

Apr 7, 2018

Psalm 67

Praying with God:
Praying with Purpose and Praise

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Today's Psalm starts by asking God to **ble**ss his people. When you think of blessing, **what** do you think of? Maybe you think of **ble**ssing your **meal** before you eat. Does a voice from the past or from a recent Holiday tell you to, "**C**ount your blessings"? Maybe you think of the last time you gave money to a **homeless person** or the **bell-ringer** for the **Salvation Army** and they said, "Bless you..." Maybe you've had a **priest** or a **nun** say, "Bless you my child" (that happens in the **movies** so it must be true). Someone gave us a **decorative** serving dish with the traditional Irish blessing:

*May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields
and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

Today's psalm, Psalm 67, also starts with a **ble**ssing. This is a Psalm of **corporate thanksgiving** and **praise** and it starts by asking God to bless the people. But the Psalmist doesn't ask God to bless his people for selfish reasons (like, "God would you bless us all with **Ferraris**.") but with a very specific **purpose** in mind.

May God bless us so that all the world may know him. (v1-2)

Growing up my **dad modeled** how to **pray**. He often prayed for God to **ble**ss my brothers and me. Now I pray for God to bless my family, the church, people I talk to. But **what** does that mean? What does it **mean** for God to bless us? I want to **break down** my first point to...

May God bless...

In the Psalmist's prayer, which was meant to be **sung** with **stringed instruments** just like a **worship song**, and like worship songs sometimes have **strange lyrics**, the Psalmist asks for God to **ble**ss and **shine** his **face** on his people. The two are **connected**. God blesses us **by** shining his face on us. The **concept** of God shining his face comes from **Moses'** experience with God at Mount Sinai. Moses used to meet with God **directly** at a tent outside the **camp**.

Exodus 33:11 The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. (NIV®)

But when the Israelites made a **golden calf** and worshipped it, God **threatened** to leave the Israelites for their sin of **idolatry**. So Moses made a **special intercession** for the people, and God had **mercy** and promised not to leave them. But Moses wanted a **demonstration** from God that he wouldn't leave them. He asked for God to show him his **glory**. And in response, God **reveals himself** to Moses, but **not fully**.

Exodus 33:19-20 And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." (NIV®)

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

I believe when Moses spoke to the Lord face to face in the tent, he was speaking to the **subdued presence** of God. Some think he was speaking to the **pre-incarnate** Son of God (aka. Jesus before he became a baby). The Bible elsewhere says that no one can see God and live (John 1:18, 6:46; 1 Tim 6:16). So to see the actual face of God is to see his **unsubdued presence**. At Sinai, Moses doesn't get to see God's face (essence) but God does go by him and Moses sees **his back** (Exod 33:21-23), and just seeing God's back **transforms** him.

Exodus 34:29 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.
(NIV®)

Moses' face was so **radiant** the people were **afraid**. After Moses told the people what God said he covered his face with a **veil** so they wouldn't see the glory **leaving** his face. But seeing Moses' face like this seems to have **impacted** the whole community because when the Lord **institutes** the **priesthood**, he tells the priests to pray this prayer for the people.

Numbers 6:23-26 "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

""The Lord bless you
and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.'" (NIV®)

So **how** is God's face connected to his blessing? *The blessing is God's face. God's face is his presence.* So when we pray for God to bless us, we're asking God to be **present** with us in a real and personal way, for God to show us his compassion and mercy and character, for God to show us his power. When God shows up, it changes us. When we spend time with him, our lives and even our physical demeanor can change. Have you ever been super stressed and you spent time in prayer and it relaxed you? The face of God is changing your face. Or have you ever been about to get angry at a family member, and you remember God's Word, and in obedience, you calm down? The face of God is changing you.

I was at Free Christian Church in Andover this past **Thursday** for a pastor's roundtable discussion. They have honorary paintings of their **previous pastors** on the walls (don't worry, this isn't a hint). One of the paintings was of my **mentor** who **died** several years ago, Pastor David Midwood. I read its **plaque**, and it explained that the painting was based on a compilation of photos of David, and in all of the photos he was **smiling**, so he's smiling in the painting. It's kind of funny because all the other pastors have serious faces. His plaque said, "He will be remembered as a man who loved God and lived to share Christ's love with everyone he met." Every morning David got up for about an hour and spent time studying, praying, and worshipping the Lord, and that time **with** the Lord is what filled him with joy for the rest of his day.

That's an individual application, but this Psalm is really a **corporate** Psalm of **praise** and **thanksgiving**. We **encounter** God through the Holy Spirit as we worship together, listen to God's Word together, and also as he directs our hearts towards Jesus Christ. God most **clearly** shows himself to us through the person of **Jesus Christ**. We see God's **compassion** and **mercy** most clearly as we gaze upon the **cross** and remember how Christ Jesus **sacrificed** himself so that we can live. Any who **repent** of their sins and put their **faith** in Jesus, God's face **shines** on them. So when we ask for God's blessing, we're asking for him his presence, and we can ask him to do this through Jesus Christ. But this blessing is not just for me, it's for us...

May God bless us...

Before I get to the purpose of this prayer, I want you to notice something. This **whole Psalm** is directed to the **community**. Every word and every phrase is directed to “**us**” or “the **peoples**.” “May God be gracious to us.” “May the peoples praise you.” Today the people of God is the church. God gives us these Psalms so we as a community can pray them together. You’ve heard the song, “**All by myself...**” That person needs **Christian fellowship!** Being a part of a regular church community is essential to the faith. Praying by yourself is good, but God actually calls us to **pray corporately** together. That’s why we’re incorporating praying together more into the service. *May God bless us...* But his Psalm has a **purpose** in the blessing.

