

Telling God “Thank You” Psalm 100

With the “Christmas season” approaching, some people have to wrestle with the question, “What do you give the man who has everything?” Is there anybody on your shopping list who just has everything s/he needs? It’s hard to know what to give the person who has everything. Well how about the question, “What do you the God who has everything?” After all, God is “the possessor of heaven and earth,” and “The earth is the Lord’s and everything it contains.” What do you give the God who has everything?

Psalm 100 suggests that we should give God our worship and our thanks. That’s what He really, really wants. He wants us to notice who He is and what He has done. He wants us to respond by expressing back to Him how much we appreciate Him. This Sunday before Thanksgiving we are going to consider Psalm 100. It is the only psalm which has the designation “A Psalm for Thanksgiving.”

You may have come here today full to overflowing with gratitude and praise to God. If so, hopefully this psalm will fan the flames in your heart. Or you may have come here today discouraged and disheartened over your circumstances or over your walk with God. In other words, you may not feel like praising God this morning. If I’m describing you, Psalm 100 can still fuel your praise and thanksgiving. The psalmist is going to say that if we will only pay attention, we will notice plenty of things that fuel our praise and thanksgiving.

Whatever your condition here today, I would simply invite you to enter into this psalm and catch a vision for how God wants us to give Him praise and thanksgiving.

Psalm 100 has two stanzas. The first is found in verses 1-3. The psalmist begins by calling the entire earth – all the nations – to worship God. Throughout the Bible it is clear that God wants and deserves the worship of all the nations/peoples of the earth, not merely one tribe or clan. Notice the emphasis on *exuberant* worship in these verses.

- 1 Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.

All the people of the earth are to shout *joyfully* to the Lord. The next time you’re at a football game, notice how people “shout joyfully” when the home team takes the field; notice how joyfully people shout when their team does well. Something deep within erupts spontaneously into a shout. I’m not quite sure how to pull it off in church, but there’s plenty about God that could easily warrant a corporate joyful shout.

“Serve the Lord” is sometimes translated “worship the Lord” because the psalmist has in mind serving God through worship (in the temple). When we worship we are serving God. The challenge is to serve God “with gladness” – as opposed to serving begrudgingly or reluctantly. We should gladly bring God our worship when we gather.

“Come before Him with joyful singing” also refers to a heart attitude. When we come before God in worship, our singing should express our satisfaction in who God is and what He does.

In verse 3 the psalmist turns to the people of God and challenges them to “know” something, something that should fuel the type of exuberant worship that has just been described. In the OT, to “know” something is to have an intimate understanding of it. In our day, we might say that to know something in this way is to “get it.” Notice what the psalmist wants us to “get”:

3 Know that the LORD Himself is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

We need to “get” that the LORD Himself is God. Whenever you see LORD in all caps in your English Bible, you are reading the name YHWH – the personal name of God revealed to His chosen people. The psalmist wanted them to know that YHWH, the One to whom they were bound by covenant, **HE is God!** YHWH isn’t merely a tribal deity; no, YHWH is God, the One who has all power and all knowledge and all sovereignty.

The psalmist didn’t merely want them to know that YHWH is God; he wanted them to know their relationship to the One who is God. “It is He who made us, and not we ourselves.” Translations of the last phrase vary. The NIV, for example, reads, “It is he who made us, **and we are his.**” Either translation is possible, and either translation is compatible with the rest of Scripture. But I tend to lean toward the NAS which emphasizes that the people of God have been shaped and formed by God Himself: “It is He who made us, and not we ourselves.” You’ve heard of the “self-made man”? That’s the person who worked hard to become what he is in terms of wealth, status, and power. The people of God are anything **but** self-made. It is He who has made us and not we ourselves. Any goodness or power or influence we might have is the result of God’s creative work in our midst.

