

# “Blessed” // Luke 1:46–56 // *God With Us 2*

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## Announcement

We are in a short mini-series leading up to DPAC...

- (EPIC; we try to provide certain events in the year that make it easy for you to invite somebody; a simple invitation could change someone’s eternity). “God With Us,” and we’re talking about when God becomes personal to you.
- For many people God is not personal to them; for many years God was not personal to me; “God” was a doctrine that I learned, a lifestyle I pursued.

But God has always pursued relationship with people. **Micah 6:8**, “He has shown you, o man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: do justly; love mercy; walk humbly with your God.” Many people have the “do justly”—do what’s right; and maybe even “love mercy”—be generous; gracious; but “walk humbly with God?” Do you do that—do you walk with God? Do you love him? Is he a Father and a friend and companion to you?

Today we’re going to look at a concept that makes God personal to you. It’s the question of what it means to walk in the blessing and favor of God.

## Introduction

**The word “blessed” gets thrown around a lot in Christian circles.**

- A lot of times it means you’re rich in something—so and so is blessed.
- You ask some Christians how they are doing and they’ll say, “blessed and highly favored.”
- Sometimes it means things are just really going well for you (almost like you’re “lucky”).
  - TV preacher: “Favor of God: parking space”
  - “Heaping helping of blessing is coming your way”—by that he means, “Everything’s about to go your way.” Christian version of: “May the odds be ever in your favor.”
- Of course, we always say it when people sneeze, though no one understands why... of all the things that happen to me, sneezing is not when I feel most in need of a blessing. Maybe when I slam my toe into piece of furniture, and my mind fills with Christian swear words—that’s when I need to hear someone say, “bless you”... or when I get a paper cut or whatever.
  - Some people say the tradition goes back to the belief that your heart stops when you sneeze, so saying “God bless you” means, “I hope heart starts again...”
  - Some say that the tradition started because in the Middle Ages people believed that sneezing was expelling the demon of sickness so saying God bless you kept the demon from flying back in.
  - Others say that because if you keep your eyes open your eyeballs will fly out of their sockets and saying “God bless you” means “Good job not letting that happen.” (not true: you don’t see people’s eyes bulge out)
  - Most likely it goes back to the days of the ‘black death’ plague, when someone sneezed they were immediately blessed so that they didn’t develop the black plague.

*So what exactly does “blessed” or “favor” mean? How do you know you’re walking in the blessing and favor of God?*

- The phrase, “blessed and highly favored” comes from a statement Gabriel said to Mary when he told her that she was pregnant with Jesus. He said, “Mary, you are blessed and highly favored among women.” When Elizabeth saw Mary she used the word blessed with Mary 3 times. [Luke 1:42] “she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘**Blessed** are you among women, and **blessed is** the fruit of your womb! [45] And **blessed is** she who believed...”
- Mary composes a song in which she calls herself blessed, and says, boldly, that’s how the generations will most remember her. [Luke 1:48] ...from now on all generations will call me blessed;

“What does that word mean?”

## Luke 1:46–55

If I were to list out the things that people in our community are most confused about regarding Christianity, I’d put this in my top 5. If you would ever get the real meaning of this, you will have captured the heart of the gospel.

(This is the 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas carol ever written, technically. But unlike a lot of our Christmas music, it’s not sentimental. It’s revolutionary. A true Christmas song should turn your world upside down.)

Let me read the whole thing and then we’ll ask some questions about it.

[46] And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, [47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

[48] for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

[49] for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. [50] And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

[51] He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; [52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; [53] he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

[54] He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, [55] as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

**4 Questions: 1. Would you have thought of Mary as blessed? 2. What was the nature of her blessing? 3. What was the basis of her blessing? Then finally we’ll consider: Are you living as one blessed and highly favored?**

### 1. Would you have thought of Mary as “blessed”?

- At the point these statements were made, Mary’s life was basically ruined:
  - **Her reputation was ruined.** A **teenage girl out of wedlock** in that culture was a serious scandal. Add to that the fact **she was engaged** to another guy, but they lived apart so people knew the baby wasn’t his, **and so she was considered** a loose girl, and someone who betrayed her fiancée. (By the way, the **angel did not even tell Joseph** about this until several months later—so when she is writing this the man she loves has turned his back on her). **And this stained reputation** stayed with her, in the eyes of many, for the rest of her life. Even when Jesus was old there were some who still told the story that Mary had gotten pregnant by a Roman soldier.

