

Planning a Prayer Walk to bless your neighbourhood,

By Lyndall Bywater

This guide gives you practical tips on planning a prayer walk, as well as some of the theology of blessing which we would encourage you to draw on as you go out into your community. It ties in with the idea of praying blessing over your street which 'Adopt a Street' are advocating. For a related article, please see the story of Ffald-y-Brenin to see the power of praying blessing, and the transformation that results. Imagine what would happen if every Christian chose to continually pray blessing over a particular street.

This guide is suitable for children to use providing they are accompanied by a parent or youth leader. Please adhere to your church's child protection policy.

1. What is a prayer walk and why is it a good thing to do?

'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger bringing good news, breaking the news that all's well, proclaiming good times, announcing salvation, telling Zion, "Your God reigns!"'(Isaiah 52:7 The Message)

A prayer walk is exactly what it sounds like: a walk filled with prayer. Prayer walking has been woven through the history of the British church for centuries. People would walk from Cathedral city to Cathedral city on pilgrimage, and these pilgrimages were all about prayer. Still today, many Anglican churches mark Rogation Sunday with a prayer walk around their parish boundaries. This tradition is called 'beating the bounds', and is an act of claiming the ground for God in prayer.

Prayer walking simply involves walking around your community (either alone or in a group), praying for the places and people you see around you. You may plan to stop at specific locations, or you may just walk and see where the Spirit leads – either way, it's an exciting and engaging way to pray.

God told Joshua: *'I will give you every place where you set your foot'* (Joshua 1:3 NIV), and there is something powerful and significant about making our prayers physical: expressing our longings for places by going and standing there to pray.

Blessed to be a blessing

'Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:15-17 NIV 1984; see also Ephesians 1:3-14)

We are truly blessed. It is this amazing privilege of blessing which we want to invite you to use as you walk your community. This walk isn't about praying complicated prayers, tackling spiritual forces or solving social problems, it's about blessing your community with God's life, love and power. It's standing in your identity as a child of God, and speaking the good things of your Father's Kingdom into being in your local neighbourhood.

From the very earliest stories of God's interaction with humankind, we see a particular pattern of blessing emerging. God blessed Abram in order that he might give that blessing away to others:

'Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing."' (Genesis 12:1-2)

Having blessed his people Israel, God expected them to extend his blessings to the foreigners in their midst

"And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

Jesus continued that same mandate of blessing: no sooner had he won salvation and freedom for his disciples on the cross than he sent them out to carry this ultimate blessing to the very ends of the earth.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8; see also Matthew 28:18-20)

The moment we open our hands to receive blessing from God, we are nudged by the Holy Spirit to go out and give it away.

This business of blessing is not just some well-intentioned positive thinking though. God's blessings are powerful and life-changing. They can unlock the strangle-hold of death in desert places, and cause life to spring up:

'Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.' (Isaiah 55:13 NIV)

God's words can reverse the effects of sickness:

'The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed."' (Matthew 8:8)

God's words can bring impossible peace in the midst of impossible pain:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27 NIV)

‘And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’ (Philippians 4:7)

When God speaks in blessing, the world is changed. And we, his children, are given the privilege of accessing those same blessings. We get to experience them in our own lives, but we’re also given the privilege of speaking them into being for the people and places around us. Jesus gave his disciples authority to reverse the works of the enemy, and to cause life to spring up:

‘I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.’ (Luke 10:19 NIV; see also Mark 16:17-18)

He intended us not only to be present where there is pain and sin, but to speak out the blessings which will turn those situations around.

As we walk the streets of our communities, whether on our own or on a church prayer walk, let’s resolve to be good news... to be those who carry the blessings of God in our thoughts, words and actions.

2. Planning your prayer walk

Before you gather people, work out the route or general area you’re going to walk (or drive). Either create a route-map for people to follow, or tell them to go wherever God leads them, but to stay within a certain geographical area. Ensure that those who have difficulty walking can still take part in the event, either by praying at base, or by having a short route to walk, with plenty of stopping points. Also, have a wet-weather plan: either ascertain whether people are happy to walk in the rain, or else use maps of the area and pray together somewhere under cover.

Prepare some ideas of locations or things people can pray for while out walking, such as GP surgeries, police stations, retirement homes, fire stations, local shops and the streets people from your church live or work on.

3. Getting ready to go out

Since this is a walk of blessing, it is crucial to take time together to receive God’s blessing in your own lives before you start walking. We all put barriers up from time to time, not allowing ourselves to truly absorb God’s blessings into our own lives, but before we can truly bless others, we need to remove those barriers.

Ask the group to get into twos and pray ‘Aaron’s Blessing’ over each other:

‘The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.’ (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV)

As they are prayed for, encourage each person to consciously welcome into their lives all that this ancient blessing contains. Also encourage them to invite God's cleansing and empowering in their own lives before they go out, and remind them to put on the full armour of God as they pray together

'Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' (Ephesians 6:14-17 NIV)

4. Practicalities of prayer walking

Send people out in twos or small groups, so that no-one is walking alone. Groups should only be a maximum of four in size, so that it is easy to hear one another when they stop to pray.

Remind the walkers that they need to be sensitive while they're out praying – not trespassing, not standing where they will cause an obstruction, and being considerate to those around them in the way they pray.

5. What to pray for

Remind people to pray with open eyes and ears. Someone once said that prayer walking is 'praying on site with insight'. The fact of walking or standing in a particular place brings an immediacy to our prayers. We're not just imagining that place from the comfort of our prayer room, we're actually there, seeing it, hearing it, experiencing it, and that means God can speak to us through the things we see and hear there.

Make sure people take a Bible or handout of Bible verses. Our prayers should be informed by our surroundings, but rooted in the word. This is a walk of blessing, but we don't want to just make up the blessings we speak over our communities, we find them in God's Word. Those involved need to know what God's blessings are before they can speak them out.

'The Lord is your Shepherd, Castle Street, you shall not be in want' (based on Psalm 23); or 'I speak over this hospital and say blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted' (based on Matthew 5). Other useful Scriptures for this would be: Deuteronomy 28, Ephesians 1:3-14, 3:14-20, Psalm 103.

Why not get the group to spend some time practising turning Scripture into blessing prayers.

(For more prayers of blessings please visit our website.)

It's vital to be attentive to the Spirit: God is lavish in his blessing, but he is also strategic. He knows which particular blessing is needed in each place we will go to. So encourage

the group to listen to him as they walk, praying the prayers of blessing which he is prompting them to pray.

6. Physical symbols

It can be helpful to have a physical symbol of blessing to use as you walk. Why not take with you some water and sprinkle a little bit on the pavement or brickwork of the places you bless. Please don't sprinkle water on people. (If you'd rather not use water, another idea would be to print stickers with an image or word of blessing on them and give people 5 or 6 each, to stick on pavements or brickwork as a sign of the blessing they've prayed.)

7. Finishing the prayer walk

It's always good to debrief after a prayer walk, and to share what you've heard God saying. So agree a rendezvous (either back at base or elsewhere along the route), and gather about 15 minutes before the end of your time together. Give everyone in the group the opportunity to share, and pray for one another before you go your separate ways.

8. Making it more than a one-off:

Once you've completed the walk, please encourage those present to make a habit of walking and blessing the places where they live and work. Perhaps challenge them to adopt a street or the street they live on, to walk it at least once a week and to keep speaking blessing over it.