

The *Original* Thanksgiving Hymn

Thanksgiving 2006

Psalm 100

Introduction

Sarah Hale was a persistent woman. She was the editor of at least two different magazines for women and she used them to promote her view that our country needed to express national thanksgiving to God.

After forty years of writing governors and presidents, Sarah's passion became a reality with the agreement of a new President – named Abraham Lincoln. He seemed the most unlikely candidate to launch a national party of thanksgiving. In fact, when he did agree, it was a time in American history when no one had anything close to a thankful spirit, for the civil war had been raging for several years.

In spite of this, President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving. He actually called his fellow countrymen to repent of their perversity and thank our most high God for his goodness.

Since that time, every President has proclaimed Thanksgiving a national observance in November. It was considered the role of each sitting President to declare this day in November a day of Thanksgiving.

This has continued to today – except for the year 1865 when Thanksgiving was celebrated in December because President Andrew Johnson forgot. This should encourage us that even the President of the United States could forget Thanksgiving.

The truth is that we resemble Andrew Johnson now more than ever, do we not? As far as our world is concerned, Thanksgiving has been forgotten.

Thanksgiving has become merely the first sales day of the Christmas season. This really should not be a surprise. In fact, according to the Bible, one of the chief characteristics of the unbelieving world is ingratitude.

We might think that the marks of a degenerate and depraved society would be murder and all sorts of perverse behavior, but according to Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, a wicked and corrupt culture would be filled with people who are ungrateful (II Timothy 3:2). In fact, Paul puts ingratitude right up there with,

. . . unholy, . . . brutal [behavior], haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (II Timothy 3:2b-4)

It is interesting that the mark of a godless culture is revealed in their attitude as much as it is in their actions.

As Paul chronicled the digression of society from bad to worse; from unbelieving to uninhibited in perversity, right in the middle of his remarks, he states that one of the chief reasons mankind becomes so bad – so evil – so perverse, is because they refuse to give God what? Thanks! Paul wrote,

For even though they knew [about] God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks . . . (Romans 1:21a)

Perhaps this is the reason there is a command for the believer to be thankful. Maybe this is to be one of the distinctives of the Christian's life – that no matter what, we give thanks to God.

Paul commanded the early believers to,

... *be thankful. (Colossians 3:15b)*

Be thankful. Say thanks! Express gratitude! This is actually a New Testament command for the believer.

This is why our minds need reshaping; transforming – from being pressed into the mold of the world, which is marked by ingratitude, to being pressed into the mold of Christ, which is marked by gratitude.

It is no wonder the Lord modeled gratitude for us. At the time of His greatest crisis – the hours leading up to His brutal crucifixion, His agony of being separated from the Father, and His becoming the stench of a sin offering for us – Jesus Christ gave *thanks*. Jesus took bread and wine – the elements representing His crucified body and His shed blood and all of that agony, that would remind the church for more than 2,000 years now of His suffering – and gave thanks.

This is like a surviving Jew going back to Auschwitz and standing in the courtyard and giving thanks!

This is like a parent going back to the intersection where their child was run over by a drunk driver and giving thanks.

This is like a man or woman going back to the cancer center where they first heard the news of their terminal disease and giving thanks.

You might say, “That’s unnatural.”

I would agree.

It is supernatural.

The truth is, we need to be taught how to be thankful and we need to be reminded why. We are a lot like Andrew Johnson – we tend to forget.

A Psalm for Thanksgiving – Teaching How and Why

In the middle of our Bible is a hymnbook called the book of Psalms, or literally, The Book of Praises. Even though many of the Psalms encourage the believer to thank God for many things, the 100th Psalm is the only one in this entire inspired hymnbook that is noted as “A Psalm for Thanksgiving.”

The inscriptions just under the Psalm number were not a part of the original or inspired Biblical text. However, they are ancient – going back before

the time of Christ as the Jewish leaders designated the use of these Psalms for worship.

It was Psalm 100 – and only this Psalm – that was designated as a public praise of thanksgiving. Psalm 100 is the original Thanksgiving hymn!

Charles Spurgeon, who pastored in the 1800s, said that there was nothing more sublime than hearing a congregation singing praise to God with lyrics composed from this 100th Psalm.

The questions believers had long ago, as well as in the twenty-first century, are:

1. First, “How do we give thanks to God?”
2. Secondly, “Why do we give thanks to God?”

The text of this original Thanksgiving hymn can easily be outlined with only two words. In Psalm 100:

- Verses 1-2 answer the question “How?”
- Verse 3 answers the question “Why?”

