

Insights from Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein



BUILDING BRIDGES OF BLESSING

Understanding the Biblical Command
to Bless God's People



International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews®

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Building Bridges of Blessing

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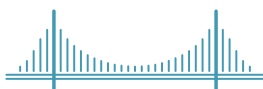
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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

When Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein launched the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews* more than 30 years ago, his vision was to build bridges of understanding between Christians and Jews, looking for ways to bring healing and reconciliation to a relationship that for 2,000 years has been fraught with discord, misunderstanding, and at times, hatred and fratricide.

But how? To find the answer, Rabbi Eckstein turned to the eternal promise that God had given to Abraham more than 3,000 years ago in calling him to leave his homeland and go to a new land:

*“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”*— Genesis 12:2–3

With Genesis 12:3 as the biblical bedrock of *The Fellowship*, Rabbi Eckstein has devoted his lifework to building bridges between Christians and Jews and helping others become bridge builders through blessing others.

In this study guide, we will look at what it means to be a bridge builder as someone who blesses others by:

- Offering hope;
- Extending acts of kindness;
- Guarding over the vulnerable;
- Treating others with dignity and respect;
- Praying for peace; and
- Standing for truth.

It is our hope and prayer that you will be encouraged by the teachings and challenges in each lesson, as well as be inspired by the stories of other bridge builders to bring reconciliation and hope to the relationships in your life.



INTRODUCTION

*“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people
live together in unity!” — Psalm 133:1*

When I was a young, newly ordained rabbi, fresh out of rabbinical school in New York City, I came to Israel on a tour with Christians — the first time I had ever shared this holy venture with anyone outside my own faith. My roommate was an 86-year-old black Baptist minister from Virginia. We couldn’t have been more different.

On my first morning back in Jerusalem, I walked onto the veranda overlooking the Holy City and tears rolled down my cheeks as I thanked God for the opportunity to once again be in Israel and have the privilege to pray in the land God promised the Jewish people.

Later that evening, when I returned to my room, I discovered my roommate kneeling in prayer, with hands outstretched to heaven. He hadn’t noticed me walk in. I watched him pray, tearfully thanking God, saying that he was luckier than Moses who had only been able to see the Promised Land, while he had been able to walk on these holy grounds.

At that moment, I realized that Jews and Christians have far more in common than I had ever imagined. This simple, yet profound, experience prompted me to dedicate my life to building bridges between the two faith communities based on our shared values and beliefs.

Amid criticism and obstacles from both sides, in 1983 I founded what would eventually become the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews*. As I embarked on this journey, I discovered that while Christians had a deep love for Jews and Israel, at that time, they had no way to properly express it. They longed to partake of the biblical promise in Genesis 12:3, “*I will bless those who bless you,*” but didn’t know how.

Jews, on the other hand, were fearful and even resentful of evangelical proselytizing. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of Jews did not differentiate between Christian denominations, assuming that all Christians were alike and wished harm upon the Jewish people.

Faced with these large chasms, I decided to build bridges armed with unshakeable faith in God's eternal promise to Abraham from Genesis 12:3 and the firm conviction that this is what God had called me to do.

Over the past 33 years, *The Fellowship* has grown from a one-person operation into the largest non-profit organization providing lifesaving social services to the state of Israel. We continually work to provide ways for Christians to bless the Jewish people, to understand the ancient Jewish roots of their faith, to support and stand with Israel, and ultimately, to partner with God in fulfilling biblical prophecy.

Inside this study guide, we will explore how to bless others by being a bridge builder — offering hope, kindness, protection, dignity, prayer, and truth not only between Christians and Jews, but wherever there is brokenness and discord.

In an increasingly polarized world that is hungry for peace and unity, my hope and prayer is that you will join me by becoming a bridge builder “*for such a time as this.*”

With prayers for *shalom*, peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rabbi Eckstein". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter of "Rabbi" being a large, prominent capital 'R'.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein



BLESSING GOD'S PEOPLE

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” — Genesis 12:3

In life, there are two ways to get ahead — either by raising ourselves up, or by pushing others down. Unfortunately, more often than not, people choose the latter option. Be it a colleague in a large company trying to ascend the corporate ladder, or a cruel dictator wanting to enrich himself, many people choose to better their own conditions at the expense of others.

This was exactly the choice facing Balak, the king of the Moabites. In Numbers 22, Balak was afraid of the children of Israel, and so he employed Balaam, a sorcerer, to curse the Jewish people. The king could have just as easily hired Balaam to bless Balak's own people. He could have asked for his people's strength, but instead he asked Balaam to weaken the Israelites. Unfortunately for Balak, his plan did not succeed, and instead of being diminished by Balaam's words, the Israelites were strengthened when Balaam's curse came out as a blessing.

