

The Blessing Zone

By David Feddes

The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.
Proverbs 3:33

Julie lives in the blessing zone. She loves her children, and they love her. Her children are talented and responsible. Julie gets much joy and satisfaction from seeing the kind of people they are growing up to be. She feels good about what she accomplished in her years as a stay-at-home mom when the kids were small, and she feels good about the way she's been able to help others during her years of working as a nurse in a medical clinic. Julie and her husband have been married for over twenty years. They own their own home. They can pay their bills each month and still have some extra money saved up. Julie is thankful to be living in the blessing zone.

Brittany lives in the misery zone. Her children are out of control, doing poorly in school and often getting into trouble. Each of her children has a different father. Brittany didn't marry any of these men, and for the last few months she has been living with a new man who isn't the father of any of her children. Brittany and her man are renting because they can't afford the down payment on their own home. Money is a problem, but government aid helps keep groceries on the table and beer in the refrigerator. Brittany has it hard in the misery zone.

It might seem that Julie has a picture-perfect life or that she just has better luck than Brittany, but the truth is that Julie was once in the misery zone herself. She was abused and molested as a child. When she got older, she got into a wild pattern of drugs and casual sex. Julie would be no better off than Brittany, except that something happened which changed her life. She met Jesus Christ—or rather, he found her.

Jesus took Julie out of the misery zone and into the blessing zone. Julie left behind a sense of helplessness and began living in the power the Holy Spirit within her. Julie left behind her guilt and worthlessness and started living in the dignity of a beloved daughter of God. Julie left behind destructive behavior, and she began to live in obedience to the Bible. Julie left behind her aimless, pointless lifestyle in which she couldn't see beyond her immediate desires, and she gained a long-term vision and a purpose.

Did everything become sweetness and light the moment Julie met Jesus? No, she had some bad habits and dangerous addictions to deal with. Her new relationship with Jesus enabled her to face the terrible truth about the abuse she suffered, but there were dark valleys of horror and depression as she finally dealt with those memories. Her new faith helped her to be honest about some terrible things she had done—things she had tried not to think about—and when she finally let it sink in how bad she had been, there were times when she thought it would crush her.

Even after those past wounds were healed and those past sins were cleansed from her system, her life didn't become paradise. Julie's marriage had started off wrong, and even after she became a Christian, she could still be very disappointed in her husband. He was a hard worker, he wasn't mean, and he didn't run around with other women, but he often seemed distant. He wasn't as warm or understanding as Julie wanted. She sometimes got so frustrated that she thought she might be happier just leaving her husband and looking for someone else who would be more of a soul mate. But Julie knew the Lord wanted her to be faithful, and she knew that leaving her husband would offend God and take her out of the blessing zone and into the misery zone. Julie's faithfulness has brought her many blessings, and her husband and children have also been blessed.

Julie's first years in the blessing zone were hard, but now she is reaping the sweet fruit of life in Christ. She is happier, and her children and grandchildren have the opportunity to grow up knowing God, experiencing healthy family life, living in the blessing zone without ever being stuck in misery zone.

Over in the misery zone, Brittany has never felt quite as miserable as Julie felt when she was first leaving the misery zone. When you're in the misery zone, you can get used to it. Your conscience and feelings are deadened, you are numb inside, and you might not feel the full pain of your predicament. You don't see any reason not to give your body to men who are here today and gone tomorrow. You don't see any problem with bringing children into the world to live in moral confusion and poverty. You don't see any reason not to live on government payments rather than having a family that can support itself. This way of life seems normal to Brittany, and it might seem normal to you. But if you really get to know Jesus, your inner deadness is replaced with life. Then your feelings come alive, your conscience awakens, and your expectations change. For a time you may feel worse than you did before, as Julie did, but the long-term result is a life of blessing and satisfaction not only for you but for upcoming generations of your offspring.

If you watch movies and TV shows or depend on mainstream news for information, you seldom hear what causes problems for people in the misery zone or what helps people to flourish in the blessing zone. The usual message is that any view of religion is as good as the next and that any lifestyle choice is as good as the next. But that's not what the Bible says. The Bible makes it clear that there is a way of thinking and living which is blessed, and that there's a way of thinking and living which is cursed. Proverbs 3:33 says, "The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous." There's a blessing zone and a misery zone.

If you want a life of blessing, the Bible shows the way. The Bible is so saturated with blessing that it uses the word *bless* and related words more than 400 times. We can't explore all 400, so let's focus on three main things in the blessing zone: faith, forgiveness, and vision.

The Faith Zone

The first thing is to have faith that connects you to God and his presence in your life. The blessing zone is the faith zone. If God is in your life, your health, finances, and relationships with family and neighbors often flourish as a result. In Old Testament times, the ark of the covenant was a sign of God's presence and power, and it could bring tremendous blessing among people of faith. On one occasion, the Israelite people were going to bring the ark into their capital city, but they handled it sinfully and a man named Uzzah was struck dead as a result. At that point, they decided the ark was bad luck or too dangerous, so they stored it at the home of man named Obed Edom. "The ark of God remained with the family of Obed-Edom in his house for three months, and the LORD blessed his household and everything he had" (1 Chronicles 13:14). When the Israelites saw that this household was truly a blessing zone, they decided to bring the ark into the capital city of Jerusalem, and to do it right this time. This launched Israel's golden age under King David and King Solomon. With God in their midst and with faith burning brightly, the nation and its people flourished more than at any time in their history. That's what God's presence can do for an individual, a home, or a nation.

