

The Blessings of Fearing the Lord

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[0 : 00] Well, let us pray. A Father in heaven who has richly blessed us with every spiritual gift in the heavenly places in Christ.

! We confess that, left to ourselves, we cannot do anything aright.

We need your Spirit to work in our hearts so that we might relish the things that you have revealed, and that we might truly walk uprightly and fear your name all the days of our life.

We pray now that, as I seek to preach, you would grant to me freedom, fervency, and also faithfulness to your word, recognizing that, Lord Jesus, apart from you, I can do absolutely nothing. We ask that you who have spoken your word and assured us that if we ask for bread, you will not give us a stone, and that if we ask for fish, you will not give us a serpent.

[1 : 20] And therefore, for this reason, we come and ask now for the Spirit's presence among us to enable the preaching of the word, and to do so that it might truly bring about the salvation of sinners in our midst, and that it might build up your people so that they would not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, but rather they would stand firm in the grace of God, and that they would persevere until the end when they shall look upon their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And find all of their desires and all of their blessings fulfilled in Him. We ask these things now in the name of our Redeemer and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Scriptures contain statements that are contrary to the natural man and to the thinking of the world.

For example, the Lord Jesus taught that if anyone wants to be great in the kingdom of God, he must be a servant of all.

Again, the Lord Jesus taught that if anyone desires to be first, he will be last. Or the other passage where our Lord Jesus also taught that if anyone wants to save his life, he will lose it.

[2 : 48] Or if anyone desires to lose his life for his sake and for the gospel, he will actually save his life. And these statements to the world and to the natural man are contrary.

There's another statement that is rather perplexing. And to the world and to its thinking, it is confusing. And it is a statement that says, How blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Or how blissful are those who fear the Lord. Now to the world, they would say, How blessed are those who are rich, successful, or prosperous.

To the world, happiness or joy or blessedness is rather rooted in what is in this created world. But the Scriptures teach otherwise.

The Scriptures teach us that if we are to be a people that are to seek and to find true blessedness and true joy, it is in fearing the Lord.

[4 : 03] And sadly, even in the professing Christian world and in the church, something that blessing is through a path of wealth, fame, or success. Just fill in this blank.

Think. I am blessed because of X. I am blessed because of X. Or think of it another way.

I am filled with joy because of this. Or I believe I will be more joyful because of this. And so this morning, I want us to consider briefly in our time together that those who fear the Lord may anticipate God's blessings in their individual life and in their family life.

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And for the text, please turn with me to Psalm 128.

Psalm 128. As you may be aware, we have been working through the Psalms of Ascent and we're now on Psalm 128 itself.

[5 : 24] And just a little bit about Psalm 128 as you find it there. In Psalm 128, this is another wisdom psalm. You'll remember that last week it was mentioned that Psalm 127 is a wisdom psalm.

And now again, this psalm is another wisdom psalm. And I think it's important that as we begin to read this psalm, that you're aware of the first word that's in there, blessed.

The word blessed. And I think it's important that as you read that you have an idea of what this term means because it's important. The word blessed itself in this psalm has the idea of blissfulness or rejoicing.

You might say, oh, the delight. Oh, the joy. Oh, the one that should be envied is this one. And so as you read this word blessed, it does contain the idea of happiness.

But it's more emphasized. It's one of bliss, one of joy, or one of envy in this one. And so let us read together Psalm 128. Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways.

[6 : 31] You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands. You shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel. So read the word of God. Well, this morning, as I said, what I hope for us to do is to spend a few moments right now looking and seeing that those who fear the Lord may anticipate God's blessing in their individual life and in their family life.

And as mentioned already, this term blessed itself, it really has the idea of one who is in a right relationship with God, and as a result of that relationship with God, they have the blissfulness, they have a joy, they have a measure of being envied.

And I want us to consider now this morning these blessings under three main points. The first point is this. The recipients of God's blessings. Who are the recipients of God's blessings?

[7 : 55] The recipients of God's blessings. Then secondly, I want us to consider the examples of God's blessings. The examples of God's blessings.

And then finally, I want us to consider the prayer for God's blessings. The prayer for God's blessings. Well, let us consider first the recipients of God's blessings.

