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Series: The Ripple Effect  
Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 5:13-16

October 25, 2009

**“Imagine”**  
**John Ortberg**

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Well this weekend we're wrapping up the series we have been doing...looking at *The Ripple Effect*, studying...*What is God's plan to use people to extend blessings to other people?* I want to start with a passage from the book of Genesis where the whole ripple effect really began, but see if you can tell what part of this passage is inaccurate. Most of it's just like it is in the Bible. One part of it is off a little bit. See if you can tell. ***"The Lord had said to Abram, 'I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great,* and you can keep all these blessings to yourself."** Can you tell which part is a little off? What God actually said was, ***"...you will be a blessing."*** "I'll bless you and you'll be a blessing. I'll make your name great, and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you."

God wants to bless you, but it's not just about you. It's not just about me. His idea is that the blessing is kind of a pass-through deal. They come *to* me so that they can flow *through* me into other people's lives. That in fact is how it is that I enter into life in God's kind of kingdom. So what we're going to look at as we wrap up this series today is...*What makes somebody a ripple maker?* What are the characteristics that kind of mark or distinguish the life of a person who actually becomes a conduit for God's blessing, make an impact for God in this world, which is what we want to do or you wouldn't be here. Then just give some time at the end to let us all respond to that.

Now before I get to that, I want to say two things a ripple maker is *not*. Okay, just to clarify this. First of all, *being a ripple maker does not require perfection*. A ripple maker is not somebody who is perfect. You do not have to be a monk, a mystic, a missionary, or a hermit. Whatever your track record is, if you are willing to fully surrender to God right now, then God can use you.

Nowhere in the Bible does God ever say to anybody, "You went so far off the rails I'm sorry I just... I don't have enough grace for you." Look at the people God uses. Abraham was a liar. Jacob was a deceiver. Moses was a fugitive. Joshua was jealous. Gideon was a coward. Samson was a walking impulse-controlled disorder. Eli was a bad father. David was an adulterer. Elijah was suicidal. The disciples were all people of little faith. James and John were status seekers. Peter denied Jesus three times and cut a guy's ear off.

Paul said it was precisely when he felt most inadequate that God's Word came to him. ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness."*** Being a ripple maker is about God's grace, not about your or my gifts. So it doesn't require perfection. If you're willing to fully surrender right now, then you're eligible.

One other thing a ripple maker is not. *Being a ripple maker is not about what might be called bumper sticker Christianity*. It's not about slogans and t-shirts. Jesus actually warned one time about people who clean up the outside of the cup but they neglect the inside. Somebody sent me this a while ago. "A man

was being tailgated by a stressed-out woman on a busy street. Suddenly just in front of him, the light turned yellow. He did the right thing. He stopped at the crosswalk even though he probably could have made it through if he had hit the gas pedal. But the tailgating woman was furious...repeatedly honked her horn, screamed in frustration because she missed her chance to get through the intersection while also dropping her cell phone and her makeup."

"While she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked into the face of a very stern-looking police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell, opened the door. She was escorted to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, 'I'm very sorry for the mistake. See I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, gesturing rudely to the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. But then I noticed that *What Would Jesus Do?* window sticker, the *Choose Life* license plate holder, the *Follow Me to Sunday School* bumper sticker, the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally I assumed you had stolen the car.'"

I think the world is getting a little tired of Christians who are mainly known for Christian bumper stickers and Christian slogans and Christian t-shirts and listening to Christian music on Christian radio stations and buying Christian merchandise and living in a little Christian sub-culture but who do not actually do what Jesus said to do. I think that's what the world is waiting for is people who are known because they're actually living the kind of lives Jesus said to live. He is quite clear about this. This is from the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew, chapter 5. This is from Eugene Peterson's translation *The Message*. Here is what Jesus says to you and to me.

***"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Here is another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."***

What Jesus said is what He actually did. Whatever you think about Jesus...whatever you believe about the authority of the Scripture...it's a simple historical fact that no life has ever had as much impact as the life of Jesus. So in the rest of this talk, we're going to look at the greatest Ripple Maker who ever lived and let Him teach us...*What does a ripple maker actually look like?*

It starts with this. This one is a sobering one. It begins with a willingness to let my heart be broken when I look at the world, to step out of my life. It's a striking thing about Jesus. Over and over there is a word the Bible uses to describe Him. It's a broken-hearted word. It's the word *compassion*. One time a leper approached Jesus and asked to be healed.

