

May the Lord bless you and protect you.

May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace.

Why are our prayers about receiving the blessings of God? Why do we ask for things we need, want, or desire? Isn't it enough to have what has been given over what has not? With blessings there are so many questions. Maybe it's because a blessing is such a good thing. It's like receiving presents at Christmas. We love blessings and presents. It makes the day special and memorable. They say it's better to give than receive, but do we really believe that?

I wonder if life is fairly hard. We find curses and day to day living tough enough. I live in a strange part of the world. Calgary Alberta gets the weirdest weather. It can be -20 Celsius one day and plus 20 two hours later. They call them chinooks. Leonardo DiCaprio was filming here recently and he cried "global warming" because he had experienced these chinooks for the first time. I have seen 5 feet of snow fall and then melt away in a day. To me this is life, but to Leonardo it was the coming apocalypse.

A cold winter storm is a curse as it can make the winters seem so long. A chinook blows in and we feel spared for a day. Around here we long for the blessing of a chinook. I can't imagine living with winters for six months without them. We think of chinooks as blessings and the rest of the winter as a curse. In a way we long for the good weather and curse the bad. We attach blessings and curses to events in our lives.

The benediction of the Lord by Moses is a great prayer. It could be also called a blessing. We ask for more chinooks than storms. It makes sense, as who wants bad weather anyway? We pray for good times rather than turbulent. The turbulent tend to stretch and grow us, but in truth who wants that? The easy road is a less stressful place. We can take our time and enjoy the ride.

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Look at the benediction again because it says we want blessings, protection, smiles, graciousness, favor, and peace. Moses is asking for the good life.

Jesus in Luke 22, is praying to his father right before they came to arrest him. They say he sweated great drops of blood in his anguish. If you knew you were going to be whipped to shreds and sent to the gallows the next day, you might sweat blood. He cries out in anguish, **"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."** So much has been interpreted about what Jesus meant by that prayer. Maybe he was looking for a blessing.

If Jesus knew he was going to die, then why the prayer? Why ask his father for another way? I firmly believe it comes back to why he was here in the first place. There can be tons of reasons but for me it comes back to humanity. God could relate to us if he became human. He could experience sin firsthand, not by sinning, but by feeling the wrath of sin. Do you think the Son of God (as a human) could put aside deity and not feel anxiety and pain?

He was able, for the first time, to touch humans in their sin. He could smell death, and taste evil in the form of a whip. In my mind, Jesus wanted a blessing over the curse. The curse by the way is called a cross. It was considered the most humiliating death. On that cross they say Jesus bore the weight of all humanity's sins as he died. Imagine someone who knew no sin having it consume him on a cross as darkness came across the land. I feel darkness was compassion from God the Father to hide the horror Jesus must have endured in that moment.

My connection to blessings through Jesus is that he knows life here and he knows why we ask for blessings. God knows everything but to experience creation in our shoes is all together different. A prayer to heaven after Jesus died carries more weight. Why? Because God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit could now relate. It was more than just because they could bless us.

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Doing that is easy if you're all powerful. To put the weight of anguish, pain, and hopelessness on a prayer means so much more. It puts statements like Jesus carrying our troubles in a different light because he experienced what we did.

In the first chapter I talked about my friend Beth who believed that her good actions blessed her. I wonder if she considered Jesus' good actions of becoming a man. A powerful God could decide to give a blessing or curse based on any reason He wanted to. Maybe He liked a certain person or just wanted to kick someone because He "God almighty" was in a bad mood. If Jesus was God then he didn't need to do miracles. He didn't have to feel obligated to heal. It was not necessary to die on a cross. However, it says over and over how he felt compassion for the helpless. A God, like Jesus could help because he wanted to help.

Why does God bless? I think it's for two reasons. One is that he created us. We tend to cherish the things we make. The second is that He has walked in our shoes. I think real grace is forged through, care, compassion, and love for the things around us. We want to give people a second chance because of those things. I think it's that way with God too. It says in 1 John 4:19, **"We love because he first loved us."** God desires to bless rather than curse because he chooses to love rather than hate.

We ask for blessings for various reasons. I'd like to explore some of those reasons through our eyes and God's eyes. How do we ask for blessings through God's eyes? Well, it comes from what we know. Since humans existed, we have said a God or Gods exist. Some Gods demand a sacrifice while others do not. However, this God demands we act like Him because we are made in His image. Right from the beginning we have been trained to love first and hate second.

