



FOCUS VERSE

Psalm 68:19

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.

LESSON TEXT

Psalm 144:1–15

1 Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight:

2 My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.

3 LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!

4 Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.

5 Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.

6 Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them.

7 Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children;

8 Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

9 I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee.

10 It is he that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword.

11 Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood:

12 That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace:

13 That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets:

14 That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets.

15 Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.



FOCUS THOUGHT

It is the desire of the Lord to bless His people as they continue to walk with Him.



CULTURE CONNECTION

An Eternal Benefits Package

When an individual who is looking for a job considers offers from different companies, often a specific salary is not the only piece of compensation he or she will request. For some people, the benefits a company offers are just as important. Business surveys tell us “there are baseline employee benefits that most industry experts say are needed to attract talent competitively: healthcare, paid time off, and possibly a retirement savings options” (<http://www.zanebenefits.com/blog/the-most-important-benefits-to-employees>, accessed November 30, 2015).

Though some may not like to admit it—because it does not sound spiritual—the

benefits were the reason we first turned to Jesus. We all had sinned, were living in despair, and could not find a way out. Peace was fleeting, hope was lost, and true joy was only a mirage. But when we heard of Jesus and the change He could bring to our lives, we surrendered our hearts and asked Him to take up residence. The benefits package was unmatched.

Yes, the Lord offers many benefits to the believer, but in order to continue living in peace, our focus must change. Our work in the kingdom of God must not be driven by our love for the benefits, but because of our love for the benefactor and giver of all those benefits.

OUTLINE

I. BLESSED WITH GOD’S LOVE

- A. Blessed with God’s Peace
- B. Blessed with God’s Presence
- C. Blessed with God’s Joy

II. BLESSED IN RELATIONSHIPS

- A. Family
- B. Friends

III. BLESSED IN SOCIETY

- A. Blessed with Integrity
- B. Blessed with Work Ethics
- C. Blessed with Talents

IV. BLESSED IN OUR DAILY LIVES

- A. Sound Mind
- B. Absence of Fear
- C. Daily Blessings

V. BLESSED IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

- A. Trust in the Lord
- B. God Is Our Refuge and Strength
- C. God Can Make Things Work for Our Good

life. If we were to peruse the shelves of a local bookstore or perform a search on *amazon.com*, we would discover hundreds of titles that promise to reveal how to achieve the best life, how to overcome obstacles in our way in pursuit of this life, and even the “necessary” beliefs and practices to achieve this life.

The problem, however, is our human tendency to search for happiness in all the wrong places. Whether material things, the latest technology, relationships, fame, fortune, or even drugs and alcohol, people make assumptions and pursue choices they believe will bring them happiness. As sociologist Greg Easterbrook pointed out in his book *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*, even as people on average are better off financially, materially, medically, and technologically than their forebears even sixty or seventy years ago, people today report lower levels of happiness than previous generations. While we may be better off, many of us do not feel better off.

The witness of Scripture directs us to find our happiness in the blessings of God. In fact, the Greek word *makarios*, found in the New Testament and often translated as “blessed,” also means “happy.” Our happiness comes

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

What is the secret to obtaining happiness? This may be the central question of modern

when we recognize, seek, and celebrate the blessings of God in our lives (Psalm 144:15). May our happiness increase as we explore this lesson and consider all the ways God blesses us.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. BLESSED WITH GOD'S LOVE

A. Blessed with God's Peace

Perhaps the opposite of peace is stress and anxiety, and the circumstances of our lives and the world around us cause us to yearn for even a moment of respite. Whether they are financial concerns; health concerns; challenges of raising children; trying to find balance between work, church, and family responsibilities; concerns about personal safety; or even spiritual attacks, God's love is presented to us through His peace. Psalm 29:11 declares: "The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace."

God's peace is so incredible we cannot fully comprehend its benefits. Paul declared, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). As we daily face new challenges, we can imagine the peace of God standing guard over our hearts and minds, protecting us from harm. Discover His peace by setting aside daily time with God to pray and read Scripture and perhaps write in a journal or sing. We can experience His peace sweeping over us every day.