- Here's something you need to think about: **God did that to her.** He could have done it another way. He chose to. Would you consider this situation blessed and highly favored?
- She was very poor. Indications are the poorest of the poor:
  - Scripture shows you that: when they offered their sacrifice at Jesus' birth, they couldn't afford to offer the lamb the law required. They offered two turtledoves, which was an exception made for poor people in the law. She was not just poor; the poorest of the poor.
- And then **there's just the difficulty of having the kid.** Scholars say she would have been, at the oldest, about 17. An angel shows us and tells her, "You're going to have a kid. By the way, he's going to be God. That's all. You figure the rest out. Oh, by the way, I'm not telling anybody else about this—not even Joseph, your fiancée, at least for a little while. Good luck." Can you imagine being 17 and having this weight dropped onto you? How can you explain this to anybody?
  - "Angel came. The baby is God's."
  - There is no believable explanation.
- **Be honest: if you were looking at Mary, based on the externals,** would you have called her "blessed"? No. She's hasn't been given a **close parking space** at the mall of life.
- But, in the core of her being, she's carrying God.
- *Her blessing consists of two things:*

## 2. What was the *nature* of her blessing?

**A. Presence:** Notice how much she speaks about God in the first person.

- God *my* Savior.
- He has looked on me.
- I was hungry: you fed me.
- I was lowly: you exalted me.

**But nothing has changed in her circumstances,** so she's not rejoicing in what God has given to her, but what God has become to her in Christ. At this point, Christ in her is the only exaltation she has; the baby in her womb is her only fullness; her only sustenance; her only salvation.

Look at vs. 49: [49] for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. [50] And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

- These 3 attributes of God combine to make the gospel.
- **Holy:**
  - People have misunderstandings of the word "holy." Weird, church word that means ultra-religious; weird; other-worldly.
  - But holiness means "wholeness;" "perfection." It is everything as God created it to be.
    - A **holy earth** is an earth that functions in all the beauty God created it in. A **holy person** is someone lives with integrity; honesty; love. A **holy marriage** is one in which husband and wife love and serve each other.
  - **God is holy,** which means he is perfect, with no corruption.
  - We get used to sin—in movies. Abuse. Violence. Betrayal. Hatred. Dishonesty. Immorality. God never does. Holiness is his beauty.
  - Sit down to a meal. Perfectly prepared. On the plate was a piece of a rotting corpse. That's what it would be like for us to be in heaven. Sin approaching God is like an icecube approaching the surface of the sun.
  - So that he is holy meant that, if we were going to know him, we needed to be saved.
- **Merciful:**

- Mercy means that God looked at us and had compassion. He couldn't just watch as we perished.
  - Isaiah says it is something like a mother feels for a newborn baby. Me wanting to take the pain of my kid.
  - But even that doesn't get it. Jesus said in Luke 10 that our compassion for our kids was "evil" compared to God's love for us.
  - **(Mighty):** *"Because he's holy, he had to do something about our sin. Because he's merciful, he wanted to do something. Because he's **mighty (and that's #3)**, he was able something."*<sup>1</sup>
    - Only one thing in the Bible is called "the power of God." God does many things by his power, but only one thing is itself called "the power of God." That is the gospel.<sup>2</sup>
    - Ps. 8. God made the universe with his *finger*.
      - **Kids' book:** If the Milky Way were the size of North America, our solar system would be a coffee cup. Earth would be a speck of dust inside the cup. And each us is a speck on the speck inside that cup.<sup>3</sup>
      - God made this with his finger—it didn't even take his arm, just his finger. Yet he never calls that "creation" the power of God. He calls the gospel his power. It was a miracle when God hung the stars in place; it was an even greater miracle when he came to earth to rescue us.
        - Song I sang as a kid:

*It took a miracle to put the stars in place;  
it took a miracle to hang the world in space;  
but when he saved my soul; cleansed and made me whole;  
it took a miracle of love and grace!*
        - Do you still think you're too guilty for God to forgive—your life too messed up for God to save?
      - David says in Psalm 8, "That this God, who created the world with his finger, a world that is so big I'm just a speck, would look on me and regard me..." He loses his words, and says, "Who are we, that God should regard us?" **To know this is blessing.**
- The greatest blessing—the blessing that makes all others appear insignificant in comparison—is that Jesus is ours. Holiness, mercy, and might characterized his life.
  - **He was holy:** He lived with perfect love to God and man. A picture of what we were supposed to be and what God wanted to make us.
  - **He was merciful:** Can you think of anyone who came to him in repentance or in need that he ever turned away for any reason. His mercy appears almost reckless (woman with an issue of blood).
  - **He was mighty:** Was there anything we fear that he could not fix? Was there any sickness he could not cure? Any demon he could not command? Any storm he could not still or grace he could not empty? Was there anything that scares you he could not overcome?
  - To the dying thief on the cross, he showed us there was no sinner beyond the reach of his mercy.
  - To the woman with the issue of blood, he showed us there was no problem too small, no person too marginal for him to care.
  - At the tomb of Lazarus, to Mary and Martha, he showed us he weeps with us in our pain.
- He is the treasure; he is the blessing.
  - The **problem with prosperity gospel.** It prioritizes earthly blessings God can provide over God. God is like a piñata; faith our whacking stick; earthly prosperity, power, privilege and comfort the candy. Mary's song shows us that God is the candy inside the piñata; he is the great reward.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, Luke 1:46–55

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:16; Eph 3:7; 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Cor. 1:18.