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In a nutshell, the God of the Old Testament is always asking us to come back to Him first. We tend to say He hates sin and gets angry a lot, but that is not true. I know my kid has said I always criticize or get mad at his decisions but that is not true. To him I am angry and disappointed in him a lot, but to me it is far and few between. I love my boy first, but he only remembers the bad times. In my love, I tend to think of the good times. I certainly loved him more than I ever hated him.

We tend to see God's angry actions far more than His good blessings. However, God's good blessings have been strong throughout history. They tend to be lessened because they appear slight rather than powerful. For instance, God hears the people's cry after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. To the people, 400 years is a very long time and it seems like God does not care. Funny that it says, "When God heard their cries." We tend to pray to God for blessings when things go bad. So maybe the cries were in the last 50 years. Then God acted swiftly, but we think it took 400 years.

Imagine His answer is to put them into a desert without food and water with their backs to an unpassable sea. How about adding an army bearing down on them? God opens the sea and saves them and they sing a song of deliverance in Exodus 15. Then right after that, in chapter 16, they say it would have been better if they had stayed in Egypt. Time is spread out in the Bible so how long is there between songs of praise and words of distain? I think the Bible wants to point out they grumble more than they give thanks. Yet, weaved throughout the stories is a theme: time and time again God is found saving them.

It's amazing that God put them in harms way at the Red Sea, but had every intention of answering their prayers. I think God loves to bless and makes sure we are a position to receive. That mentality is what I am talking about. We have heard the stories and been given the

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impression of God's goodness. We all believe God can give us the blessings we desire. Inside us, we truly think God can, has, and should deliver. That's why when things go wrong we know what to do next: we pray. So maybe putting us in harm's way opens a dialogue between us and God.

I hear non-believers say all the time, in tragedy, they are sending their thoughts and prayers. The ancient people in the Bible always asked to have their bones put into the Promised Land. We ask our children to be good or else. In a way, we are saying that if we don't do something, then bad things will happen. We send prayers to help the pain. We send our bones to give us rest. We are good so we don't get in trouble. There is an innate sense of receiving a blessing inside us. How often do we wish for blessings in the good times? We could say tragedy brings out the best in God and the best in us through prayer.

What are these things called blessings that we want so badly? They come in different forms, so how do we know a blessing from a curse? Imagine a plane falling from the sky and missing you by mere feet. That is a blessing, isn't it? What if your family was on the plane? That's a different story... or is it? It's still a blessing that you didn't die, right? From the beginning of the day until we sleep at night we judge all the events in life as blessings or curses. For a while I seemed to be a cursed driver. These days I am a fairly good driver. So my kids were cursed with a bad driver for a while, and yet blessed more recently?

I want something because it is nice, such as a TV. If I had the money to buy it, I might be sitting at home saying I am blessed. If it falls off the wall, then I feel cursed. I felt cursed in my trailer because I lost my house. I did not see the blessing of having a roof over my head. So is a blessing what we want? I guess it is for a moment in time, before something goes wrong. Then could a blessing be that period of time between curses?

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That seems crazy but half the time we are waiting for the other shoe to drop. I am certainly not a great Christian. Depending on who you ask, I may be somewhere from bad to very bad. I probably don't deserve to enter heaven. I read my Bible and pray for blessings. When good things happen I still think I don't deserve a blessing because I'm not good enough. I expect a ton of shoes to drop. When they don't I seem to be waiting for the curse. I wonder if that robs me of the full effect of a blessing.

Look at these three verses:

Matthew 6:2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Matthew 6:5 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

2 John 1:8 Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

Each of these Bible verses talk about a reward in heaven. We have been schooled to expect rewards for good work. If we do it right, then good will befall us. Look at the tone in the verses through the words. "Don't, watch out, and not to be like hypocrites." St Nick was as real as a man but his legacy is that we better not pout, we better not cry, because he is watching us. Throughout history we have been told the same thing in regards to God through rewards or blessings.

Check these verses out:

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2 Timothy 4:8 **"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."**

Matthew 5:10 **"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

"Blessed are those "who" is the key line. If we are good, then good things will happen in childhood and adulthood. In reality God always comes through, but it's the timing that sucks. God saves the Israelites but not until they suffer for 400 years. God allows a child to die but in heaven we will be reunited. I hate getting strikes at the end of a bad bowling game. I always say, "It's too late now." Some people would die for a strike. Maybe our actions determine the blessing. I doubt that but we tend to think that way. Depression seems to say, "I don't get or deserve blessings."

