

Be a Practicing Blessologist

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

Lord God,
let the words of your servant's mouth
and the meditations of our hearts
be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer.
Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Background

Our Scripture this morning is one of the oldest and most beautiful poems in all of Scripture. The blessings in this benediction are like a cascade and a crescendo—they progressively lengthen, expand, and grow—culminating in God's peace. One of the chief duties and privileges of the Levitical priest was to bless in the divine name of the Lord, blessing individuals—"the me" and blessing the community—"the we."

Peter tells us in his first letter that in Christ we are a "chosen people and a royal priesthood" set apart to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. And so this duty, this privilege, this command of God to bless is not just for priests and pastors, but for all of God's people. In other words, we're called and commissioned to be "practicing Blessologists."

I like how Bible scholar Gordon Wenham puts it in his commentary on Numbers.

“God’s permanent purpose is to bless all of God’s people.”

Since we’re all made in God’s image and likeness, this too is the permanent purpose in our lives—to be living channels and funnels of God’s blessings wherever we go.

Let’s hear now the word of the Lord.

Scripture: Numbers 6:22-27 (NRSVue)

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them:

²⁴ The Lord bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

²⁷ “So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – “Be a Practicing Blessologist”

The 11th century Jewish philosopher Bachya Ibn Pakuda once said,

“Days are scrolls, write on them what you want to be remembered.”

Blessology 101 trains us to mark our days and moments with *grace*. The practice of blessing helps us savor all aspects of our lives as la’chaim moments—where we say a resounding “yes!” to life and choose to see things from a divine perspective. We’re most human when we’re blessing.

We can learn a lot from Judaism about how to be practicing Blessologists. The Jewish tradition of blessing is called *brakoth*. The Jewish faith has blessings and prayers for about every life situation.

Each blessing prayer starts with blessing God first:

*“Blessed are you, Lord our God,
King of the Universe,
by whose word all things come into being.”*

Here are some examples of blessing prayers:

A blessing for good news:

*“Blessed are you, Source of all life, being good
and doing good.”*

There's also a blessing for *bad* news:

"Blessed are you, Source of all life, being the true judge."

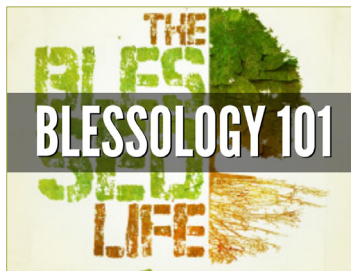
There are blessings for:

- *Hearing thunder
- *Travel
- *Blessings after going to the bathroom.
- *Blessings for sweet smelling perfumes.
- *Blessings before eating biscuits.
- *Blessings before lighting a candle.

I like how author and seminary professor Barbara Brown Taylor puts it:

"Start throwing blessings around and chances are you will start noticing all kinds of things you never noticed before."

We're never promised a bowl of cherries or a bed of roses. And we don't walk through life with rose-colored glasses.



There are no easy formulas or money-back guarantees ensuring non-stop success or incessant happiness. We also know there are times in life when we have to share difficult words—hopefully with grace and love.

But in good times, and especially in bad times, Blessologists liberally sow seeds of love wherever they go. It's a way of life. There's no better source for a Blessologist to draw from than Numbers 6:22-27. God coaches Moses and us on how to best bless. It's here we learn that God is the divine source and author of all blessings.

We're not the source of blessing, rather we're living funnels and channels of God's blessing to those around us. We literally place God's name on others. We pronounce God's name as a blessing, not a curse over others.

Always - "God bless you."

...

The blessings of God are three-fold:

– **First, the Lord bless you and keep you.**

We pray for God's protection over others. That God would take care of them, safeguarding them along the temptations, trials, and tribulations of our earthly journey.

– **Second, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.**

God is light. When God looks upon you, he shines. He lights up in your presence. You bring a smile to God's face.

– **Third, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.**

God's movement is **towards you**, not against you or away from you. God is favorably disposed to you, always dealing kindly with us. God is gracious and forgiving. God loves you and isn't ashamed of you. You matter to God. He pays attention to you. Each and every one of us is God's favorite—He looks upon all his children with favor.

God's **blessings** lead to the best thing for us—peace, shalom. Divine flourishing and nourishment. Well-being, goodwill, and soundness of mind and heart.

