gift is meant to be used for the benefit of others—and to give you great joy whenever you use it to help someone else.

While your gift is unique, the fact that you are so distinctly blessed is not. Everyone you know has a unique gift to

share as well. Your mom and dad, your brother or sister, your spouse, your children—even that whiny neighbor or annoying coworker—each has been given a wonderful gift intended to be used to make our world a better place. And the way each of us sees the world and processes our gifts—what I call our unique genius—is distinctive. Research, however, shows that most people consistently downplay their talents, gifts, and accomplishments. I have observed this tendency as well. Most of us, I believe, have been conditioned to minimize who we really are.

That's certainly what was modeled to me. Then, when my wife and I had our own sons, I discovered something fascinating. When they were very young, we rejoiced over every little step of progress—their first words, their first steps, their first few tentative pedals on the bike, their first hit in Pee Wee baseball. We encouraged any emerging talent we spotted in the classroom, on the ball field, and elsewhere.

As our sons got a bit older, my expectations began to grow, and I became more critical and less encouraging about my sons' activities. Eventually, my words of affirmation became rarer, and my speech became an almost constant stream of criticism. How horribly sad.

That's not the kind of father I wanted to be. Yet I found that affirming my sons was far more complicated than I had imagined. After all, I was discovering that my boys are very different from me. Some of those differences were challenging, hard to understand, and sometimes even difficult to see as positive traits.

I had heard innumerable times how blessed we are as Christians, yet I was struggling to bless others, especially my five sons and my wife. I was also very concerned about the inexplicable bouts of anger I felt over seemingly minor things, particularly any form of criticism directed at me. The words bursting from my mouth in those moments of anger were anything but a blessing to those on the receiving end. Something was very wrong; something felt broken inside of me, and I needed to address it immediately.

I took a major step forward in 1989 when I started a small ministry called New Life, a Christ-centered, twelve-step program for people in relational crisis. Even though I had been a Christian for seventeen years by that point, I did not yet understand or know what God meant when He called us to bless others. During the next ten years at New Life, seven thousand people participated in a journey to a new relationship with God that led to healing, self-discovery, and blessing. What I learned in partnership with those involved in New Life has informed my work since then, including this book. More important, it changed the way I related to those closest to me, especially my wife and my sons.

Just a few years before New Life Ministries was launched, Gary Smalley and John Trent released the bestselling book *The Blessing*. Drawing on their work as family counselors, Smalley and Trent introduced readers to the biblical concept of the blessing and explained why it is so critical that children receive the blessing from their parents. They define the

blessing as having five components: touching in a meaningful and appropriate way, speaking affirming words, attaching high value to the child, picturing a special future for him or her, and actively committing to help the young person fulfill the blessing.<sup>1</sup>

Smalley and Trent's book remains an invaluable resource, and I did not set out to rewrite it. *The Language of Blessing* developed as a result of my own experiences as a ministry facilitator and life coach. I found that people often struggle to speak meaningful words of affirmation that communicate their child's value and specifically confirm his or her unique design.

This book differs from *The Blessing* in several ways. First, while working with New Life, I uncovered a number of common tendencies that prevent many parents from affirming their children and envisioning their future. Simply put, our differences sometimes lead to tensions, misunderstandings, and even broken relationships. For this reason, the book examines some well-intended behaviors that become gift, talent, and character blockers, which I call the Cycle of False Identity. I wrote this book to help you recognize this destructive pattern, which tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation—as it did in my own family.

If you are often disappointed in yourself or frustrated with other people, this book will help you better understand the source of your discouragement and give you some practical tools to move beyond it.

Second, although I learned a lot about family systems

at New Life, my work over the past decade has been as a leadership and strengths coach rather than a family counselor. That means I'm particularly interested in helping people—whether parents, lay leaders, or supervisors—draw out the best in those they lead and influence. No two people think, relate, learn, or are motivated in exactly the same way, and as people discover the unique design God put inside them, many come alive in a totally new way. On top of that, they are in a better position to affirm the special giftedness in others.