Thank God for that! Because, ultimately, if Balak had succeeded in tearing down the Israelites, he would have only been hurting himself and the whole world. In Genesis 12:3, God promises, *“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* Blessing the Israelites brings blessings to the world.

We all have the choice to cut others down, or instead, build ourselves and others up. While pushing others down through gossip or the like may be tempting, it's only ourselves we are hurting. On the other hand, when we make ourselves better, everyone benefits. Similarly, when we bless others, we benefit from their blessings as well.

Genesis 12:3 has been a foundational biblical principle for our work at *The Fellowship*. We have witnessed this promise fulfilled time and time again. Our donors share the stories of blessings they have received — whether it's a financial blessing, a spiritual or physical healing — as they have blessed God's people, either by praying for them, providing a much-needed food box during the Jewish festivals or helping bring a persecuted Jew back to his spiritual homeland, Israel.

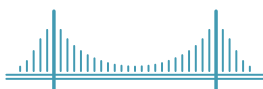
We all, Christians and Jews, can make the world a brighter place to live, not by diminishing someone else's light, but as we make our own flame brighter by adding light to someone else who is in need. That is God's eternal promise to each of us, and it is its invitation of *The Fellowship*, to come join us in blessing God's people of faith everywhere.

Let us all work together to make our light shine in the dark places of our world.

CHALLENGE

In what ways have you experienced the promise of Genesis 12:3 in your life? In what ways have you raised others up around you — whether at home, at work, or among your friends? Think of at least one way this week that you can bring light to others. Maybe it's by providing a much-needed meal, taking an elderly friend to a doctor's appointment, or encouraging a colleague at work.

Through the generous and compassionate support of our donors, The Fellowship last year alone extended lifesaving aid to 1.4 million needy Jews in Israel and around the world.



OFFERING HOPE

*They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. — Isaiah 40:31*

The book of Isaiah, Chapter 40, begins “*Comfort, comfort my people . . .*,” talking about events that would occur following the long exile of the Jewish people in Babylon and how they would eventually return home. By this time, after witnessing the destruction of God’s Temple and the fall of Jerusalem, the Jewish people would indeed have become weary and faint. But Isaiah promised them that God would renew this old and battered nation, giving them strength and carrying them home “*on wings like eagles.*”

Later in Isaiah 60:8, we read, “*Who are these that fly along like clouds, like doves to their nests?*” Nearly 800 years ago, the Jewish commentator Rabbi David Kimhi explained that this verse referred to the Jewish people who had been exiled from the land of Israel after the destruction of the Second Temple and their eventual return to Israel in the future. They would come swiftly like clouds in the sky and fly like birds returning to their nest.

I often wonder how people understood these verses for thousands of years. How did Jews interpret the idea of “flying like eagles”? What did these verses mean to the persecuted Jews of Europe or the victims of the Spanish Inquisition? How did they ever conceive that they would return home to Israel? How was it possible that they could literally fly away from exile back to their homeland?

Yet 3,000 years later, we can see clearly what Isaiah’s prophecies meant as Jews from the four corners of the world are returning to their spiritual

homeland through the miracle of modern-day flight. Yes, they are soaring “*on wings of eagles*.” Yes, they are returning “*like doves to their nests*.”

However, the children of Israel who left Egypt for Israel also went on “*eagles’ wings*.” In Exodus 19:4 God told them, “*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself*.” The children of Israel certainly didn’t fly on airplanes, so there must be an alternate meaning as well.

The Jewish sages explain that the majority of birds carry their young in their claws because they are afraid of high-flying predators that soar above them. But no bird flies higher than the eagle. So the eagle carries its young on its wings. The eagle places itself between its young and any danger from below. Likewise, during the Exodus, God carried His children from slavery to freedom, from suffering to redemption, into a land of hope and salvation.

Like an eagle, no one is higher than God. And like an eagle, He protects His children with love. Today, God continues to bring Jewish people back to their homeland “*on wings of eagles*” — with miracles, compassion, and love. In the same way, God carries all His children to where they need to be in life. Moreover, He gives us the opportunity to partner with Him by carrying each other with generosity and kindness.

CHALLENGE

Just as the Jewish people belong in Israel, we all have a place where we belong and thrive the best. Maybe that means finding the right job, meeting the right person, or getting proper medical treatment. And just as we can partner with God in bringing Jewish people to Israel, we also can serve as bridges for the people in our lives as well, helping them get to where they need to be.

How might you help someone discover his or her true vocation? Perhaps you can set up a meeting, mentor a young person, or point someone in the right direction. Sometimes God places us exactly where we are — with our talents, resources, and wisdom — so that we might help another person get to where he or she is meant to be.

