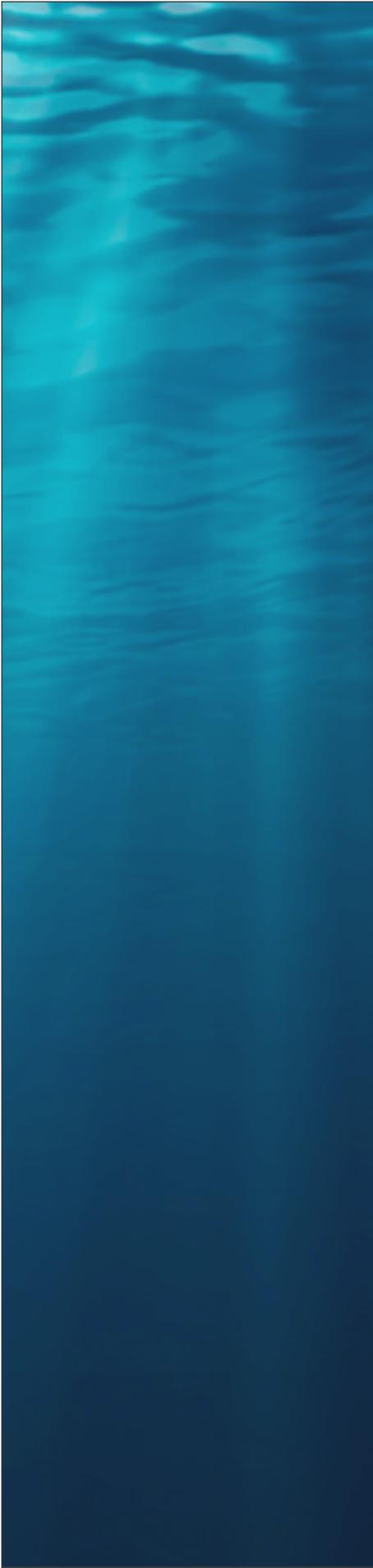


THE
BLESSING
LIFE

40 Days of Blessing

Home Groups
Leaders' Guide



TO THE GROUP LEADER:

Thanks for agreeing to lead a home group! We hope you will have a wonderful 40 days and rejoice to see and hear all that God does as we engage his Word. Your role is so important as cheer-leader and encourager. We offer these suggestions so that you will feel comfortable.

What follows is a guide for the 60 to 75 minutes you spend with your group. There is more offered in the first sessions than the last, because after you get into it, your group will have its own personality and you will have a better feel for how to lead. We have suggested approximate times for each section so you can get through the whole lesson. But every group is different, so adjust as you need to.

Be sure to read through the whole lesson each week before your group meets!!

The questions for discussion are just that: questions meant to stimulate discussion. They are not meant to have a quick right answer response. So let your group wrestle with them! Your main task is to keep them focused on the Scripture and its meaning, and its application to life. That's where God does his work. Feel free to add your own questions as you look at the passages in preparation.

Also note that we have tried to provide more material than you have time for if everything works, so select according to your style and the personality of your group.

If you have questions or concerns, feel free to contact Alec or Gerrit right away! And may the Triune God of Blessing bless your efforts and your group!

INTRODUCTION

This is the opening week of your group, so don't feel like you have to do "everything."

The objectives of the first week are the following:

- 1) Introduce people to small groups
- 2) Start the process of getting to know one another
- 3) Introduction to working the 40 Days of Blessing booklet

1. Getting to Know One Another (10 minutes)

Welcome everyone to the group and ask each to do the following:

Introduce yourself by saying your name, where you grew up, and, very briefly, that town's "claim to fame."

2. Introduction to the Blessing Life Groups (5 minutes)

These groups are about doing life together, studying the Bible and growing closer to Christ. With that, each group needs a few "ground rules" in order for the deal to work. Ask each person to commit to the following:

- 1) Show up every week (if you are going to be absent, let someone know)
- 2) Show up on time (the group will start & end on time)
- 3) Use your prayer guide every day before we meet
- 4) No cell phones (emergencies are the exceptions)
- 5) Keep confidentiality of others.
- 6) Participate, but also respect the need for others to participate. A group should not be dominated by one or two people, nor should the group have people attending and not participating.
- 7) Bring a Bible and Your Prayer Guide

If the group can commit to doing these things, it will lead to a dynamic time!

