

THE
PROMISE
OF
BLESSING



Trevor, Johnny, Connor and Ben



THE PROMISE OF BLESSING

KATE PATTERSON



First published in 2015 by
Muddy Pearl, Edinburgh, Scotland.
www.muddypearl.com
books@muddypearl.com

© Kate Patterson 2015

Kate Patterson has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews or articles.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica formerly International Bible Society. Used by Permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. NIV is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790.

Scripture quotations marked esv are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (esv®), published by HarperCollins Publishers, copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations from The Authorised (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorised Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press.

Scripture quotations marked (*The Message*). Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked (J. B. Phillips) are taken from The New Testament in Modern English, copyright © 1958, 1959, 1960 J.B. Phillips and 1947, 1952, 1955, 1957 The Macmillan Company, New York. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-910012-26-0

Cover image © Shutterstock: Nino Rasic, lecosta

Typeset in Minion by Waverley Typesetters, Warham, Norfolk
Printed in Great Britain by Bell & Bain Ltd, Glasgow



CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Introduction: The Promise of Blessing	ix
Chapter 1: God's grand plan	1
Chapter 2: The Lord bless you	13
Chapter 3: The Lord keep you	39
Chapter 4: The Lord make his face shine on you	57
Chapter 5: The Lord be gracious to you	82
Chapter 6: The Lord turn his face towards you	108
Chapter 7: The Lord give you his peace	126
Chapter 8: A new name	153
Chapter 9: Blessed in the Beloved	172
Epilogue	193



FOREWORD

God is *for us*. But, so often, so many of us have bought into the lie that God is disappointed with and disapproving of us. He may want to bless others, but not us. Kate uses a wealth of means to persuade us otherwise – the Biblical story, which speaks to us of God’s good purposes and His desires for us, her personal story of struggling to know acceptance from God and other people, illustrations and quotes from other authors affirming God’s power, and testimonies by people whose lives have been turned around through discovering God’s love for them personally.

The Promise of Blessing is as practical as it is inspiring. Kate addresses the worries that can consume our thinking, the fears that can cripple us, the unhelpful comparisons with other people and the *if onlys* that stop us finding contentment. She helps us to lay them aside through growing in our confidence of God’s interest in us in our situation here and now, and of His promises to provide us with all that we need.

Kate reminds us again and again that God’s desire is to bless us with his joy, his peace, his purpose and his freedom, and to live a life that is connected to others. As she affirms, ‘The circle of love that is the Trinity is open and God wants to place you in it.’ As we grasp who we are in Christ, so we discover our true identity.

This book could change your view of God and change your perception of yourself. In fact it could change your life, now and forever.

NICKY and SILA LEE

Holy Trinity Brompton, London, June 2015



Introduction

THE PROMISE OF BLESSING

Around three thousand years ago, God gave a blessing for his priests to speak over his chosen people, words still cherished in churches all over the world.

*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 towards you
and give you peace.*

NUMBERS 6:24–26

I first heard these words spoken over me as a child, but never grasped their extraordinary significance, until about five years ago, when I was asked to give a series of studies on Numbers chapter 6. It was the first step in a journey that still has no end in sight – a journey into God’s extravagant blessing.

Why is this particular blessing so significant? The Old Testament records lots of blessings, but the ‘shining blessing’ of Numbers 6 stands above them all, because it is given directly by God himself. That means we can be utterly sure that blessing is his plan. If you are anything like me, you will need that reassurance. Life can be messy and tough and I am far too easily distracted so I frequently need reminding of God’s promise of blessing.

In these brief verses of Scripture, we get the most amazing sneak preview of what God has planned for us. Each line of our blessing is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus and brought to us by his Spirit. And, as if that is not enough, God then explains, ‘So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them’ (Numbers 6:27). I had never noticed verse 27 until I embarked on this study. What a plan! It is through blessing his people that God writes his name and his character on their lives.

God is intent on restoring us into his image. That means that the glorious end result of our salvation is far more than a room in the sky. It is that we become like him – those who bless others. He makes his face shine on us *and* through us to a world in darkness. He blesses us to make us a blessing.

