

Participant Guide for Study 8: Benediction

Introduction:

Have you ever attended a productive business or ministry meeting where there were no action items or follow-up actions delegated out at the end of the meeting? Have you ever watched a riveting movie or TV series that had no resolution at the end? After affirming our faith; confessing our sins; receiving a pardon; and learning about our God through worship music, Scripture, and preaching what are we expected to do after we leave church on a Sunday morning?

The benediction provides both a resolution to the Sunday service and a charge to apply what we've learned throughout the week. It is a proper close to an inspiring and complete worship service.

The benediction can often be glossed over as an obligatory Scripture reading to simply close out a service. However, an effective and well-thought out benediction placed after a thought-provoking and inspiring sermon and worship service can be a powerful pastoral care tool. As we will see, the benediction can help inspire the a congregant to be an effective ambassador for Christ in his/her daily life by clearly conveying confidence that the Holy Spirit is with us not just in church but throughout our daily lives and embedding the charge to emulate Jesus Christ's perfect example throughout our day. So the benediction serves as a critical component of worship to provide Biblical direction for us as we close our weekly worship.

Part 1: What Does it Mean?

"Benediction" derives from the Latin *bene* or "good" and *dicere* of "say." In the Bible, benedictions refer to "good words" or a blessing from God to his people. But benedictions in practice can be much more than simply good words.

Historic Christian worship typically consists of four acts: 1) gathering, 2) listening, 3) communing, and 4) sending. This historical structure is a metaphor of God's relationship to creation.

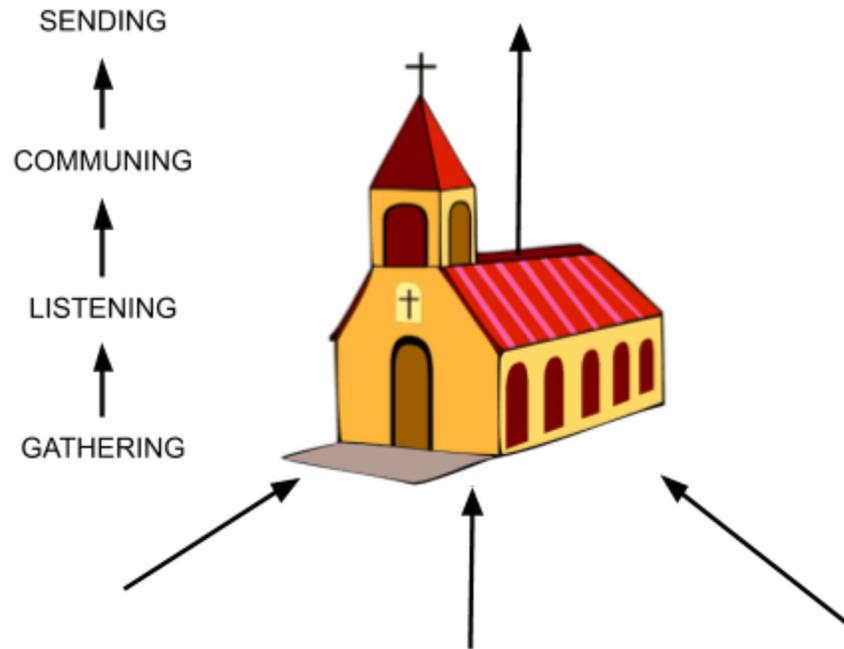


Figure 1: Source-Smith, James K.A. 2016. *You are What you Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, MI. p. 95.

The benediction represents the sending act of worship. It is not merely a closing of the service, nor is it a summary of the sermon or a Bible verse praising God. These elements are great and can be components of a benediction. However, an effective benediction is an integral part of the service to send forgiven, instructed, and blessed people out into the world and do God's will. It is often both a blessing and a charge to go with the presence of the Son who will never leave us or forsake us.

Read Phillipians 4:7:

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (ESV)

Discussion:

- 1) What does the phrase "good words" mean to you? What does it mean to you to end a worship service with "good words?"
- 2) What does a benediction do? What tone does it set for the upcoming week?
- 3) Looking at Phillipians 4:7, what does this passage say about the peace of God and what it will do? If you heard this verse at the closing of a service, how might it help you in your walk during the following week?

Part 2: Why Do We Practice It?

Why do we need a blessing and a charge to start our week? The other elements of the service are intended to invite us into the life of the Triune God, recreate us in Christ, learn from God's word, and nourish us with the bread of life. After being renewed in Christ we are to cultivate and till God's good creation, spreading God's good news into the world. We do the benediction to provide us with a blessing and the confidence of his promised care and enabling to do this.

The benediction is a reply of the original commissioning of humanity as God's image bearers. As God's image bearers in the world armed with the Holy Spirit we can be the humans God created us to be. The commission charges God's people to inhabit His creation as "images" of God.

An effective benediction can be a powerful instrument of pastoral care and worship that the congregation will remember throughout the week. Done effectively, it should communicate the care of the Father for his people with tenderness and power. An effective benediction leaves the congregants with full confidence in God's love and mercy and a heart full of joy for their work in the world.

Discussion:

- 4) What does it mean to be God's image bearers in the world? What does it look like in practice?
- 5) How can a benediction enable us to be God's image in the world?

Read Romans 15:13

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (ESV)

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. (ESV)

Read 2 Corinthians 13:14

¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (ESV)

Discussion:

- 6) What do these verses convey about God and being his image bearer in the world? Do they inspire you and if so, how?

Part 3: How Do We Practice It

The benediction typically consists of a passage of Scripture or combination of Scripture passages that conveys both the blessing and the charge. Sometimes it can also be tied in with the message of the sermon, but the blessing and the charge are the most important elements in an effective benediction. Some churches choose to use responsive readings, choral benedictions, corporate hymns, or final prayers.

Read Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD lift up his countenance^[a] upon you and give you peace.
(ESV)

Discussion:

- 7) Numbers 6:24-26 is one of the best known and widely used benedictions in Scripture. What do you think it means for the Lord to:
 - Bless you and keep you?
 - Make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you?
 - Lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace?
- 8) What is this benediction sending us out into the world to do?

The benediction is typically delivered by an ordained pastor who understands the words are Christ's own blessing on his people for work He is calling them to do. The most important aspect of the delivery is the tone of the minister's voice and the gospel message in it that communicates compassion, tenderness, joy, and strength to Christ's followers. Ministers can deliver the benediction by raising a hand towards the congregation as a gesture of blessing, holding up three fingers together representing the Trinity, or raising the Bible to emphasize the authority of Scripture. Most of the time a minister would stand at the front of the church and deliver the benediction with raised open hands signifying the wideness of God's mercy and generosity.

The congregation typically receives the benediction with bowed heads, uplifted eyes, or hands outstretched as if receiving the blessing. Typically the congregation will follow the benediction with a hearty and genuine, "Amen."

Discussion:

- 9) How can we do a better job of receiving and putting the benediction into action each week?

Conclusion:

In a well organized and executed business or ministry meeting, we leave the meeting with clear action items to work on before the next meeting. A great book, movie, or TV series ends with an effective resolution that ties up loose ends, makes us satisfied, and leaves us with a message that we can take with us. Similarly, an effective benediction provides direction for how we can apply the lessons learned from the worship service in our lives before gathering again next Sunday.

The benediction is not only an appropriate close to a worship service. A benediction contains both a blessing that the Holy Spirit is with us and a charge to live a Holy life by loving our God and loving our neighbor. With it we are sent into the world to serve as disciples of Christ. Through the benediction we leave the church ready to spread the Good News to others.