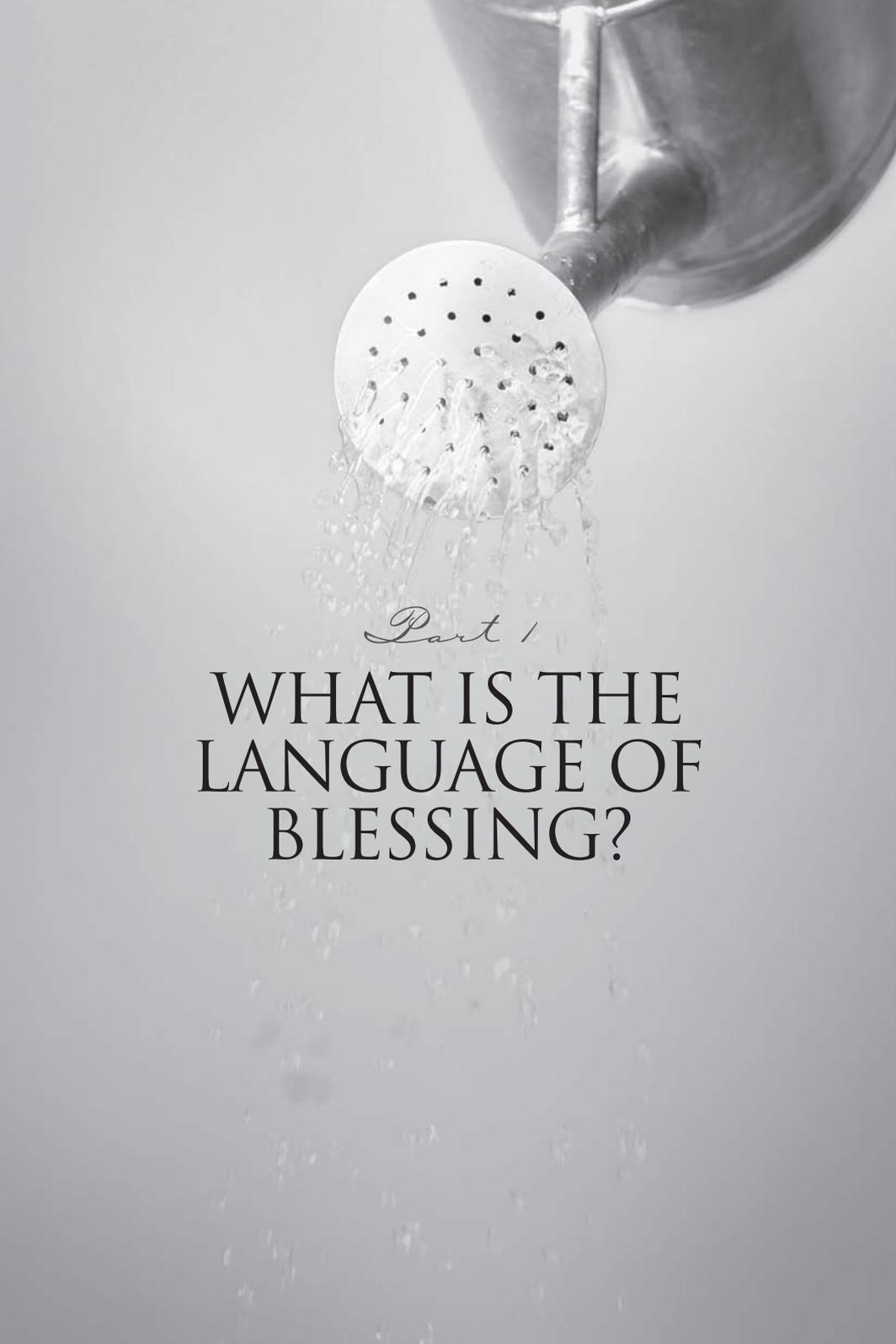
Finally, scientific breakthroughs over the past twenty-five years have offered new insights into the importance of the blessing, as well as hope that those who never received it from their parents can still experience it later in life. At the same time, sociological research has demonstrated why our culture's focus on self-esteem and individualism, which are intended to make people feel better about themselves, is such a poor substitute for the blessing.

This book will help you gain a deeper understanding of your own mix of personality, gifts, talents, and character. Through this journey of discovery, you will begin to see how dramatically different your gifts and talents are from the gifts and talents of those you most care about. These differences can create a rich diversity within families and communities. You'll also discover how to affirm others by beginning to uncover the abilities that they, as unique creations of God, possess in surprising abundance and variety. The process of recognizing, encouraging, and affirming one another's unique gifts can become one of life's most joy-filled experiences.

