

The How and Why of Giving Thanks

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[0 : 00] Hopefully you've got your Bibles there, although I'll be putting the verses on the screen to help you as well. I don't know if you noticed when Grace read our psalm out today that our psalmist is full of thanks and praise.

In fact, the Psalm 100 is called the Jubilate because it is full of jubilation, joyous, thanks and praise. But I wonder if that's how you're feeling at the moment.

Because every time we turn on the TV or radio, there seems to be more news about vaccinations or protests or border issues or COVID cases.

In fact, yesterday, Melbourne scored the, well, we broke the record for the most COVID cases in Australia since the pandemic. Yay us! And I don't know if you heard, but last Monday, Melbourne officially became the most locked down city in the world, beating Buenos Aires, who was previously. As the article says on your screens there, we've traded our title as the world's most livable city for this unenviable one that being locked down.

[1 : 16] And by the time, I don't know if you can see this, but by the time we open up later this month, we apparently would have spent 45% of the pandemic in lockdown, almost half of it.

And so at this point of the pandemic, you may not be feeling full of thankfulness, but feeling full of fed upness. Especially if you're having to live on your own or having to deal with extra stress.

And so when we read Psalm 100 before, perhaps you thought the psalmist was just having a good day. You know, perhaps his parcel in the post finally arrived or that he was just about to be let out of lockdown like New South Wales tomorrow.

But however you are feeling, giving thanks is something that ought to characterize our Christian lives. We saw this from our second reading where we are encouraged to continue with Christ, to be built up in his likeness, to be strengthened in the faith.

And notice out of all the other things that Paul could have added, what does he add at the end? Overflowing with thankfulness. Overflowing with thankfulness.

[2 : 34] But how and why? Well, Psalm 100 tells us. You see, the title for this psalm is literally a psalm for thanksgiving, or as Grace said, giving thanks.

Because it teaches us how to give thanks, why to give thanks, and was sung by Israel as a way to give thanks.

Now, I'm not going to sing it for you this morning, so you've already got something to be thankful for, don't you? But I am going to take you through it using the how and why as headings.

In fact, the psalm seems to be structured around the how and why. And so, on your screens, we have three commands in yellow about how to give thanks, followed by a reason why.

And so, I'm going to group the hows and the whys together, beginning with how. So, point one, verse one and two. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

[3 : 44] Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs. And so, here are the first three commands about how to give thanks.

To shout, worship, and come before God with joyful songs. And the next three commands in verse four are these. Now, for Israel, all this took place at the temple.

That's where God especially dwelt. So, that's where they would come before him. That's where they would enter his gates, the gates of the temple and the courts of the temple.

And so, that's primarily where they would sing this psalm and do these things to give thanks. In fact, that's where the psalmist calls all the earth to come.

And notice in verse one that the psalmist commands all the earth to shout for joy to the Lord who is at the temple. And so, this psalm has an evangelistic edge to it.

[4 : 57] Of course, there is no temple anymore in Jerusalem, is there? And so, we cannot enter its gates, even if Qantas flies there next month.

What's more, Jesus has replaced the temple anyway. And so, to come to God, we and all the earth must first come to Jesus.

We must believe in Jesus. And as we do, then we are joined with Christ and become God's temple too.

Both as individuals and as a church. Which means we can give thanks in these ways, not just as a church, but as individuals anytime, anywhere.

For example, verse one, we can give thanks by shouting for joy to the Lord. Or as the New Testament often puts it, to rejoice. Now, I know for most of us, you know, we don't like to show too much emotion, do we?

[6 : 01] But it is okay to rejoice. You know, to shout joyfully in thanksgiving. I mean, have you ever lost your wallet or purse? Or for the younger generations, you know, your phone.

And you cannot find it anywhere. And so, after a while, you begin to panic. Because it's got your license, your credit cards, or your personal ID that people can steal.

And so, then you pray, often much later than we should have. Please, God, help me find it. And after a while, it turns up in the washing basket or somewhere odd.

Well, when it does, or when you get that last car parking space, or the good result from the medical test, or that answer to prayer, do you rejoice?