<sup>3</sup> *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing, Vol. 1.*

**B. Promise:** [54] He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, [55] as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” In Christ, God was fulfilling the promise he gave to Abraham and his descendants many years before to bless him and make him a blessing to all the nations of earth.

- It’s been 2000 years since that promise! I’m sure many had concluded those promises were no longer valid, if he even exists at all! When the angel showed up to Mary, the people had not heard from God in 400 years.
- Yet God had not forgotten. In all things he was working to bring forth Jesus, which was a greater blessing than any of them had dreamed.
- In the same way, he’s working in and through you—sometimes invisibly, silently—to bring forth Jesus from you. Sometimes it may feel like he has forgotten. But he hasn’t.
  - **Kids book:** *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing*, by Sally Lloyd-Jones: “When God promises to bless you, he is saying, ‘I’m going to make you into everything I’ve ever meant for you to be. It means that God is taking every day and every single thing that happens in it—good or bad—to make you stronger, to mend whatever is broken inside, to change you into the person you were always meant to be.’”<sup>4</sup>

***The blessing is what God is making you and the knowledge of Jesus he is bringing to others through you.***

**Let me go back to the question I posed at the beginning.** Why did God choose to do it this way? He didn’t have to.

- It was not just that God took a bad situation and worked in it—God created that bad situation. He could have appeared to Joseph, Mary’s circle... but he chose not to.
- Why? **He was allowing Mary to taste the cross**, because that is how he will bring salvation to the world.
- God has said that he will bring salvation to the world, in part, through our suffering.
  - Raudel’s dad: Stage 3 cancer. “Here’s my dad with a terrible prognosis, but more joy and contentment and happiness than people who have health. Raudel told me he said recently, “I know it’s ok to cry and hurt, but either we believe the Bible or we don’t.”
- Being blessed and highly favored does not mean living a life without suffering and bad situations and parking spaces miles from the mall—it means having the presence and unalterable promises of God in those situations. It means having a life in which God is committed to conforming you more toward the image of Jesus and bringing others to know Jesus through you.

**Two clarification before I look at our final point:**

- I’m not saying that God causes all kinds of suffering. Here, he is directly involved. Many of you are suffering and God is not behind it in the same way, but God is still directing all of it sovereignly for his good.
- I’m not saying that God never gives tokens of his goodness on earth... (Ps. 27:13: *“I know that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”*) We should take these tokens of goodness with thanksgiving, but that we should also not be surprised sometimes when he appoints us the cross as a way of bringing salvation to others, just like he brought salvation to us.

### **3. What was the basis of her blessing?**

- What you should notice in this song is that there is very little about her. Only a couple of lines. The rest is about God—his character, his presence, his promises.
- ***There is nothing in this song about her personal worthiness.***

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<sup>4</sup> *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing*, Sally Lloyd-Jones, Loc. 24.

- Some believe that Mary was sinless. That is completely the opposite the spirit of this song. She says, “God is my Savior.” She sees herself as guilty, unworthy, empty, hungry, and weak—in need of mercy, in need of help and strength, and in need of a Savior.
- **Vs. 46, My soul “magnifies” the Lord.** Mary was not amazing. Jesus was amazing. So her soul magnified him, not herself, and for you to idolize her is to miss the point of her song.
- Your life can only magnify one thing.
  - The GOSPEL IS... that we are unworthy—that we deserve death.
  - He took our sin.
  - Jesus would say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” The poor in spirit have nothing. God gives them his riches. Blessed are those who mourn because of their guiltiness; they are the ones who get forgiveness. Blessed are those who know they are weak; they are the ones who get God’s strength.

#### 4. Are you living as one “blessed and highly favored”?

- Notice this: in Mary’s song, those whom you would naturally think of as blessed are not:
  - “[51] ...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
    - Imaginations. Dreams.
  - [52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones... [53] and the rich he has sent away empty.”
  - There’s nothing wrong with dreams; riches; positions of power. The problem is when you magnify them. When they become your source of delight. Your source of identity. Your source of pride. At that point you have given them glory.
  - **Friend of mine: What if God ordained failure to give you a much greater blessing?**
    - I once heard a pastor say that the growth and success of your church may not be a blessing ... it could be a curse. At least to you. Many pastors lose their way with success. They forget who called them and the basis on which he did so. Failure... find God. Isn’t it true that often in your failures and disappointments you learned more about God than anything else?
    - God to me: what do you rejoice in? Jesus told his disciples: “Rejoice not that the demons are subject to you; rejoice that your names are written in the Lamb’s book of Life.” In other words, that you know me. To me: “Don’t rejoice that your church is successful... rejoice that you know me.” And if take the former from you—can you still be happy!