## THE LANGUAGE OF BLESSING

I wrote *The Language of Blessing* with an emphasis on application rather than just theory. For that reason, each chapter ends with questions or examples to help you put the principles into practice.

And so your journey of discovery begins.



*Part 1*

WHAT IS THE  
LANGUAGE OF  
BLESSING?



*Chapter 1*  
THE BLESSING

As a child, I loved visiting my maternal grandmother on her farm in western Iowa. Grandma's yard was bursting with vibrant flowers from early spring to late fall. She knew just how to cultivate a scene blooming with every color of the rainbow for each season. As a young child, I thought every yard should look that way.

However, the view from the house where I grew up was nothing like Grandma's. Our poor yard was a rather forlorn and neglected affair. My father didn't seem to care about it, other than occasionally dragging out a hose and sprinkler when our sparse grass began to turn brown in the summer's heat.

Two huge silver maple trees, one in our front yard and

one in the back, provided a bit of shade. The only other plants were white spirea (bridal wreath) bushes, which grew along the front of our house. Every home on both sides of our block seemed to have those same bushes growing in the front yard. The spirea would bloom in May for a couple of weeks, and the arching cascades of pure white flowers with their golden centers did look beautiful. But then all too soon, the display would be over until the next May.

As if our yard were not plain enough, there was an ugly scar in the front of our lawn. The rut had been worn by the neighborhood kids and my siblings as they took a shortcut from the sidewalk to the walk that led up to our house. I am sure I sometimes took the same shortcut when I was in a hurry.

But by the time I was ten, I saw that ugly rut as an insult to our yard and our home, and I decided to take on a landscaping project. I wanted to do something about that rut and at the same time bring color and beauty to our home. My plan was to plant a closely spaced row of beautiful hybrid tea roses along our front walk. No one would think about cutting through the rosebushes, which have sharp, one-inch-long thorns! As this vision of landscaping glory began to take form in my imagination, I could see this row of roses becoming the envy of the neighborhood.

I had learned from Grandma that I'd have to choose a hardy rose that would thrive in our climate. I did my research by reading a book on roses at our local plant nursery. One picture of a particular rose jumped out at me—the

Peace rose. As the Peace rosebuds begin to bloom, they are a bright yellow, but when they are fully opened, the color mutes to a pinkish cream with a radiant yellow center. The rose is so beautiful that the Germans named it *Gloria Dei*, or “glory to God.” In America, it was named the Peace rose, since Field Marshal Alan Brooke had refused the honor of having it named after him following the end of World War II. He said he would prefer Peace, a name that would be remembered far longer than his, and the name stuck. Since my dad served in WWII, I thought he would find that information fascinating.

As it turned out, potted Peace roses were too expensive for my limited budget. Fortunately, the helpful people at Earl May Nursery told me I could get a bare root plant that would be much cheaper. When I explained I did not yet have all the money, they were kind enough to hold five plants for me. They also explained that I would need peat moss, compost, mulch, and rose fertilizer. This was going to be much more expensive than I had hoped.

I dedicated the next month to doing any kind of odd job I could find in our neighborhood, like digging dandelions, mowing and raking yards, hauling trash, and clearing out brush. Once I had earned enough money to purchase one of the items, I would ride my bike the two miles to the nursery and then bring the purchase back to the house, where I'd hide it under our front porch.

Finally, the day came when I was able to buy the rosebushes. The next day would be D-day . . . digging day.

I rushed home from school that afternoon so I would have time to finish the project before my dad got home from work. I dragged everything I would need out from under the front porch. Using my twelve-inch wooden ruler from school, I began to carefully measure out two feet from the front walk and two feet between the rose plants.

I would be planting the bushes a bit closer than recommended, but I wanted the roses to be an effective deterrent to anyone taking a shortcut through the lawn. All this activity began to draw a small crowd of neighborhood kids, much to my exasperation. I explained what I was doing and why I was doing it. Some of the kids asked if they could help. I not so politely declined their offer and told them that the most helpful thing they could do would be to leave me alone so I could finish before my dad got home.