Since we are all remedial students, even though some are smarter than others, David repeats the lesson again as:

- Verse 4 answers the question “How?”
- Verse 5 answers the question “Why?”

How do we give thanks to God?

David answers the first question, “How do we give thanks to God?” with three words in Psalm 100.

1. The first word that tells how to give thanks to God is, “**shout**”.

David writes in Psalm 100:1,

Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth.

The original Hebrew word for “shout” refers to raising one’s voice or giving a blast from a trumpet. In other words, we raise our voices with words of celebration. These are verbal statements of thanksgiving and praise to God.

We refuse to go quietly through the night – the darkness of our world is interrupted with praise in the same way that fireworks turn the night sky to blazing color.

Did you notice in Psalm 100:1 that as far as David was concerned, all the earth was invited to join him? He resisted the pull of the flesh to not honor God or give thanks to Him.

Whenever we praise God, we resist the undertow of ingratitude.

I remember hearing a teenager being interviewed on a Christian radio program about his testimony. He was the quarterback for his public high school – admired and respected by his peers. He was asked by the interviewer, “How do you resist the peer pressure at school?” I have never forgotten his answer. This teenage boy replied, “I am the peer pressure . . . at my school, I challenge them to praise God with me.”

We shout with joyful praise to God.

2. The second key word that tells us how to praise God is “**serve**”.

David commands, in Psalm 100:2a,

Serve the Lord with gladness; . . .

Notice Who we are serving – “Serve the *Lord* with gladness”.

If you happen to be serving the Lord, but are not very glad about it, then you might have forgotten Whom you are ultimately serving. Ultimately, you are not serving the church, you are serving the Lord. You are not serving the pastor; you are not serving the department; you are not serving your children; you are not serving your husband or your wife, you happen to be serving the Lord.¹

This is the true source of joy in serving – we are serving Him.

This is the reason Paul could dare to write to the Christians in Corinth,

. . . whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31)

Make a special note of the fact that David does not write, “Serve the Lord.” You might have the idea that a period goes there. In other words, “If you want to show God how grateful you are, simply serve the Lord.”

There is no period there. David writes,

Serve the Lord with gladness; . . .

Can you imagine being told to be glad about something?

Have you ever told your children to be happy? Perhaps you have said, “You had better change your attitude right now and put on a happy face.” Or, “You’ll never get another happy meal if you don’t put on a happy face.”

Where did you learn that? From your parents – and this was before happy meals.

Your parents actually told you such things as, “You’d better stop pouting and put a smile on your face.”

Our parents acted like we had the ability to put a smile on our faces or, even harder, to, “Wipe that smile off your face.”

How do you do that? When your younger brother got the hiccups in church – that was just too good!

Another one was, “You’d better adjust your attitude.”

Do you remember that one?

Now we are saying the same things to our kids.

It does have some merit, though. Now that we are parents, we have realized that attitudes can be adjusted.

God evidently thinks so.

David does not say, in this verse, “Serve the Lord, whether you’re glad about it or not.”

David says, “Serve the Lord and be glad about it.”

It is as if he is implying, “If you can’t be glad about it, don’t serve!”

By the way, God said the same thing about giving money,

. . . God loves a cheerful giver. (II Corinthians 9:7b)

In other words, “If you can’t be glad about giving, don’t give.”

So, “Serve the Lord with gladness . . . or don’t serve.”

When our children were little, they got an allowance for doing their chores. However, we only paid them if they did their chores with the right attitude.

Our children had to serve the household with gladness. In fact – note this – we expected them to adjust their attitude simply because it was our will.

This means that we evidently assume their attitude is capable of changing simply by them making up their minds to have a different attitude. Our heavenly Father expects this as well.

Paul writes in I Thessalonians 5:18,

in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Evidently God expects us to adjust our attitude simply because it is His will. This means that a thankful heart is not a personality trait, but is an act of the will surrendered to the will of God.

3. The third key word that tells us how to give thanks to the Lord is “sing”.

David continues in Psalm 100:3, to tell us how to thank God by adding,

. . . come before Him [literally, come before His face] with joyful singing.

A few moments ago, with the congregation of the redeemed, you had the opportunity to do just this – you were given a chance to sing. How did you do? Did you do it joyfully? Or did you do it as if it were a chore?

