

pray it
forward



About the Cards and these Worship Materials

'Pray-It Forward' is a new resource from the Mission and Discipleship Council that aims to help congregations and individuals find ways of talking *to God* as well as talking *about God*. To live out the life of receiving, and giving that we are called to by the Gospel.

These worship materials can be used for a Service of Blessing, Dedication or Commitment and include sermon ideas, music suggestions, prayers and an act of blessing. This is not a service to promote a new project or initiative, though. It is a time to draw close to God in worship. A time to look for God's blessing so that we can go out knowing that we have everything we need to bless others.

Each pack has a selection of eight Biblical blessings printed on the cards that can be said for, or even with people you know. On the reverse side, the cards say "A friend prayed for you. Why not pray for another friend and pass this card onto them." As well as telling people we are praying for them, it invites them into this vital habit – receiving a blessing and then, in turn, being a blessing that someone else might receive.

A set of practical '**Serving Suggestions**' give ideas of how you could incorporate the cards into ways you are already serving in your community – such as hospital, or district visits, school chaplaincy, coffee mornings etc.

The boxes can be purchased from the Mission and Discipleship Council for £5 per box of 80 assorted cards or 3 boxes for £12 (plus post and packaging). They can be ordered via www.madstuff.biz or by emailing mandd@cofscotland.org.uk

These cards could be dedicated any Sunday but some Sundays in particular may lend themselves to commissioning the congregation to go and bless others:

The celebration of harvest – blessing others with the gifts we celebrate

A stewardship Sunday – bringing and dedicating gifts.

Advent Sunday – the start of the church year. Beginnings in blessings

New Year – praying others into new beginnings

The Baptism of our Lord – another day to focus on our calling to bless the world around us.

The beginning of Lent – a Lenten challenge – to go and bless others.

Pray It Forward – An Act of Worship

The purpose of the service is to give people a sense of being blessed before going on to bless others. The cards help us, but are not what gives us the ability, or authority, to bless people.

You will need to decide if you would like to distribute the cards as people arrive, or later as part of the worship.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: God is love

All: Blessed are those who live in love

Leader: We will bless the Lord

All: Who has blessed us with every good gift

Leader: We will share God's blessings

All: With all of the world

PRAYER

READINGS

Some Scriptural References that could be used

Genesis 1:22

Genesis 12:2-3

Genesis 26:2-5

Numbers 6:24-26

Deuteronomy 7:12-15

1 Kings 8:56-61

Psalms 1:1

Psalms 121:7-8

Ezekiel 34:25-26

Matthew 5:2-12

Luke 11:28

Romans 15:33

1 Corinthians 1:3

Ephesians 1:3

Ephesians 3:14-20

Revelation 1:3

SERMON

You may wish to explore the theology of blessing, drawing different stories of from the Bible of how blessing is used. Why did people bless themselves or their homes? What happens when we bless? Who can bless? What makes blessing difficult? Who is it hard to bless and how can we bless our enemies with integrity?

This could be an opportunity to preach on the priesthood of all believers, that all are called to bless. You might however wish to invite people to think of how they feel about prayer and blessing. Do they believe they can do it? What would help them?

Some thoughts for starters...

As a child, I had a brightly coloured box that sat by my bedside. The box contained little scrolls of paper along with some tweezers used to extract the scrolls. It was called a Promise Box. Every morning I would select one of the scrolls and contemplate the random blessing for the day. If I remembered, at the end of the day, I might reflect on whether or not the promise had been fulfilled. In all of God's covenants with humanity, blessing plays an integral part. God's desire to allow people to prosper and know favoured status pervades the Biblical accounts.

From God's earliest blessing on Adam and Eve, to the covenant with Abraham; from the blessings conferred on individuals to the promises of peace and prosperity made to nations, promise and blessing go hand in hand. Not only did the blessing of God confer status – the status of one beloved of God and destined for success – it also imposed an obligation on the blessed to live a life in keeping with one so favoured.