They shrugged their shoulders, put their hands in their pockets, and shuffled away, glancing back at me with a “Why are you being such a jerk?” look. At that moment I really did not care—I just wanted to get the plants in before Dad arrived.

After over an hour of digging in the hard-packed, heavy clay soil, I had dug all five holes. Each one was eighteen inches deep and three times the width of the roots, so that the holes almost touched one another. I then carefully mixed the dirt, compost, and peat moss in the proper proportions and planted the rosebushes, making sure they were all exactly twenty-four inches from the front walk and exactly twenty-four inches from each other. I remember looking at the roses

from every angle and deciding they looked perfectly symmetrical. As I stood there admiring my creation, I heard my dad's car pull up and realized I had not yet put the mulch around the roses. I dropped to my knees and began quickly spreading the mulch so the roses would have that finished look.

As Dad walked up to me, he looked at the roses and then at me and asked, "What in the h--- are you doing?" The tone and intensity of his question shocked me and left me struggling for breath. My response bordered on incoherent as I stammered out something about, "The rut . . . the roses . . . stop the kids from walking here." He stood staring at the roses, silent and frowning. Finally, he said, "They look crooked to me."

As he walked away and into the house, I stayed there on my knees, trying to comprehend what had just happened. *Why do I feel so foolish and weak?* In my passion to do something meaningful for my dad and our home, I had made myself very vulnerable. I was angry at myself for not anticipating his response.

I haphazardly scattered a bit more mulch around the bushes, wanting desperately to still care about the roses, to care about what I was doing. But it was as if my passion to make our home more beautiful had shriveled up in the toxicity of my dad's words. I picked up the leftover packaging and supplies and angrily threw it all in the trash. I never planted another thing in that yard. And my father never said another word about it.

Clearly, my father missed an opportunity to affirm one

of his children. So how significant was that moment? As an adult, I realize my love for growing plants never went away. It connects me somehow to God and the wonder of His creation, and I've always drawn energy from it. I have a deep sense of contentment and peace when I'm surrounded by living, growing things—which is why, when I had an office at Gallup, I filled it with plants and relished the view from my windows, overlooking the Missouri River. I believe that if my father had affirmed and blessed me the day I planted those roses, I most likely would have chosen a career in horticulture.

I do not blame my father for the career path I chose; I am the one who tossed out everything having to do with gardening and landscaping. I understand that my father and I were not at all alike. Our differences seemed to completely confound him and, as a result, to irritate and anger him. Nevertheless, the story of the rosebushes shows just what power a word of blessing—or a lack of one—has in directing and shaping a life.

And what do I mean when I talk about the word *blessing*? For most people, a blessing is something you give before a meal or when someone sneezes. Many people may say things like, “You are such a blessing” or “That was a blessing” when referring to a positive event in their lives. However, such uses don't convey the transforming power inherent in the way I am using the word. When speaking the language of blessing, a person communicates, affirms, and empowers God-given intrinsic attributes—such as personality, gifting, talents, character traits, and intelligences—that he or she sees in another person.

Sadly, I hadn't learned the language of blessing by the time I was a dad myself. I often took on a critical, glass-is-half-empty approach with my own sons. When I asked them to do something in the yard or around the house, I inspected their efforts and pointed out what did not meet my expectations—expectations I now realize I'd either communicated poorly or failed to communicate at all.

When my wife would overhear me scolding one of the boys, she'd sometimes point out that she had not heard me clearly explain those standards to my sons. I would then say something like, "I should not have to point out that kind of detail. Any fool would know that is the way it needs to be done."

My focus was always on what needed improvement. Like most people, I found it very difficult to give to others what I had not received from my own dad.

It does not have to be like that. In the introduction, I explained how New Life, a ministry in which I helped people through relational challenges, taught me the importance of unconditional love and acceptance. It was also the first time I learned how intrinsically the blessing is tied to whether you and I feel affirmed.

My experiences at New Life also enabled me to see the reality of my life as a child and as a young adult. I had always tried to portray myself as the product of an idealistic,

*When you speak the language of blessing, you communicate, affirm, and empower God-given intrinsic attributes that you see in another person.*



Midwestern, middle-class experience. The reality was something very different. My father tried to be a good man, but he struggled with alcoholism and inappropriate anger. At times he felt such rage that he became physically abusive and demanded perfection. He also struggled with a bipolar disorder. I have calculated that, by the time I left home at age twenty, I had received over ten thousand statements of criticism from him and not a single word of affirmation. I believe my father had the distorted belief that if you praise a child, he will quit trying to improve. Criticism, not praise, he thought, would make a person stronger.

