

Cultivate: Growing in Grace through the Psalms
session #5
Psalms of Thanksgiving
20150714
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Of all people, Jesus followers should be (and often are) people who are filled with thanksgiving - and we have every reason to be so. Let me explain.

I once was lost, in the darkness of self centeredness, in the consequence of evil things done to me, of my own evil done to others and to the personal evil passions and attitudes that my own sinful nature bred; and before a holy God, I was fully worthy of judgement, of punishment, of God's real wrath on my life. I can safely say I was a rebel to God's will. AND, left on my own, I had no interest in seeking God, and I had no interest in knowing God. I didn't want God to rule over my life. I was a slave to sinful passions - just like every other person who is born a descendent of Adam.

BUT, while I was in that state, God was at work in my life - and through a series of providential events, my life somehow intersected with the goods new that Jesus Christ had come to save people from themselves and from their sins, and that he had actually given His life as a substitute sacrifice to pay for the sins of sinners. I also learned that the forgiveness and the salvation he offered was free of charge - not because it didn't cost anything, but because Jesus had paid the price for what it costed, Himself. And this meant what He had to offer was a free gift.

So, through a series of events I don't have time to relate, I came to a place where I realized I WAS separated from God AND had offended Him greatly - and I saw that, admitted that, and one night, confessed my sins to God and asked Him to forgive me and to save me. Now, after that, something very interesting began to take place. I started discovering that I had come to the place where I cried out to Him, seeking forgiveness, because He, in the most gracious way, had opened my blind spiritual eyes, had given my dead soul life, and had done this so I could understand my need and His remedy, to the end that I believed - which reconciled me to God the Father, making me His child.

On the one hand, every person who belongs to Christ has a different story about how becoming God's child happened in their life. But every person belonging to Christ passed through a similar process as I did, on the other hand. The detail differs from person to person but the result is always the same - new life, in Jesus Christ., by God's gracious activity, through faith. And this alone, is enough to fill us with thanksgiving.

In addition to this though, there follows grace upon grace and blessing upon blessing - many of which are spiritual, but many of which are physical/temporal. I began to follow Christ Jesus 'sort of', in 1970 - 45 years ago; but after straying from Him for five years (1972 to 1977), came back to Him for real, 38 years ago - and as I look back over my life, there are **SO many reasons** to be thankful!!

We are great sinners, but Christ is a GREAT Savior - and through Him we have forgiveness, but we also come to know the triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

On this backdrop - the backdrop of God, who He is, the benefits He extends to those who love Him, the scripture teaches us that thanksgiving is both fitting, and a proper attitude of Christ's followers - and we learn about this in many ways from the Word of God.

- 1) Some offerings during the OT era, for example, were offered as Thank Offerings - or, Offerings of Thanksgiving (Lv. 7: 11ff; 22: 29;
- 2) Thanksgiving was an attitude Jesus commended (Lk. 17: 15);
- 3) In several places in the NT letters, the apostles instruct us to do things with Thanksgiving (Phil 4: 6; Col. 2: 7, 4: 2);
- 4) We learn from other places that Thanksgiving should be an integral part of our praying (1 Tim. 2: 1-2) and that even our food should be received with Thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4: 3-4)
- 5) And in Revelation 7: 12, we learn how Thanksgiving is an integral part of the worship that takes place before the throne of God and of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

It seems safe to say that in the same way God is Love and love characterizes Him, so Thanksgiving should characterize God's people. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that in the book of Psalms, we have a number of Psalms that fall into the category of Psalms of Thanksgiving.

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I. Thanksgiving Psalms: How would you define a thanksgiving Psalm?

By definition, a Psalm of Thanksgiving is a psalm where the psalmist expresses a deep gratitude and appreciation for God's grace, love, blessing - sometimes to himself, and sometimes to God's covenant people.

Many of the Psalms **identify as Psalms of Thanksgiving: Psalm 8, 18, 19, 29, 30, 32-34, 36 and 40 are Psalms of Thanksgiving, as are Psalm 40, 41, 60 103-106, 111, 113, 117, 124, 129, 135, 136, 138, 139, 146-148 and 150.**

Psalms of Thanksgiving have a few unmistakable characteristics. They will sometimes start with an exclamation - "Praise the Lord!" (see Psalm 149); **Or**, the refrain will be a call to praise or thank God for a certain benefit or other (see Psalm 107: 1, 8, 15, 21, 31-32, 43).

Sometimes, a Psalm of Thanksgiving will be FILLED with related calls to praise the Lord (see Psalm 150); and sometimes, they simply list out a number of blessings and benefits which come from God and which he bestows upon those who trust Him (see Psalm 40).

And so, in various forms, Psalms of Thanksgiving offer up praise and thanks to God for Himself, for His benefits and deliverances, for His salvation, for His blessing.

II. Thanksgiving Psalm considered: I have several personal favorites in this category of Psalm - but tops on my list is Psalm 103. Let's take some time to consider Psalm 103.

Structure and Focus: Psalm 103 is a medium length Psalm, having 22 verses - and the Psalm follows a clear structure.

1st, the opening and closing verses of the Psalm (vs. 1-5; 20-22) form a crescendo of Blessing of the Lord;

2nd, vs. 6-14 name many of the Lord's acts and qualities;

3rd, vs. 15 to 19 are a comparison - between man, who is temporary at best, and the Lord and his covenant faithfulness. So, breaking Psalm 103 down, I could outline it like this:

Introductory Praise Offering (vs. 1-5)

Praiseworthy works and benefits of the Lord (vs. 6-14)

Man's Fading, God's Abiding (vs. 15-19);

Exhortation to Praise the Lord (vs. 20-22)

Analysis: That's how the Psalm breaks down. So, what I would like to do now is read the Psalm; and then, I want us to take ten minutes and list out as many SPECIFIC benefits the Lord extends, and specific works or acts the Lord takes toward His people. Sound good.

Listen as I read. Now, take some time, and list benefits and blessings.

Lessons: Based on the exercise we just completed, let's take a moment and quickly name a few of the lessons this Psalm teaches us about the benefits of the Lord. Keep it brief, like popcorn.

III. Praying the Thanksgiving Psalms: How would one go about praying this or any other Thanksgiving Psalm?

We learn to pray with thanksgiving by seeing the model of thanksgiving in these Psalms of thanks and then copying this in our own times of prayer. We can also pray through these Psalms, adapting the Psalm to our own needs.

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