3. Study- (40 minutes)

Introduction to the Guide (approximately 5 of the 40 minutes)

Invite everyone to get out their 40 Days of Blessing Guide.

Note that the 40 Days of Blessing Guide is all about Scripture!

Scripture is the way God engages us through his Spirit as we read, study and pray his Word.

The 40 Days guide has 3 main sections every day:

- 1) Receiving the Blessing of God. We consider great Scriptures in which the God of grace desires to bless his people.
- 2) Blessing God in Return. We read Scriptures in which God is blessed for being who he is. Then, we pray those Scriptures to God, attaching our hearts to the words.
- 3) Reflecting the Blessing of God to Others. We read Scriptures which model the blessing of others, and then are challenged to enact this blessing in our daily life. This section also includes a paragraph called "Practical Blessing."

The prayer guide is meant to be used at home, for about 15 minutes a day, with activities to take into the rest of your day. The purpose of our group is to reflect upon and encourage the daily practices.

Each week, we will work through some of the Scriptures from the previous week's reading. We will discuss the great and precious promises from God's Word that we have been asked to trust. We will discuss how we did blessing God and others, and then get set to focus on the week ahead. So let's try it as we work through the three sections from Day 3 of our guides.

1) Receive the Blessing of God. (approximately 15 of the 40 minutes)

Would someone please read the two passages from John:

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)

The guide tells us that every Tuesday, we will be considering passages from John in which Jesus declares great things about himself. John's Gospel contains many great "I am" passages in which Jesus describes himself powerfully through some very common images. Today, he offers living water. Let's start by thinking about this literally.

- If I say the phrase, "Dead Water," what kind of water comes to mind? What does "dead water" look like, smell like, taste like?
- So, by contrast, describe a picture of water that could be said to be "living." What does "living water" feel like and taste like?

Obviously, living water is meant to be a symbol, so let's press on the word picture Jesus uses to see if we can get to the meaning.

- What kind of thirst do you think Jesus promises to satisfy?
- If Jesus' living water were flowing freely through you today, what would life be like?
- How would you finish this sentence: "The living water Jesus mentions is _____"

Jesus says that whoever believes in him will receive his living water. He told the woman at the well that if she would ask him, he would give her a source of living water inside her.

The challenge on this day, then, is for us to ask Jesus to give us his living water. We ask him to get his Spirit flowing within us. We accept his desire for us to live from the inside out, from a source of life that is Christ in us.

2) Return the Blessing to God (approximately 10 of the 40 minutes)

Blessing God means praising God for who he is. Blessing God is different than thanks. In thanks, we name what God has given us. In blessing, or praise, we admire God as we tell him who he is and all he has done. Most of us are better at thanks than we are at praise. Our “blessing” muscles are a bit weak. Thankfully, we get a lot of help from the Psalms.

Would someone please read the quote from Psalm 16:

I say to the LORD, “You are my LORD;
I have no good apart from you.”
I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16: 2, 8-9, 11)

Blessing God means acting like a mirror to him. We tell him who he has already shown himself to be. We do this by adding the devotion of our hearts, the intention of our mind, and the obedience of our wills.

- From the Psalm we just read, what are some qualities of the LORD for which we may bless him?

When we are in love with someone, it’s easy to bless them with praise. We say, “You are so beautiful. You are so kind. You are so wonderful.”

Blessing God is just taking the words of Scripture and telling them back to God, praising him for who he is. We will try to do that when we close in prayer later.

In preparation, write under Psalm 16 on this page of your 40 days guide:

O God, you are_____.

3) Reflect the Blessing of God to Others (approximately 10 of the 40 minutes)

Would someone please read the verse from Psalm 22: 22:

I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.
(Psalm 22: 22)

Reflecting God’s Blessing to others means connecting to another person, and letting a bit of what we have experienced of God’s blessing be known to them. The exercise for this day asks us to “Consider today who might be blessed by your speaking and praising of God. Is there an email you could write which includes the words, “Today, I am praising God for _____ and I just wanted you to know how good He has been in my life.”

If you actually wrote that email, what would you say you are praising God for? To whom would you feel comfortable sending such a note?

Now, let's note the practical aspect of blessing that is given every day.

Look at Day 1. It tells us about the power in simply smiling.

Day 2 tells about thanking.

Day 3 tells about giving complements.

How do you imagine people are blessed when we smile, thank, and compliment?

