

The Meaning of Blessing Prayer

Bless the Lord—And Each Other

By Alvin VanderGriend

It all started with prayer—the prayers of a church to bless its neighbors. I was privileged to pastor this new church plant in a Chicago suburb, a church committed to prayer and evangelism. Our building was in the middle of a new housing development with many unchurched families.

Our evangelism team and church leaders spent hours in prayer asking God to help us reach those neighbors for Christ. I remember the joy of kneeling with that evangelism team in a circle on a rug in the center of a living room as we poured out our hearts to God for the salvation of lost souls.

God heard our prayers and gave us a unique outreach strategy. Within a few months the classrooms in our new building filled up with preschool children coming to our story hour. While the little ones spent time learning about God through songs and games, their moms spent time in Bible study groups. In the next two years, 52 of those young moms came to Christ. What a blessing!

And it did not stop there. Other churches inquired about our strategy, so we offered training for this new ministry called Coffee Break. Soon the ministry began to spread, first to the greater Chicago area, then throughout North America, and beyond that to South Korea.

Today Coffee Break is flourishing and has taken root in 25 nations of the world. Thousands are coming to Christ.¹ Talk

about blessing!

God's Nature to Bless

To bless is to favor with a gift—a gift that brings the person receiving it comfort and joy. God loves to bless. It's His very nature. He made that clear to His chosen people—the Israelites—early in their wilderness journey by assigning high priest Aaron and his sons to raise their hands every morning and every evening over His people to pray:

“The Lord *bless* you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Num. 6:24–26, italics added).

Biblical scholars tell us that all the favors mentioned after the word “bless” in that passage simply expand upon what it means to bless. In other words, to be blessed by God is to be favored with His protection, His smile, His grace gifts, His watchful eye, and His perfect peace.

Along with these wonderful spiritual blessings, God gives us the added blessing of co-laboring with Him to bless the people of His world. In other words, we are blessed to be a blessing.

Shaping History

As mere humans we do not have the ability to supply the blessings that people want and need. But God does! So, He has given us a unique and special way to release His blessings into the lives of others. He has given us prayer—the ability to ask Him to bless those who cannot or do not pray for themselves. We can release His power and grace into their lives.

God has always used intercessors and their prayers to bless people and shape history. God used:

- Moses' prayers to help Joshua and the Israelite army win a strategic battle (Ex. 17:10–13)

- Elijah's prayers to stop rainfall in Canaan for three-and-a-half years and then to restart the rain once His people had repented (1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17–18)
- Daniel's prayers to return Israel to the Promised Land (Dan. 9)
- Watchmen posted on the walls of Jerusalem to prayerfully "call on the Lord" day and night (Isa. 62:6).

God still does today what He did throughout history. He uses ordinary people like you and me to rain down His blessings on our hurting and needy world.

Prayers Bring Blessing

Our prayers can be used by God to bring blessings in a variety of ways, from within our homes to the broader scope of our nation.

Blessings into the lives of children and families. When people brought little children to Jesus, His disciples protested. But Jesus "took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:13–16). In other words, Jesus released His Father's blessings into their lives through prayer. I am sure His blessing prayers made a huge difference in the lives of those children. Today, Christlike believers can pray to bring God's power, grace, and protection into the lives of children and families, friends and neighbors, teachers and schools.

Blessings to needy or hurting persons. Jesus told the story of a person who has no bread with which to bless a friend who came at midnight. Unable to meet the need of his late-night guest, this host went to another friend. He pleaded boldly and shamelessly until he received what was needed, and then carried it back to his friend in need (Luke 11:5–8). I call him the "friend in the middle." That is what we are, friends in the middle, pleading with God to supply needs in our hurting world, needs that we in our own strength cannot meet.

Blessings, peace, and prosperity to whole cities. God urged Jewish exiles deported to Babylon to pray in this way: "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:7).

Though we are limited in what we can do for our world, by means of prayer we can make an enormous difference. Our intercessory prayers can quell unrest, foster peace, avert disasters, and bring prosperity. Helmut Thielecki writes, "The globe itself lives and is upheld as by Atlas arms through the prayers of those whose love has not grown cold. The world lives by these uplifted hands, and by nothing else!"²

Blessings to leaders and nations. God wants His world to function as He intends, and prayer is a means to make that happen. Paul urged:

First, I want you to pray for all people. Ask God to help and bless them. Give thanks for them. Pray for kings. Pray for everyone who is in authority. Pray that we can live peaceful and quiet lives. And pray that we will be godly and holy. This is good, and it pleases God our Savior (1 Tim. 2:1–3, NIRV).

Those in authority include leaders in government, business, education, health, and media, as well as the church. Authorities exert powerful influence. Their decisions affect many lives. Our prayers can help give them wisdom, health, strength, protection, endurance, and much more.

Eugene Peterson writes about the value of prayer for leaders: "Far more of our nation's life is shaped by prayer than is formed by legislation. That we have not collapsed into anarchy is due more to prayer than to the police . . . to business prosperity or a flourishing of the arts. The single most important action contributing to whatever health and strength there is in our land is prayer."³

Bless the Lord

Our prayers are even a blessing to God—not that God Himself will be minus anything if we do not pray. He lacks nothing. However, He is blessed in and through our intercession. The blessing He receives when we pray is the glory He receives when He accomplishes things on earth in response to our prayers.

Jesus, in the final day of teaching His disciples, stressed that the grand scale purpose of intercession is to glorify God. Having promised that great things would happen if they asked “in my name,” He added that “the Father may be glorified in the Son” through such prayers (John 14:12–13).

Ole Hallesby synopsized that wonderfully, saying, “The fundamental law in prayer is this. Prayer is given and ordained for the purpose of glorifying God. Prayer is the appointed way of giving Jesus an opportunity to exercise His supernatural power of salvation.”⁴

When we think of intercession as more for God than for us, our outlook on prayer will change. Instead of asking, “What do we want from God?” we will ask, “What will bring God glory?”

When our intercessory prayers release God’s rich blessings in the world, God will be the first to be blessed. That is clearly what happened when the people of God in Israel were threatened by a vast three-nation army. Jehoshaphat led the people in prayer: “Our God . . . we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chron. 20:12).

God’s answer to that humble prayer came in the form of an astonishing victory that happened as a choir went out ahead of the army, singing praises to God and saying: “Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever” (vs. 21).

The Lord fought the battle that day and defeated the enemy.

Israel's intact army returned to camp praising the Lord, and God's people thronged to the temple to give Him the glory.

Release of Power

God's power is released from heaven through our prayers. His love is conveyed to people through our prayers. When we obey the call to pray, God does what only He can do!

The kind of prayer God expects of us is not the quick and easy, short and shallow, bless-me kinds of prayers so widely practiced today. Jesus planted the Church on earth to be devoted to bold and persistent prayer—and the world has been blessed through it. We are His Church, and He expects no less from us.

Sometimes, when I get a prayer request from a friend by text or e-mail, I respond simply by saying, "Count on me!" Today our friend Jesus is asking us to pray down His blessings on our world. My response to Him is, "Count on me!"

Are you with me?

1For questions or information on training about Global Coffee Break, visit globalcoffeebreak.org or contact program manager Juan Sierra at jsierra@crcna.org.

2Helmut Thielecki, *Our Heavenly Father* (New York: Harper, 1960), 109.

3Eugene Peterson, *Where Your Treasure Is* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 6.

4Ile Hallesby, *Prayer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), 127-128.

ALVIN VANDERGRIEND is the prayer evangelism associate for Harvest Prayer Ministries and a member of America's National Prayer Committee. He is the author of several books, including *Love to Pray* .