The text says, ***"With compassion, Jesus reached out His hand, touched the man. 'I'm willing.' He said, 'Be clean.'"*** Or another time a whole crowd brings people who are suffering, people who are ill to Jesus. It says, ***"Jesus had compassion on them when He saw them and healed their sick."*** Or another time it

says, ***"When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them."*** Now not just because of their physical suffering but spiritually ***"because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."***

Jesus consistently and deliberately put Himself in places where He would see human suffering, and it wrecked Him. He felt it so deeply...He identified with it so fully...that He said, "When you see people suffering, whatever you do even for those who seem to be the least important, it's like you're doing it for Me. When you see human suffering and you do nothing, it's like you're doing nothing for Me." Ripple makers get hearts broken by this.

I got a letter a while ago from a man named Frank. He is a lawyer who lives in Miami. His wife talked him into going on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic several years ago. He didn't want to go, but he decided he would. He thought he'd just do a little scuba-diving and R&R until they found themselves one afternoon with a doctor friend on the third floor of a building totally unprepared for what they were about to see. They walked into a room reeling from the stench of human waste. There were dozens of children... some had cerebral palsy, some Down's syndrome. The doctor said they had just been thrown out like garbage.

Frank wrote to me he saw one boy about eight years old being kept in a cage three feet tall, three feet long, four feet wide. When he asked why this boy was in a cage, he was told the boy was hyperactive, and it was their only way to control him. Nobody even knew this boy's real name. He lived among 75 naked, deformed, dehydrated, starving orphans...human beings. Many lay in their own excrement and urine. The stench was so bad he said he could barely breathe.

His wife saw Dominito, a little boy who was eight years old, suffering from cerebral palsy, dragging himself on the floor with his elbows and his knees. There was in this room no running water, no air conditioning, no working toilets, broken windows, decaying walls. Frank said when they first got involved, the children would take turns eating. One child would eat on Monday and then not eat again until Wednesday. On weekends, no one would be able to receive anything. A bath consisted of pouring a cup of water on a child.

Most of them lay on the floor, tethered to beds or huddled in cages...untouched by the outside world, starving for any human contact. Every single one of them was malnourished, dehydrated. Many were about to die. These are little children.

Frank said he kept thinking about what Jesus said, "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for Me. Whatever you did not do..." He said, "God, I have to do something." He and his wife, Lori, prayed and started doing something. Eventually it turned into a venture called *Project Child Help*. They began running it out of their garage. They would recruit doctors and nurses to visit the Dominican Republic to help with these children.

They would collect everything they could. When Frank goes on a vacation, he spends it taking 5,000 pounds of medicine and food and clothes to this orphanage. American Airlines found out about it, and so they would ship all of the supplies for free. Now there is a little group of children, and they eat three times a day. They get bathed every day because somebody took what Jesus said seriously.

I get this letter from Frank, and then I ask myself, *Am I willing for my heart to be broken? Do I avoid going to places like that? Do I avoid going on mission trips? Do I avoid watching certain documentaries? Do I avoid looking at pictures of hungry children in certain magazines because if I look at them, I'll be*

*sad or guilty, and I'd rather just feel okay?*

One of the ways God will speak to you...will change you...is through a broken heart. Probably almost everybody in this room knows about an outfit called *World Vision*. I'll tell you how they get started over 60 years ago now. A guy named Bob Pierce traveled around the world preaching the gospel of Jesus. He was in China, and a little girl heard that message and received Christ. When she went home to tell her family, her father disowned her and kicked her out of their home.

She went back to the missionary she knew there and asked if she could live with her because she had no place else to go. The missionary went to Bob Pierce and said, "If I could have \$5, this little girl could live for a year in my home because it's overloaded right now. If I can't find \$5, I'll have to say no." Bob Pierce wrote on the flyleaf of his Bible, "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God." That's how *World Vision* got started...one broken heart.