Building Bridges — On Wings of Eagles

On Wings of Eagles assists needy Jews in making aliyah (immigrating to Israel) to escape anti-Semitism and extreme poverty, and to find new hope in their biblical homeland. Last year, The Fellowship helped 20,000 immigrants come to Israel from the former Soviet Union, Germany, Turkey, the Middle East and other countries, including 400 immigrants from war-torn Ukraine.



Rina, Mariupol, Ukraine

At 56, Rina decided to make *aliyah*, leaving her hometown of Mariupol, Ukraine. Her husband had passed away, her son was married with his own family, and many of her friends had already left. Still young enough to work, Rina knows that at her age it won't be easy to find a new job. She worked for 20 years as a preschool teacher in Ukraine and hopes she can find a similar job in Israel.

“In Mariupol, you never know what is going to happen. How can you live like that? But Israel opens her arms and gives us an opportunity to move and live there, and for that I'm very grateful,” she says.

From the moment she landed in Israel, Rina has been amazed and thankful to *The Fellowship* and our donors for all the attention and care

she has received. As she starts a new life in the Holy Land, Rina is so grateful that she does not feel alone.

Evelyn, California

After seeing a presentation of *On Wings of Eagles*, Evelyn said, “When I saw the elderly Jews’ living conditions — no heat, food, or medicine — I cried. I felt so sorry in my heart. I had to help. I bless God’s people every day. I don’t know how to thank God enough for this opportunity to help bring His people back to Israel. I want to obey God, but I give because I love them, too!”

“God has blessed me so much. I have such good health and am still strong enough to work as a caregiver to a woman who has Alzheimer’s. My children are well, although one daughter has Lupus — but I believe God answers our prayers and that He will take care of her.”

“What *The Fellowship* is doing is fulfillment of prophecy — for God to gather His people back together in their homeland. I pray that many people will be touched to give and to pray for Israel every day and night.”



EXTENDING ACTS OF KINDNESS

*“And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.” — Isaiah 58:10*

Hillel the Elder was a great Jewish sage who lived in the Holy Land during the first century BCE. He once was challenged by a man who asked, “Teach me the entire *Torah* while I am standing on one foot!” Hillel took up the challenge and replied, “What is hateful to you, do not do to others. The rest is commentary — go study it!”

Hillel’s reply was basically a flip-flopped version of the biblical command to “*love your neighbor as yourself*” (Leviticus 19:18). In other words, Hillel was teaching that loving others is essentially what the entire Bible is all about.

With that as our framework, we can better understand the context of Isaiah 58, where God — through His prophet Isaiah — chastised the people for their meaningless fast days. Outwardly, they were serving God. However God, who sees into the heart of everyone, knew that their worship was only superficial and He wanted none of it. What God truly desired for His people — both then and now — is to stop injustice, free the oppressed, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and provide shelter for the poor.

Kindness toward others is what God loves best.

In Psalm 118:19 we read, “*Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.*” Every person when he or she dies will stand in judgment. We will each be asked, “What was your occupation?” If one answers, “I fed the hungry,” they will answer, “This is God’s gate.

You, who fed the hungry, may enter.” If one answers, “I gave drink to the thirsty,” they will reply, “This is God’s gate. You, who gave drink to the thirsty, may enter.” And so on. All who performed acts of charity and kindness will gain entrance to God’s gate.

Helping others through acts of kindness has always been of utmost importance in Judaism; indeed, as indicated above, in the Jewish tradition, it is the entry ticket into God’s Kingdom. Isaiah said, *“Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.”* How can we honor God? By serving and helping others. As one 18th century rabbi once put it, “The physical needs of another are my own spiritual obligation.”

God counts on us to provide for the needy and to use what He has given us for the less fortunate. In that way, we show our regard for God as Creator of all people, share His goodness with others, and draw others to Him. In addition, we contribute to the overall mission of all humanity, which in the Jewish faith is known as *tikkun olam*, or “fixing the world,” by making it a place of goodness and godliness.

CHALLENGE

In what ways can we make a difference in someone’s life today? What can we do to reach out to someone else? Perhaps it’s by volunteering in a soup kitchen or donating clothes or other household items we no longer need. Or maybe we can spend some time with the elderly at a nursing home or cheer up patients at a hospital. Our good works need not be difficult or complicated. A simple act of kindness or word of encouragement can shine our light and bring honor to God.

Building Bridges — Isaiah 58

Isaiah 58 provides children and elderly Jews in the former Soviet Union with food, clothing, heating, and other necessities, and rescues orphaned and abandoned Jewish children from life on the streets by funding Jewish children's homes throughout the FSU. Last year, The Fellowship provided food vouchers and other lifesaving aid to 100,000 children and elderly in the FSU.



