

GIVING THE BLESSING

This year our Birthday Faith Experience is centered on giving a blessing to your child. Below you'll find a guide to giving your blessing written by a youth minister we know named Jeremy.

Why Give Your Blessing

I am from Baltimore, Maryland. If you live in Baltimore, it is a legal requirement to be a fan of Cal Ripken Jr. Cal Ripken Jr. was the legendary shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles.

If you are from Baltimore, you can always remember where you were on the night of September 6, 1995. That is the night that Cal Ripken played his 2,131st game that broke the 56-year-old record for consecutive games held, by Lou Gehrig.

On that night, I was sitting in my dorm room at Mississippi College in Clinton, MS, glued to the television. I was in my sophomore year, and I was missing my family in Maryland, wishing I could be around this historic event.

The next morning I went to the college computer lab to check my email. An email popped up from my Dad, and this is what it said.

*Dear Jonathan (my older brother) and Jeremy,
Last night I watched Cal Ripken Jr. break the big record. He was doing a lap around the stadium shaking the fans' hands and celebrating. Then they turned the camera to Cal Sr. in the dugout (Cal Jr.'s dad was a coach on the team).*


I lost it. I started crying not because of Cal Jr. breaking the record, but because in that moment I realized that I have two Hall of Fame sons that will make more of a difference in this world than any broken record could.

*I am so proud of the men you have become. I love you.
Dad*

98 Words

Those 98 words that my Dad wrote to me aren't just any words. They are a gift unlike any other gift I can ever receive. Only one person exists on this planet that can offer me a father's blessing, and that is my Dad.

Why is the blessing of a father a big deal? Just talk to grown men and women who never got one. In fact many of you read those 98 words my father gave me, and you were immediately filled with sadness and grief. You would have done just about anything to have your own 98-word gift from your father. Maybe your Dad was





IT'S JUST A PHASE

abusive, absent, sick, emotionally distant, or just plain scared. Maybe your Dad never received his 98 words, so he had no idea how to give it to you.

The ultimate reality is this. The best gift I ever received from my Father was not money, a car, or a college education. The best gift he and my Mom gave me was their blessing.

98 words is just an example of a parenting posture that said, “You have my approval. I believe in who you are, not just what you do. I unleash you to go into this world and make a difference.”

The best gift he and my mom gave me was their blessing.

There is nothing more powerful than the transfer of Blessing from parent to child.

Unleashing Your Teenager

Giving your teenager a Blessing will unleash them. It will free them to take on the world with your approval.

The term Blessing can mean an unexpected gift, but it can also mean the invoking of favor on a person. The latter term is really what we’re describing here.

A few years ago, I was asked to participate with a Dad who wanted to hold a special evening of blessing for his 18-year-old son.

He asked a few of us men who had been influential in his life to attend. After spending some time sharing with the young man, the father took his turn.

He asked his son to kneel down on the ground in front of him. Then he walked over to a closet and brought out a huge Braveheart sword that he had purchased for this special evening.

He laid the sword on his son’s shoulder and said something I will never forget. “Son, I know many 30- and 40-year-old men who act like children because no one ever told them they were men. So tonight, on your 18th birthday, I say to you that you knelt down as a boy, but you will rise as a man.”

It was one of the most powerful parenting moments I have ever witnessed. To watch the look on that young man’s face. He stood with pride. He was a man because his dad said he was.

The Blessing was unleashed. When you unleash your blessing, you unleash your teenager to change the world.



When To Give Your Blessing

By now I hope that you are sold on why it is important to give your Blessing away to your teenager. But how do you give it away? When should you give it away? How often should you give it away?

When my first son was born, I started a practice at his birthday party of giving him a public blessing. I will admit it felt a little weird speaking a blessing over a little baby, but it was a rhythm that I was determined to get into. Every year both of my boys now understand, that just before they blow out the candles on their cake, I will offer a short blessing to them.

I would like to suggest that you give a similar Blessing to your child on or around their 13th birthday.


All families establish their own traditions, and it is those traditions that tell their story. It would be wise and strategic for you as a parent to make a Blessing Ceremony a huge part of that story.

Do What Fits You and Your Teenager

If you decide to do a Blessing Ceremony for your teenager, I want to spend some time setting you up for success. It is a big deal to put your heart out there for your teenager to see, so I want to make sure that it is a positive experience for you.

That is why before you do the Blessing Ceremony, you should probably talk to your teenager. Teenagers typically don't like to be surprised publicly, so let them know what you are planning to do.