Who are the recipients of God's blessings? Who are those that should be envied? Look in verse 1. It says, Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.

And so the psalmist there declares that it is those who fear the Lord who are blessed. It is those who walk in His ways. And I think it's very helpful for us to have a clear idea and a conception of what does it mean to actually fear the Lord?

What do we have in mind that when the psalmist says, fear the Lord, what is he talking about? And the fear of the Lord, first of all, is an inward disposition of godly worship.

[9 : 00] You notice that he's speaking of fearing the Lord. It begins with an inner disposition. And that is essentially, the one who fears the Lord has a reverential awe of God.

The child of God has a profound veneration of who God is for His majesty. Think of it like this. To fear the Lord is to have a filial fear of God.

What do we mean by filial fear? Think of it this way. Filial fear has the idea that a child of God who loves God, who is aware of who God is, and in that love for God, desires with all of his or her being not to disappoint by doing anything that would offend him, and at the same time, doing everything in submitting to him that pleases him.

So when we speak about fearing God, it is a submission, wholehearted submission, to God, out of love, out of delight, out of joy, for His majesty, before His goodness, and who God is in Himself.

Think of it similar like this. An earthly son finds that they will have a fear for their father, for his character, and for his love for that father, and will seek, if they truly respect, if they truly revere, if they truly venerate that earthly father, they will submit to that father out of love, out of joy, and out of gratitude, and will do everything not to displease him, and will do everything to please him.

[10 : 49] Now, this fear is in contrast to what we might call an ungodly fear. What I just spoke about is a godly fear. An ungodly fear is a slavish fear.

It is one in which one has a fear of dread or of terror. An ungodly fear is a servant who desires to do his master's will in order that he or she may not be struck.

So think of it this way. The master has come and instructed the servant that they want him to do this. And the servant, the only reason why the servant desires to comply is that they may avoid being struck.

And so there is no genuine love for his master. There is no sincere desire to do his will out of respect. And such ungodly fear drives the man or the woman away from God because of a sense of

their sin and because of God's justice.

And so here is a slavish fear. It is an ungodly fear. It is a fear, in short, that an unregenerate who is unwilling to submit to the judgment of God for their sins but grumbles and complains before God.

[12 : 06] And so here you have a contrast between the one who is submitting to God out of love for God, out of delight for God, out of the majesty of God, and then one who has a slavish fear.

One who is fear of dread and of terror. And so when we speak about who is the recipient of God's blessings, it is one who has a godly fear for the Lord our God.

But notice that not just generally, the psalmist then moves from the inward to the outward conduct and says that the one who is fearing the Lord is one who is walking in his ways.

And what does he mean by that? Simply he means that that individual is complying, is submitting, is obeying to what God has revealed in his word. And that is a continual obedience.

It is a repeated obedience. And so the scripture does not know of such a thing as respect or reverence for God while walking in your own way. For someone to say that they have respect or they revere or they honor God and then turn away and walk in the ways that displeases him, that is not to revere, to respect, and to fear the Lord.

[13 : 20] And so for someone to claim that they fear the Lord and yet do not bridle his or her tongue is a person that is not walking in his way and should not anticipate the blessings of God.

And for someone to declare that they fear the Lord and yet loves the world and the things that are in the world is not walking in the ways of the world.

It's not walking in the ways of the Lord. And so as one commentator said, reverential fear for the Lord is exhibited by worship and obedience.

And to put it more directly, to those who fear the Lord, they obey him. And what God has joined together, let none of us separate. Well, let us examine now ourselves whether we are in this state of the recipients of God's blessings.

Let us probe our own hearts whether we possess this filial fear, this godly fear ourselves. And first, we should understand that this godly fear is one that is innately in none of us who have been born into this world.

All of us who have entered into this world, born in Adam, are born with a slavish fear. All of us who are born into this world come with a dread and with a terror of God himself.

[14 : 38] And that is one in which they do not possess a filial fear of God. And so when the apostle Paul himself in chapter 3 says, when he's summing up the charge, talking about the Jews and the Gentiles, he says that all are under what?

