

Praise and “Thank You” Psalm 100

This morning we continue our sermon series on learning to pray from the Psalms. Our hope is that you view this sermon series as something of a workshop on prayer. We’d really like for you to take away one or two ideas from each sermon that you might try out. Thanks to those of you who emailed me to say that you were practicing something you heard in last week’s message. That’s perfect.

This morning we are going to consider Psalm 100. This psalm gives a series of rapid-fire commands that we might practice: “Shout joyfully, serve the Lord, come before Him, know that the Lord is God, give thanks to His name, etc.” The emphasis, as we’ll see, is upon expressing to God our praise and thanks corporately - when we gather together for worship. If we want to, we can actually practice the commands we see in Psalm 100 ***before we leave today.***

The ideas we’ll see in this psalm are very simply and very familiar to most of us. I was trying to figure out a way to make them new and complicated, but I decided against it. The power of this psalm lies in its simplicity: Because of WHO God is, He deserves our praise and thanksgiving.

Let’s consider this Psalm and try to catch a vision for how we might come to God through 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 how ***exuberantly*** the psalmist tells us to worship.

- 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 us 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 really serving God in the sense of offering sacrifices of praise to Him. The challenge is to serve God “with gladness” – as opposed to serving out of obligation or reluctantly.

“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. These commands are challenging because we normally associate “gladness” and “joyful” with emotions. And we tend to think that our emotions are

completely out of our control. Consequently when we don't feel like singing (or if we don't like some particular song or if we are in a foul mood for whatever reason) we might think, "I can't worship God with **gladness**. I'd be faking it if I tried to sing **joyfully**."

I would agree that there is an emotional element to worshiping with gladness and singing joyfully. But the psalmist appeals to something much more stable and constant than our emotions when he calls us to praise God. He appeals to something that is true no matter how you feel this morning. He wants us to "know" who God is and how deeply He cares for us. 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 intellectually 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. As the people of God we 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. This understanding prompts us to acknowledge God's work in our midst. Especially if you're a person who tends to focus on what is wrong and to ignore what is 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 might be a long way from what we can and should be, God has made us to be the body of Christ. And anything good that flows from this fellowship can be traced back directly to God. “It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves.”

“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” – should fuel our praise week-in and week-out. These are things that are always true no matter how we might feel on any given Sunday morning. The ***prayer idea*** from these verses is arrive on Sunday mornings with the intention of expressing to God your praise for who He is and what He has done for you. Many of the songs we sing express praise to God in some powerful ways.

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. Sometimes 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. This is consistent with the type of praying Jesus taught. He taught us to begin, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. . .”

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 shouldn’t be dependent on our mood or our spiritual temperature. It’s dependent upon the goodness, lovingkindness, and faithfulness of God. Thanksgiving (by definition) isn’t about us; it’s about 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. “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 in every generation. 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. This truth has heightened meaning after the cross. Jesus’ sacrifice is the ultimate expression of God’s goodness, covenant love, and faithfulness.

The simple *prayer idea* here is to “enter His gates with thanksgiving” - give thanks to God when you enter into His presence. Since we’re always in God’s presence, thanksgiving is always appropriate; Paul even wrote, “In everything give thanks.” And we should certainly also give thanks when we gather for corporate worship.

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. . .”

After 20 years of self-destruction, 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 later, 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 or very different from Heather King’s. God may have already rescued you from all sorts of self-destruction and dangers. Or you may be in the middle of such circumstances. Whatever the case, are you willing to slow down and consider who God is and what God has already done for you? And are you willing to tell God, “Thank You”? You don’t have to wait until everything is perfect to become a person of thanksgiving; you don’t have to feel great to give God your thanks. Because of Who He is and what He has done, giving thanks is always appropriate. You can even tell Him thank you before you leave here this morning.