The Apostle Paul emphasized this truth in relation to individual believers and the body of Christ in general. When it came to himself, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 10, “I am what I am by the grace of God.” Even though he worked hard in seeking God and spreading the message about Christ, Paul said that it wasn’t him, but the grace of God that accomplished it all. God made him and appointed Him and empowered him. And when it came to the body of Christ, Paul said that God has placed each member in the body of Christ just as He desired (1 Corinthians 12:18). That is true for the body of Christ universally and for each individual expression of the body of Christ (i.e., each local church).

We are supposed to **know** that our God has sovereignly made us. In the context of this Psalm of Thanksgiving, this understanding prompts us to acknowledge God’s work in our midst. Especially if you’re a person who tends to notice what’s wrong and to ignore what’s right, this is a great reminder. There is a time and a place to critique “the church” so that we might live better. But before we are able to critique the church in any sort of helpful or constructive way, we need to acknowledge that God has designed the body of Christ with great skill and wisdom. Even though we are often luke-warm and disobedient, God has made us to be the body of Christ.

“We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” The 23rd Psalm is a beautiful expression of what it means to be sheep in His pasture. If the LORD is your shepherd, you won’t lack a thing. He will lead to places that give you rest and refreshment; when you feel like giving up, He restores your soul and leads you in paths of righteousness. When you get into dangerous places

in your life, if the Lord is your shepherd, you don't have to fear; you will be protected and your enemies will be scattered. You can live with the conviction that you will dwell in presence of God forever.

If David could say "The Lord is my shepherd," surely those who follow Jesus can say the same thing with great confidence. Jesus said (John 10), "I am the good shepherd." He speaks and we hear His voice. He protects us from enemies and leads us into wide open spaces.

Knowing these things – really "getting it" – can fuel our praise in significant ways. But I have to admit that sometimes I get going so fast that I just don't notice God; I don't notice ways that Jesus is being a good Shepherd to me.

Donald Whitney writes that "one of the saddest experiences of [his] childhood" happened on his tenth birthday. He had sent out invitations to eight of his friends, and they all showed up at his house for his birthday party. They spent the afternoon playing games in his yard; then they ate hamburgers and hotdogs, followed by birthday cake and ice cream and opening of presents. The highlight of the birthday party, however, was going to be Whitney's gift to his friends. All nine boys piled into his mom's station wagon and they drove to the high school basketball game. They stood in line and Whitney bought them each a ticket. In his mind this would be the perfect ending to a perfect birthday party. He would sit in the stands with four friends on each side, eating popcorn and goofing off with his friends. But when they got inside the gym, all eight of his friends scattered and he didn't see them the rest of the night. There was no "Thanks for inviting me to your party" or "Thanks for the tickets"; they just scattered. Whitney sat alone the rest of the night watching a miserable ball game.

Whitney points out that the way his friends treated him is the way we often treat God in corporate worship. When we gather in worship, God is the Guest of Honor. We may give a routine gift or sing a few customary songs, but we largely neglect the One we have come to celebrate. Like Whitney's friends, we leave without a twinge of guilt, without any awareness of our insensitivity to God Himself. (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, pp. 79-80)

The mystery of all this to me is that God even notices or cares. But He does. He is more attentive to our attitudes here today than a ten year old boy at his birthday party. He sees what is in our hearts. And He takes great delight in our expressions of "Thank You" and "I love Who You are and what You do." God actually notices and cares. That's why the psalmist tells us to **know** Who God is and what He does for us – and to respond with joyful worship from the heart.

The *second stanza* is found in verses 4 and 5.

4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving,
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him; bless His name.

This is a call to corporate thanksgiving, a call for the people of God to come together and tell God "thank You." When you came to the temple, you entered through the gates into the courts of the temple. The psalmist is saying that when you come into the temple to worship bring thanksgiving and praise with you. Even if you weren't carrying an animal sacrifice, you should never come to the temple empty-handed. You can bring your thanksgiving and praise. You can

bless His name. In the new covenant, worship isn't localized in one specific place such as the temple in Jerusalem. But anytime we gather for worship, we should bring our praise and thanksgiving. We shouldn't come empty-handed.