I get eight weeks' holidays. I think that's extreme, but hey who's arguing? When I had only three weeks it was pretty good but certainly eight is better. Many people in many countries get none. People tell me I better be grateful. Yes, that is true but year after year I have received more holidays and the gratefulness has become routine. What if a day off in Cambodia with pay is a miracle? Am I more blessed than them or are they more blessed than me? Our perception of a blessing is interesting.

In a way we are extremely blessed in North America. There is a saying that goes, "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth." It refers to looking in the mouth to check on the age and quality of the horse. It seems to imply the horse was a blessing and we should be grateful. Basically it's a blessing no matter what, but we tend to look at the quality of the blessing. Is it big or small?

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Eight weeks of holidays is a big blessing compared to one week. Still, I certainly felt excited to receive four weeks after only getting three weeks before.

Do we expect God to bless us? I have worked at *Canada Post* for 28 years so I expect to have more pension and holidays. Do I think I deserve them? In my heart I know I do. I have paid my dues and put in the time. I am grateful but probably not as grateful as receiving one day off while living in poverty stricken Cambodia. In the concentration camps of WW2 there was an expectation that God would deliver them. They prayed and held on to their faith. God did deliver them but not until 6 million of their countrymen died.

Some survived and some died. Were the survivors blessed and the deceased cursed? I have read that many survivors never survived mentally at all. Are they too, cursed? Is a blessing something we can say, saved us? In that frame of mind is death more likely a curse while a blessing extends life? To many in this world that might be true. On Vulcan they say, "Live long and Prosper." Isn't that similar to the benediction of the Lord? "May the Lord bless you and bring peace." These sayings have been there for thousands of years, such as Hebrew 'Shalom Aleichem' and the Arabic 'Salaam Alaykum' meaning, "Peace be upon you."

We call for blessings and hope for blessings. I believe we expect God to deliver blessings because He has in the past. They say he is the good Father of love. Loving parents always bless us. Bad parents tend to be curses. We pass on blessings to our friends, family, and neighbors, and we expect the same in return. Aloha means greeting or peace. The response is Mahalo meaning thanks and gratitude. The saying was made to compliment the actions of another.

Is it possible that we are saying to God, "Because you have blessed in the past, we expect more of that good stuff now?" We expect greetings and we expect a thank you. We have been trained from birth to expect these things. Traditions and words have been formed to guide us in

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the world of blessings. God and people should bless us because we believe we are good. Is that the way blessings work?

We all have different words that mean thank you or bless you. A person sneezes because they are sick and we say bless you. It's the shortest prayer I know to ask God to help them. It's also used to ask God to protect us. We are prepared to bless others and we ask God to bless us. It still seems to come back to a bad world where bad things happen. We have an arsenal of words and prayers we use in times of trouble. How often do we place curses on people or situations? The point is we don't very often.

I think that is because we have been trained to expect the good. We want the best in people and the best from God. I don't think this world is plainly evil or bad. I look at it more like we want blessings and don't care much for curses. Blessings bring us warm thoughts. A blessed greeting is wonderful. Seeing a smile on a face as we return the blessing is great too. It's like in scouts when they shake with the right hand. This depicts us dropping our sword and coming in peace. A blessing is an action of kindness maybe.

There are incidents where a good act turned out badly. Spock in the Wrath of Kahn died while saving the ship. He said earlier, "**Logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.**" However, his single selfless action cost him a curse but became a blessing to many. His action was kind but it killed him. There was a boy who was abused by his coach. He came forward and exposed that some coaches were bad. His actions caused us to rethink safety in the dressing room. To other boys, who wanted to remain silent, it became a curse. One boy's curse helped many but some of the many felt cursed by one boy's or man's actions.

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It's weird, but in a way there are good blessings and bad ones. Do all blessings make us happy? Maybe they do at first but blessings seem not to last very long. We gain a TV and it is awesome. The next day we find a car for sale that is perfect. There are now two blessings but the first is out of sight as soon as the new one appears. I tried three times this year to get the right present for my wife. They all were good choices, but each one had different drawbacks. The one constant was the thought of blessing her, yet I returned the gift twice trying to make it perfect. I was afraid my blessing could turn out badly. Isn't any gift good?

I remember watching the movie, "A Christmas story." The boy wanted a pellet gun. The family kept saying why do you want that, "You'll shoot your eye out." Ironically, they still gave him a gun for Christmas. So, of course he went outside, and while shooting it, a ball ricocheted and hit his glasses. He was blessed that it did not take out his eye, yet he got what he wanted. What a dangerous blessing. Maybe a blessing is only good if it works out okay. Is it better to get a blessing because we want it?