This week, be on the alert for an opportunity intentionally to smile, thank and compliment. Make notes of any effect or reactions you see when you do this on purpose.

4. Prayer (10 minutes)

As time allows, let group members share any prayer requests for themselves or others. Do not force anyone to pray, but ask for 4 volunteers to pray for the group (you can be one).

In your prayer time, you will have four ways to pray!

- 1) One volunteer will Thank God for the blessing you have received by the living water of Christ.
- 2) One volunteer will lead us to bless God by reading the sentence completed from Psalm 16, and asking others to do the same.
- 3) One volunteer will pray for those to whom you want to bless this week.
- 4) One volunteer will pray for any prayer requests made.

1. Introduction

Open with prayer, then take a moment to let the group members once again introduce themselves.

2. Blessing Review (20 minutes)

A. Practical Blessing

Lead a discussion of what happened this past week as group members more intentionally tried to bless others. Here are some sample questions to get discussion going:

- Let's take things in reverse order as we review the last week and our attempts to live the Blessing Life. The Practical Blessing sections encouraged us to smile, thank, complement, notice, inquire, and give. Did you find yourself remembering to be intentional more as the week went on?
- What happened when we blessed in our daily lives?
- What was difficult about being intentional in blessing?

B. Blessing God

Lead a discussion about the group members' attempts to bless God more passionately this week. This is the most difficult aspect for people to do and talk about, so be prepared to share first how it went for you!

Here are some sample questions.

- Gerrit has mentioned that Blessing God is difficult for us. Did you find this to be true, and if so, what made it hard?
- We were often asked to pray a Scripture aloud, and to do that more than once. What happened when you did that?
- What did you notice about the way you felt God's presence during the day if you had blessed him in the morning?

C. Receiving the Blessing

Lead a discussion about any insights or jewels people discovered while reading and considering the "Receiving the Blessing" passages. Give them some time to leaf back through the past week's Scriptures.

- What was your favorite passage in the "Receiving the Blessing" section?
- How did you overcome reluctance to believe that these blessings are actually for you, this week, in your daily life?
- What have you learned about God's heart for his world?

3. Study (10 minutes)

Turn to Day 9 in your 40 Days guides and locate the passage from Luke 1 in, "Receiving the Blessing." Ask someone to read aloud:

And the angel said to [Mary], "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word.” And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:30-38).

Discuss:

- What is God doing for the world in this passage?
- Mary receives the blessing of God by saying, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word.” What makes these words such a great response of faith!
- How would this phrase “Let it be to me” enable you better to receive the promises of God that we will read this week?”

4. Bless God (15 minutes)

Turn to Day 9 in your 40 Days guides and locate Mary’s song from Luke 1 in the Blessing God section.

Invite the group to read it aloud with you:

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”
(Luke 1:46-55)

Discuss:

- What phrases in this passage cause Mary to sound like a young woman praising her “man”?
- What wonderful promise for all the people is given at the end?
- What would happen if our blessing God included these kinds of “big picture” praises?

Ask the group to close their eyes and focus their hearts as you read this prayer again aloud and slowly.

4. Prayer (15 minutes)

As time allows, let group members share briefly how the group might pray for them this week. Do not force anyone to pray, but ask for 3 volunteers to pray for the group (you can be one).

- 1) Volunteer to pray on behalf of the group, “Yes, Lord, let it be to us according to your Word as we receive the blessings of Christ coming to us”
- 2) Volunteer to bless God for his plan of salvation in coming as a baby born of Mary.
- 3) Volunteer to pray for our blessing work this week and any prayer requests.

Encourage Participants to really work the Blessing projects this coming week!

Open with Welcome and Prayer

Blessing Review (25 Minutes)

Ask the group for Blessing Stories from the previous week.
(Be sure you have one in case the group has a slow start!)

After a good time of sharing, ask the group to turn to Day 11 of the 40 Days guides and to look again at the Scripture and exercise for Reflecting God's blessing.

Ask someone to read aloud the Colossians passage:

...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive (Colossians 3: 13).

Discuss:

- In what ways did you become aware you needed to bear with someone this past week?

What is the connection between knowing God's forgiveness of us and forgiving others?

The Practical Blessing section asked us to give others the Benefit of the Doubt.

