

## DAY ONE

# Bless the Lord!

*Psalm 103:1 (ESV)*

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!”*

*Psalm 34:1 (ESV)*

*“I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

### REFLECT

As we begin our 2022 prayer week, we want to refocus on what new things lie ahead. As we hopefully return to some semblance of normal (viz., returning to the classroom and workplace, and re-engaging relationships with neighbours and friends), we want to pray for new vision and increasing passion for entering these spaces as image-bearers of Jesus. Our prayer theme this week is BLESS!

The words “bless” and “blessed” are all over the Bible, showing up 427 times in the NIV. Blessing normally involves a **verbal proclamation** over someone that expresses a desire that God would intervene for their ultimate well-being. But blessing must also, when possible, involve **actions that help bring about that well-being**. Normally God blesses people, or priests and leaders bless people—but we begin our prayer week with the unusual biblical command to “Bless the LORD.” In this context, the word bless seems to mean “worship,” “praise,” or “extol.”

We begin our prayer week with worship prayers to the one who gives us physical and spiritual life, salvation, community, meaning and purpose! We bless the Source of Life—the Bread of Life—the Living Water! We verbally speak and sing this blessing upward in the direction of Jesus. We bless the LORD as we sit, stand, kneel, and walk. We bless the LORD in our hearts and homes—and we bless the LORD as we gather together with other disciples of Jesus. We bless the LORD in sorrow and in joy; in suffering and in celebration; in the rain and in the sunshine; in solitude and while surrounded by the joyous community.

To bless the LORD means we verbally express worship both on our own and also corporately (e.g., “I will declare [God’s] name to my people; in the assembly, I will praise you” [Ps 22:22]). To bless the LORD also means that we pursue actions that participate in God’s Kingdom mission in the world. To bless is both to speak and to act. So on day one our prayers are declarations of worship: “Bless the LORD, O my soul!”

### CONSIDER

What does it look like to “Bless the LORD” in my prayers?

What does it look like to “Bless the LORD” in my actions today?

### PRAY

#### **Pray words of blessing and praise to Jesus**

- that Jesus would be worshiped in your words and actions “continually”;
- that Jesus’ Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven;
- and that God would be blessed today by hearing these prayers and the prayers of disciples of Jesus worldwide.

#### **Pray words of commitment to Jesus**

- that Jesus would strengthen you today to participate in God’s Kingdom mission;
- that Jesus would pour out his Spirit on you so that you can love others and embody and act out God’s blessing to “all nations”;
- and that “all that is within me” would “bless his holy name.”

## DAY TWO

# Bless our neighbours

Mark 12:28-31 (NIV)

*“One of the teachers of the law came and ... asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important? The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these.”*

Genesis 47:10 (NIV)

*“Then Joseph blessed Pharaoh.”*

### REFLECT

Our model for blessing others comes from a desire to be image bearers for our Triune God. God is a God of blessing who blessed the first humans (Gen 1:22, 28), blessed the Sabbath day (Gen 2:3), and promised that “all nations on earth” will be blessed through Abraham’s offspring (Gen 18:18). God’s heart is not to “condemn the world” (John 3:17) but to save the world through Jesus. God’s heart is to bless, not curse. If we are to reflect Jesus in our world, we must walk this same path.

Blessing involves **speaking gracious words** that proclaim our desire for God to act for the other person’s ultimate well-being. Blessing also involves **doing actions** to help make these words of blessing a reality—as much as this is humanly possible. Blessing is what love of neighbour is all about. If we love, we will speak words of blessing. If we love, we will take action to help make these words a reality.

Joseph verbally blessed Pharaoh but then participated in actions that helped make this blessing a reality (Gen 47:10-26). Jacob verbally blessed Joseph’s two sons but then took actions to ensure that they received twice the inheritance (Gen 48:8-22.); Naomi blessed Boaz (Ruth 2:19-20) and then took actions that ultimately would lead to Boaz being part of the family line of Jesus Christ (Ruth 3).

So on day two, our prayers are about how to bless our neighbours as a practical application of God’s command to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31). To love our neighbours in 2022 means that we speak words of blessing over our neighbours and participate in actions that help bring these words into reality (as far as that is humanly possible). While we certainly want to focus this blessing on those living closest to us, we must not forget about our most vulnerable neighbours:

- Indigenous neighbours.
- Neighbours who have recently relocated here from all over the world.
- Neighbours who live without proper housing.
- Neighbours who struggle with addictions.