Enslavement to sin. And he identifies one piece of scripture as evidence to support that he says there is no fear of God before the rise. That is, that every single person, every boy, every girl, every man, every woman that has come into this world is born enslaved to sin.

And as a result, they have no fear of God before the rise. No matter how educated, no matter how wealthy, no matter how prosperous, no matter what nationality, no matter what they look like, every single person entering into this world is born into the state of enslavement and dread before God.

And so therefore, if anyone is to possess godly fear, he or she must have a change of heart. They must be born again. And that is the work of the Spirit of God coming upon the unbeliever, and changing their heart and causing a change of heart to now fear God.

You remember that in the New Covenant in the Old Testament. In the book of Isaiah in chapter 32 in verses 39 and 40 speaking about the New Covenant, the Lord promises that He will give His people one heart and one way.

[16 : 07] That why? That they may fear Him always. That the Lord would give His people one heart, one way. Why? For this purpose that they may fear Him always.

And, it goes on and says, so that they will not turn away from Him. And then, it continues on and says, that He will put the fear of the Lord in their heart so that they will not turn away from God.

And so, in the New Covenant that is promised in the Old Testament, you remember that God promised that in that covenant He would take out of the heart of His people, a heart of stone, and give to them a heart of flesh.

And in that heart of flesh, God would implant into them a heart that would fear the Lord. And so, anyone who has a godly fear has a heart that has been transformed, that has been changed, that has been renewed by the work of the Spirit, and that is a work of grace.

That is something that is undeserved, that is unearned. It is a work of the sovereign work of the Spirit in which He has come by His own work, and changed the heart of the unbeliever and caused them now to have a fear for the Lord that is godly.

[17 : 20] And that is a gracious work of the sovereign Spirit of God. But let us also consider then some motives or reasons why any of us should fear God.

Why should you fear God? Well, one of the reasons, first of all, is that the Scriptures teach that the Lord favors those who fear Him. in Psalm 147, verse 11. If you could have the favor of an earthly king, think of whoever it is, the most powerful person in all of the universe, if you could have their favor upon you, you would desire their favor.

But now consider, the King of kings and Lord of lords says that He has favor towards those who fear Him. But if that's not all, the Lord also goes on and says that He has compassion on those who fear Him.

The one who is infinite in compassion, who is tender in mercy, whose heart overflows with goodness, He says He shows compassion on those who fear Him. but if that isn't enough, then consider that He says that His, what, steadfast love, His loving kindness toward those from everlasting to everlasting, that is, that God is faithful to His covenant.

He's saying that, child of God, why should you fear me? Because my steadfast faithfulness is set upon you from everlasting to everlasting. that's why you should fear me.

[18 : 53] And then the Lord says, He promises to fulfill the desires of those who fear Him in Psalm 145 verse 19. Think about it, that the earth belongs to the Lord, all that is in it.

And He says to the believer, if you fear me, if you are the one who has reverential fear, godly fear towards me, I will fulfill the desire of those that fear me.

And so, no wonder then, the psalmist David says in Psalm 34, O saints, fear the Lord, for those who fear Him lack nothing. They lack nothing.

And so, brothers and sisters, why is it that you should fear the Lord? Think of all these good things that the Lord has made known to us. Fulfilling the desire of those who fear Him. Showing compassion to those who fear Him.

Manifesting His everlasting covenant. Showing His favor. Why should you fear the Lord? Here are multiple reasons why your heart should run out and say, oh, let me fear the Lord. And let me be one of those who lack no good thing.

[20 : 02] Well, having seen the recipients of God's blessings, well, let us now consider the examples of God's blessings. The psalmist encourages the godly that as he fears God and walks in His ways, that he will experience God's blessings in his individual and family life.

You see that in verse 2 and in verse 3 and 4. He says, you shall eat of the fruit of the labor of your hands and you shall be blessed and it shall be well with you.

Now, notice that the psalmist has transitioned from a general statement in verse 1. He's been speaking about generally everyone who fears the Lord, right, are the ones who will be blessed. But now he comes to a particular.

And notice in your own Bibles that how many times he used the word you. He says what? In verse 2, he says, first of all, you, singular, you shall eat the fruit of your own hands.