The Maltsev family, Russia

The Maltsev family lives in an old apartment in a remote village in Russia. Their apartment has broken windows, a leaky roof, and a broken heating system. It is not a suitable place to live during Russian winters, especially for a family with small children, but it is all they can afford.

The parents both work, but the money they earn is only enough to cover the most basic necessities. New clothing is out of the question; the children all wear clothes that have been handed down several times. Much of the family's food comes from their backyard, where they grow vegetables and keep an egg-laying hen. The family cannot afford to purchase meat from the supermarket.

Through *The Fellowship's Isaiah 58* program, the Maltsevs were provided with clothing and food packages to nurture their bodies and souls. Thanks to this assistance, the children have clean and new shoes,

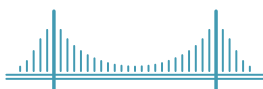
coats, underwear, shirts, and pants. They are able to enjoy their favorite foods — such as chicken and fish — and are so thankful that through these gifts, they are now connected to Jewish and Christian friends around the world.

Jay and Jo Anne, West Virginia

A dynamic couple with big hearts, Jay and Jo Anne were born and raised in the mountainous state of West Virginia. Having raised three children, they now enjoy their four grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

One day, while busy with office work, Jo Anne left the television on in the background. “All of a sudden, there was Rabbi Eckstein talking about *The Fellowship*,” she says. “I have a real empathy for any people group facing discrimination. I really felt the world should be large enough for the Jewish people. They have suffered enough.”

Jay and Jo Anne are wise stewards of their finances and like to make sure that organizations use their money with integrity. While researching *The Fellowship* before making a donation, the Goulds received four checks — all from unexpected sources — in one day. The most amazing part was that the amount of the checks was equal to the figure Jo Anne already had in mind to give to *The Fellowship*. Jay affirms her enthusiasm when he says, “It became pretty clear to us that God wanted us to give to the Jewish people!”



GUARDING THE VULNERABLE

*indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.* — Psalm 121:4

Throughout the Bible, it is very clear that Israel is a land special to God. In Deuteronomy 11:12, for example, we read, “*It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.*” God’s eyes are *always* on the Holy Land. The psalmist in Psalm 121 illustrated God’s vigilant providence this way, “*indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*” In the Jewish translation of this verse God is called “the Guardian of Israel” who neither sleeps nor slumbers. God is always on guard.

Elsewhere in Jewish writings, the Jewish sages discuss the difference between slumber and sleep. They differentiate the two states of rest with the following standard: If you call the name of a person who is dozing, and that person responds, he or she was in a state of slumber. If, however, a person does not respond when his or her name is called, we can say that the person is fully asleep.

With this understanding, we learn the following: When it comes to the land of Israel, God doesn’t wait for impending danger and people calling out His name in prayer and with pleas for help before He responds. Rather, God is always on guard, always protecting His people before the danger is upon them. He neither sleeps nor slumbers, making it unnecessary to get His attention. God is ready to help before the call of distress is even uttered.

Along the same lines, in Leviticus 25:35, we are instructed: “*If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them . . .*” However, literally translated from the original

Hebrew, the verse reads: “If your brother is lowered and his hand is failing with you, you shall make him strong . . .”

What’s so different about this interpretation?

In the general way that we interpret the verse, we are commanded to help out our brethren once they have reached rock bottom. In the more literal translation, we are asked to be pro-active — willing to help before someone sinks so low in the first place. When you see a person whose “hand is failing” — when you see that things are beginning to go badly for your friend, family member, or acquaintance — that’s the time to make them strong.

Here’s how the Jewish sages explain the importance of working pro-actively to help others with the following analogy. They teach that when a burden on a donkey’s back is shifting and beginning to fall, one person can straighten it out and allow the donkey to continue walking. However, if people wait until the donkey collapses from the awkward burden that it cannot bear, even five people cannot get the donkey to rise again.

Taking steps to help those who are struggling is far more effective than helping those who have fallen and call out for help. God is always on guard so that He may catch His people before they fall. We should do the same for each other.

CHALLENGE

Take a look at the people in your life. Who might be struggling with a financial, emotional, or spiritual challenge? What might you do right now to help lighten their burden before the situation becomes dire? How can we be guardians for those around us — whether it’s at work, at home, or within our faith communities?

Building Bridges — Guardians of Israel

Guardians of Israel provides food, clothing, shelter, housing and other urgent needs for all Israelis, including children and the elderly, who are suffering due to poverty, terrorism, and war. As part of this program 28,100 impoverished children were given new clothing for Passover and Rosh Hashanah.



Vladimir and Ida, Israel

Vladimir and Ida are Holocaust survivors who spent most of their lives in eastern Ukraine. They were proud of their Jewish heritage, but it often made their lives difficult. They faced anti-Semitic hatred on a regular basis, and it wasn't uncommon for them to hear the phrase "dirty Jews" called out at them as they walked through the streets.