In February, we're going to come back to this whole ripple effect idea as a church and look how God is at work in our world. Somebody was telling me this last week... One of the volunteers who is helping get us ready for that was reading to a group a poem by a woman who lives in poverty in our day. She was just in tears just praying, "God, could there be like a Spirit-powered revolution in our church?" One of the things God says is, **"I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."** It happens in a ripple maker. It's just am I willing to let my heart be broken, or would I rather just, you know, have my own little life be okay?

Then a second mark...we see this in Jesus...of a ripple maker is not just generosity. It is sacrificial generosity. Jesus is the most generous Person who ever lived. Jesus said once, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."** Paul once said about Jesus, **"Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor."** I'll ask myself sometimes, *Just honestly...just honestly...does giving feel like something I have to do because if I don't do, I'll get in trouble? Do I do it for like compulsory reasons?* Somebody sent me this this last week.

"Pastor Schmidt answers the phone. 'Hello, is this Reverend Schmidt?'

'It is.'

'This is the IRS. Can you help us?'

'I can.'

'Do you know a David Anderson?'

'I do.'

'Is he a member of your congregation?'

'He is.'

'Did he donate \$10,000 to the church?'

'He will.'"

You have to kind of think about that one for a moment. I kind of like that one. This is what the apostle Paul wrote. He said, *"Each of you should give whatever you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver."* Because that's the heart of God. Because God is Himself a cheerful giver. Because Jesus is the most sacrificially generous Person who ever lived. It didn't drag Him down. It gave Him joy.

Does giving bring joy? I mean, God is really serious about this. I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but I'll say it anyhow. If you don't want to give, just stop giving. There is no gun to anybody's head. Just do an honest experiment. If the truth is... If it feels to you like, "If I could just quit giving and keep everything I get and acquire more" just go down that road as far as you need to go down that road. Just run an honest experiment and ask the question...*Does hoarding everything I can...does the acquisition mode...give me a more joyful heart?* Just try. If it does, just go down that road.

But what Jesus would say is, "You know, real smart people with lots and lots of acquiring capacity have been farther down that road than you ever have, and they found out it's a dead end." The question here is...*Do I find myself...when I compare myself to other people, do I compare up, or do I compare down? You know, Am I looking mostly at people who have more stuff than I do (which then feeds that more, more, more, more) or am I looking at people who need something?*

Because then the desire to give just... You can't look at that with God's help and not have a generous heart grow inside you. Ripple makers are always developing a heart for people with less so giving becomes something their heart is engaged in. Ripple makers live with a growing sense of sacrificial generosity. Honestly, has that happened in my heart?

Another sign of a ripple maker. *Ripple makers live with a sense of what might be called sanctified dissatisfaction.* Okay? There is good discontent, and there is bad discontent. Ripple makers live with what might be called *sanctified discontent.* Let's get into it this way. Turn to the person next to you. Tell them the worst sin you ever committed. No, don't actually do that one.

I said that because I'm going to tell you about what I think would probably be my worst sin just in general terms. It would be selfishness. It is my propensity to put *me* in the center of my little agenda...my life. Then when I do that, life becomes about the pursuit of *my* dreams. Isn't it interesting all the language we have around that? "Follow *your* dreams." "Living the dream." "I'm living the dream."

Then what I want to do is get into my dream school so that one day I can have my dream job and then I can drive my dream car and that will help me attract my dream spouse. Then we can live in our dream house. Then we can have some dream kids. Then we can go on our dream vacation to get away from those dream kids. Then we can have a 401K so that one day we can live in our 401 retirement. Then I will die and have a dream funeral. Get laid out in my dream casket. Buried in a dream plot of dirt. Because if I follow my dreams, see, that's where it always ends up.

What happens is, if I'm doing this and God is part of my life...and this does happen, you know, for people...this sucks us in even if we're in the church. If God is in my life, then God's job becomes fulfill *my* dream. If it's not happening...if I don't get in to my dream school or get my dream job or my dream car or the dream spouse or the dream house or so...then it's God's fault. Then I start getting mad at God because He hasn't fulfilled my dreams. It gets all messed up.

The invitation of the Bible is not quit dreaming because you can't live without a dream. Dreaming goes way deep in the human heart. The invitation in the Bible is to quit making God the genie who is supposed to fulfill my dreams, to resign from the center of my life, to let go of my little dreams, and to hook my life to a much bigger and better dream. That is what might be called the dream of God.