Again, he says in verse 2, you shall be blessed and it shall be well with you. He's speaking specifically now to the Israelites and to the godly person. He's saying, here are the blessings that are to the individual.

[21 : 06] And what is the first thing he points out? He says that when you labor, when you work, when you toil in your work, that is, that you will enjoy the fruit of your labor.

That is, you will eat and that you will enjoy these things. But what is he speaking about? It is the picture of one who is diligently laboring, whether they are at home and they're working, whether they're going to the office, whether they're a student, whatever the work is, right?

He has this picture that one who is diligently working and they're laboring and he's saying that as you do so, you can enjoy the labors of your hands. That you can have satisfaction.

Now it is true that as you and I labor in this world, that the result of the curse in the garden, that there is toil. That is true. And that our work is not perfectly blissful.

That is true also. But for the godly, what is transformed, what is changed is this. The godly person actually can begin to have satisfaction with their own labor of their hands.

[22 : 10] In fact, what you're seeing in this verse itself is a reversal of what took place in the actual garden to a certain extent. Where we remember that in the garden, God came to Adam and said what?

Cursed is the ground and that you what? From the sweat of your brow that you shall labor, that you shall have to work. But here is the godly person who is fearing the Lord. And that individual now is able to have a measure of satisfaction, a measure of joy.

As they produce, they're able to enjoy their own work. Now this is in contrast, you'll notice, to Psalm 127. You remember last week in Psalm 127, it speaks about those who what?

Stay up all night or they rise up early and they labor. And what did the Lord say in Psalm 127? Their labor is what? In vain. Here is the picture of one who is working independently of God, who has no mind, who has no thought of God, and as they labor, they're doing it all in vain.

But in Psalm 128, he's saying, as you're laboring diligently, as you're working hard, there is a measure of joy and satisfaction that you will derive and you will find in itself.

[23 : 22] And so there's a bliss also and a joy now for your labors because of the divine blessing. But notice, he says, you, shall be blessed and it shall be well with you.

And so what he's speaking here now is the future. He's saying that it's not just a blessing presently, but actually it's a blessing that is continuing on to the future, that is. And so now, the psalmist moves from the individual to the family life in verse 3.

He speaks now of your wife. And he uses the comparison, he says, your wife will be like a fruitful vine in your house. Now, you and I probably look at that and read it and trying to understand, well, what is that speaking about?

What is the metaphor? What is the comparison that the psalmist is using when he's saying your wife will be like a fruitful vine? I trust that many of us who are married and so forth, we don't think of it in that sense, but the picture, the idea is this, that the wife is one who is not only bearing, that is, bearing children, fruitful vine, that is included in there, but a part of that also is that she is a blessing to the home, that she is contributing to the welfare of the home itself.

That is a picture of comparing that she is a benefit to the home. She is thriving, she is flourishing in her role in her home. And so the idea is that here is this man who is fearing the Lord and he's receiving these individual blessings and these blessings now also are manifest also in the home with his wife who is thriving and flourishing.

[24 : 58] But it doesn't just stop there. It goes on and it spreads out further on now to your children, he says. He says that your children in verse 3, it says, will be like all of shoots around your table.

Again, you have this picture of the agriculture which is taking place and the comparison is as one commentator has remarked about the metaphor. It's the picture of a young olive plant tree springing from the parent stem and that springing up is fresh, it's vibrant and full of promise.

And so the olive tree was an emblem of vigor and vitality and naturally a symbol of long endurance since they last for such a long time. So it's the idea of children, right, who will endure, who will be one who is a blessing, who will be one who is causing joy in the home.

And it's a very wonderful picture of God's blessing to the individual in their home, that is, and you see joy being manifest as the God-fearing man experiences both blessing in the present in the future.

And then in verse 4, you see now that the psalmist comes back as it was. He begins with blessing and he turns around and says, now thus the man shall be blessed who fears the Lord.

[26 : 19] He's summarizing it. And the language is so wonderful that it's an emphasis. He's saying, first of all, he's blessed. You see it in his individual life, you see it in his wife, you see it in his children, and now he comes back and says, you want to know certainly this is maturity.