Perhaps you are like Joanne Weil’s son that I read about this past week. Her son asked her one Sunday on their way home, “Mommy, what’s the highest number you have ever counted to?”

She answered, “I don’t know. What’s yours?”

He said, “Five thousand, three hundred, seventy two.”

She replied, “Wow! Why’d you stop there?”

He said, “Cause church was over.”

Why have you come to church? Will you leave with an unmoved heart or will you leave warmed by the assembly and our collective worship?

The antidote to ingratitude is joyful singing. May ours together be characterized with words such as:

- exuberant;
- enthusiastic;
- intense;
- focused;
- jubilant.

“Come before Him with joyful singing.” This privilege alone promotes praise.

We come into His presence – uniquely, as a called out body of believers.

- Shout joyfully – that is action;
- Serve with gladness – that is attitude;
- Come before Him with singing – that is access.

We approach, individually and corporately, the very throne of God.

John Phillips, the British expositor, captured this joy when he told of a young boy who was standing in front of Buckingham Palace in London, tugging on the guard’s jacket saying, “I want to see the king.”

Of course, the guard did not even flinch. Policemen were walking back and forth moving people along. “But I want to see the king,” he persisted.

“Can’t help that, sonny,” said the policeman, “you’re not allowed in there.”

About that time, a well-dressed gentleman came along with an entourage. He overheard the conversation and asked, “What’s the matter, boy?”

“I want to see the king,” the little boy replied.

“Well, you must come with me,” said the older man.

He held out his hand and the boy took it. To his surprise the policeman made no attempt to stop him, nor did the guard. Indeed, the guard sprang to attention and presented arms, while the policeman unlocked the gate. In they went, along the palace corridors and right into the presence of the king. The little boy had taken hold of the hand of the Prince of Wales, the king’s own son. That gave him access.ⁱⁱ

This is our privilege – we have access to God by virtue of the Son of God. This is how we give thanks to God and so stem the rising flood of an ungrateful heart. This is our action and attitude and access.

Why do we give thanks to God?

Now why should we bother to give thanks to God? Why should we not take Him for granted? Why not let the anesthetic of our culture and the selfishness of our character dull our desire to thank Him?

1. First, we give thanks to God because **He is God.**

David says, in Psalm 100:3a, “Don’t you know?!”

Know that the Lord Himself is God; . . .

In other words, “Know this – the Lord Yahweh, He is God Elohim!”

Within this bedrock of truth, was the renunciation of all other gods.ⁱⁱⁱ

After Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, we are told in I Kings 18:39,

When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.”

In other words, He is to be praised and thanked, not just for what He does, but because of who He is. He is God! That is enough.

What kind of God is He? David will describe further in Psalm 100.

2. Secondly, we give thanks to God because **He is good.**

Look at David's description in Psalm 100:5a,

For the Lord is good; . . .

Psalm 100:3a says He is God and Psalm 100:5a says He is good.

Then, Psalm 100:5b says,

. . . His lovingkindness is everlasting . . .

These words refer to the fact that God is loyal to His covenant with His people – it is everlasting. In other words, it will not be breached; He will not change His mind and erase His promises to His people.

Finally, Psalm 100:5c says,

. . . and His faithfulness [is] to all generations.

In other words, generation after generation after generation, God remains the same – He is faithful, not fickle; not faithless. He is dependable and trustworthy.^{iv}

David is describing a God who is unknown to the religions of the world. The gods of this world have never been good or kind or faithful or dependable or trustworthy or faultless. They can be as evil as mankind without God.

By the time of Christ, the gods were renowned for their wicked ways.

Zeus, supposedly the king of all other gods, was an adulterer, many times over.

The god Apollo, one of the sons of Zeus, was supposedly a great musician who played the harp. He was once challenged by another god Marsyas, who played the flute, to see who was a better musician. Marsyas lost and was punished by Apollo by being flayed alive.

Prometheus was the god who supposedly created human beings. However, when he stole fire from heaven and gave it to humanity, Zeus punished him by chaining him to a mountain and having an eagle gnaw away at his liver forever.

The god Hermes, evidently invented the lyre – or the harp – but Apollo took it away from him as payment for the herd of cows that Hermes had stolen from him.

The goddesses were no less evil. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, supposedly knew how to weave

with great skill. But when a human woman claimed to have weaving skill equal to the goddess, Athena refused to compete with her and simply turned the woman into a spider – which does not seem to be a very wise thing to do.

Our God, David is saying, is not like the worst of mankind, but is the best that mankind could ever want to be – good and loyal and faithful. This is who He is.