B. Blessed with God's Presence

When we sense the presence of God, we sense the assurance that God is walking with us, encouraging us, providing for us, and protecting us. Christians and non-Christians alike can sense the presence of God, whether in a worship service, a prayer meeting, private devotions, or conversation with fellow believers. We also know when it is difficult to sense the presence of God, such as times when sin separates us from God, or our emotions over a particular situation obscure our ability to sense His nearness.

After David had sinned in his actions with Bathsheba, he prayed in Psalm 51:11: "Cast me not away from your presence; and take

not thy holy spirit from me." When we have experienced the blessing of God's presence, there is nothing in the world that can replace the joy and assurance it brings. Our desire is for the Lord to be on our side. "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psalm 118:6).

David understood the implication of God's presence being with him: "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). When God is walking with us, we experience "fulness of joy," or complete, lasting happiness. While our emotions, including happiness, may fluctuate based on circumstances, joy permeates as a lasting satisfaction God desires us to have. The presence of God enables us to receive the blessing of joy and eternal happiness.

C. Blessed with God's Joy

God's joy provides a stable anchor for our mood whether tossed by storms of life or experiencing the euphoria of victory. God's anchor of joy was demonstrated when the ancient scribe Ezra declared to Israel at the dedication of the second Temple: "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10, NKJV). The people of Israel were sorrowful because the new Temple was not as glorious as the Temple Solomon had built, and they experienced sadness from unmet expectations. When we experience sadness, or even when our lives fail to meet our own expectations or dreams, the joy of the Lord is what provides us with the strength to endure.

There is joy in belonging to the kingdom of God and recognizing the blessings that come from being connected to Jesus Christ and His church. Paul declared, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). As believers filled with His Spirit, we can know joy that surpasses the superficial things of this world. His joy is our blessing!

II. BLESSED IN RELATIONSHIPS

A. Family

Often when we consider our blessings from God, we discount the role of relationships and how they can satisfy our human

need for love, support, and fellowship. Jesus said of our human needs, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). When we seek after God and what He desires for our lives, we open ourselves to the complete blessings of God. God spoke through the prophet Malachi regarding those faithful to God in their tithing: “Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). When we are faithful to Him, we can expect an abundance of blessings, including participation in a family.

Whether biological, blended, adoptive, or church family, God provides us with the opportunity to love and be loved by others. He places us with people who mutually desire to have basic needs met, including food, water, shelter, clothing, and most of all, love. Through His Spirit, God brings about a restoration of broken relationships in families and facilitates healing. Perhaps most importantly, when we join the kingdom of God we participate in His church and become members of a faith family.

Paul declared, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God . . . in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19, 21–22). While sometimes we may feel alienated by others, even our biological families, God has placed us in a church family joined together by His Spirit.

B. Friends

In addition to the families in which He places us, God also blesses us with meaningful friendships that guide us and allow us to enjoy the company of others. The writer of Proverbs stated, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV). Friendships are invaluable human relationships that provide recreation, laughter, and perspective to our lives. Friends can provide a shoulder to cry on, and they can give guidance, safety, and counsel (Proverbs 11:14). Our friends have

shared in many of our fondest memories, and no doubt we have friends that know us and care for us more than our own families.

God especially blesses us with friends who will support our spiritual well-being and encourage us to continue seeking after Him. While Scripture teaches us not to be attached to unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14–18), we are to seek friendship with Jesus (John 15:13–14) and pursue friendships with those who demonstrate wisdom (Proverbs 13:20) and pursue righteousness (I Corinthians 15:34). May God bless us with the laughter, support, counsel, and fellowship that come with godly men and women He places in our lives.

III. BLESSED IN SOCIETY

A. Blessed with Integrity

It has been said that the most important attribute people have is their reputation. While sin may blight one’s reputation, the forgiveness of God can restore an individual to right standing not only before God but also before others. The blessing of integrity is the product of seeking after righteousness, or right living, before God. This blessing begins when we take personal responsibility for our lives and decisions, and we seek to submit them to the biblical standards of righteousness.

David declared in Psalm 25:21, “Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee.” The blessing of integrity and a reputation for honest and just decisions can cause further benefits in society as we submit ourselves to God. Whether we are returning excess change given by a cashier in error, maintaining truthfulness with others, or demonstrating care for the oppressed, we are in turn blessing others.