Okay, so a blessing could be an action. It could be a gift. Maybe it's an event that saves our life. It seems like blessings come from all over the place. It's hard to say they only come from heaven. We throw pennies in the water and make a wish. Who are we wishing too? Throwing salt over the shoulder is good luck. Finding a four leaf clover is too, and so on. There are tons of places we want to receive blessings.

Do they grow faith? If we toss a penny and our wish comes true, will we throw another? Is that the same with avoiding ladders, black cats, and spilling salt. Certainly most of these things are unavoidable. Do we pray that a black cat does not cross our path? They do say we should pray that the headless horseman does not cross our path. Somehow we have many things that

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could bring blessings. Why do we judge God by His actions? If the prayer works, then does it become pennies in heaven?

We certainly judge blessings by the success we have. I was blessed at the horse track today (as if). That rich man has God in his corner, he is so blessed with money. That gorgeous girl certainly is blessed with the perfect body. How about, "I'm chained to this wheelchair." I married the old ball and chain. An accident or bad marriage might not seem like a blessing. Is what's happening to us how we judge our blessings?

There are people who change their name to change their lives. A football star has the last name luck. Is that partly why he is a star? Do we make our own blessings? God helps those who help themselves. It's not in the Bible so why accredit it to God? Proverbs 12:24 says, "**Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.**" There are several scriptures that point to the relationship between work and blessings. Then we have the other side of the coin. Take a look at these verses:

Ephesians 2:8-9 "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**"

James 2:18 "**But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.**"

It appears luck had nothing to do with our blessings. Take a quick look at one more verse Deuteronomy 2:7: "**The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.**"

This whole talk about blessings comes back to who and why. We have been schooled to believe that someone nice will reward us for being nice. Nice people do nice things for nice

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people. Isn't that a nice saying? We do and they reward us. The Bible does not shy away from pointing out that blessings come from the Lord. There are enough scriptures to suggest that our efforts will gain favor with God. It appears that these actions grow our faith.

The way I see it, this is trouble. We believe our faith grows as God supplies. Well our faith in wishing wells could grow too. If we seek out a palm reader and they are right, then should we trust them more and more? We tend to attach success and blessings together. I suppose it's the proof in the pudding. Is pudding good? Sure it is because it contains milk, sugar, salt, and chocolate. These are all good things. Pudding tastes great too and that helps. Blessings taste good, don't they?

Malachi 3 has a curious set of verses:

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings. 9You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 10Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

Read it again. It seems to suggest that we do and God provides. It may say our faith will grow and our storehouse will too. We are to test the Lord to see how good he is? The questions are as follows. Is God commanded to provide? Are we commanded to give? Are our actions related to blessings? On and on we could go dissecting and analyzing scripture and blessings. Within it all is love, compassion, and goodness. God helps those who help themselves, right?

“Why does a dog lick himself? Probably because he can, right? A blessing is given because it can be. A blessing is received because someone gave it. A friend got a happy birthday

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greeting from me but felt disappointed there was no gift. A blessing is not what we want, desire, or deserve. It's what we receive from someone who cares.

How we handle the blessing and use it is in our hands. Some blessings become curses because we mishandled them. Some blessings are overwhelming because we didn't ask for them. Some have received a double blessing because they asked and received. A blessing is given because it can be given. What is sad is that we judge the gift when it is given in love. Maybe we have a hard time with love because it was given too little. Maybe we have a hard time receiving blessings because we are not interested in blessing others. How do you handle blessings?

I know someone who questioned me. I was helping a charity for free. It was a tough job in this charity. That someone asked, "Why am I bothering?" I was bothered that they were bothered at my generosity. What does that say about their heart? A blessing is what it is: a blessing. Call it a gift if you want. Blaming those who give of their time or for their own reasons is rude. In many countries a blessing seems far and few between. There is not much love in a heartless nation, accept all that you are given as a blessing. How exciting would it be to accept the day as a gift to be opened? That would be a blessing indeed.

A blessing is what you make of it. I suppose if you expect too much from it then disappointment might creep in. You could think everything is a blessing and miss the little things God and people do for you. Be a blessing more than a curse. Seize the day rather than rate it. Inspire others and be open to being inspired. I feel many blessings are missed because we are so busy judging the day. Living for tomorrow is okay, but living for today is better. Dreaming is fun but don't let, "Are we there yet?" rule your thoughts. Blessings are good if we let them have their place in each day of our lives. Don't make them more or less than they were meant to be.