It is important that you tell them that they have no choice regarding whether or not they get your Blessing. But they do have a choice in how they receive it. You can offer them these three options.

- A Written Note of Blessing - Your teenager will receive from you a letter with a written Blessing from you as their parent. This will be for them alone to enjoy. Your teenager might be shy or extremely introverted, and this option may fit them perfectly.
 - A Family Dinner - The family will come together for a special dinner. The favorite food of your teenager will be served. During the dinner you will give a public Blessing to your teenager and offer the family members a chance to do the same.
 - A Public Blessing - Your teenager might be a party animal and an extrovert, and they may love the idea of you giving them a party for their Blessing Ceremony. This might be terrifying for you to speak publicly about anything, but remember it is more terrifying for your teenager to miss out on a Blessing. So channel as much strength as you can to rise to the occasion! Also, never fear, we will have some written Blessings for you to use to prepare. It is perfectly okay to read your Blessing. It works just the same.
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How To Give Your Blessing

When you finally get up the courage to unleash your Blessing, so that you can unleash your teenager, what do you say?

Here are some things that you don't say:

"I love you because you scored 32 points in the game last night. I am proud of your success as an athlete, and I encourage you to score 33 points in the next game. Keep getting better."


Some of you may say, "What's wrong with that?" When you bless your teenager's performance, you are saying to them that they can have your approval as long as they do something.

The beauty of a Blessing exists because it is not about what you do but who you are. As the parent, there is no one else on the planet that truly knows the heart of your teenager more than you. The Blessing is a time for you to hold up a mirror to their soul and explain to them who they are, not just what they have done.

Here are some examples of Blessing your teenager's identity:

- I know you to be a kind person who takes care of those in need.
- I marvel at how patient you are. I want you to know that I see you are slow to become angry, and I admire that.
- One of the things I respect the most is a hard worker, and when I watch you, I see a very hard worker.
- You have a natural beauty that no make-up or outfit could ever enhance. You are truly beautiful.
- When you walk into a room, you light it up. You have been given the gift of charisma, where you shine from your soul for others to see.
- I appreciate how you think before you speak. You are a deep thinker, and that is going to serve you well in life.
- These kinds of statements cut to the heart of who your teenager really is, not what they can do. These kinds of statements are the bricks and mortar by which your teenager will build their self-image.
- I don't want you to be afraid to brag on their accomplishments, but if that is the extent of the Blessing, you might be sending the wrong message.

When you bless their identity rather than their performance, they won't need to earn your approval; they will already have it.



Share Your Dream For Them In The Coming Year

There is a fine line between controlling your teenager and guiding your teenager. Hidden within each Blessing is a golden opportunity to guide your teenager with love.

Take some time in the Blessing to share your dream for them in the coming year.


Here are some examples:

- My dream for you in the coming year is that you will continue to grow in your love for others, that you will find ways to serve those around you, and that you will use your ability to make others smile.
- My dream for you is that you will be a peacemaker. You have a calming presence about you that can be a great attribute to your friends that are in conflict.
- I am so excited to watch you throughout this next year as you take your hard work ethic and apply it to your life through school, sports, and other activities. There is no telling what will happen when you put such extraordinary effort into all you do. I am proud of you.
- My dream for you this year is that you will find ways to use your gift of leadership, which is so evident.

The key to this is to keep these “dreams” you are sharing very encouraging and general. Don’t bring up specific examples, but in general, give them practical ways they can live out the character traits you have highlighted. If you say, “My dream for you this year is that you will use your brains to actually pass Biology class for once,” you have brought a negative scenario into what is meant to be an uplifting moment. There will be plenty of opportunities to discuss the poor Biology grade, but the Blessing is not that time.

**A Blessing is
an opportunity
to inspire.**

Make sure your tone is positive and your words are inspiring. You don’t guilt your student to change; you inspire them to change. A Blessing is an opportunity to inspire. It is an opportunity to help them believe something about themselves that they might have otherwise never noticed.



Give An Example Of Someone They Remind You Of

Younger teenagers especially will receive your Blessing when you compare them to someone they admire. This is a concrete comparison that might make vivid the attribute you are trying to ascribe to them.

If you do this, you want to make sure this is a person that your student will know and admire. Don't just use someone as an example that you like, but make sure it is an inspirational figure to your teenager.