God's **shalom** is like a river that washes over us and spills into all aspects of our lives family, society, spirituality, our emotions.

His **peace** is for our going in and our going out, and everything in between.

We have a benediction after every service because it reminds us that we go into the world with the promises of God's blessings.

"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."

To use another metaphor, a blessing is like a pebble. A small pebble thrown into a pond sends out ripples that the whole pond feels. Being a practicing Blessologist sends loving ripples through our lives, our relationships, and our surroundings. We toss that pebble of blessing into each place we go and watch it ripple.

Blessologists regularly ask themselves:

***What kind of waves am I making
in my relationships?***

Blessologists have transformed mindsets and "spiritsets." We look at our world with grateful, hopeful, and thankful eyes. We see life as a gift, a blessing, an opportunity to learn, grow, and improve.

- The blessed life safeguards us from becoming jaded and cynical.
- We resist going down rabbit holes of negativity, resentment, and resignation.
- We seek healing.

Blessologists want to be a part of the solution.

- We forgive.
- We persevere through life's hardships.
- We can smile on the future.



- We create cultures of blessing and possibility in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and Church.
- We're kind to ourselves, too. Don't forget to bless *yourself*.
- Blessologists create healthy and transformative climates.

Blessing ALWAYS improves the air quality more than a curse. **Being blessed is a gift.** But it's also a decision, a choice, a practice, and a way of life.

As Proverbs 23:7 says in the King James:

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he . . ."

Being blessed doesn't depend upon our circumstances. In fact, Jesus says in the **Beatitudes** found in Luke, "blessed are you" or "happy are you" when **you're in need**, when you're **hungry**, when **you weep**, when **people hate you**."

Even when we're empty, our cup is full. But when we can't bring change or we're hurting, we accept it with serenity because we're blessed with God's peace "that passeth all understanding." We can keep moving forward with Christ!

I'd like to close with a powerful true story found in Barbara Brown Taylor's excellent book, *"An Altar in the World."*

She speaks of a friend who was tormented by a recurring nightmare for a number of years. It was so bad that he wasn't able to sleep the night through. His terror of having the dream kept him up, even if he didn't actually have the dream.

In the dream, a sinister being showed up at the door of his house wanting something. The monster would pound on the door with such intensity that the wood bulged. As this was going on, he would seek something in the house with which to kill this evil creature.

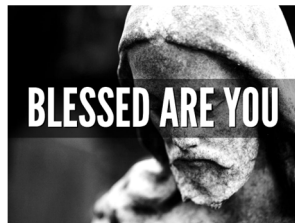
Each time he killed it, the demon grew even larger than it was before. And the pieces he hacked would get on him and begin to grow on him—like a festering infection, taking over his body. He would wake up from the dream drenched in sweat and utterly exhausted and traumatized.

One night—in *the dream itself*—it occurred to him that the demon was banging on his door to get a blessing. That would be the only thing that would end the demon’s harassment and agony. A blessing would be the only thing that would make this malevolent creature go away for good. Shaking with fear, the man swung open the door and said, “I bless you,” to the demon, “and I bid you go where God wants you to go.”

Saying it once wasn’t enough. He had to bless the demon over and over, repeatedly. In the dream it seemed as if he was doing it for an hour. It was like the demon couldn’t get enough blessing. No one had blessed him before. For the hundredth time he said, “I bless you in the name of Christ . . . Now go in peace.”

Making the sound of a kitten, the demon turned around and never returned again. That was the last time her friend ever had that dream. Blessing transforms evil.

We all need the transformative blessing of Christ over our own inner demons to tap into the better angels of our nature. Sometimes our external demons need Christ’s blessings to be transformed or bid farewell. This can apply to not only individuals, but churches, groups, and society itself. It may take time and persistence to overcome. Blessing frees us, to let go of those things that haunt us, and to embrace a life of freedom and joy. Let us be a people that bless under our breaths, rather than curse under our breaths.



And so Immanuel, as we part ways, may we ever and always be:

Living benedictions. Give thanks to God without ceasing. Bless your children and grandchildren at night. Whisper a blessing over a loved one as they pull out of the driveway or embark on a plane. Bless a stranger with a silent prayer. Bless your friends, bless your enemies. Bless the other political party.

In so doing, you’ll bless yourself and you’ll BE a blessing to your world.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” (Psalm 103:1)

Amen

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