There are over 600 accounts of blessing in the Old Testament. Blessings bestowed by fathers on the household, by rulers on their subjects and by priests on the faithful, all invocations of the blessing of God. In addition, throughout the Psalms we witness humans bestowing blessing on God in response to God's goodness and deliverance.

There is an element of conditionality in some of the blessings cited in the Old Testament: "If you pay attention" or "If you obey..." and then a blessing is cited as a reward for righteousness, all conspiring to encourage right living.

There is a distinct emphasis on material prosperity resulting from God's blessing throughout the Old Testament. This emphasis changes in the New Testament as blessing becomes focused on the spiritual, rather than the material.

The beatitudes are a prime example – ***Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted...(Matthew 5).***

Believers are then called to be a blessing to the world using all the spiritual gifts they have been given.

Perhaps the best known Biblical blessing is the Aaronic blessing recorded in Numbers 6: 24-26 ***The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*** We often bestow this blessing on infants at baptism, on communicants on profession of faith, on couples in marriage and it may also be included in a funeral liturgy. So, it seems, this blessing is suitable for all those important rites of passage.

Today, we might harness two aspects of blessing – sharing our gifts to bless others and living as those who are guided by the God who blesses humanity with endless gifts. Sharing the blessings that we ourselves have known is but one step in that journey to blessing and blessed.

**pray it
forward**

Illustration

The River Jordan collects its water from Lebanon and Mount Hermon and takes it into the Sea of Galilee. In this large body of freshwater a beautiful ecology of fish, flora and fauna lives. As a result, it has supported the lives of countless people through the bustling fishing industry that has lasted for thousands of years.

Further south however things are very different in the Dead Sea where the salt content is so high that nothing lives there.

The difference between them is caused by 'outlets'. You see, the water that enters the Sea of Galilee continues out of it becoming the south section of the River Jordan. Water flowing in, water flowing out. The water that enters the Dead Sea, however has nowhere to go, no outlet. As the sea evaporates, the salt deposits build up and all that fresh water stagnates.

This can be like us. When we find ways to share the gifts that we have been given, we become healthier inwardly, life flows in then out of us and thrives. When we live mainly for ourselves though, we find that after a while we begin to stagnate inwardly and life is diminished. In Matthews Gospel (10:8) Jesus says, "Freely you have received, now freely give." – Truly words to live by.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

*The focus of the following prayer is for preparation of the people of God for blessing using the beatitudes as a basis. The NRSV has been used, but substituting with a more colloquial version such as 'The Message' would give a more contemporary edge. **It is not necessary to use all the beatitudes**, and if desired, intercessions for the wider world and community will naturally flow on from the beatitudes used.*

Leader: Let us bless the Lord:

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.
Blessed be his glorious name forever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.
Amen and Amen. (Psalm 72:18-19, NRSV)*

Let us pray for the glory of God to fill the whole earth.
As we prepare ourselves,
let us recall those whom Jesus declared are blessed.
Let us pray, in the name of Jesus Christ,
that our lives may give the 'aroma of Christ' (2 Cor 2: 15)
and so be channels of God's blessing to the world.

Leader: During this prayer, at the end of each of reading of the beatitude, you are invited to respond with the words "**Grant us this blessing O God.**"

Leader: *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

All: **Grant us this blessing O God.**

Save us from thinking that we have all the answers to other people's problems. Teach us to rely on your wisdom so that others may know the rich blessing that flows from trusting in you alone.

Leader: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

All: **Grant us this blessing O God.**

Leader: Save us from being content to relax while others suffer. Teach us to mourn over the injustices that make you weep so that others may be blessed as your compassion flows through us.

Leader: *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

All: **Grant us this blessing O God.**

Leader: Save us from wasting time and energy by jostling for recognition for ourselves and our efforts. Teach us to accept the gifts you have given us with contentment so that others may see that we rejoice in your blessings.

Leader: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

All: **Grant us this blessing O God.**

Leader: Save us from hungering for yet more possessions. Teach us to hunger to see the world live in the ways that you declare are right so that others may know that you are a just God.