Jonathan Edwards wrote in the mid-1700s,

Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives or children or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.^v

We can thank God because of who He is.

“Know this,” David says, “the Lord, He is God! This is who He is – good and kind and faithful.”

However, this is not all – we offer thanks to God, not only because of who He is, but because of what He has done.

3. Thirdly, we give thanks to God because **He has made us.**

Look at Psalm 100:3b.

. . . it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; . . .

God is the Creator who has crafted us. Keep that in mind.

You look precisely like He planned for you to look. He made you, inside and out, literally! He wired you and gifted you.

You will not be able to joyfully praise God until you accept the fact that God made you according to His divine plan. David wrote in another Psalm that God wove you together in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13).

Every ability and every disability were pre-meditated by God.

He gave you all the strengths you would need to declare His praises.

He gave you all the weaknesses you would need.

Your strengths would be needed to declare His praises.

Your flaws would be needed to depend on His promises.

On one day you will sing, “I can do something for Him.”

On another day you will sing, “I cannot do anything without Him.”

He made you – and better still, He is still making you. He is not through . . . for God is the One who is constantly putting forth His effort in you (Philippians 2:13 Wuest paraphrased).^{vi}

By the way, God not only made you, He plans on keeping you. David praises God for that very fact next.

4. Fourthly, we give thanks to God because **we are His sheep.**

In Psalm 100:3c, David says,

. . . we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

I am so glad David did not write, “We are His people and the stallions kept in His stable.” Or, “We are His people and the eagles that soar in His heavens.” Or even, “We are His ants and beavers that work with disciplined choreography in His fields and streams.”

No, David wrote, “We are His sheep.”

Fearful, timid, ignorant, helpless, and prone to wander away – we are sheep. The good news is, we are *His* sheep.

Because of who He is and what He has done, can we do anything less than obey these commands to adjust our attitude and raise our voices and enter His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise and give thanks to Him and bless His name?

Conclusion

The devotional book entitled, *Springs in the Valley*, tells of a man who found a barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart. The man found that the seeds of discouragement were more numerous than any other seed. There were bags of them everywhere. When he asked around, he learned that it was because these seeds of discouragement would grow almost anywhere. When one of the demonic beings was questioned, he reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which they could never get the seeds to take root or thrive. “And where is that?” asked the man. The demon replied, “In the heart of a grateful person.”^{vii}

I thought about this for a while. It really is impossible to be, at the same time:

- discouraged and grateful;
- anxious and grateful;
- proud and grateful;
- selfish and grateful;
- materialistic and grateful;
- boastful and grateful;
- bitter and grateful;
- hateful and grateful.

Perhaps this is the reason gratitude really should be one of the distinctive characteristics that sets us, as believers, apart from the rest of the world.

However, since we have discovered that gratitude is an act of the will, then it is something that must be disciplined into our lives.

For example, writing thank-you notes. They take time; they demand thought. You have to stop everything to speak words of appreciation. You have to make up your mind to write someone a thank you note.

When you do this, however, you experience a special sense of satisfaction that comes from resisting the undertow of self-centeredness as you engage in the attitude and actions of thankfulness.

Psalm 100 is like an ancient thank-you note to God. If you need to prime the pump, sing this song of David. It was written especially and specifically to help us all in Thanksgiving.

So shout to Him, serve Him, and sing to Him.

Why? Because He is God alone.

What kind of God is He?

He is good, loving, and faithful.

Why do we thank Him? Not only because of who He is, but what He has done.

He made us. And by the way, our first birth *and* our second birth, by faith in Jesus Christ, were His gifts to us.

He made us – and He is still making us. And in spite of everything, He plans on keeping us.

So, in the words of Psalm 100:4,

Enter His gates with thanksgiving

And [come into His inner sanctum] His courts with praise.

Give thanks to Him, bless His name.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/26/2006 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Charles Swindoll, Living Beyond the Daily Grind (Word Publishing, 1988), p. 278.

ⁱⁱ John Phillips, Exploring the Psalms, Volume 2 (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 101.

ⁱⁱⁱ Donald Williams, Mastering the Old Testament: Psalms 73-150 (Word Publishing, 1987), p. 100.

^{iv} John Stott, Favorite Psalms (Moody Press, 1988), p. 94.

^v Heartcry! Issue 26 (2003).

^{vi} Swindoll, p. 280.

^{vii} Robert Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 735.