The couple made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel) in 1994, and they were so thankful to finally be home in the Holy Land, where they were able to live freely and openly as Jews. However, they struggled to make ends meet, as they are elderly and cannot work, and must survive on a meager government pension.

When their water heater broke one winter, they didn't have the funds to fix it. They thought they were going to have to go the entire winter without a warm shower — until *The Fellowship* stepped in and provided the money to fix it. "All my life I suffered from anti-Semitism. It's so

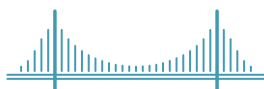
good to see that there are Christians who love us because we're Jews," Vladimir said. "Thank you."

Dana & Scott, Virginia

Scott and Dana met in veterinary school. Now married 16 years, Scott and Dana have shared their desire to support the Jewish people with their children, Caleb and Katie. In fact, the children help out during the summer, for pay, at Dana's veterinary clinic. "One summer Caleb and Katie decided to save 10 percent, or 'God's money,' in a special charity box for Israeli orphans," recalls Dana. When they sent the donation at summer's end, the children were excited to include a picture of themselves holding the box.

For big-hearted dreamers like Dana and Scott, *The Fellowship* has provided a way to "give the Israeli people immediate relief and real hope for a bright future." Says Dana, "Not only can these people be removed from anti-Semitic countries, but also, through the programs of *The Fellowship*, they will have all they need to integrate into society when they reach their promised land."

Dana and Scott stand firm in their commitment to contribute toward such lasting change. It is little wonder that they are passing on their convictions to their children, helping them carry on the family legacy of love, respect, and faith in action.



TREATING OTHERS WITH DIGNITY

“Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.” — Leviticus 19:32

It was a sad day for me when I stood on a crowded New York subway and watched as an old man boarded the train, cane in one hand and groceries in another, and no one moved from their seat. We would expect that in a moral society, younger and fitter individuals would have the decency to stand up and allow an older person to sit down. However, Scripture commands us to go even further and to rise in the presence of the elderly regardless if there are seats or not: *“Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly . . .”*

We rise to show respect for those who have lived longer than us. The longer a person lives, the more a person knows. The more a person has traveled the road of life, the more challenges he or she has endured. Growing old is not something to be embarrassed about or to hide; rather old age is an achievement worthy of respect and honor.

Notice that Scripture makes no differentiation between elderly who have passed the tests of life with faith and those who have grown bitter with age. It doesn't distinguish between elderly who have acquired wisdom and those who have drawn false conclusions from their life experiences. Why are we commanded to rise for someone who has aged, but who may have become bitter or made foolish choices?

No matter the circumstances, we show respect because every person is created in God's image and deserves to be treated with dignity — especially those in need of assistance.

In Deuteronomy 16:20 we read, *“Follow justice and justice alone . . .”* The Hebrew word used for “justice” is *tzedek*, the root of the word

tzedaka, which means “charity.” This is because when we help out another person, we aren’t just doing them a favor, we are acting justly. We are stewards of the provisions God has given to us, and it is only just and right that we share what is God’s with others.

In Deuteronomy 16:20, you will notice that the word *tzedek* is used twice. The Jewish sages explain that the repetition of the word teaches us that when we give *tzedaka* (“charity”) we must do so in a way that is *tzedek* (“just”). This means helping others in a way that preserves their honor and dignity. It means recognizing that we are all equal in the eyes of God. The beneficiary is no less than the benefactor. As it says in Proverbs 22:2, “*Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.*” I would expand upon this idea to include young and old, friend or enemy, Christian or Jew — all are children of God, and must be treated accordingly.

Following this same principle, whenever the Bible directs us to give charity to those in need, the Hebrew word used to describe the poor man is “your brother.” Whether we are lending a hand to anyone in need or standing up in respect for the elderly, we need to see all vulnerable people in our society as part of our family — deserving of our love, respect, and dignity.

CHALLENGE

Psalm 24:1 teaches, “*The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it.*” When we adopt this perspective it becomes clear that it is only right and just that we use what we have to help others. When we have this attitude, we no longer look at those we “help” as victims who are somehow less worthy than ourselves. Rather, we look at those we share with as our equals, deserving of our assistance and respect. How does this teaching change your view of the homeless? How can you honor the elderly today? In what ways can you treat every person you meet as having been created in the image of God?

Building Bridges — With Dignity and Fellowship

In 2013, The Fellowship launched its newest initiative, With Dignity and Fellowship, to provide food, medicine, and companionship to the neediest elderly of Israel, including Holocaust survivors. As part of that program, last year 190,637 Israelis were blessed with the gift of food.