- Do you recall any moments when you either colossally failed at this, or amazingly remembered to do it?
- What effect does giving the benefit of the doubt have on others to bless them?
- In what arena of your daily sphere do you particularly want to concentrate on giving the blessing of forbearance and the benefit of the doubt: home, work, church, or other?

Study (25 minutes)

Receive the Blessing

Invite the group to turn to Day 13 of the 40 Days guide.

Ask someone to read aloud the Ezekiel passage from Receive the Blessing:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. (Ezekiel 36:25-29)

Discuss:

- How do the promises of this passage apply to our task of blessing others by for bearing with them?
- How do we enter this promise so it becomes real to us? That is, how do we get this new heart?
- The LORD God wants to enter a covenant with us where he is our God and we are his people. What are the ways we say “Yes” to such an offer?
- What does Jesus have to do with this new heart?

Bless God

Invite a group member to read again the Revelation passage from the Blessing God section of Day 13:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:8-11)

Discuss

- What difference does it make in your prayers of blessing God to learn that you are joining your voice to praise that is already going on?
- What difference does it make to our praise to know that creatures higher, smarter, stronger and more glorious than we find this to be a worthwhile activity?
- What does it do for our Blessing God prayers to realize that worship is simply stepping into a stream of praise that began in eternity and will continue into eternity?
- What are we missing if we do not join this stream of heavenly praise?

Prayer Time (10 min.)

Invite the group to close their eyes and still their breathing. Ask them to imagine the scene from Revelation 4 as the angelic beings cast their crowns before the throne. Read to them the passage from Revelation. Then invite group members to speak aloud prayers of blessing that begin with the phrase, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God.....”

After the time of Blessing God, invite group members to name aloud any people for whom they have particular concern.

Then invite a time of “free prayer” after which you close.

Open with Welcome and Prayer

Study: Receive the Blessing of God (15 min)

Ask the group to turn to Day 19 and the Scripture from Titus under the “Receiving the Blessing” section. Ask someone to read aloud the passage:

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3: 4-7)

Discuss:

- How does the appearance of Jesus reveal the heart of God?
- According to this passage, on what basis did God save us?
- On what basis did he decidedly not save us?
- What does regeneration mean? How does regeneration “wash” us?
- How does the Holy Spirit renew a person?
- On the basis of Christ’s merit, we are justified before God. In the final verse, what do those justified by Christ become?
- If you are an heir to a great fortune, how does that change the way you approach circumstances of daily life?
- What difference does the inheritance of eternal life make in your life today?
- What does it take to receive the magnificent news of this passage as truly a promise to each of us personally?

Blessing God (15 min)

Psalm 139 is very famous. Let’s turn to Day 18 and the Blessing God section to find a quotation from it. Ask someone to read aloud:

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.
(Psalm 139:13-18)

Discuss:

- For what are we blessing God in this psalm?
- How do the very parts of our body actually bless God?
- What does it mean that God is thinking about you even as you sleep?
- What does it mean for the way you view your life to say in this moment, “I am with God.” Note: this is not “God is with me,” this is “I am with God. That is my present position.”

Reflect the Blessing of God to Others (10 min)

Turn to the Blessing Others section of Day 18 and read the Matthew passage:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28: 18-20)

Read from the guide:

Another way to translate Jesus’ words is “As you are going, make disciples...” Every day we are going into our world, into our spheres of influence, into our regular relationships.

Discuss:

- Name the people in your usual sphere of influence
- When are their opportunities to specifically bless others in Jesus’ name?
- What is frightening about that? Exciting?

Blessing Review (15 min)

Discuss the progress the group made in living the blessing life this past week. Share blessing stories.

Consider who you will meet this day. Pray for an opportunity to mention your Savior and for a way to show his love concretely.

Prayer Time (10 min)

Lead the group to enter a time of silent prayer in which we visualize the people whom we meet in everyday life. Ask the members to settle on one or two of those people, holding them in prayer in their minds. Then, invite the group silently to ask God to provide an opportunity this week through which we might bless those one or two people. Ask him to give us an opportunity to bless by speaking the name of Jesus and telling of his grace.

Invite the group to name aloud any persons for whom they have specific concerns.

Close with blessing God.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Blessing God (15 minutes)

Invite the group to turn to Day 28 in their 40 Days Guides and find the Philippians passage in the Blessing God section. Invite someone to read aloud:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:3-16)

Discuss

This is one of the earliest and greatest hymns to Jesus. Christians have been blessing Jesus through these words since the middle of the first century! Ask the group to work through the various parts of this hymn of praise through the following method.