No wonder this blessing has been treasured for centuries. Archeologists found two silver cylinders in Jerusalem dated from 600 BCE containing our Numbers blessing written on two silver scrolls. These are the oldest biblical texts in existence!¹

I have come to see the blessing of Numbers 6 as a most precious gift. The past decade has brought some challenges for me but I have found that God’s face shines brightest in the dark. It remains an enormous privilege to be part of the

¹ Dennis Olson, *Numbers*, Interpretation Commentary (John Knox 1996). In 1979 two tiny silver scrolls, inscribed with portions of the well-known apotropaic Priestly Blessing from the Book of Numbers and apparently once used as amulets, were found in one of the burial chambers at Keteif Hinnom (Hebrew: קַתֵּף הַיְנוֹם katef hinom, ‘shoulder of Hinnom’) an archaeological site southwest of the Old City of Jerusalem, adjacent to St. Andrew’s Church, now on the grounds of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center. The site consists of a series of rock-hewn burial chambers based on natural caverns. The delicate process of unrolling the scrolls while developing a method that would prevent them from disintegrating took three years. They contain what may be the oldest surviving texts from the Hebrew Bible, dating from around 600 BCE.

leadership of a local church and to see God's blessing in everyday life.

I am hugely grateful to all those who have so generously shared their own experiences of God's blessing for this book, illustrating that it really does make a tangible difference.

Of course I cannot do justice to the great topic of blessing in this short book. Augustine says it far more eloquently than I ever could in his *Confessions*:

You are my God, my Life, my Holy Delight, but is this enough to say of you? Can any man say enough when he speaks of you? ... For even those who are most gifted with speech cannot find words to describe you.²

My prayer is that as you engage with this shining blessing, phrase by wonderful phrase, you will meet the one from whom all blessings flow.

² St. Augustine, *Confessions, Book 1:4* (Penguin Books 1961).



Chapter 1

GOD'S GRAND PLAN

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 on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face towards you
and give you peace.’”’*

NUMBERS 6:22–26



Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.

PSALM 144:15 (ESV)



Imagine for a moment that your doorbell rings as you begin to read this book. If you are like me, you might feel mildly irritated at being disturbed, and a little curious as to who has come to see you. When you eventually open the door, standing before you is . . . an angel! It seems that people usually fall prostrate in terror before angels, so it is likely that you will do the same, but let's imagine that after you have finally scraped yourself off the

floor, the angel hands you a letter – a letter from God. What will be in that letter? What might God want to say to you? Tentatively, perhaps even fearfully, you open the envelope, unfold the letter inside and this is what you read:

‘I promise to bless you.’

How does that make you feel? Would you be surprised to discover that this is what God wants to say to you?

Because it’s true. God himself wants to bless you. When I first began studying Numbers 6, I was blown away to discover that this blessing comes *directly from God himself* to his people. And it is the only blessing in the Old Testament that does.

The LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, “This is how you are to bless the Israelites.”’

I hope that by the end of this book, you will be deeply assured that when it comes to blessing, God needs no persuading. Blessing is not just our desire, but his idea.

This blessing is often called the ‘Aaronic blessing’, because it was initially given to Aaron for the people of Israel. But I prefer to call it the ‘shining blessing’, partly to remind me that it isn’t just for one individual or group; it is for all God’s people. It is not a man-made blessing; it’s from God himself. As Gordon Wenham writes, ‘It serves to show that God’s permanent purpose is to bless.’³

I heard this blessing often as a child but never grasped that significance. Familiarity can entrench truth but also dull us to it. My kids have grown up under London Heathrow Airport’s flight path and they don’t even twitch when a 747 roars over our

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP 1981).

garden. I still wake up at 4am when it sounds as if a plane is going to land in our bedroom and find it particularly annoying when the boys come downstairs later having never heard a thing. Grow up under the flight path to a busy airport and you stop noticing the planes. Grow up hearing 'God bless you' and its meaning can go right over your head, just like those planes flying over my house. And I think for many of us that is true.

This shining blessing is tucked away in the book of Numbers, alongside long and complicated instructions about wave offerings and hair-cutting. To me, it's like a sparkling diamond in a ring, surrounded by God's call to his people to be set apart for him.