Chaya, Israel

Chaya is an elderly woman, living alone in a run-down apartment with few visitors stopping in to see her. Unfortunately, at her age, Chaya can no longer work. She has no savings left and must live off a meager government stipend of \$600 a month. “With property tax, medication, and utilities piling up each month, I had no money for food,” Chaya said. “I was about to give up, when *The Fellowship* entered my life and saved me from the hunger that I was beginning to become accustomed to.”

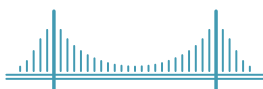
Every month, Chaya receives a credit to order food from a *Fellowship* catalogue. The catalog also has dozens of household items that Chaya can choose to order, and everything is delivered directly to her door so that she doesn't have to carry heavy shopping bags home.

“I cannot begin to thank *The Fellowship* enough for the food and household assistance I have been receiving,” Chaya said, her voice filled with emotion. “You have literally saved my life.”

Beth and Arthur, Texas

Lifelong partners in marriage and ministry, Arthur and Beth show what “love in action” can do. Over a year ago, Arthur and Beth came across a letter from *The Fellowship*. “We couldn’t believe that Holocaust survivors who’d already gone through so much were now in need of basic things like food, clothing, and shelter!” The couple became partners with the ministry. “We can’t even begin to describe the blessings that have been bestowed upon us since we’ve begun giving,” relays Beth. Giving has become a family affair now, with Beth’s parents and her older son joining in the cause.

“God has not forgotten His people,” relays Arthur. “Jesus was a Jew. The Christian faith has many roots in Judaism. The more Christians study the traditions and culture of the Jewish faith, the more deeply they can understand their own faith. I love the Jews. God loves the Jews and has a special plan for them. Our part is to love and support His chosen people.”



PRAYING FOR PEACE

At that time I pleaded with the LORD — Deuteronomy 3:23

Prayer is the most powerful force on earth — it has the power to save lives, reverse fortunes, achieve forgiveness, and bring about peace. But just how powerful is one prayer? One hundred prayers? Or just one more prayer than we have already said? For that answer, we turn to the book of Deuteronomy where Moses prayed to enter the land of Israel.

Moses pleaded with the Lord to let him into the Promised Land. He begged the Lord over and over again. In fact, the Jewish sages teach that Moses prayed the same prayer 515 times! But why did he stop there?

A few verses after Moses' prayers, we read that the Lord said to Moses, *"That is enough . . . Do not speak to me anymore about this matter"* (v.26). Was God bored of the same prayer? Was He fed up with Moses' nagging requests? Certainly not! God loves each and every prayer that emerges from our lips. When God told Moses to stop praying, the implication was that if he had continued, God would have had no choice but to grant Moses' request!

God had good reasons — albeit reasons we don't necessarily understand — for not allowing Moses to enter the land of Israel, so He put an end to Moses' prayers. The sages teach that if God had let Moses continue, the power of prayer would have "forced" the hand of God and upset His grand plan for humanity.

On the other hand, we learn from the Exodus story that prayer was the necessary ingredient for implementation of God's great plan for the world. It's only after *"The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God"* (Exodus 2:23), that the wheels of redemption were put into motion.

Right after the Israelites called out to God, God appeared to Moses, and redemption was underway.

The incredible lesson we learn from these verses is the power of just one prayer. Sometimes all it takes is one prayer, and other times it takes just one *more* prayer. Either way, we should never give up praying for what is in our hearts. The sages teach when it comes to prayer, we have to be like children who nag their parents over and over again. We have to ask, and ask, and ask again. Eventually, if we ask enough, and our prayer is in our best interest, our Father in heaven will answer us.

But does this mean that God is like a pushover parent who gives in to whining and nagging?

Not at all. It's not that we get God to change His mind with our repetitive prayers. It's that we change *ourselves* through our many prayers. We become closer to God, and we learn to value what we pray for — be it health, sustenance, peace in our families, or the peace of Jerusalem. We transform ourselves through prayer, and once we change, God can change anything.

CHALLENGE

What have you been praying for? You can judge what matters to you most by what you ask God for. Are your prayers in line with your values? Are your actions in line with your prayers? Use your prayer sessions as a way to improve your own character. Through appreciating who God is and understanding what is most important to us in life, we can become better people and better servants of God. Keep praying, keep believing, and keep improving.

Building Bridges — The Prayer Team

The Fellowship Prayer Team unites Jews and Christians around the world to raise a chorus of prayer to God for the security, well-being, and protection of Israel and the Jewish people.



Parastu, Tel Aviv

At the age of 24, Parastu and her husband, Motti, decided the time had come for their family to make *aliyah* (immigrate to Israel) from Iran. It was dangerous and difficult, but after months of planning, Parastu, Motti, and their two children were able to sneak out of the country and begin their new lives in the Holy Land.