Our definition of “neighbour” must include the most vulnerable (cf. Psalm 41:1; Proverbs 22:9).

### CONSIDER

How can you bless your neighbours today?

How can you bless your most vulnerable neighbours?

Which of your neighbours are particularly in need of blessing?

### PRAY

#### Pray words of blessing over your neighbours

- that no matter their ethnic, racial, religious, sexual, or economic realities, all your neighbours would feel welcome in your neighbourhood
- that all your neighbours would sense God’s love and care for them today
- that your neighbours would hear and respond to Jesus’ invitation to salvation and true life

#### Pray words of commitment to be a blessing

- that you would have the courage to get to know your neighbours in significant ways
- that you would show God’s love by helping neighbours in need—especially the most vulnerable
- that you would be willing, as God leads, to invite neighbours to consider the truthfulness of Jesus’ words and actions and respond to that truth, so they become redeemed children of God

## DAY THREE

# Bless our enemies

*Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)*

*“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”*

*Romans 12:14 (NIV)*

*“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*

### REFLECT

Stressful events can bring people together, but they can just as easily turn neighbours, friends, and family into “enemies.” We’ve seen this happen in the past pandemic years. Countries that have long been friends suddenly close their borders. Churches, families, and friendship groups unified around Jesus and his kingdom mission, now divided over masks, vaccines, and mandates. People have become separated along political and ideological lines.

It is easy to “curse” our enemies—but Jesus tells us to bless. Paul says, “bless and do not curse.” Peter says, “Repay evil with blessing” (1 Peter 3:9). While it is next to impossible to avoid having enemies altogether, we want to be people who bless our enemies and “pray for those who mistreat [us].”

Remember, the blessing involves **speaking gracious words** proclaiming our desire that God would act for other people’s ultimate well-being. It also includes **doing actions** to help make these words of blessing a reality—as much as this is humanly possible. So, if we want to bless our enemies, we need to speak words that reflect our honest desire for their ultimate well-being. We need to pursue actions that demonstrate our desire to bless rather than curse.

There may be no more difficult prayers than this—to pray blessings over our enemies. But this is the way of Jesus and a much-needed path as we move into 2022. So on day three, our prayers are for the blessing of our enemies.

### CONSIDER

Who are your enemies—those who stand in opposition to you?

How could you express blessing to them—and what actions could you do to express this blessing?

### PRAY

#### **Pray words of blessing over our enemies**

- that they would experience God’s health and protection at this moment
- that if they are not worshipers of Jesus, that they would hear and respond to Jesus’ invitation to salvation and true life

#### **Pray words of commitment to be a blessing to our enemies**

- that you would be able to express to them God’s blessing over them
- that you would show God’s love by helping enemies in need
- that you would be willing, as God leads, to express an invitation to those enemies who are not worshipers of Jesus, to respond to Jesus who brings salvation and true life

## DAY FOUR

# Bless our Church

*Numbers 6:22-27 (NIV)*

*“The LORD said to Moses, ‘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 upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace’” “So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them.”*

### REFLECT

A significant part of being an Old Testament priest was to bless the Israelites. Numbers 6:24-26 became the blessing pattern that continues to the present. Since the New Testament defines the church family today as a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9), each of us carries the same responsibility to bless. Numbers 6:27 implies that somehow in the process of pronouncing a blessing over the people, God will “put [his] name on the Israelites” and “bless them.” Blessing is not just empty human words but something that has a spiritual and physical impact on the people of God.

The blessing in Numbers 6 proclaims a desire that God will:

- “keep you”—which is another way of saying “protect,” “guard,” and “preserve.”
- “make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,”—which means that God’s saving presence will be near you.
- “turn his face toward you and give you peace [Shalom]”—which means that God will give you his focus and attention for the purpose of ultimate wholeness and well-being.

The Numbers 6 blessing is all about God protecting the people of God, about God’s presence dwelling among the people; and about God’s provision of ultimate wholeness and well-being. Our blessing over the Church must involve these same things—protection, divine presence, and divine provision. But in this blessing, we hope that God will “put his name on” us so that we can reflect his character, love, and mission in 2022 more than ever before. So day four involves prayers for the blessing of the Church.

