

rather than specific? This leaves the door of heaven open, as it were. It gives the blessing a kind of “fill-in-the-blank” flavor. It’s your Savior’s invitation, just as though he was saying, “I will bless you. What do you need right now?”

How would you answer that question? “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee.” In what ways do you need to be blessed? Through what challenges and changes, dangers and opportunities, do you need to be kept? In what situations do you especially need to know the sunshine of his smile, the peace of his favor? Ask! He is gracious and merciful in Jesus. He can’t wait to open heaven’s windows and pour out his blessing upon you!

### Taking It Home

Today you will take home (*name the item/s you are distributing*). I pray that each time you use it and every time you see it, you will recall God’s mercy and grace toward you in the cross of our Savior. I pray that you will receive the blessing your Savior has in mind for you—in all its fullness, especially the joy of knowing a deeper and deeper relationship with him.

God bless you! Amen.

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Expanding the Impact of Your  
Gifts of Encouragement

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*Be Blessed!*



### Introduction

Have you ever had friends or relatives who repeated themselves over and over? Maybe they tell the same jokes again and again. Or maybe you find yourself lending a listening ear as your friend struggles day by day to find answers to a son’s rebellion or decisions about medical treatment for an aging parent.

Generally speaking, when we repeat ourselves, we do it because the thing we repeat is on our minds and in our hearts. Consider, then, the fact that Scripture repeatedly returns to the idea of God’s “blessing.” His “benediction” or “good word” of grace and promise placed upon his people. Over and over again, the Scriptures return to the thought that our Lord wants to bless his people. That tells us a lot about what’s in God’s mind and on his heart!

## Getting to the Heart

God's heart toward us is a heart of love, compassion, and concern. We easily lose sight of how remarkable that fact truly is! You see, we deserve just the opposite. The Bible tells us we have rebelled against our kind Creator. Despite his goodness toward us, we have failed to thank him (Romans 1:21). Despite his wisdom, we have insisted on choosing our own paths through life (Romans 1:22). Despite his love, we have chosen to live lovelessly, focused on ourselves; we gossip, we envy others, we argue, we disobey our parents, we live lives of sexual impurity, we fail to care about those in need (Romans 1:26–32). St. Augustine summed it all up by saying that we are, by nature, “curved in on ourselves.” We place ourselves at the center of our universe—and we like it like that!

But what a mess that worldview makes! Self-centeredness lies at the heart of family fracas. It lies at the heart of all the grouching and grumbling at work. On a larger stage, it lies at the heart of poverty and pollution, homelessness and hunger, crime and corruption (James 4:1–3). Ultimately, the inward curve of our hearts leads to war and death (Romans 6:23). Sin, and the curse that accompanies it, has spread its tentacles everywhere in our hearts and everywhere on our planet—and even beyond into the rest of the universe (Hosea 4:1–3; Jeremiah 4:22–28).

An honest evaluation of our lives leads us to conclude that we deserve heaven's anger. We deserve—not the blessing—but the curse that sin carries with it. That's what Calvary's cross is all about. There on Calvary, the white-hot wrath of God, toward your sin and mine, fell on God's own Son. Jesus absorbed into himself the eternal curse we had, by our disobedience, deserved. Now, through faith in Jesus, our

Savior, we have become the sons and daughters of God. His blessing rests upon us—now and forever! Remarkable!

Again and again in Scripture, we read about this blessing. God repeats himself again and again, as if to convince us of his kind intentions toward us. The psalms overflow with promises of this blessedness. Consider Numbers 6. Here, God commands that Aaron and his sons after him speak words of blessing over the people as they gather to worship. Aaron, Israel's High Priest, raised his arms week by week, month by month, over the people of God as he invoked heaven's blessing on them: “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee” (Numbers 6:24).

Perhaps you hear these words as little more than the kind thoughts or wistful hopes of those who shepherded God's ancient people. But they are far more! Much, much more! These words are God's Word! Still today, these words of blessing carry with them the power to bring the blessing into reality in our lives because God himself has connected his promises to them! Speaking about the Old Testament priesthood and about the priests' duty to bless his people, God said, “They shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27).

Think of that! We carry God's name into the world. That name identifies us as his beloved children through faith (1 John 3:1). That name is a strong tower to which we continually run to find safety and peace (Proverbs 18:10). That name energizes our service (Hebrews 6:10) and gives focus to our witness (Romans 1:5; 10:13). God puts his name on us in blessing, and we *are* blessed.

God gave the exact words of this blessing. (Read Numbers 6:22–27.) Did you notice that these words are quite general,