In his later years, when my dad was suffering from asbestosis, I would sit by his chair or bedside. By this point, I was involved in New Life Ministries and had found that I no longer needed or sought his approval. Dad seemed to realize this, which made it much easier for him to relax around me. In addition to telling him about my work and family, I occasionally shared with him what I was learning through my journey with New Life. I think I was hoping that he might find some comfort in these truths.

Because of his labored breathing, talking had become difficult for him. He would listen silently, his eyes full of deep sadness. When I finished, he would just look up and nod his head, usually saying nothing. I interpreted his silence and the nod as affirmation. One day, he suggested I invite my siblings to participate in New Life. That was the closest he ever came to telling me I had done something worthwhile.

I now know he wanted to affirm the God-given blessing

in me, but he had no experience or language to express it. He had not received such a blessing from his father either. I believe his lifelong inability to affirm his children tormented him until his final moments.

No parent should have to experience what my father went through.

## YOU ARE BLESSED

*Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make.*

*Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! (Deuteronomy 30:19)*

Your words bring forth life or death. That may sound melodramatic or overstated; I assure you it is not. What you say has the power to give life to dreams and callings—or to snuff them out before they have a chance to develop.

As Jesus said, “The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10, AMP). One of the ways the thief (Satan) steals, kills, and destroys is through deceitful words. No wonder, then, that the tongue has the power of life and death.

*What you say has the power to give life to dreams and callings—or to snuff them out before they have a chance to develop.*



Fortunately, God’s desire for each one of us is life: “I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in

abundance (to the full, till it overflows)” (John 10:10, AMP). In fact, the Bible has a great deal to say about blessings; it mentions *blessing* or derivative terms over four hundred times! There are three Greek words in the New Testament related directly to the English word *blessing*:

- *Eulogeitos* is an adjective meaning “well spoken of; praised.”
- *Eulogew* is a verb meaning “to speak well of; to praise; to call down God’s gracious power.”
- *Eulogia* is a noun meaning “praise; fine speaking.”

Although these words are Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the concept of blessing is completely Hebrew in origin, starting in the first book of the Bible. In Genesis we read about God blessing Abram (whom He would soon rename Abraham):

*The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*

*“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.  
I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”*

*So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.*  
(Genesis 12:1-5, NIV)

I see four key principles about the blessing in this brief passage:

1. All blessings originate from God.
2. We are never too old to receive the blessing.
3. The blessing requires that we take a journey of discovery that will be different from our parents' journeys. We can receive the blessing through our parents, but it will be different from what our parents received.
4. We are blessed so that we can be a blessing to others. Note that God mentions this twice: verse 2 says, "you will be a blessing"; verse 3 goes on to say, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So we see that Abraham would himself be a blessing to others, and through him, the ultimate blessing of Jesus would come to "all peoples on earth."

Every person has already received the blessing from God in the form of his or her unique design, which perfectly

corresponds with God's calling for that person's life. Thank goodness this affirmation originates from God, not from our parents!

Yet this gift lies dormant in each of us until it is recognized and affirmed—in other words, until someone speaks the language of blessing into our lives. God's original plan was that His blessing would first be acknowledged by our parents. However, in this fallen world there are no perfectly functional families. If our parents are unable to speak the language of blessing, God does not give up. He finds other people—possibly someone in our extended family, a teacher, a friend, sometimes even a complete stranger—to be a conduit of His blessing to us.

My fifth grade teacher tried to do that for me. She was very tall and thin, her skin so pale it was almost an alabaster white. I suspect she was ill a good part of the time as she walked slowly and labored to breathe, but what I noticed most was her kind expression and gentle smile whenever she looked at me.

One day after class she told me about a writing contest to celebrate Presidents' Day. She encouraged me to enter because she believed I could win. I was incredulous—me, win a writing contest? I didn't think so. Then she asked if I would do it for her. I could not turn her down. I would write the article for her so she would receive recognition as a great teacher.