### CONSIDER

What part of God’s “blessing” (protection, divine presence, or divine provision) is most needed by your local church today?

What is most needed by our larger MB church family in Canada and worldwide?

What does it look like for you to participate in blessing your local church and the blessing of our larger MB church family?

### PRAY

#### **Pray words of blessing over the Church**

- that your local church and our larger MB church family would experience God’s spiritual and physical protection as it navigates our pandemic and post-pandemic world
- that God would bless your local church and our larger MB church family with the tangible presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit
- that God would shower his “peace” [Shalom] over our churches during times when conflict and disunity seem to be the order of the day
- that God would provide wisdom and grace for our MB leaders, locally and beyond, as they serve the church family

#### **Pray words of commitment to be a blessing over the Church**

- that you would find the opportunity to express God’s blessing to your church family
- that you would know how you can be of help for those in need in your church family
- that you would have the opportunity to encourage church leaders during this season of incredible challenge for those in leadership

## DAY FIVE

# Bless our “families”

*Genesis 31:55 (NIV)*

*“Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them.”*

*Genesis 49:28 (NIV)*

*“All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.”*

### REFLECT

As followers of Jesus, we want to nurture deep and loving relationships so that we walk through life not in isolation but in joyful community. Whether married or single, all of us need “families” of people who are in our closest network of relationships. Our prayers on this day are for a blessing over these people whom we consider “family,” whether or not they are biologically connected to us.

We have a responsibility to bless our families. We are responsible for ensuring that we do no harm, abuse, or neglect to our families. Sometimes, it may even be easier to bless the LORD, bless our neighbours and enemies, and even bless the Church than to bless those we consider family. However, no relationship will experience more harm more quickly through the neglect of blessing than our family relationships. May 2022 be a year of blessing our families!

Blessing is a much-needed part of being family. The righteous bless their parents while the unrighteous “curse” and/or refuse to bless their parents (cf. Pr 30:11). We read in the biblical story of parents like Laban and Jacob blessing their children. After bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, David went home “to bless his household” (2 Sam 6:20). Jesus blesses the little children (Mark 10:16) and then blesses the disciples (Luke 24:50-51). Jesus, though single, is creating a family—and blessing that family. We want to be people of blessing who pronounce blessings over our biological families and over those in family-like relationships with us.

Our blessing pattern continues to be Numbers 6:24-26, where we declare a desire that God will:

- “protect,” “guard,” and “preserve” those in our family.
- be a gracious and redemptive presence and that our family will become faithful disciples of Jesus.
- give his focus and attention so that our family can experience ultimate wholeness and well-being.

Blessing our family involves a desire and a responsibility to protect and guard those in our family. Blessing our family also involves encouragement to respond to God’s gracious invitation for relationship, salvation, and discipleship. Finally, blessing our family means we desire God’s ultimate wholeness and well-being for our family. We participate in making that a reality (as much as we can). So on day five, we pray prayers of blessing over our family.

### CONSIDER

Write down the names of those who are in your “family”—both biologically and relationally.

What does each of these “family” members most need in 2022—protection from harm, God’s gracious and redemptive presence, or an experience of God’s ultimate wholeness and well-being?

### PRAY

#### **Pray words of blessing over your family**

- that this very day your family would experience protection from harm; the gracious presence of Jesus; and God’s wholeness and peace

#### **Pray words of commitment to be a blessing to your family**

- that God would help you see how you might protect your vulnerable family members from harm
- that God would help you embody and demonstrate the gracious presence of Jesus to your family so that they would become faithful disciples of Jesus
- that God would help you participate in bringing God’s wholeness and peace in the lives of your family

## DAY SIX

# Bless the whole world

Genesis 12:3 (NIV)

*“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

Revelation 7:9 (NIV)

*“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”*

### REFLECT

We begin today with the foundational statement: “God so loved the world...” (John 3:16). Because God so loved the world, God wants “all peoples on earth” to be blessed. This blessing fulfills God’s Kingdom vision as described in Revelation 7:9 where a “great multitude” of the redeemed come from every nation, tribe, people, and language and worship Jesus before the throne. Our prayer today is for the nations.