I want to tell you about the dream of God. I want to dream the dream of God together as a church. Thousands of years ago, some powerless and impoverished men called prophets changed the world forever with words. Their words were a description of God's dream. The great old word for God's dream...the old Hebrew word...is the word *shalom*. Now it has mostly lost its bite and its edge and its audacity. We've turned it into kind of a greeting card word. It usually gets translated *peace*, but it's way bigger than that.

*Shalom* is where things are just the way God wants them to be...physically, spiritually, and relationally and economically. Now if you believe as many people in our day do that reality is nothing more than a random accident, a cosmic mistake which is evolving in darkness to some unknown future, then there is no way things are supposed to be. There is just the way I want things to be, and the way you want things to be, and the way things are.

But the prophets said, "No, there is a way things were designed to be because there is a Designer." They used not engineering language. They used pictures, images, metaphors, symbols, and stories to describe the way things are supposed to be. People beating swords into plowshares. So instead of using technology for violence or injustice, it's used for generosity.

The hearts of the fathers being turned toward their children. The hearts of the children being turned toward their fathers, as Malachi said. Images that will make you weep if you spend much time with them. They said in *shalom* people ***"will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by God."***

The reason the books of the prophets are hard books is the prophets lived in the pain of the gap between the way things are and the way things are meant to be...*shalom*. No one lived with this pain more than Jesus. Jesus, although He was the most joyfully generous Person who ever lived, I think you could also make a case that Jesus was the most dissatisfied person who ever lived. Not dissatisfied in His life with God...dissatisfied with a sin-wrecked world. Dissatisfied with the hypocrisy and the greed and the misused sexuality and exploitation and pride and deceit. He confronted it so uncompromisingly that it got Him crucified.

Now we live between the beauty of *shalom* and the pain of how things are. Sex trafficking so bad UNICEF says every two minutes a child is being prepared for sexual exploitation. That's not the way things are supposed to be. A story in the Associated Press last week...best estimates are right now a billion people in our world are desperately hungry. A child dies of malnutrition every six seconds. That's not the way things are supposed to be. There will be over a million abortions in the United States this year. That's not the way things are supposed to be.

So where do you feel this burning, sanctified discontent? Maybe it's over young people not getting a quality education. You look at young lives on a track to just get thrown away. It just cries out and says, "That's not the way things are supposed to be." Maybe it's over little children who don't have a home. You

say, "That's not the way things are supposed to be."

I'll give you an update on this one. We saw this months ago...the foreclosure crisis going on in our country right now. One of our elders sent me a story. The last three months not only has it not abated, the last three months have been the worst of all time in terms of foreclosures. Now right around this church, not so bad. You see the foreclosure action here. Those little flags just a couple of them run around our church. On the other side of the 101 Freeway, that's what's going on. Most of those homes involve little children. I just read about this yesterday. Now one in 10 people seeking help or relief from homeless shelters are doing it because they have recently gone through a foreclosure. Not the way it's supposed to be. God will stir up something in our hearts.

For sure you know that sanctified discontent will not just be about the sin that's going on out there. It will begin with the sin that's going on in here. If I get more riled up about the sin around me than I do the sin inside me, then I know I'm on a wrong track. The first ripples in a life are always ripples of repentance. Because Jesus did not die just for the sins out there; Jesus died for the sins in here. It starts with this unease...this dis-ease...this lack of *shalom*...in my own heart. If you've never asked Jesus to clean out the sins inside you... You know that's why He died on the Cross to pay the debt you couldn't pay. You can ask Him, and He'll do that today.

That leads to what might be called another mark of a ripple maker...*a sense of active dependence*. Now we're dependent on God but not in a passive way. We're active but not in an independent way. It's active dependence on God. Once more, see if you can spot the inaccuracy in this Bible text. These are the words of Jesus. Jesus says, **"I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.** Apart from Me you can still do quite a lot because of your natural intelligence and good intentions." Did you pick up on what actually didn't belong there? Jesus actually said, **"Apart from Me you can do nothing."** Nothing!

You know, there are dozens of passages about the coming of *shalom*...the way things are supposed to be in the Old Testament. They all share one feature. No prophet ever says, "If..." No prophet ever says, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if..." No prophet ever says, "Maybe someday..." No prophet ever says, "Might be... Could be... What if..."