Apart from God and his presence in your life, you are outside the blessing zone. The result can be a decline in physical health, loss of mental and emotional wellbeing, crumbling relationships, and failure in work and finances. Then again, the Lord may still send some good things your way for a time—lovely children, good feelings, financial gains—but his gifts

eventually grow bitter in your mouth if you go on trying to enjoy them apart from the Giver. Did you know that the suicide rate is highest among the very rich? Wealth without God often produces misery. So whether God withholds his gifts or sends good things that turn into curses, you end up in the misery zone unless you have faith. When the misery zone becomes final and permanent, it is hell.

However, if you put your faith in God and trust Jesus as your Savior, you enter the blessing zone. The Bible says, “God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Physical, financial, and relational blessings often come as well, but the most basic blessing is *spiritual* blessing, a relationship with the Lord and the presence of his Spirit in your heart and life.

My parents and grandparents were people of strong faith in Jesus, so I grew up surrounded by many spiritual blessings. I didn’t have to search high and low for God. I met him every day in the love of my parents and in Bible reading and prayer at every meal. I met him every week as we worshiped in church with other believers. I was taught about him constantly in Christian education. I grew up in the faith zone, and that faith is mine personally. I look to Jesus as my Savior, and now my wife and I strive to make our home a zone of faith and blessing for our children. Many of us can thank God for faith-filled mothers and fathers who lived under God’s blessing and passed it along to us.

But what if you didn’t have parents like that? Maybe you grew up without any real sense of God and his blessing on your life. Your parents were not people of faith and did not bring you up in God’s covenant. Does that mean you’re stuck outside the blessing zone forever? No, family is not destiny. The Bible speaks to people who grew up without God and says, “God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors... He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). No matter how many of your ancestors were in the misery zone without God, you can live in the blessing zone. No matter how long you’ve lived in the misery zone, no matter how wrong you’ve been, now matter what seems to be against you, you can live in the blessing zone. Jesus says that whoever trusts in him and in God the Father “has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). The Holy Spirit enters your life, and you cross over from the misery zone to the blessing zone.

The Forgiveness Zone

The blessing zone is the faith zone; it’s also the forgiveness zone. It’s where your past doesn’t have to determine your future, where you can start clean and fresh. A lot of young women aren’t very proud of their past, and they don’t think they can be good mothers or wives. Some are so trapped by their own sense of guilt and worthlessness that they don’t think they could ever marry an excellent man or bring up fine children. They think they deserve only to shack up with one loser after another. They choose men almost as though they are looking for trouble. It’s as though they are trying to punish themselves.

But because of Jesus, you don’t have to live that way. You don’t have to pay the price for your own sins. Jesus paid that price with his blood. He wants you to live in the blessing of forgiveness, not in the misery of ongoing guilt and self-punishing choices. The Bible says, “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2). Forgiveness is the blessing that makes it possible to enjoy other blessings.

A young mother was falling apart and wanted to talk with me. She was an emotional wreck. She was depressed and sometimes thought about taking her own life. Her biggest problem wasn’t

her present life. Her house was lovely, her job was okay, her husband wasn't leaving her, and her children were doing well. But she couldn't live with her past. She had done things she had never told anyone, things I can't mention here for reasons of confidentiality and because some of them would be too bad to describe on a public broadcast. As she confessed one awful deed after another, tears began to roll down my cheeks, both for her and for those she had sinned against. After each sin she described, no matter how horrible, I told her, "The blood of Jesus washes this sin away." Then she would tell me about the next sin, and I would reply, "The blood of Jesus washes this sin away." Again and again and again, I spoke the blood of Jesus to her guilty soul. That time of confession and forgiveness wasn't an instant fix for all her inner struggles, but it was the turning point. She began to heal inside, and before long she started to positively flourish and enjoy God's blessings. What a blessing to be forgiven, clean, accepted by God!

Much of the wreckage in the misery zone is caused by past sin that hasn't been confessed and cleansed. If sin is not dealt with, it's like a wound that hasn't been cleaned or healed. It becomes more and more infected, making you sicker, causing complications and endangering your life. Sin needs atonement, and without Jesus taking away your punishment by his blood, something inside you drives you toward punishing yourself or punishing others. You often get angry and mean toward people close to you, or you're terribly hard on yourself. You are drawn like a magnet to people of the opposite sex who are bad for you, or you play around with drugs that you know are bad for you, or you do dumb things at work that are bound to get you fired. But Jesus' blood changes all that. Jesus provides atonement to get you out of the misery zone into the blessing zone, the zone of forgiveness and new life.