Once again, we want to follow the Numbers 6:24-26 model. A faithful blessing means that we desire that:

- God would guard and protect those in our world;
- God’s redemptive presence would be proclaimed and become a reality for those in our world;
- God would bring his ultimate wholeness and well-being to our world.

Our blessing for the nations is for God’s protection as people around the world experience suffering: suffering resulting from the pandemic, suffering from violence, war, or political unrest, suffering from natural disasters, and suffering as a result of famine and economic disaster.

Our blessing for the nations is also that God’s redemptive presence would be demonstrated and proclaimed around the world so that people from every nation would become redeemed worshipers of Jesus as described in Revelation 7:9.

Finally, our blessing for the nations is that God’s peace or Shalom would spread across our earth—as we await the day when Jesus returns, and his kingdom comes to earth as it is in heaven. So on day six, our prayers are for God’s blessing over the nations.

### CONSIDER

Is there a particular nation that God has put on your heart to bless?

Is there a particular ethnic group living in Canada that God has put on your heart to bless?

### PRAY

#### **Pray words of blessing over the nations**

- that this very day people around the world would experience protection from harm and suffering; an authentic and loving presentation of God’s good news for the world; and a taste of God’s redemptive desire for wholeness and peace
- that God would bless our mission agencies (Multiply; MDS; MCC) as they seek to be the hands, feet, and voice of blessing to the nations in the name of Jesus
- that the particular nation or ethnic group God has put on your heart would experience God’s blessing

#### **Pray words of commitment to be a blessing over the nations**

- that God would help you discern what you can do to support the work of blessing the nations in the name of Jesus
- that God would help you discern how you could bless an ethnic group living in your community in the name of Jesus

## DAY SEVEN

# Bless the Creator

*Psalm 19:1-2 (NIV)*

*“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.”*

*Revelation 4:11 (NIV)*

*“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*

### REFLECT

While it would be tempting to label this final day “Bless the Creation!” the biblical record does not contain examples of people blessing inanimate objects. Jewish prayers almost always begin with the words: “Blessed are you, O Lord, King of the Universe.” While the Rabbi in Fiddler on the Roof suggests a blessing for the new sewing machine, the biblical pattern is to bless the Creator rather than the creation. While we often ask people at mealtime to “bless the food,” the biblical pattern is to bless the ultimate giver of the food rather than the food itself. (Although many Bible translations of Matthew 26:26 imply that Jesus blessed “it” [the bread], the Greek only says that Jesus “blessed”—which in the Jewish tradition of his childhood would have meant that he almost certainly blessed God rather than the bread itself.)

We have come to the end of our week of prayer, once again, directing our attention to God—the one who is “worthy...to receive glory and honour and power” because he has “created all things.” We should bless the Triune Creator God for his physical creation, which sustains us, mystifies us, enralls us, and gives us meaningful work. We should bless God for the beauty he paints across the evening sky, into each snowflake, across the rock cliff faces; and into every unusual and amazing creature of sky, sea, and land. But we also should bless God even when the physical creation terrifies us with its immense and destructive power manifest in floods, fires, storms, earthquakes, and volcanoes.

Blessing the Creator God starts with going outside and truly opening our eyes. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem says: “Earth’s crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.” We need to walk slowly and notice the intricate beauty and immense power of God’s Creation. We need to turn away from our screens and look! We need to take out our earbuds and noise-cancelling headphones and listen! And with each new sight or sound, we need to verbalize a prayer of blessing to our Creator God! And after verbalizing these prayers, we must ask Jesus how we could act in ways that honour and preserve God’s good creation. So, we come to the end of our 2022 Prayer Week, praying prayers of blessing toward our Creator God.

### CONSIDER

How can you verbally bless God for his amazing and terrifying creation?

How can you guard and protect that which the Creator has made?

### PRAY

#### **Pray words of blessing toward the Creator**

- that this very day you would find new words to express gratitude and praise for God’s beautiful creation
- that you would have a greater appreciation for the power, goodness, and redemptive purposes of God by observing and reflecting on the creation

#### **Pray words of commitment to be a blessing to the Creator God**

- that God would reveal to you steps you could take to appreciate God’s creation better
- that God would reveal to you steps you could take to better care for God’s creation