Our good deeds and integrity may also preserve us if we are falsely accused of evil: “Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (I Peter 2:12, NKJV). God blesses us with the knowledge of Him and His ways, blesses our pursuit of His righteousness and integrity, and allows our integrity and good works to serve as a blessing and witness to others.

B. Blessed with Work Ethics

With the steady advancement of technology, availability of education, and transportation mobility, there seems to be endless possibilities for career pursuits and business opportunities. Yet all these potential opportunities can overwhelm and paralyze our decision making, reducing our productivity and earnings. When we serve God, however, He blesses us with employment and the desire to perform at our best. He desires us to achieve our career dreams and remain productive for society and His kingdom. The writer of Proverbs stated, “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3, ESV). When we commit our work to God, we provide Him an opportunity to bless our plans and see them come to pass.

God created us to work, and it is a blessing to be employed. In North America the higher unemployment of the Great Recession affected many individuals and families, helping us recognize how meaningful work can be in providing for us. We are commanded through our worship of Jesus Christ to “eat [our] own bread,” or earn our own living. (See II Thessalonians 3:12.)

In our society we understand there are people who are disabled and cannot work. Others have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, perhaps because of a company downsizing or a depressed economy, and are in the process of seeking employment. God provides grace to those who find themselves in these circumstances.

The writer of Ecclesiastes stated, “Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). We are blessed when we have the ability to choose a career, gain employment, earn a living, work hard, and give thanks to God in everything.

C. Blessed with Talents

God provides us with various talents to serve in His kingdom and to benefit society. These talents may be provided based on natural ability (Matthew 25:15), by the grace of God (Romans 12:6), or through the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:1–11). Regardless of how

we received our talents, we recognize they are sourced from God Himself. Whether our talents are in construction, teaching, music, financial management, leadership, communication, technology, medicine, or some other field, God intends for us to utilize our talents as gifts He has entrusted to us.

IV. BLESSED IN OUR DAILY LIVES

A. Sound Mind

In our world that is increasingly focused on techniques to safeguard and improve mental health, it is helpful to recognize the blessing of God on our minds. Paul told Timothy, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7). When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we receive power that enables us to overcome fear and anxiety and allows us to rest in His comfort and peace. While pastoral counselors and other helpers can lead us on a path to a “sound mind,” it is God Himself who restores us mentally and emotionally.

B. Absence of Fear

What makes us afraid? What is it that scares us to the point where we are unable to sleep or even function at work? When we give our fears to God, He removes them and gives us peace. His perfect love casts out fear (I John 4:18), and our fear disappears when we remember the Lord is on our side, fighting for us (Psalm 118:6; Romans 8:31). Our God is greater than any obstacle, enemy, spirit, or circumstance that would seek to destroy us. When we cast our anxiety on God (I Peter 5:7) and seek Him for deliverance (Psalm 34:4), we realize His blessing as an absence of fear.

C. Daily Blessings

We experience the blessings of God daily. The salvation of the Lord, while realized through the new birth at a particular moment in time, is maintained as we walk by faith (Habakkuk 2:4). In sight of the sacrifice and exaltation of Jesus Christ, we are to work out our salvation as God works in us and through us (Philippians 2:12–13). Our blessing of salvation is realized every day

when we recognize our identity as children of God and live in faith and obedience to His Word.

When we walk in the daily blessings of God, we experience His healing working throughout our lives in our minds and bodies. The Lord declared to the people of Israel, “For I am the LORD that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26). While we celebrate the advancements of modern medicine, doctors cannot heal the mind and body but only facilitate the mind and body’s capacity to heal itself. Our bodies are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) by our Creator, and His hand is present in the natural and supernatural healing we receive every day. While the human mind is still largely a mystery to medical science, the Lord searches us and knows us, understanding our thoughts (Psalm 139:1–2). His Spirit heals our deepest hurts, restores our dreams, and fulfills our joy.