“Our hearts overflowed with joy as we landed in Tel Aviv,” Parastu said. But despite their happiness at finally being in their true home, the family faced new challenges making a new life in Israel and finding employment.

Parastu learned about *The Fellowship’s* program to help immigrants attend the Hadassah School for Dental Assistants and Hygienists. Through this program, *The Fellowship* subsidizes a portion of the tuition for poor immigrants who are qualified, but do not have the means to pay, and helps turn these immigrants into young professionals.

“This was the answer to our prayers,” Parastu enthusiastically explained.

“With *The Fellowship’s* help, I would be able to study to become a hygienist, a dream I never thought could come true.”

Varitema, California

As a young girl growing up in the beautiful Fiji Islands in the South Pacific, Varitema recalls having a keen interest in world news and listened to the radio whenever she could. As she listened, she was especially dismayed by events taking place in Israel. “I remember crying, sobbing even, hearing how the Israeli soldiers were trying to protect the small country. I knew from reading the Bible that the Jews were God’s chosen people. It just broke my heart that they had such fierce enemies.”

Now in her 40s, Varitema has had a long career as a live-in caretaker. “God has blessed me so much,” she says. “I remember receiving a mailing about *The Fellowship*. My heart went out to these people the moment I heard what they are going through. I prayed, ‘God, please let me help!’” She recalls the compassion she felt for the Jewish people: “I want to help in every way — whether it’s in the soup kitchen or the bomb shelters, with children or the elderly.”

Varitema urges Christians everywhere to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. “God is so big. So *real*,” she says with wonder. “We must never forget to pray for Israel. If we will pray, God will hear us and answer our prayers for our brothers and sisters there.”



STANDING FOR TRUTH

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch. — Isaiah 62:1*

To many people, the word “kosher” refers to those foods permissible to eat and those forbidden by Jewish law. However, in modern Hebrew, the word “kosher” can also mean “strong,” “proper,” and “worthy.” Kosher is not just a label that validates food; it’s a term that confirms a person’s character.

The connection between kosher food and a “kosher” person goes a step further. According to the biblical laws, two requirements are needed for a fish to be considered kosher — it must have scales and fins. These physical attributes of a fish also have spiritual counterparts for people.

Scales are a fish’s protective coating and correspond to the spiritual protection God provides for all who trust in Him. Fins give fish the ability to swim against the current. Similarly, anyone who makes God his or her Master and is willing to go against the crowd is called “kosher” — strong, proper, and worthy.

In Isaiah we read: *“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet . . .”* Over the years, I have often heard people claim, “I love Israel. I love the Jewish people.” However, it is not enough to love Israel in our hearts. Israel needs us to love her with our voices and actions. She needs people who are willing to stand up and to speak the truth even if their voices are shaking. We need people of conviction — people who are “kosher.”

In Genesis 11, when we are first introduced to the patriarch Abraham,

we learn that his brother, Haran, died in Ur. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham's father was an idol-maker. One day, Abraham was left in charge of the shop. At that time, Abraham already believed in the one Holy God, and so seizing the opportunity, he destroyed every idol except one. Abraham placed a stick in the hand of the surviving idol, and when his father returned and angrily demanded what happened, Abraham pointed to the idol and said, "He did it!"

As punishment, Abraham's father brought him to Nimrod, king of Ur, and Abraham was immediately cast into a furnace. Miraculously, Abraham emerged completely unharmed. Seeing this, his brother quickly decided to also renounce idolatry, and Haran, too, was thrown into the furnace. Only this time, there were no miracles. He perished in the flames.

The sages explain that Abraham was deserving of a miracle because he acted out of his conviction and moral integrity; however, Haran saw the incident as a power struggle between Abraham and Nimrod. He was only interested in being on the winning side.

The world loves a winner, but God loves a person of conviction. Like Abraham, let us strive also to be people of conviction — "kosher," upright, and unafraid to speak the truth.

CHALLENGE

It's not always easy to speak the truth. But the real challenge is knowing when to speak and when to remain silent. The rabbis advise that before speaking the truth, we should first question our motives: Am I speaking for the sake of God and truth, or am I speaking for personal gain and validation? The second question is equally important: Will anything good come from this?

Think of a situation right now where truth is needed and consider how you might speak into that situation. Carefully consider your motives and the possible outcome; then pray God will give you the right words.

Building Bridges — Stand for Israel

Stand for Israel *aims to engage people both spiritually and politically on behalf of Israel and the Jewish people, by encouraging them to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” and providing them with the facts they need to advocate for the Jewish state and fight anti-Israel bias in media.*



Yvette, Ashkelon

Yvette and her husband have lived in the beautiful and quiet seaside city of Ashkelon. Recently, however, their lives took a frightening turn after Hamas terrorists in Gaza were able to obtain long-range missiles that allowed them to target Ashkelon.