This man is blessed. Now the blessings of God in individual life, in family life, should not be understood as a guarantee or some kind of formula.

If he feared the Lord. That if I feared the Lord, then the Lord would always bless me. That is not what the psalmist is teaching. And we must be very careful of that.

Because that is what the error of a number of people teach. That if you do this, then this would happen. That's not what the psalmist means here. We should think of this psalm as one that is teaching if one walks up. We should not think that if one is walking uprightly, then I will necessarily receive the blessings of God.

Our own experience. And we know throughout history that just is not the case. How should we then interpret this passage? Or we should interpret it this way. You remember that, as I said at the beginning, this is a wisdom psalm.

[27 : 26] And we need to interpret this in the literary context. And that is this. Wisdom psalms teach general principles. It instructs us about what is descriptive and not prescriptive.

It's important that you don't take like how Proverbs teaches, what? Things that are general truths, you don't apply them as if they are always the case. Train up a child on where you should go and he will not depart for you.

If you take that to mean that that's always the case and never fail, then you're going to find yourself truly in trouble. And so we need to understand this psalm and its blessings in its literary context. And so when hardships and difficulties in our places of employment or disappointments and distresses enter in our life, we must recognize that what the psalmist is doing is he is teaching a general principle that as you walk with the Lord, as you are fearing the Lord, that the blessings that will come upon your home generally speaking, will be for you individually, satisfaction and productivity and then in your home.

And so we must be aware then that everyone who has a home has challenges, as we all know, unrealistic expectations, selfish attitudes, words that are harsh, sleepers nights, fearing siblings, all of these.

[28 : 50] But what the psalmist is seeking to do is to provide us with skills and godly living. I think the other thing we must also be aware about the blessings is this, that the blessings that are to a family and to the individual and to work point to a much greater reality in Christ.

If we are to take these material blessings, and they are, right, that is, that if the work it is, and we are to interpret them only in this life and forget that they ultimately point to a deeper reality or to a fuller reality that is in Christ, that we miss something very important.

We must, I think, understand that just as types and shadows were in the Old Testament, you think about the types that is in the Old Testament, that these blessings that came to the nation of Israel, that is, to work and also to the home, they ultimately point to the new heavens and to the new earth in which the relationships will have all its fulfillment, have its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

So if we fix our hearts on these temporal blessings and do not see what they point to, then we will be greatly disappointed. That is not to say that we don't enjoy, we don't enjoy, we don't say we don't enjoy what God has blessed us with in this life, but the earthly blessing should always cause us to look upward and onward to what God promises to us in the ultimate heaven and the ultimate earth. love. And so therefore it should cause all of us, whether we are married or we are single, whatever state that we are in, that we should be longing for the fuller reality of all these blessings, of him who is the bestower of all blessings, which is the ultimate blessing.

[30 : 35] It is God himself that in seeing these blessings we should always fix our minds on the true blessing, which is God himself.

that is the blessing of all blessings. For if God was to give us everything that is, that we would desire, and he left himself apart from us, that is no blessings, brothers and sisters.

God is our chief blessings in Christ. Christ is our supreme blessing. Well, having considered the examples of blessings, let us now consider the prayer for blessings, for God's blessings.

The prayer for God's blessings. We see there in verse 5 and 6, the Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel. Now, some of you may or may not have a different translation among us, and there are different translations of the first clause or the first statement, which says the Lord bless you from Zion.

[31 : 34] Some translate this as may the Lord bless you from Zion. And there are reasons for that itself. And I don't want to get into the technical reasons, but there are reasons for why it says may the Lord bless you from Zion.

And I think the actual translation is better to translate it. May the Lord bless you from Zion that you may see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life, and that you may see the children's children.

Peace be upon Israel. Peace be upon Israel. And so what the psalmist here is doing is that he's coming back to the individual. And he's saying, listen, here's a prayer that should be prayed.

The Lord bless you from Zion. And in that blessing now, he extends the blessing to the community. He's saying, listen, the blessing is for you, but now he's extending it also to the community of believers, that is, the prosperity of Jerusalem.

And he says that that blessing he wants and desires that it would be all the days of your life, that you would live and see all the prosperity, all the flourishing that would take place.