May God bless us so that all the world may know him.

Why does God bless us in verse 1? The **reason** is in **verse 2**, “so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.” Now, this is a pretty amazing Psalm because the **Jewish people** were not **historically** known as a **missionary people**. But here the Psalm is asking for God to make his presence known among his people **so that** all the peoples of the earth may be saved, Jews and **Gentiles** (non-Jews). The **goal** and **purpose** of God’s blessing is to share the blessing with the whole world.

If we look back to the **forefather** of the Hebrew people, **Abraham** himself, we find the Lord telling him this very same message. **Genesis 12:2-3**

“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.” (NIV®)

Just like Abraham and the Israelites, we want God to bless us (to be present among us) so that we can **tell others** about what he has done. We want to be so **changed** by Christ so that when we speak to others about Jesus, they catch a glimpse of Jesus in our **eyes** and on our **face**.

In the fall I interviewed Bruce about how God uses him on his **frontline**. Your frontline is the place where you spend lots of time with people who don’t know Jesus yet. **Bruce** takes lots of **airline flights** and he likes to tell people the **story** of our church and how God has **blessed** us. According to Psalm 67, this is not only a **valid form** of **evangelism**, it’s **God’s form** of evangelism. Do you all know the story of Cornerstone? Do you know how God has blessed us as a new church in Westford? It’s an amazing story that you should ask Bruce to tell you. One of the reasons we “count our blessings” as Christians is so that we can give God the credit and tell others what he has done.

Would anyone be willing to **share** one way God has blessed you or **answered your prayer** this week? God’s blessing is a **demonstration** of God’s **presence** in our lives. **This week** I want to **challenge you** to think of ways God is **answering your prayers** and **blessing** you, and then to share how God has done so with a family member or friend. *May God bless us so that all the world may know him.*

May God bless us so that all the world may know and praise him. (v3-5)

Notice verses **3** and **5** are the **exact same** verse, “May the peoples pray you, God; may all the peoples praise you.” This is a Hebrew poem and it’s forming an **inclusio**, which is when a Psalm or section of Psalm begins and ends with a **similar verse**. *Inclusios* are meant to draw our attention to what’s in the center.

The outside, verses 3-5 is all about **praise**. May **everyone** praise you God! But what's in the **center**? The center tells us **what** everyone (aka. "the nations") is praising God **for**. Verse 4b, "for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth." When the nations hear of the God of Israel's **just rule** and how he **leads** his people, they praise him. But this isn't meant to just be an **outside** praise, this is meant to be praise from the **inside** as the nations join the **believing community** and become the people of God.

Have you ever had a **conversation** with someone who tells you they **don't believe** in God because of all the **bad things** that are happening in the world? They say, "Either God doesn't exist or God isn't good because he has let war, and disease, and genocide, and pollution, and evil things happen." I think we as Christians need to take a little bit of **ownership** for their **view of God**, because if we're not telling them about all the good things God is doing, how can they **know**?

As believers, we need to point out God's presence and blessing to those around us because they're not going to see God's blessings and presence on their own. When God **heals** someone from **cancer**, we need to tell others. When God provides a **mortgage payment** when money is low, we need to tell others. When God takes someone who is **drowning** in **addiction** and brings them back to life, we need to tell others. When God forgives someone of their **sin** and removes a **mountain** of **guilt**, we need to tell others. When God cures someone of their **pride** and **self-centeredness**, we need to tell others. When God shows up in the **big things** or the **small things**, we need to tell others because we want them to **praise Jesus** too! *May God bless us so that all the world may know and praise him.* Last verses...

May God bless us and meet our needs so that all the world may know and praise him. (v6-7)

The last two verses speak of the land yielding its "**harvest**" and the whole earth "**fearing**" him. I think the fear it's talking about is one of **awe** and **reverence** for what God can **provide**. I like how verse 6 pulls us back into **reality**. God does want to provide for us spiritually, to be in his presence and to have God's presence in our lives, but sometimes that seems a bit **intangible**. God provides for our **human needs** as a way to demonstrate his goodness and power. This is why I've already mentioned God healing our **sin** but also our **sickness**. Our God is not just a God of the clouds, but of the **everyday**.

When God provides for our material needs, we should praise him. As we're approaching the end of our **ministry year**, let's give praise for all the gifts God has given us and all the ways he has provided for us **financially** and for the **budget**. So here's my closing **big idea**.

May God bless us and meet our needs so that all the world may know and praise him.

Last week I asked Bernie to say the closing prayer to the sermon, but this week, since this is a **corporate** Psalm of **praise** and **thanksgiving**, I want to ask all of you to pray together. In response to the message, please pray with those sitting next to you or near you by filling in these two blanks. You're free to sit by yourself, but I hope none of you will pray alone. First, we start by remembering God's blessing and then we pray for the nations. "God, thank you for blessing _____. Would you help me share this blessing with _____?" For example, "God, thank you for blessing our church with a wonderful **Easter breakfast**. Would you help me share this blessing with people who ask me about my Easter." The **worship team** will lead us forward when it's time. Let's pray.

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church.
Click to listen to more sermons or to read our story.*