When God first gave this blessing to his people, they were in the wilderness, still fresh out of their long and painful slavery in Egypt.⁴ They had been in the desert for just over a year, in which time they had grumbled, rebelled and generally failed dismally to trust God, despite all his provision for them. God had miraculously brought them out of slavery, fed them and led them in the wilderness and instead of being grateful, they asked Moses' brother, Aaron, to make an idol of a golden calf to worship. When God then declared that he would not go with them, the people mourned, Moses pleaded, and God relented. Here in the book of Numbers, God now gives them detailed instruction about how he wants them to live in order to be a people set apart for him. He is getting them ready for life in the Promised Land.

And it is in the wilderness that God chooses to bless them. Astonishingly, he asks faithless Aaron, of all people, to lead in pronouncing the blessing over these faithless people. God's blessing doesn't come by our deserving, only by us yielding our

⁴ The Hebrew title for the book of Numbers is 'In the Wilderness'.

lives to him. He is still the same generous God who told his priests to bless his beloved people. He blesses those who don't deserve it through those who don't deserve it. As we will see, he so often chooses to bless us through each other.

Look closer and you will discover that blessing is God's grand plan. What is the very first thing that God does after he makes humanity, the pinnacle of his creation? He blesses Adam and Eve:

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.
God blessed them ...*

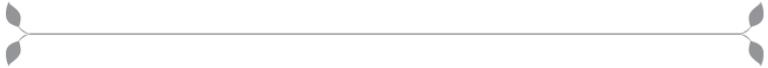
GENESIS 1:27, 28

Blessing is the refrain that echoes through the early chapters of Genesis: God makes, he blesses, God makes, he blesses. Because God is wholly good, he wants to bless us.

Even when Adam and Eve reject him, God doesn't give up on his blessing plan. God calls Noah and what does he do? He blesses him. God calls Abram and he not only promises blessing over his life, he promises that Abram will be a blessing to the world. Abram could never have dreamed of just how great that blessing would ultimately be in his descendant, Jesus!

In Christ, God's intent to bless us is clearly revealed. As we shall see, through Jesus, we become heirs of the promise of blessing given to Abram. Of course Jesus' final day on earth ended with blessing. Luke tells us that his last act was to lift up his hands to bless his disciples: 'While he was blessing them, he was taken up into heaven' (Luke 24:51). I like to think that this suggests that he is still blessing us. He hasn't stopped.

So our own story must too begin and end with the blessing of God. Like those first hearers of the blessing, we are in some ways in the wilderness and we need God's blessing to reach the land of promise. Our Christian journey is our walk towards the fulfilment of God's great promise of blessing over our lives.



STRUGGLING TO BE SURE

But if Almighty God so wants to bless us, why is it often a struggle to live 'the blessed life'? Sometimes I feel more like a slug on sandpaper. Maybe it's the little irritations – the computer crashing or the noisy neighbour or the dog being sick in the car. But sometimes it's because life has jagged edges and even when my little world is rosy, I see those I love facing gigantic challenges: a cruel medical diagnosis, the endless aching loss of a stillborn child, an unexpected redundancy, a fractured relationship.

If I dare to lift my eyes beyond the relative comfort of the west, easy answers are elusive. How can we trust in God's promise of blessing in a world where blessing seems erratic and uncertain? Turn on your TV and, on one channel, there are endless adverts for expensive cars and luxury holidays. Flick over to the news channel and suffering could overwhelm you. If it isn't another terrorist atrocity, it's another refugee story, another natural disaster, another child with an empty swollen belly or yet another war. Pick up your remote control again and switch over to the religious channels and too often they seem glib in their offer of blessing. How can we believe the TV evangelists in their dazzling white suits with their dazzling

white teeth and their dazzling offers of unlimited health and wealth when they seem to ignore the poor all around us?

It is no surprise that some people dismiss the idea of blessing as mere childish superstition. Christopher Robin looks naïve as he kneels by the side of his bed, praying ‘God bless Daddy and Mummy’, blissfully unaware that in this tough world, sometimes Daddy leaves home or Mummy gets cancer. A few disappointments later and Christopher Robin has abandoned his belief in a God of blessing along with his stuffed Winnie the Pooh.