*What do you magnify? Here’s how you know: What do you rejoice in? Look at Mary’s verse:*

**[46] And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, [47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

Those two statements are connected. Whatever you magnify, you rejoice in. What has to be true in your life for you to rejoice?

- “An old man may not give two cents about the gospel, but he sure knows he feels really good when his grandkids come over.
- Men who are sit through church services absolutely unmoved by songs and teaching. You’re only here because your wife demands it. But this afternoon you’ll leap off the couch when your team scores a touchdown.
- Young women here who feel complacent when they read the Bible but light up when there are sales at the mall, who will look for hours online at clothes they can’t afford but can’t spend 15 minutes in prayer talking to the God of all surpassing glory who has given himself to them in Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jared Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness*, 148

Joy should function something like a smoke alarm in your life. If you don't have joy right now, it's likely that the source of your joy has moved from God to some lesser blessing. Here's Mary, in the worst possible circumstances for a 17 year old girl: rejoicing.

\*\*\*MUSIC\*\*\*

**Habakkuk 3:17–19:** [17] Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,

[18] yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. [19] GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's (running through fields of poverty); he makes me tread on my high places.”  
(those mountains of pain)

A choice. You don't always feel like it. This Christmas, you can choose.

You can say: *In Christ, I can lose all that I have, because in Christ is all that I need.*

## Conclusion

Are you blessed and highly favored this weekend? God's presence and promises are with you. That's all you need, regardless of your external circumstances.

It's a gift. Have you received it this Christmas?

## Prayer

## Bullpen:

*“Because he’s holy, he must do something about our sin. Because he’s merciful, he wants to do something (that thing he did was not destroy us, but save us). Because he’s mighty, he can do something.”<sup>6</sup>*

- **Sometimes it may feel like he has forgotten.** But think about Mary. look at vs. 55: *“As he spoke to our fathers.”* It’s been 2000 years since the promise to Abraham! It’s been 400 years since the latest prophecy. Many would have concluded God’s promises were no longer valid, if he even exists at all! You and I have that same waiting posture sometimes. You might still be in the midst of financial ruin; your reputation may be unfairly tarnished; your life might have taken a severe downturn; and you can still be blessed and highly favored—not because of your circumstances, but because of the presence and promise of God in those circumstances.

One more verse: **Ps 90:14:** *“Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”* A choice to reflect on it every morning so that regardless of what the day brings, you can rejoice and be glad!

When you get this, your life erupts into a song of praise:

- This kind of song does not produce a sentimental feeling about chestnuts roasting on an open fire and sleigh bells that you forget as soon as the season is over.
- Mary’s song is a whole new life. “Never have I been so broken down and built up; so empty and so filled; so stripped down naked and then clothed richly.

Look at Mary’s verse one more time.

**[46] And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, [47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, [48] for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;**

Blessing is not about your circumstances; your potential; personal worthiness, but about the character of the God who is for you. Presence and power.

How to know: joy

If I am in Christ, all things good and bad, are the blessing of God to me.

But we see throughout the Bible that God has always pursued a relationship with his people.

- He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden
- He had his people build a tabernacle in their midst where his presence dwelt. The people called God him “Jehovah Shammah” which meant, “The God who is present with us.”

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<sup>6</sup> Keller, Luke 1:46–55



- When the angel appeared to Mary she told her she would give birth to a child and his name would be “Emmanuel,” which meant “God with us.”
- And now, he dwells in us by the Holy Spirit, which makes him closer than ever.
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- They are about being nice; we forget them as soon as the season is over. Mary’s song changed her life. It’s not sentimental! N
- That God is holy means that we need to be saved. That he is merciful means he is willing to save. That he is mighty means he is able to do it.
- A lack of joy in God shows a wrong basis for life

Spurgeon and Luther quotes

Christmas Vacation. Songs about Christmas. (NEED ILLUSTRATION)

How does God become personal *to me*? God with us.

It’s not about her personal potential, but God’s sufficiency.

- Scattered the proud
- Brought down mighty from thrones
- Sent the rich away empty
- Filled hungry with good things
- Exalted those of humble estate.

God’s mercy. God’s strength. God my Savior.

Theology becomes biography that turns into doxology.

Mary is not sinless; she needs a Savior

Not about Mary’s external circumstances

- Mary’s blessing was not in the present. She was considered a whore in the present!

Not about Mary’s worthiness

- Statements about rich and poor
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It was about the God was *for* her.

[39] In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, [40] and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. [41] And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, [42] and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “**Blessed** are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! [43] And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44] For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to

my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. [45] And **blessed** is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”