

As I was preparing for today's message I came across an interesting article which I think sheds some light on understanding a basic need in our life. In the article which came out in 2009, at the height of the financial collapse; Daniel Gilbert (a psychology professor at Harvard) drew from the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index and stated that the Index showed "that Americans are smiling less and worrying more than they were a year ago, that happiness is down and sadness is up, that we are getting less sleep and smoking more cigarettes, that depression is on the rise."

He stated that the real problem is not financial—not having enough money, but something else: Uncertainty. People don't know what's going to happen. Will I have a job next week? What's ahead in the future for me?

Daniel Gilbert summarized, "An uncertain future leaves us stranded in an unhappy present with nothing to do but wait Our national gloom is real enough, but it isn't a matter of insufficient funds. It's a matter of insufficient certainty." *Daniel Gilbert, "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," (9-21-09); as seen in The Week magazine, (6-5-09), p. 14*

Three years later I'm not sure if we've moved past that uncertain future enough to say that people have a sufficient certainty about their future.

But this isn't a sermon about economics; this is a sermon about the need for others to be blessed – and our role in passing along that blessing. Just to recap we've defined the blessing as five elements discussed in the book entitled, *The Blessing*. We've discussed the first three elements in the last two weeks: meaningful touch (the blessing of acceptance) and the spoken word expressing high value (the blessing of encouragement). Today we tackle the last two elements: picturing a special future and an active commitment. And we'll combine them into the blessing of certainty.

Certainty is something that everyone wants. Certainty is something on which kids thrive. Kids who are blessed with the picture of a special future and encouraged by an active commitment of their parents go confidently into life.

In adolescence, one of the challenges that every young adult faces is finding certainty. When adolescents are absent the blessing of someone picturing a special future for their life and no one to actively commit to fulfilling that future; they traditionally drift into lifestyles that lead to negative consequences.

And when young adults come to big life issues like marriage and employment I think we all agree that the hope is there for a high degree of certainty. When you enter a marriage relationship you picture a special future and make an active commitment to see that relationship succeed. Without both of those at the beginning of a relationship it is easy to see where the relationship will end.

Certainty, as we are looking at it today, as picturing a special future and providing the active commitment to see it happen; is something that all of us wish we had in our life. And if we are going to succeed in blessing the world- one life at a time- it means that we must be willing to build these two concepts into our relationships with others.

Before I move into how we make that happen let's take a look at the story of Joshua; the man who would take over leading Israel after the death of Moses.

Think about Joshua standing on a hillside overlooking the vast camp of the Israelites as the sun is rising. Moses is gone. The people are looking to him to lead them. And, all he can think is, 'How is this ever going to happen?' For 40 years Moses had led the people; but now Moses was gone and the uncertainty of the next moment was all that Joshua could comprehend. What would the future hold? Who would be there when Joshua needed someone?

Aren't those the questions that we are always asking? Aren't those the questions that others around us are always asking? What kind of future can I hope for? Who will be there when I need someone to help me?

Joshua 1:1-9

In no uncertain terms God blessed Joshua with what he needed at that moment- certainty.

God pictured a special future for Joshua and the people he was to lead. In a strange twist, this man who had first seen the promised land during a scouting trip 40 years earlier and who had encouraged the people to go up and possess the land was now going to be the man who would lead a new generation into that very same land. I wonder if Joshua had gone to sleep every night for the past 40 years picturing the land he described as flowing with milk and honey.

Joshua and Caleb had encouraged the people to go up and take possession of the land- the special future that God had long promised. But as is so often the case the majority report scoffed at what Joshua and Caleb pictured. The other 10 spies reported that the land was full of giants and great fortified cities that could not be overcome. The majority could not picture a special future, only disaster.

But now, here was Joshua, the man who had believed God could deliver what he promised, needing one final word from God so that he could step forth with certainty into this special future.

And so, God painted the picture for Joshua one more time. It was a picture of a vast land and victory at every turn. But God didn't stop with just a picture of a special future; God promised his presence and his power.

This wasn't just a promise; this was God's promise to be with Joshua and the nation of Israel. This was God's active commitment to go before and go with Joshua. And Joshua knew that just as God had certainly been with Moses; that God's commitment to Joshua would be no different. Joshua understood that when God pictures a special future God is committed to making it happen!

So what does all of this have to do with us? How do we bless others with certainty in a world that is all too uncertain?

Let's break it down this way. First, we need to help others picture the special future that is possible for them.

Parents, you are the first developer of that picture of a special future for your child. Parents are great at telling their children they can be and do just about anything. Don't ever let your kids think that anything is outside the realm of possibility because they will face people telling them to think realistically soon enough.

I heard a quote recently from actor Will Smith who said: "Being realistic is the shortest path to mediocrity." Don't ever buy into the lie of simply being realistic! God is committed to us seeing and achieving more than what is realistic; God promises us to do more than we can ask or imagine.

Many people, not just kids, never rise above the level of mediocrity because they've never pictured a special future. We need to be part of helping others to picture the special picture that God has for their life. You and I can be the encouragers of faith and dreams and visions!

I think the uncertainty of today can drain people, especially kids. But I am encouraged when I hear stories of 19-20 year olds who are starting non-profit organizations because they don't want mediocrity. They look at the uncertainty of today's world and are willing to see a different future, a special future that they can make happen.

If you want to bless your kids, if you want to bless anyone around you; help them to picture a special future that they can be a part of and make happen.

But the blessing is not complete with just a picture; it requires an active commitment on our part to make it happen.

I love this passage in James 2:15-17

You can almost hear James saying something like, 'It's nice to picture beautiful clothes and delicious food for the naked and hungry; but if you don't make an active commitment to do something about it, all the pretty pictures are meaningless.

So listen, if you are not willing to put your whole life into helping your child, your friend or someone else to make the picture of a special future a reality; don't paint the picture! It would be like telling your child that they can one day play the piano at Carnegie Hall but then never giving them a piano to practice on.

So ask yourself this, 'How committed am I to not only picturing a special future; but to making the active commitment necessary to make it happen?'

I heard a great illustration this past Friday about commitment. When the Spanish General Hernando Cortez and his men landed in Mexico; Cortez knew there was only one way to make victory a certainty, to Burn the Ships. You see, when there are no ships to retreat to, you are committed to going forward; and going forward with everything you have to achieve what you picture. If you are committed, you'll burn the ships and never retreat! That is commitment!

Let's go back a moment to that opening illustration.

The insufficient certainty in which we live today calls for disciples of Jesus to bring a blessing of certainty to others. And that blessing comes in our helping others to picture a special future along with our active commitment to see that future become a reality. When we are willing to bless others in this way; what led to the researcher's observation will begin to change...

'that Americans who are smiling less and worrying more' will begin to smile more and worry less because they see the certainty of a special future and know the active commitment of a companion to help them achieve that future.

And where *'happiness is down and sadness is up,'* and where *'we are getting less sleep and smoking more cigarettes,'* and where *'depression is on the rise.'* That can all change when the disciples of Jesus are invading an uncertain world with the desire to see lives transformed by the power of a blessing- a blessing that comes from the special future- here and now- that God promises along with God's commitment to be with us so that we experience God's active commitment in our lives.

Can we change the world? Can we change the insufficient uncertainty of individual lives? Yes we can, as we turn uncertainty into certainty through the power of a blessing!