“We only have a 15-second warning between the ‘code red’ siren and the rocket strike. No one goes too far from the bomb shelter in our building,” Yvette said. Additionally, their building bomb shelter was badly in need of repairs and lacking in basic necessities such as food, water, electricity, and plumbing.

The Fellowship stepped in to renovate the shelter, along with thousands more throughout Israel. Yvette is deeply grateful to donors of *The Fellowship* for their invaluable, life-changing support. “You’ve done more than we could have imagined,” she says. “It’s a wonderful feeling

to know that Christians care. May you continue helping Israel and be blessed for your efforts.”

The Pyles, USA

Yael Eckstein, Senior Vice President of *The Fellowship*, shares the following story of two Christian donors who responded immediately upon hearing the need for more bomb shelters during the war with Hamas in 2014.

I met these amazing people — the Pyles — and told them about the situation in Israel. I explained that when the rocket attacks from Gaza began and the sirens sounded, I sat in my stairwell with my three children because I didn't have a bomb shelter . . . likewise, many others in Israel live without bomb shelters.

Mrs. Pyle looked at me and said, “I've been saving up money to renovate my kitchen for the past ten years. I have exactly \$13,000 (the amount a bomb shelter costs). This is from God. Instead of renovating my kitchen, I'm building a shelter for the people of Israel.”

It goes without saying that the contribution of a bomb shelter literally saved lives. But, as Yael said, “Do you know what kind of message this generosity also sends to the people of Israel? It tells us that we are not alone — that there are Christians around the world who love us and support us.”

BUILDING BRIDGES, SAVING LIVES

The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews was founded in 1983 by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein to promote understanding between Christians and Jews, and to build broad support for Israel through these ministry programs:

BLESSING JEWS IN NEED AROUND THE WORLD



Isaiah 58.



- ***On Wings of Eagles*** — Helping bring Jews to the Holy Land
- ***Isaiah 58*** — Providing lifesaving aid and assistance to impoverished Jews in the former Soviet Union
- ***Guardians of Israel*** — Assisting needy Jews in Israel with food and other lifesaving needs and providing security against terror attacks

UNDERSTANDING THE JEWISH ROOTS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

למוד Limmud



- Devotions and Hebrew Word of the Day from Rabbi Eckstein
- ***Limmud***, online monthly biblical studies
- Teaching videos on the Jewish roots of Christianity
- Online resources on Jewish holy days and festivals
- ***Holy Land Moments*** daily radio program on Jewish life, culture, history, and faith

ADVOCATING FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL



- ***Stand for Israel*** — Mobilizing support to stand with Israel through advocacy
- ***Fellowship Prayer Team*** — Joining in prayer for Israel
- ***Israel in the News*** — Covering issues of the day relevant to Israel and her people

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BUILDING BRIDGES OF BLESSING

Understanding the Biblical Command to Bless God's People

"I will bless those who bless you." — Genesis 12:3

It took a visit to the Holy Land with an elderly African American Baptist preacher to help the newly ordained Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein realize that Christians and Jews had much in common — a shared love for Israel, for God, and the ancient roots of their faith. Since that time, Rabbi Eckstein has devoted his lifework to providing ways for Christians to bless their Jewish brothers and sisters and to helping people of faith become bridge builders. Discover how you can bless others in your life through offering hope, extending kindness, protecting the weak, respecting others, praying, and standing for the truth.



RABBI YECHIEL ECKSTEIN

In 1983, Rabbi Eckstein founded the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (The Fellowship)*, devoting his life to building bridges of understanding between Christians and Jews and broad support for the state of Israel. He is an internationally respected Bible teacher and acknowledged as the world's leading Jewish authority on evangelical Christians. Under his leadership, *The Fellowship* now raises over \$125 million annually, making it the largest Christian-supported humanitarian nonprofit working in Israel today.

Rabbi Eckstein is the author of 10 highly acclaimed books, including *How Firm a Foundation: A Gift of Jewish Wisdom for Christians and Jews*, and *The One Year® Holy Land Moments Devotional*. His newest book, *Passover — An Inspirational Guide* was released in March 2015, and an authorized biography titled *The Bridge Builder: The Life and Continuing Legacy of Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein*, written by respected author and journalist Zev Chafets, was released in August of the same year. In addition, he is a renowned Israeli Hasidic singer and has recorded four CDs. His daily radio program, *Holy Land Moments (Momentos en Tierra Santa)*, is now heard in English and Spanish on more than 1,500 stations on five continents, reaching more than 9.1 million listeners weekly.