Leader: *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

All: **Grant us this blessing O God.**

Leader: Save us from closing our eyes and ears to the needs of others. Teach us how to show your concern so that others may know that you are a loving God.

Leader: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

All: **Grant us this blessing, O God.**

Leader: Save us from looking down on those you call us to help. Purify the motives of our hearts that your love may flow through us, unhindered by our pride.

Leader: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

All: **Grant us this blessing O God.**

Leader: Save us making battles out of causes you will not own. Teach us to make your peace

with our words and actions so that the lives of others will be blessed.

Leader: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

All: ***Grant us this blessing O God.***

Leader: Save us from bland living which conceals our faith in you. Teach us to be willing to know Christ and the fellowship of his suffering so that others will be blessed by our perseverance in faith. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

You may wish to use a song at this point that helps people prepare to be blessed. *If the cards are not dispersed already, you may wish to do that during the song.*



pray it
forward

ACTION OF BLESSING

Invite people to hold their card and read the blessing on it and consider what it might mean for them. Give people some time to pray to God in the quiet.

It may be helpful to give a good time of silence here. Longer times of silence can be uncomfortable for some people, so it is important to tell people how they might use it: in this case, to ask God for a blessing, such as the one on the card. Quiet background music can help support longer silent prayer for those not used to it.

(silence)

After some time, have someone start singing the Aaronic Blessing allowing others to join in as they wish. It is probably better not to interrupt the silence to introduce the song, but rather allow people to move from prayer directly into singing it a few times through. This allows us to affirm and celebrate the blessing we have received with a Hymn that is one of the Church's most beloved anthems.

AARONIC BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you:
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you:
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

Leader: Let us Pray

Living God, we pray that by the work of the Holy Spirit now,
your blessing will rest upon us.
Bless us as we receive these cards;
may they remind us to pray for others.
Bless us as we share these cards,
that they will lead others to receive your love,
and rest in your grace.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Leader: In baptism, just before the members of the congregation agree to play their part in nurturing a child, we often hear the words: “Sacraments bring us joy – they also bring us responsibility”.

So it is with blessings – they bring us joy and comfort and strength – but we are then called on to live bringing blessings to others.

And so we say these words of commitment together:

All: As God has chosen to bless us with all manner of gifts,
Resilience in joy and comfort in sorrow,
so we, God’s people here,
dedicate ourselves anew
to living as those who are blessed.
By our daily lives, we will bring the blessing of God
to all whom we encounter,
in the name of the triune God forever.
Amen.

Leader: As we commit ourselves to sharing God's blessing with others, let us ask for his blessing on each other turning to our neighbour, swapping the cards, and saying the first line of the Aaronic Blessing “The Lord Bless you and Keep you”

Invite them to do this now, perhaps even shaking hands as we might do during ‘the peace’.

*After enough time has passed you can close this section by singing the **Aaronic Blessing** a few times through, though this time the purpose is more about us blessing others.*

NOTE: It would be worth thinking about how you might adapt this material to include any children in the action of blessing.



pray it
forward

PRAYER

Leader: Lord keep to the front of our minds
all the ways you bless us every day,
through joy and triumph and through sorrow and pain.
We give you thanks for all who have made your blessings real to us,
the saints of the past and of the present.
May we, in keeping with that great tradition of prayer
bring your blessing to others near and far.
Expand our vision of blessing
until we see in our lives and in the lives of others
how far your goodness stretches.
May we, in this community, continue to be a fount of blessing.
Amen

BENEDICTION

Leader: Go into the world in peace.
Be of good courage;
hold fast to that which is good,
render unto no-one evil for evil.
Strengthen the faint hearted,
support the weak,
help the afflicted,
honour all people.
Love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The blessing of God Almighty,
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
Be with you always.
Amen.

These materials have been prepared by members of the Mission and Discipleship Council.
With particular thanks to Rev. Dan Carmichael, Minister of Lenzie Union and Rev Liz Crumlish
Minister of Castlehill Church.



**pray it
forward**

Disclaimer: Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.