In the chapters ahead, we will consider in more depth why it is that our world is so broken and how God’s blessing plan still prevails. God wants to reassure us that blessing is his purpose for our lives. Just as he did so long ago with his people, he calls us to choose his lordship, to choose life and to choose his blessing (Deuteronomy 30:15–20).

Do you know that God wants to bless you? Do you think that he even cares about you? I meet far too many people who think that God is like a stern headmaster and that church is all about following rules. But as we have seen, God does not only give Moses the Ten Commandments, he also gives words of shining blessing for Aaron and his priestly family to proclaim over the people.

God is unchangeable. Blessing is still his promise, a promise that we need to trust if we are to receive it. He wants each of us to have a rock-like certainty that we never need to twist his arm when it comes to blessing. He wants to build in you and me the breathtaking confidence of King David who could boldly declare, ‘Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life’ (Psalm 23:6).

I am a slow learner when it comes to trusting God. For too long, whenever I hit a problem, I would see it as a sign that

God didn't want to bless me. I needed a concept of blessing big enough to encompass the reality of suffering in our world. I needed a great enough God, who does not run scared from the painful struggles of life.

This is the God we have. Our God came in Christ precisely because of the reality of suffering. He didn't run scared; he came running after us, all the way to the cross. If you want to be sure that God wants to bless you, the Cross can be the outrageous measure of your certainty. As we will see in the chapters ahead, our God meets suffering head on. At great cost, Jesus bore the curse of sin so that we might be blessed.



A RIGHT VIEW OF GOD

It is so important that we trust that God wants to bless us. We will be like a millionaire who lives in a hovel and dresses in rags if we don't. In the words of A. W. Tozer, 'What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.'⁵

What you think about God matters; it affects your expectation of blessing. If we live life expecting nothing of God, our heads will be down, we won't seek him and we will miss what he has for us.

I had a secure and loving childhood, but, like many people, my dad had a pressurised work life. He was vicar of a busy growing church and his study was in our home. One of my memories is the invisible 'Do Not Disturb' sign on his door, and somewhere along the way, without even noticing, I came

⁵ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins 1978).

to see God like that. It was only in a wonderful time of prayer with others that I recognised that my view was askew and that I have unlimited access to God. He is never too busy. He is always thrilled to see me.

Regardless of our childhood experiences, we can all pick up a distorted picture of God. My parents were exceedingly generous and patient with our many misdemeanours but nonetheless, at times, my view of God has been so skewed that I have presumed him slow to bless and quick to rebuke instead of the other way round. Instead of ‘The Lord bless you’, I have tended to expect a stinging rebuke along the lines of, ‘The Lord is very disappointed with you because you have let him down, yet again!’ But when I draw near to God, I always find that he is slow to be angry and swift to bless.

I still constantly need to beware the subtle temptation to envisage God as some grumpy old man who measures out blessing in measly thimblefuls. From the start, the enemy of our souls has constantly broadcast the lie that God doesn’t want the best for us and it is just too easy to tune into that wavelength.



When I was a child, I used to love walking alongside my dad, playing the game of adjusting my footsteps until finally we walked in sync with each other. God invites us to walk in sync with him, to walk in step with his Spirit, and that begins with the expectation that he has blessings for us each day.

Since studying this blessing, I have tried to start my days with the expectation that God is with me and for me, that he has great stuff for me and him to do together. I have a different kind of day when I begin it with the reminder that God is on

my side. I am such a spiritual amnesiac that I have actually set a reminder on my phone that comes up every morning at eleven saying, 'To do nothing by myself'. If I am honest, I do still sometimes forget God as the day goes on but less than I used to and because of that, I have more and more stories of what God can do.

I work as a chaplain in a school. Recently I went to meet with a child there who had been having panic attacks at night for three months. Every night, she got into a terrible state and could not go to sleep on her own. We met and talked and all the while, I kept asking the Lord for wisdom and help. He gave me a glimpse of how precious this little girl was to him and I knew that he wanted to bless her. We prayed together, I told her that she was very precious to God, and asked him to bless her sleep. Four days later, her mum rang to say that her daughter had 'miraculously' settled to bed happily every night on her own since we met. I don't know who was more pleased.