[32 : 40] Now, Zion, as you may be aware of, is speaking of Jerusalem, which is the place of God's temple. That is, he's saying, may the Lord bless you from the place where God resides, that is.

And we know that now Jerusalem is not the physical Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem is what? Now the people of God. That is, the temple of God is now the church.

That is, you and I. And the psalmist goes on and says that he now prays for the Lord to bless Israel. He says, peace be upon Israel.

You notice that in verse 5 and 6, like Hebrew parallelism, you notice that all the days of our life, speaking about may you see your children's children, and so those two things are essentially saying the same thing, that the psalmist is praying that I hope and desire that you would live a long life, right?

And you would be blessed, and that you would see your grandchildren. It's a very homely picture. It's a picture in which one is saying that the blessing now is coming back to the individual, and he's seeing his grandchildren.

[33 : 46] But not only his grandchildren, but the hope is that you would now begin to be praying for the community of believers that prosperity of Jerusalem and peace would be upon Israel itself.

And the peace be upon Israel there as Paul mentions in Galatians 6 really has the idea that peace would come upon ultimately now in the New Testament, that is the church. And so here we have the psalmist concluding that he wants the believer that is fearing God to receive individual blessings, and then he moves to the family, and then he moves outwardly to the community.

And the desire is that as the family is living a godly life, that will then spread out also to the community. And the desire is that to see the entire community living out in a godly manner.

Well, in the midst of all of this, I think it's very important that we think and behold our God, who is the bestower of all of our gifts. That it is God himself who is the one who is giving us all of our gifts. And that we should adore, we should admire, and we should be in awe of the blessed Lord, who is the source of all of our blessings to those who walk in the fear of the Lord and who walk in his ways.

[35 : 08] That we should remember that our God, our blessed God, who is blessed forever, is infinitely, unchangeably, and perfectly good.

And that from him come all of our blessings. From him comes every good and perfect gift from our Father, with whom there is no variation or no shadow of turning.

And our God, who is, and whom is all blessings, richly supplies us all things to enjoy. And him, in this God, is a treasury of all of our spiritual blessings.

And this same God has lavished on us all spiritual blessings. Just think, brothers and sisters, of all the spiritual blessings that God has lavished upon us. He has redeemed us from the enslavement of sin.

He has taken you and I out of the slave market of sin and has placed us into a position of grace and of liberty. He has also pardoned all of our iniquities, every single rebellious thought, every revolting word, and every seditious act that you and I have committed.

[36 : 21] this God, who is the giver of all spiritual blessings, has bestowed upon us freely and fully in Christ. And so, who is a God like our God?

Who can compare to this God, who is an ocean of blessing, who is a stream of unceasing blessing? There is none like him. There is none. But just not think of only his spiritual blessings.

Let us think of how he has lavished us with temporal blessings. Think about how God has lavished upon us the work and the provision for our needs. That he has blessed us with work and we have found a measure of joy while providing for our family and for our own needs.

And despite some of the challenges and trials in our families, our blessed God has blessed us with families in which we can rejoice. we have rejoiced, are rejoicing, and will rejoice.

And then we might add the blessing of fellowship, the community of believers. And so how often has God blessed the appearance of a believer with a word or a deed of a fellow saint to refresh our souls?

[37 : 33] And so all of these blessings, whether spiritual or temporal, should evoke in our hearts adoration, adoration, and an awe for our blessed God who gives us grace and glory and does not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly and fears the Lord.

Let us bow in prayer. O Lord, whose name is the fear of Isaac, and who by your grace to us in the spirit has given to us a new heart and written your law upon our hearts and put your fear in our hearts, grant that we would walk in the fear of the Lord always, and the fear of the Lord knowing that it is to hate evil, and the fear of the Lord that is to turn away from iniquity, and the fear of the Lord that prolongs life.

Lord, may we be those that genuinely desire to walk day and night in your ways, and that we would not depart from you. And in so doing, may we receive and experience the blessings that you will bestow upon your people for their good and for your glory.

We thank you that you are the giver of all good gifts, and that you are ultimately the source of all of our blessings, but not just the source, you are our blessing itself.

We pray these things now in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.