The Lord blesses us with hope of future glory to be shared with Him. This hope is realized through Jesus Christ, who by grace has established this hope in us (Romans 5:2). Our daily struggles remind us of our brokenness, the fallen nature of our world, and the hope of redemption that is coming when Jesus returns for His church. We are reminded every day that we need Jesus in our lives, and our hope causes us daily to look forward to the “glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

V. BLESSED IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

A. Trust in the Lord

As part of the human condition, it is inevitable that we will all face crises and troubles from time to time in our lives. The nature of our humanity is to seek a savior when we are in trouble, be it family members, doctors, counselors, attorneys, first responders, or even our own intellect. While these are all resources in helping us through trouble, and likely even sent by God Himself, we are blessed to be able to trust in the Lord at all times (Psalm 7:1; 84:12; Jeremiah 17:7). He provides us strength and deliverance with salvation and protection (Psalm 18:2; 37:40; Isaiah 12:2), giving us an assurance we are safe with Him.

When we trust in the Lord, we can be assured God knows us and our situation: “The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him” (Nahum 1:7). Sometimes we find ourselves in circumstances no one seems to understand: the doctors are unable to render a diagnosis, the counselors are unable to provide advice, and even police officers are unable to adequately provide protection. Even when no one else understands what we are experiencing, God knows.

B. God Is Our Refuge and Strength

The blessing of God is revealed when our personal testimony is expanded through God’s provision as “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). David’s testimony grew to include a song of deliverance from the Philistines: “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence” (II Samuel 22:2–3). As believers empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can also recognize the refuge and strength of God in the comfort He brings in the midst of adversity (John 14:16).

This blessing of refuge comes when we actively seek His protection: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10). Instead of first running to professionals or friends, we can run to Jesus Christ and find safety. In emergencies, often the only prayer we can think of amidst the stress and chaos is to say the name “Jesus.” This simple prayer of the Lord’s name by faith is all that is needed to bring His refuge and strength directly into our situation. Let us always remember to call on Jesus!

C. God Can Make Things Work for Our Good

When we call on Jesus, we not only invite His protection but also invite Him to bring a benefit to situations we thought were only intended to harm us. Often we are unable to see, except through the passage of time, how God uses the negative circumstances we encounter to allow us to emerge stronger, more

faithful, and more like Christ. When Paul stated, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28), he was trying to encourage the church at Rome in the midst of current suffering to recognize a future benefit (Romans 8:18–30). When we face trials, we can expect God to comfort us in the midst of our difficulties (Isaiah 61:3) while looking forward to the ways God will refine our faith and deepen our desire to worship Him (1 Peter 1:7).

Our faith in Jesus not only enables us to see the good in suffering but also enables us to experience miraculous reversals that bring glory to God. David celebrated how God intervened in his life, singing, “Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness” (Psalm 30:11). When we call the name of Jesus in faith over our lives and circumstances, we should always expect His miraculous power to turn around medical diagnoses, provide the means to pay financial debts, and restore broken relationships. We serve a God who is able!

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1).

When we stop and consider all the blessings the Lord provides for us as His people, how can we not call on His name in worship? When we consider how His blessings provide us not only happiness but also eternal joy, how could we not dance in celebration of God’s goodness? How could praise to God not be continually in our mouths when we consider His daily and forever blessings on our lives? The Lord truly is good to us regardless of our circumstances and regardless of how we feel in the moment. Our joy is rooted in His joy for us.

In the pursuit of happiness, men and women will always come up empty if they seek to find lasting joy in larger homes, fancier cars, and bigger bank accounts. They will be unsatisfied if they seek joy in relationships or “true love.” The joy of the Lord, however, is available for all who will call on Him, run to Him, and trust in Him. Jesus brings true joy. What a blessing it is to live for Him! ■

REFLECTIONS

- What are some areas of your life in which you have tried to achieve lasting happiness on your own?
- How has God blessed you through relationships in your family? friends? church family? Are there any additional blessings you desire from God in your relationships?
- Take an inventory of your talents and strengths. Are you utilizing them to their fullest extent at work? at church? during leisure time? How might you maximize your talents for the kingdom of God and society?
- What is one thing that makes you most afraid? How might you allow the love of God and His Spirit to neutralize that fear?
- Consider the major points in your life where God “expanded your testimony” through deliverance, protection, healing, and so forth. How have these encounters with God refined your faith and deepened your worship to God?