Imagine my shock when my story won first place. My mom was excited about the award, but neither she nor my

father attended the award ceremony. My picture was in the paper, but I did not care. I was sure my win was a fluke. Since it didn't impress my father, it meant nothing to me either. I missed the affirmation God wanted me to have because I was demanding that it come through my father.

By age ten, I had become the primary hindrance to receiving the blessing in my life, which meant I would be unable to pass it on to anyone else. After all, you cannot give to others what you have not received yourself. Only through New Life did I learn that accessing the blessing for myself was not conditional upon receiving my father's approval, which had seemed so impossible to earn.

Not only does God's blessing communicate our purpose, our meaning, and our reason for existence, it influences how we relate to others and how others will relate to us. It is indelibly a part of our very identity and our destiny. It has the authority and power of God to transform our lives. It speaks to each person's true authentic self; it empowers and releases God's unique design, calling, and purpose in our lives.

*You cannot give  
to others what you  
have not received  
yourself.*



Blessings are prophetic in that they communicate the heart, mind, and will of God for an individual. They connect us with our Creator's dream for us. Words of blessing affirm and empower God-given intrinsic attributes, such as personality, gifting, talents, character traits, and intelligences.

When we hear a blessing from God through another person, it resonates deep within our hearts, our innermost beings. We recognize that the words are true and authentic, and they speak the truth about who we were created to be. It touches a deep passion within each of us to make a difference in this world.

*The blessing connects us with our Creator's dream for us.*

✦ ✦ ✦

## THE POWER OF WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Sociologists report that even the average introverted person, if he or she lives to about eighty years old, will influence over ten thousand people. An insurance company produced a TV commercial that illustrates the power of one act of kindness. The ad shows a person doing something kind while another person observes her. The next scene shows the observer doing a kind deed, which is then observed by someone else, who then does his own act of kindness. You get the gist; it is an illustration of a kind of pay-it-forward concept.

Notice that it wasn't just one person, the observer, who was influenced. The first person's act of kindness acted as a catalyst to all the other people's acts of kindness. In a way, then, that first person was actually "responsible" for the actions that followed. The more I ponder this, the more I conclude that the estimate that even one introvert influences ten thousand people is probably much too conservative.

If you doubt that you and I really have that much influ-

ence, consider what happened to me not long ago when I walked into our local gas station to pick up a fountain drink. As I proceeded to the counter, deep in thought about the next chapter of this book, the attendant behind the counter exclaimed, “Ah! What’s the matter?”

His pained response shocked me out of my preoccupation. I looked at him and said, “Huh?” He said, “Joe, you always come in here with a smile on your face, and you always greet us. Today you walked in without so much as a ‘Hi,’ and you looked almost angry.”

Now, I was not angry at all; when I am deep in thought, though, I must look angry. What so caught my attention was how strongly the attendant reacted to my not greeting him and smiling as usual. It was another example of how we influence and bless people.

A more poignant example comes from a good friend, whom I’ll call Mary. While we discussed how affirming people’s gifts and talents is a powerful way to bless one another, she told me how she’d witnessed this for herself.

One day at work, Mary sat down at a lunch table opposite Betty, a coworker whom everyone tried to avoid. Betty always seemed down, and she was cranky and very unpleasant to be around. Mary couldn’t help wondering, since everyone has gifts and talents, what Betty’s looked like. As Mary thought about it, she recalled many of the skills and talents Betty exhibited in her work, some of which directly benefited Mary.

As she began eating her salad, Mary said, “Betty, I wanted

to tell you how much I appreciate the way you . . .” As Mary proceeded to articulate each of Betty’s positive contributions at work, her coworker sat speechless, tears filling her eyes. Finally, she told Mary that it had been a very long time since anyone had said anything kind to her.

Betty began to tell Mary how she had spent all her life caring for others. As a young girl, she cared for her sickly mother. Now she was caring for her husband, who was too ill to work. Betty continually felt overwhelmed and trapped. Though life had not been kind to Betty, when Mary spoke life and blessing to her, it had a profound influence.

One final example of the power we have to bless one another comes from the movie *Hugo*, which I recently enjoyed watching with my family. The story revolves around a young boy named Hugo who loves to fix things—especially clocks.