God wants us to live life with him, blessing us and making us a blessing. I love it when I find he has set up meetings in my day. Recently we were travelling to Northern Ireland for my father-in-law's funeral and my son Connor had challenged us to expect God to use us during our trip. When we got to check-in, somehow, I just knew that God wanted me to talk to the man at the desk. As he reached across for my bag, he grimaced and I asked him what was wrong. He explained that he had an old injury that was untreatable. I asked if he would like us to pray for him. He told me that he wasn't a Christian but this was extraordinary because the day before a passenger had prayed for him, and he had a daughter who was a Christian and who was praying for him, so yes please! He was so grateful to us and I was so grateful that God is near.

I wonder how it would change your life if you truly believed that God has blessings for you today and every single day until your final day, and that he wants to bless you to be a blessing.

If you never have done it before, try it. As you start each day this week, ask the Lord to help you to walk in step with him and see what he has in store.



A PROMISE MADE PERSONALLY TO ME

Every time I speak on God's blessing, I see written on some faces a struggle to believe that this blessing could possibly be for them. And I identify with that struggle, because I have heard our shining blessing time and time again, and yet so often its meaning has missed me. Nice words, perhaps even a warm glow, but the weight of transformation that they carry too easily passes me by.

Is this blessing for *me*? Many of us secretly believe that God is more likely to bless someone else. Despite our living in an apparently scientific age, the prevalence of superstition indicates how many people are insecure about God's favour. I remember walking with someone when a lone magpie fluttered ahead of us; she stopped stock still and solemnly saluted it. Across supposedly sophisticated London, there are hordes of people touching wood, walking around ladders and refusing to travel on Friday the 13th.

We think we have to do something to persuade the universe to be on our side. We are not quite sure that God is for us so we keep a few back-ups just in case. Some people even do church 'just in case'. They have their children christened 'just in case'. Far too much religion is 'just in case' it might persuade God to bless us.

How much would it change us if we grasped that we don't need to persuade God to bless us? It was always his idea. He wants to bless every person he lovingly created in a personal way.

Hebrew is a language that has two words for 'you' depending on whether you are talking to one person or a group. In our blessing, the word for 'you' is in the singular. Some believe that this is because the people of Israel are together seen as a single entity. However, Old Testament translator and commentator Elmer Martens says it is better read as 'referring to the individual, who, however, is part of a larger community.'⁶

Today, this blessing is for you *personally* – for you as part of the community of the people of God, but equally, for you, personally – from God: 'The Lord bless **you**.' Could you take a moment to listen to God saying to you personally that he wants to bless you?

In 1779, a hymn was published which became so popular that we still sing it today. It is my favourite of all – John Newton's *Amazing Grace* and it includes these lines:

The LORD has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;

John Newton committed such unspeakable crimes as captain of a slave-ship that he assumed Paul's description of himself as 'chief of sinners',⁷ and yet he, even he, could still trust that God promised good blessings over his life. With Newton, we can turn to God's Word to secure our hope.

⁶ Professor Elmer A. Martens: *Direction Journal* Fall 2009, Vol. 38 No. 2 Intertext Messaging: Echoes of the Aaronic Blessing (Numbers 6:24–26).

⁷ John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, 2:246, 5:173, 5:570 and 6:58 (London 1820).

My prayer is that as you welcome the God-given words of Numbers 6 to settle upon your life, you too will discover that God has promised good to you and that his promise holds true.

RESPONSE

*Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall!
Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!*

PSALM 144:15 (ESV)



- Do you see yourself as one who is blessed by God? Ask him to reveal how much he wants to bless you as you read this book.
- Read the blessing from Numbers 6, pausing at the end of each line and receive it as God's words spoken personally to you.
- Ask God to show you if your view of him is warped or limited. Do you think he is like those who have disappointed you in the past?
- Could you invite him into your day every day this week and expect his blessing on your life? It might help to give yourself a reminder to do this – a note on your mirror, a reminder on your phone, but just if it helps. Look for the opportunities that he gives to you to be a blessing.