But what if you don't feel like giving thanks? What if you haven't felt particularly close to God this past week, should you still enter in and tell God thank you? The short answer is "of course!" Our thanksgiving isn't dependent on our mood or our spiritual temperature. It's dependent upon the goodness, lovingkindness, and faithfulness of God. Look at verse 5:

5 For the LORD is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting,
And His faithfulness to all generations.

The Lord is good even if you feel bad. And His goodness is a reason to give thanks. This past week I was talking with someone about this. His comment was, "Giving thanks is the remedy to many of my problems: anxiety, bad attitudes, selfishness, etc." He said that when he slows down long enough to remember all the things God has done, it changes the way he thinks about his circumstances. He said, "God has given me a good job, health, a family, food . . ."

"His lovingkindness is everlasting." Lovingkindness translates the Hebrew word *hesed* – God's covenant love, God's loyalty to His people. Have you stopped lately to consider how amazing it is that God is loyal to us. He's not fickle when it comes to His love; His love is steady and strong and constant.

"And His faithfulness to all generations." God is faithful to His character and to His promises. The good news here is that you can bring thanksgiving and praise because the Lord is good, His lovingkindness is everlasting, and He is faithful to all generations.

When was the last time you slowed down long enough to notice the goodness of God in your life? That His lovingkindness is everlasting? That He has been faithful to you?

Heather King is an author and a commentator for NPR's *All Things Considered*. In 2005 she wrote a memoir entitled *parched*. It tells the story of her life as an alcoholic, living in and around Boston. She is one of those people whose first experience with alcohol triggered an obsession that would last the rest of her life. That's obviously not everyone's experience, but it was hers. At age 13 she got drunk with some friends. The next 20 years of her life were dominated by her obsession with alcohol.

In her memoir King describes how she managed to sabotage every significant relationship in her life and every opportunity to "make something of herself." She got both a college degree and a law degree while drinking heavily. But after law school she kept working at bars and restaurants because that's where she knew she could get alcohol. She wrote that at the age of 33 "alcohol had drained [her] of every emotion but self-loathing. . ." Here's a portion of an entry in her journal:

"The temptation I have been powerless to resist all my adult life – the one which has been responsible for virtually all of my misery, the one which has made me a failure, which has largely shaped my reputation and character in the cruel, unflinching eyes of the world

– is, yes, the deadly demon ALCOHOL: my nemesis, my Armageddon, my albatross, the noose around my neck, my personal skull-and-crossbones. I hate to keep dwelling on it, but I must, for it has literally taken control of my life . . .” (p. 238)

Shortly after that realization, her family staged an intervention and had she agreed to enter into a treatment facility in Wisconsin. At first she mocked everything: the slogans, the group sessions, the white paper butterflies that people were given when they left treatment. But God did a work in her life at that facility. Eventually she came to Christ. Eighteen years after she got her own white paper butterfly, Heather King wrote this:

I still don't know why God allows obsessions, cravings, disease: I just know I'm really glad that when Christ stood among the Pharisees he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor; sick people do." I just know that anything that is worthwhile about me arose, in one way or another, from the suffering of those twenty years of drinking. I just know that only a God of inexhaustible love, infinite creativity, and a burning desire to count every last one of us in could have taken a broken-down wreck like me and made something useful out of her.

And as the great German mystic Meister Eckhart noted, "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was 'Thank you,' that would be enough."

(parched, p. 276)

Your story may be very similar to Heather King's, or your story may be very different from hers. God may have already rescued you from all sorts of self-destruction and dangers. Or you may be in the middle of dangerous circumstances. Whatever the case, are you willing to slow down and consider who God is and what God has done for you? And are you willing to tell God, "Thank You"? That's what He really wants.