When you're forgiven and adopted into God's family as his daughter, you become a princess, a daughter of the king. You begin to act like royalty and won't stoop to rotten behavior that's beneath you. As a king's daughter, you don't settle for just any man who comes along. You require a worthy husband. You save yourself for a prince, someone who is also royalty and will treat you like royalty. If you have children, you treat them as princes and princesses—not that you spoil them, but you teach them to see themselves as members of Jesus' royal family and to behave in a way that brings credit to God's family name.

The Vision Zone

The blessing zone involves faith and forgiveness; it also involves a vision of what is best. What moral choices are best? What are your possibilities for enjoying God's best? Blessings come to those who have a God-given vision of right and wrong, and a vision of what their life can become. Blessings come to those with high expectations. The Bible says, "Where there no vision, the people perish: but blessed is he that keeps the law" (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). The blessing zone is the vision zone.

Vision is revelation that leads to expectation. God reveals his standard and purpose for you, and you set your expectations according to that revelation. Vision includes God's revelation of right and wrong. Things fall apart without moral vision, but blessings abound when we obey God's law. The Bible says, "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD" (Psalm 119:1). Moses said, "I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

This applies in many areas of life, including family life. The Bible teaches that sex is for marriage and that marriage is for life. The Bible teaches the wisdom of working hard, of not

lying or stealing, of being honest and generous, of planning ahead and saving wisely. Ignoring such wisdom and laws brings trouble and ruin. Obeying God's guidance makes for stable families and builds prosperity instead of poverty. In North America, avoiding poverty is not terribly complicated. If you have the foresight to finish school before getting married and the moral restraint not to have babies before you get married, you have very little chance of being poor for long. One of three unmarried households lives in poverty, while less than one in fifty married couples with one person holding a job for a year is below the poverty line.

Another example of biblical behavior that brings blessing is family worship. In families that read the Bible and pray together daily, there is hardly any divorce, and children are less likely to have serious problems. Is that too much to expect: ten minutes a day reading the Bible and praying together? Stick with that pattern, and good things happen.

Don't expect blessing if you choose a lifestyle that God curses. Blessing isn't just a blank check. Jesus teaches us God's will for life and says, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17). He doesn't say, "You will be blessed no matter what." He says, "You will be blessed if you *do* them." To enjoy Jesus' blessings, live by his vision of godly behavior.

We need a vision of what is right, and we need a vision of true success and happiness under God's blessing. We need a sense of purpose, and we to know that this purpose is possible. You will never reach your potential if you don't think it's possible. If you see yourself as a victim who can't possibly be more than what you are, you will stay stuck in the misery zone.

In the misery zone—the victim zone—you don't take responsibility. There's always someone to blame or someone to sue. If only you had better parents and a better upbringing, if only you had less poverty or better education, if only you lived in a better neighborhood, your life might have turned out well. But everything is against you, so what else could you expect? You're a victim of social forces beyond your control. You can't be expected to limit sex to marriage. You can't be expected to get a job instead of stealing from others or ripping off the welfare system. These are the expectations of the victim zone.

The vision zone is very different from the victim zone. In the vision zone, you have high expectations, because you know the Bible. You take responsibility to honor God and to obey his laws for family life, for helping instead of harming, for working instead of stealing, for striving to succeed rather than just coveting the success of others. When you fail, you don't make excuses or lower your expectations. You pray for God's forgiveness and for his help to keep aiming higher.

Vision raises your moral expectations, and vision raises your expectations for purpose and achievement. You want your life to count for something, and you believe God will make it happen. The biblical prayer of Jabez is an example of this. Jabez was given a name of low expectations. The name Jabez means "he causes pain." His mother named him this because his birth hurt her so much. Some mothers might tell a child, "You're a real pain," but Jabez's mother went even further and actually named her son Pain. Many people of that time believed that a bad name was an omen of a bad life. If your name was Pain, you'd be a pain to others and have plenty of pain yourself. You'd be stuck in the misery zone.

But Jabez lived by vision, not victimhood. He took responsibility for his own conduct and character. Though he had been named Pain, he didn't turn out to be a pain but a pillar of society. Jabez turned out to be "more honorable" than those around him. He lived by a moral vision, and he had a vision of what he could achieve with God's help.

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request" (1 Chronicles 4:9-10).

Jabez prayed with a vision for his future, and God made that vision a reality. Despite disadvantages, the man named Pain turned out to be honorable and successful.

You are not a victim. If you suffer for doing wrong, you are not a victim. Your misery is your own fault, and you need to get out of the victim zone and into the vision zone. Even if you didn't bring trouble on yourself and you suffer for doing right, you're still not a victim. Most of the time, you won't get hurt for doing the right thing, says the Bible. "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed" (1 Peter 3:14). So get rid of the "poor me" mentality. Get out of the victim zone. If you've truly been wronged through no fault of your own, look to God for strength and help. The Bible says that no matter what happens to those who belong to Jesus, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Nothing "can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39). Our ultimate vision is to reign with Jesus Christ and to enjoy his happiness forever.

This is the life-changing message of the gospel. This is what transforms despair into delight. Faith, forgiveness, and vision—these are the keys to life in the blessing zone. "Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).