Here are some examples:

- You remind me of your grandfather. He was one of the kindest men I have ever met. I sometimes have to do a double-take when I see the way you treat people. It looks so much like the way he treated people.
- I am sure you have heard of Martin Luther King Jr. He was a man of peace. When the whole world wanted to respond to racism in violence, he taught a nation to respond with love. I see his spirit in you.
- Your natural beauty is something I have seen before in the face of your mother. She is beautiful inside and out, and you were given that same gift.
- In the Bible there is a man named Joshua. He was known to be a man of great courage. I often look at you and see that same kind of courage. You remind me of Joshua.

These comparisons can be so powerful in the life of your teenager. I have seen teenagers receive a Blessing like this, and the person they were compared to becomes a hero to them.

The Power Of Using Symbols In Your Blessing

One great addition to your teenager's Blessing would be to include a symbol. This is another concrete way to get your point across to your teenager. Whatever character trait you are seeking to communicate can usually be represented by some sort of symbol. If you present that to your teenager during their Blessing, it will be something that they can hold onto for the rest of their lives.

Here is a great tip for giving your Blessing: Write down your Blessing and read it to your teenager. It will calm your nerves, and you can give it to them as a keepsake, so they can read your words over and over.

You can give your teenager a family heirloom, a gift, or an object that you attach meaning to. The point of the symbol would be for them to be able to hold it in their hands and remember the Blessing it represents. Using a symbol will help the words of your Blessing last.

Resist The Temptation To Instruct

I can't say this enough. A Blessing is not a time to instruct your teenager on what you wish they would do better. Save that conversation for later, but for now put courage in your teenager through encouragement.

Resist taking a shot. Resist giving a to-do list of things to earn your approval. Resist withholding your Blessing due to a grudge.

You have heard it said, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Some very honest and vulnerable parents have confessed to me that there has been such rebellion and conflict that they don't have anything they can come up with for a Blessing.

The reality is, if you don't have anything nice to say to your teenager, it is most likely because you are experiencing parental fatigue. There are seasons of so much fighting and angst that your parenting batteries can be drained. This is nothing to feel guilty about, but it is something to take action on.

If this is you, my encouragement is to interview their friends, teachers, and other folks they interact with. They will give you another perspective of your teenager that will spur on things to share. It is great to quote other folks and what they have said about your teenager as part of the Blessing.

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY 13 YEAR OLD?

This year is the “Wonder Year,” where your brand new teenager begins to try on identities and discover who they are going to be. This guide will give you a map into the body, mind, and soul of your thirteen year old.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- There may be comparisons with other students who are developing faster or slower than they are.
- Stress begins to develop from relational struggles and from an increase in school work.
- There may be a high energy level, but it is balanced by a high need for rest.
- Skin problems and acne can become issues.
- Menstruating has begun for most girls.
- Girls typically experience growth spurts before boys (about one year ahead).
- Bones and muscles are not growing at the same rate, which may lead to feelings of awkwardness and clumsiness.
- There is an increased need to pay attention to personal hygiene.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Your thirteen year old may:

- Desire and need more privacy
- (with boundaries)
- Become moody and easily frustrated
- Begin to experience “bullying issues”
- Show more concern for body image
- Start to be mean, due to being driven
- by fear
- Experience emotions in extremes
- Be characterized by curiosity
- Become more socially expansive and aware
- Express less affection for parents
- Encounter periods of sadness, depression, and desperation, which can lead to poor coping habits

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Adults who tease them do more damage than they might realize.
- There is a strong desire to be accepted by peers.
- Girls have a tendency to be interested in older boys.
- There is a desire to have and “overuse” a cell phone.
- Friendships change due to new schools, boyfriends/girlfriends, and change of affinity groups.
- Girls tend to build friendships in groups of 2-3.
- Boys tend to build friendships in “packs” of 8-10, based on affinity.
- Boys struggle with being “loners” if they do not find a pack of friends.
- A strong interest in sports is typical for both genders but is not exclusive.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

- They have a great propensity to memorize scripture, but they still struggle to fully understand it.
- They thrive in a small group of peers led by a trusted adult, who serves as a spiritual guide.
- Concrete thinking begins to give way to abstract thinking, which creates a new world of questions about faith and spiritual things.
- The desire to question and disagree with their parents’ beliefs arises, but it is tamed by fear to express those doubts.
- Learning how parents interact with God through prayer and Bible study is greatly beneficial.
- While timid about taking on difficult intellectual tasks like studying the Bible, they are ready to begin the practice of daily Bible study (with lots of encouragement).