

I want you to think about a significant moment from your life in which touch was involved. Think about the first time you held hands with the person who would become your spouse. Think about the first time you held your child. Think about the importance of that moment; the excitement, the joy, the knowledge that you were accepted.

“All of us long to be accepted by others. While we may say out loud, “I don’t care what other people think about me,” on the inside we all yearn for intimacy and affection.” That is how the book, *The Blessing*, begins.

I first read the book back in the mid 80’s (before many of you were born), but it was revised and updated last year. It was a great book as we raised our kids because it helped us to understand the elements that go into making a child feel accepted and loved.

During the month of May we’re going to look at the five elements that make up the blessing. These elements include:

- Meaningful touch,
- a spoken message,
- attaching high value to the one being blessed,
- picturing a special future for the one being blessed, and
- an active commitment to fulfill the blessing.

We will examine each of these over the next weeks so I hope you can make it a point to catch the messages here or online at our website.

As we come out of this last series on grace, I thought that it might be a good time for us to explore some practical ways we extend grace to others and in so doing, how we help others to know what true acceptance is and how we can pass along a blessing to others.

You see each of us here today is already a part of the great flow of God’s blessing of love and acceptance that has been handed down from generation to generation. In Genesis 12, when God calls Abraham, God promises to bless Abraham so that he can be a blessing to others. That blessing was passed down through generations; eventually reaching to Jesus who was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that through him all the world would be blessed!

So my prayer today is that just as you have learned about God’s acceptance of you by his grace; I pray that you will be able to model that same grace and acceptance to others. And we are going to see how that happens today in a story from the life of Jesus which demonstrates the first element of the blessing- touch.

Mark 1:40-42

Jesus did what no one else would do in that culture- he touched a man with leprosy. He touched a man that society saw as an outcast. He touched a man that was not accepted into everyday life. Lepers had to shout to others, 'unclean' so that as they passed by no one would accidentally come into contact with them.

Jesus practiced grace. In touching the leper, Jesus is telling him that he was accepted. Jesus blessed a man with the power of a single touch. That touch transformed the leper's life in more ways than one.

Jesus knew the power of touch. Whether it was to heal, comfort or encourage; Jesus made it a habit to touch the untouchable and to demonstrate grace and acceptance through his touch.

Jesus knew the power of touch. So did the authors of a UCLA study that found that people who experience meaningful touch ten times a day live longer than people who don't. (We experience that in the church when we greet one another.)

And that is our challenge today as disciples of Jesus. We are called to act on the grace that we have received by reaching out to provide a meaningful touch to others- to our family, friends, and yes; to those who otherwise are considered untouchable. (remember Jesus told us to bless our enemies) When we are willing to offer a meaningful touch to someone we bring untold blessing to their life; just like Jesus did when he touched the leper.

You and I are called to model Jesus' life by being willing to reach out and by grace offer a meaningful touch. We are called to live out grace for others by demonstrating through a simple touch that they are accepted. That is what we are called to do as people blessed to be a blessing.

Are you willing to make grace practical by touching the untouchable?

Are you willing to touch someone who otherwise would not be considered acceptable?

I think the really important thing for us to remember this morning as we share together in communion is that at the table of the Lord everyone is accepted and welcomed.

Jesus didn't die for one group or another. Jesus didn't give his life for a select group. Jesus love is available to all persons and Jesus grace is free to everyone regardless of what labels you may wear.

So as we receive these reminders of the grace of Jesus I want to encourage you to offer a meaningful touch to someone as we share in this communion service.

It might be a handshake, a hug- if you are comfortable with that- a hand on someone's shoulder.