

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Sometimes I end the service with the Celtic benediction:

*God be with you to strengthen you, about you to keep you, above you to protect you,
beneath you to uphold you, before you to direct you, behind you to keep you moving
forward, and round about you to defend you.*

It is a call for God to walk with you all week as you leave worship. It is like God carrying you. Your life is in God's hands and purpose. "You go no place by accident." The blessing refers to a journey; movement from one place to another, with intention.

"God bless you and keep you . . . in your going out and coming in."

It is like a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is a journey, usually a long one to a sacred place. You are going with the sacred in mind. Going with a purpose or a call.

The Celtic benediction is a beautiful blessing. One phrase captures my attention: "behind you to keep you moving forward."

How often do we get stuck!

- Do you ever get stuck doing the same old thing and wish you could get out?
- Do you carry around old resentments and regrets?
- Do you get stuck making the same mistakes again and again?
- When there is loss, do you get stuck in the loss and never get over it?
- Or childhood memories, and stay made about it.

God is a forward-moving God. *God be behind you to keep you moving forward.*

The choir sang: "Surely God is Able!"¹ Did you catch the lyrics?

As pilgrims we sometimes journey
And we don't know which way to turn,
But there is One who knows the road,
He'll help you carry your heavy load.

Don't you know God is able
He's able, He's able;
Clouds may gather, (may gather)
All around you (All around you),
So dark, (so dark) and sable.
Surely, surely, surely
He's able to carry you through.

May I have an "oh-yeah?!"

¹ "Surely God is Able," see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJjifFo5VIc>, or hear Aretha Franklin at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtENZehHe4g>.

Do you ever experience that overriding, overcoming presence of God?

God be with you to strengthen you, about you to keep you, above you to protect you, beneath you to uphold you, before you to direct you, behind you to keep you moving forward, and round about you to defend you.

Nebuchadnezzar was only two years into his reign. It was going quite well, yet he was ill at ease; having nightmares. The nightmares are related to his kingdom. In Nebuchadnezzar's mind, as powerful as he is, there's some kind of weakness or trouble attached to his nation and its future. It disturbed him.

Perhaps the Israelites who had been exiled had a few nightmares, too. They had lost their nation. Did that mean their future was over? They probably wondered, will I ever have a home again? Is God with us?

Insecurities. Ever wonder where your place is in the world, or if you will have a spouse? Or, will your children... _____ you fill in the blank. Nebuchadnezzar was insecure about his nation; the exiles were insecure about their future. **Who can help here?**

When Nebuchadnezzar went to the chief advisers, he knew they would consult their "dream-interpretation" manuals. Let's see . . . "dreams about statues." But these dreams were complicated, intense, and frightening. He could hardly grasp them himself. To understand them required more than research in a library.

Daniel knew that too. He was bold, and took initiative. He explained to the king:

"No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come." (2:27)

That got Neb's attention. Daniel went on: "As you were lying there on your bed, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen." (2:29)

Have you ever been so worried about something that you lie on your bed and ponder until late at night?

God be before you to direct you, behind you to keep you moving forward

This king did not have the wealth that you have. He did not go to church each week and gain encouragement. He did not have a Bible that he could read daily. He did not have the fellowship of the "saints"—that's what God calls you—or faith enough to pray. Everything in the Christian faith centers us on God and the future we are journeying toward. This is not news. The Bible is full of this.

But you are seeing a new person being exposed to it now, outside of Israel. The story so far has been about Abraham's growth into the nation Israel. Now God reaches out to someone beyond Israel because God is moving forward.

This week I talked to community leaders about our nation's past. I talked about Christians called Pilgrims—they were people on a journey. They risked coming to America in 1620 because they wanted religious freedom and to develop a culture that would positively affect their children in terms of faith.

They had a vision to do just that, so they moved forward. Did God call them to do this? It was a whole new place and way.

It was not an easy journey and they got blown off course and landed 250 miles away from their destination. It was nearly winter and they could not disembark. But they kept moving forward. Scouts went out again and again for a month, until they found an abandoned settlement which was perfectly situated on a high hill with a sweet-water brook, shelters, and plenty of dried corn and seeds.

But it was a hard winter and nearly half of them died. In spring, the captain of the Mayflower took his crew and headed back to England. He urged them all to quit this adventure and return with him. Every one of them turned him down. After the captain left, an Indian showed up, and he spoke English. He decided to live with them because he had grown up there, and he taught them to plant.² That next fall was the first Thanksgiving, held with the Wampanoag tribe. The harvest was so abundant, the celebration lasted three days. The Pilgrims believed Squanto's devotion was a gift from them from God, a way to keep them moving forward.

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, "As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind." (2:30)

God said Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would pass away. Other kingdoms will rise. But one is far greater than all the others and will last forever.

Isn't it amazing that God cares about him? God meets him as he ponders in the night and opens his eyes to the future.

You know how your parents say when you are young, "You must study so that you can get into college one day." Or, you must brush your teeth every day so you still have them when you are a grown up. Or, you must get a job and learn how to work so when you grow up you will have a great career and be able to support yourself.

You are pointing your child toward a bright future. If your child prepares, it will go well for him. When he has trouble, when she suffers or gets off track, the vision will stabilize her. If crisis comes, the dream will keep him from quitting.

But if he or she does not grasp the future, they will easily get lost.

² Squanto was his name. He had been taken to England where he learned English, and Spain where he was exposed to Christianity, but his greatest dream was to return to the village where he grew up. God kept him moving forward and used his dream in a mighty way.

Eternity was confronting Nebuchadnezzar, king of a powerful Gentile nation. But his government was not the solution to the world's problems. Nebuchadnezzar had to face the fact that there was someone greater. While kingdoms will rise and fall, God and His ruler, Jesus Christ, will never fall. Do you want to be a part of it?

God pushes us toward the future because God is probably, frankly, very excited about it. Are you taking the journey with equal excitement? Are you laying your anxieties down in light of it or turning around and giving up? Are you taking those necessary steps to prepare yourself?

Surely God is able to carry you through because God knows THE future.

"You are our blessing, God, forever and ever."

AMEN