The formula is very consistent with the prophets. "In that day..." "And in that day..." "And it will come to pass..." *Shalom* is coming. The kingdom is coming because God will have it so. *Shalom* is not a human project. By the way, when it gets turned into a human project...when it's just kind of a good work fest... human beings trying to force utopia on a community...it pretty much always ends up in disaster.

*Shalom* is God's project. I'm just a gopher. Therefore, it always begins in prayer. **"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."** In my body...in my family...in this church...on the streets of this town...on our playgrounds...in office cubicles...on streets where little children are running around...on the third floor of some little tenement shack in the Dominican Republic where a little eight-year-old boy is in a cage right now. Your kingdom come to that little boy; Your will be done with that little boy on earth as it is in heaven.

That's *shalom*, and it will come one day because it's God's project. It's not yours or mine. We ask God to use us in His project. Therefore, ripple makers do not get overwhelmed by the size of the problem and decide to give up, giving into discouragement because of the scale of the problem. It's simply not an option because it is not our project. We're not the ones who will make it happen. We pray, "Make up there

come down here. Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. God, use me. God, use me." There is this sense of active dependence. On our own, we can do nothing, but with Jesus...with Jesus... Now Jesus says, "My peace...My *shalom*..." See, He is saying something way more than just deliverance from anxiety or even deliverance from war. When He says *peace*, that's the word behind it. "My *shalom* I give to you, not as the world gives give I to you."

Then that leads to inconvenient servanthood. Whoever wants to become great among you...it's a good thing to want to become great...it's a good thing to dream...must be a servant. That's greatness in *shalom*. Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. There is a verse in Isaiah when Isaiah is speaking about the coming of *shalom*. **"How beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those who bring good news."**

In the ancient world, feet were not considered the most beautiful part of a person. They didn't... You know hygiene was a problem in that world. A lot of people couldn't have shoes. That's why washing feet was such a humble task. But it's part of the way prophets would communicate with these images, these stories. *Shalom* is so wonderful. The good news of it is so moving that even the feet of the one who brings good news of *shalom* are beautiful.

How beautiful are your feet?

A guy we know, Shane Claiborne, was saying... He worked for some time with Mother Teresa in Calcutta. When they were going into church, it was customary to take off their shoes. He noticed one time how deformed Mother Teresa's feet were. They looked so misshapen he actually at first thought maybe she had leprosy. He didn't dare to ask. Then one day while talking to one of the other sisters the subject came up. The sister asked Shane, "Have you noticed Mother Teresa's feet?" He said, "Yeah."

She went on to tell him that they get donations of shoes in Calcutta only once in a while. There are only just enough for each person to get a pair. When the shipments came in, Mother Teresa would sort through all of the shoes. She would look for the worst pair, and she would claim them for herself. Mother Teresa never wanted anybody to own a pair of shoes that were in worse shape than her own.

See we don't live in a world that appeals to that part of the human heart. We say around here, "We are the Body of Christ. We are the hands and the feet of Jesus." His feet were scarred. "How beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those..." His hands had nails driven through them. His side was pierced by a sword. His heart was broken for you. Though He was rich, yet He became poor for my sake...for my sake. He gave His life. He died on a cross so I could live. "Now," He says, "you go. You be My witnesses. You be My ambassadors. You care. Let your heart be broken. Let your feet be beautiful."

Let's pray: Now Heavenly Father in this moment in this silence, we just allow Your Spirit to speak to us with open hands and open hearts. We often distract ourselves with other realities, God, but we remember right now the brokenness, the hunger, the suffering all around us in this sad world. We remember every aching life is loved by You. Every little child is the object of Jesus' death on the Cross.

God, for so many of us, we'd have to say You have blessed us. You have blessed us. You have blessed us. You have blessed us. God, forgive us because we live in a part of the world that just tells us to keep trying to get more blessing and more blessing and more and more and more and more. God, forgive us and help us to die to small and petty dreams and offer our little lives into Your dream for this world and for this race You love.

Would You speak right now, God, to every heart? However it is You want to call people into a life of being a blessing for Your world, You call us right now. We say yes to You. We as a church, God, say yes to You whatever the cost, whatever the price because of what Jesus did for us. We lay our lives before You, our possessions, our time, our gifts. We can do nothing else in the presence of the crucified One. We pray in His name, Amen.