Hugo’s mother has died; his father is a watchmaker who works in a museum fixing complicated devices. Hugo loves spending time with his father learning the trade. At the beginning of the movie, Hugo’s father is trying to repair an enormously complicated mechanical boy, an automaton that has been donated to the museum.

Tragically, Hugo’s father dies in a fire at the museum. Without any compassion, Hugo’s drunken uncle arrives at Hugo’s home to tell the boy that his father is dead. He then drags Hugo to the train station, where the uncle lives and works maintaining the clocks. Before leaving his home, the only thing Hugo grabs is the automaton, which he intends

to repair someday. Meanwhile, Hugo learns his uncle's trade of keeping the station's clocks running.

Even after his uncle disappears, Hugo continues to live at the station and maintain the clocks. There he befriends a young girl who was adopted by her godparents. Together they try to solve the mystery of the automaton, which Hugo thinks carries a secret message for him from his father. Hugo believes this message will speak to his very purpose in life.

This brings me to what I consider the key point of the movie: a conversation between the two children about their life's purpose. Hugo says, "If you lose your purpose, it's like you're broken." He adds, "I'd imagine the whole world was one big machine. Machines never come with any extra parts, you know. They always come with the exact amount they need. So I figured, if the entire world was one big machine, I couldn't be an extra part. I had to be here for some reason. And that means you have to be here for some reason too."<sup>1</sup>

"If you lose your purpose, it's like you're broken." Wow, what an insight! So many people feel broken because they do not know their true and authentic purpose in life. Film reviewer Drew McWeeny observed about *Hugo*, "Early on, it's obvious that the film is less about the mechanical man and more about the way broken people sometimes need other people to fix them, how we can all play some part in the lives of others, sometimes without meaning to."<sup>2</sup>

*So many people feel broken because they do not know their true and authentic purpose in life.*



I am quite passionate about several concepts underscored by this movie:

1. We are created with purpose.
2. When we have lost our purpose, it is as if we are broken, and we do not function the way our Creator designed us to function.
3. Sometimes we need other people to help fix us—to help us find our true purpose—an illustration of our interdependency.
4. We often play a part in the lives of others, sometimes without even being aware of it. The more we can live with a clear sense of purpose, the more impact and influence we will have on others.

You are not an accident. Before He even created the world, God began to dream of you. The apostle Paul writes, “Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:4-5).

He envisioned a unique design for you and decided to invite you and your purpose into His eternal purposes. That purpose will not end with your physical death. After you’ve finished your life on planet Earth, you will stand before our Lord and Maker. If you’ve lived out your purpose, you can expect to hear these words: “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).



APPLICATION ACTIVITY

I serve as a life coach to a number of individuals and couples. Life coaching is very different from sports coaching, voice coaching, and even executive or business coaching. In those areas, coaches are viewed as the experts in their fields and tell others what they are to do. In life coaching, I do little instructing; instead, I ask lots of questions. That's because I understand that each individual I coach is the world's leading "expert" on his or her unique design and calling. Through the right questions, I help draw out what is deep within each person into his or her conscious awareness. I then affirm and celebrate each person's unique design.

I have coached over one thousand highly gifted and talented individuals, and I have noticed that when we start working together, the vast majority have little or no sense of their life's mission. When I ask them about their "unique" purpose, many roll their eyes and ask, "Really, a unique purpose? You're serious? I'm supposed to have one?" You may feel the same way at this point. I understand. Many people find it extremely difficult to discover their distinctive purpose on their own. As you will learn in part 2, this can be challenging for many reasons. The good news, explained in part 3, is that there are many tools to help you discover it.

As you begin this book, let me assure you that the benefits

## THE LANGUAGE OF BLESSING

of knowing your unique design and purpose are numerous. If the idea of finding your life purpose seems out of reach right now, I encourage you to work through the Application Activities at the end of each chapter. Writing down or discussing your answers to the questions will put you on the path to discovering the gifts and purpose God has placed within you. Knowing what you were put on earth to do will then positively affect your relationships, your work, your spirituality, your health, and every other area of your life.

1. Do you have a sense of your unique purpose—what you were born to do?
2. If you do have a sense of your distinctive purpose, how would you describe it? If you don't, what is your response to the assertion that you, like every other person, were designed with a God-given purpose in mind?