We will borrow the prayer form from Revelation we used last week. Let's start each sentence with the words, "You are worthy Lord Jesus, because..." And then, one by one, we'll add the phrases of praise from this passage.

I'll start us: You are worthy Lord Jesus because though you were in the form of God, you did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped."

Now, look how the rest of the verse goes. We would add the second blessing of Christ by saying, "You are worthy Lord Jesus because you made yourself nothing, being born in the likeness of men."

Now, let's work through all the phrases of this hymn with this prayer form. Would someone else do the next phrase?

Note to leaders: go ahead and line this out yourself beforehand so you can help the group.

Discuss

- What changes are you noting in your prayer life as a result of blessing God every day?
- What have you learned about God through blessing him?
- What response from God do you experience after blessing him these last few weeks?
- What questions would you like to ask about blessing God?
- How would you recommend blessing God to others?

Blessing Review (20 minutes)

In days 22, 23, and 24, the practical blessing sections were about time: 1) meeting people on time, 2) showing up early, and 3) staying late.

- How have you experienced these ways of keeping time as ways to bless others?
- What makes is time so interconnected with love and blessing?
- What other blessing stories do we have from the past week?
- What else did you notice in your reading this past week that struck you?

Blessing Others (15 minutes)

This week, we're going to look ahead in our guide for an activity we want to practice so we can discuss it at our final session. Turn to Day 39 in your 40 Days guide to the section on practical blessing. Let's read that aloud:

Practical Blessing

Speak a word. In our final week, it may now be time to go on and give a Biblical blessing to someone! Perhaps a child or grandchild or grandmother or friend in the hospital--the Lord will lead you. But write down one of these great benedictions, or mark one of the psalms you have read, and speak it over someone when the time is right, with your hand on their shoulder or head. Ask, "May I bless you?" And then do it!

Discuss

- Has anyone ever blessed you with such a prayer? What was that like?
- Have you every blessed someone this way? What was the result?
- What makes us afraid to do this?

Gerrit mentioned how Bill Glass encourages parents to bless their children by 1) holding them, 2) Looking at them directly, and 3) saying, "You're mine and I'm glad. I love you and I think you're terrific."

- Can you imagine actually doing that? If you couldn't say it, could you write it?

Bill Gothard has written about the power of spoken blessings in the Lord's name. There is great power in speaking the Lord's name and word over someone. Our very fear to speak in his name indicates the level of power involved.

- Let's pray for one another every day this week, that we would each have opportunity and courage to actually bless another person in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Prayer Time (10 minutes)

Ask the group to join you in a time of free prayer in which we do both kinds of prayer: blessing God and asking his blessing for others.

Welcome and Introduction

Blessing Review (30 minutes)

Let's discuss if God answered our prayers by providing opportunities for a spoken blessing this past week.

Who has stories of blessing others in Christ's name?

Did anyone see an opportunity and pass it up? What's your follow up plan?

How have you seen God's blessing in your life over the last five weeks?

Let's see if we can, as a group, list 20 ways that we've learned God desires to bless us!

Receiving the Blessing (20 min)

Let's turn to Day 39 of our 40 Days guide, to the Receive the Blessing Section.

Would someone please read the passage from Isaiah:

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David. (Isaiah 55:1-3)

- How do people spend energy on what does not bring life?
- How do we try to buy, earn, manipulate or force life that only God can give?
- How would you define receiving God's blessing according to the imagery of this passage?
- What must we bring to the bargaining table to get the blessing God offer?
- What actions during a worship service remind you of this passage?

The question for all of us desiring to live the Blessing life is whether we hear the gracious invitation of our God to come to him as to the source of all good and fulfillment. Will we come to him daily asking for his life and blessing, with nothing to trade him but a receptive spirit and a willing heart?

Now, for our final study, let's look at the glorious future vision of Revelation 21. Let's turn in our 40 Days guides to Day 34 and the Receive the Blessing Section.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN...

If every day for 40 days,

I received the blessing of God's love more deeply?

I blessed God for his love more passionately?

I blessed others with his love more intentionally?

What could happen if I engage in 40 Days of Blessing?



First Presbyterian Church, 763 North Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70802
www.fpcbr.org, 225.387.0617