Do you shout joyfully to the Lord? After all, non-Christians do it all the time, don't they? They find something and go, oh, thank God, in an unbelieving way.

[7 : 05] Well, let's reclaim that in a believing way and say, thank you, God. For this is how we can give thanks. But we can also do it, verse 2, by worshipping the Lord with gladness.

Now, the word worship here is really to serve the Lord with gladness. Israel would serve God at the temple. But as God's temple, we can serve God anywhere, can't we?

Not just on Sundays, but every day. And notice we are to serve with gladness. And so, serving God is not meant to be a duty. It's meant to be a joy.

Because it's part of our thankful response to what God has done for us. The New Testament puts it like this. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, so it's a response, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice to serve God.

And notice, this is our true and proper worship. And so, we can give thanks by serving God in response to all he's done for us.

[8 : 22] I've been so encouraged by people who have been doing that, even during the pandemic. One person has said to me, Andrew, please tell me whenever you need someone to read the Bible, it is such a joy to do it.

Another person said, if you know anyone in need, please let me know. I can drop some things to them during the week. I'd love to do it.

Here are just two examples of serving the Lord with gladness, in response to what he's given us. So, we can give thanks by shouting joyfully.

We can also give thanks by serving the Lord with gladness. And then verse two, coming before him with joyful songs, anytime, anywhere.

I know for a lot of people from the morning services, they often tune into songs of praise after the live stream service. And they kind of hum along to the words.

[9 : 34] Here they are, coming before God with joyful songs. For younger generations, it's worth having some Christian music to listen to, because it's much more edifying than the secular music.

Of course, singing joyful songs out loud can feel a bit weird on your own sometimes. In our house, almost every Sunday morning, my wife, Michelle, sings out loud along to the songs on the online service.

And almost every Sunday morning, the kids tease her about it. And not because she's bad, I hasten to add, but because singing is better together, isn't it?

For then singing encourages one another, as well as thanking God. As Colossians says, let the word or message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and admonish one another, through psalms, hymns, and songs.

There's the horizontal encouragement to one another, but notice singing to God with gratitude, thankfulness in your hearts. And so we can thank God by coming before him with joyful songs, can't

we?

[10:52] Which will be so much easier and better when we come back together, won't it? And verse four, we can enter, and not just these gates, but through Jesus, God's very throne room in prayer, and to give thanks and praise his name, anytime, anywhere.

Now to praise his name means to speak of his character, his goodness and greatness. But it's also a way of giving thanks, because when we come before God's throne, and praise his name, we often do it in a way that gives thanks at the same time, don't we?

For example, thank you, God, for your sovereign control over our world. We're praising his sovereign character, but we're doing it in a way that gives thanks.

Of course, we can enter in prayer to simply give thanks for all the good things he gives us. Are we going to do this in a little while, as we share those points of thanksgiving, many of which have been emailed into us?

In fact, the Bible encourages us to thank God whenever we pray. Notice on your screens, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.

[12:13] And so whenever you pray, why not always try and add one point of thanks? Well, here's the how of thanksgiving, to shout or rejoice, to worship or serve, to come before God with joyful songs, to enter his gates in prayer, to give thanks and praise.

That covers quite a bit, doesn't it? But that's because, like the psalmist, our Christian lives are to be marked with overflowing thankfulness.

Remember? But why point two? Well, the psalmist tells us, verse three, he begins by saying, know that the Lord is God.

To help us give thanks, the psalmist says, know who God is. We often think only about what God has given us.

But here, we're told to firstly know who God is, his character. Know our Lord is the God here.

[13:26] You see, in Israel's day, the question in society was not, is there a God? No, the question was, who is the true God? And the psalmist is saying, our personal Lord, he is God, the true one.

Know that we have the real deal. In fact, we can know this with even more certainty, because Jesus has made known God to us. But having the true God as our God is worth giving thanks for.

When I was a kid, my mum would buy us the breakfast cereal Cocoa Pops for a holiday treat. But she got the no frills version from Franklin's.

Here it is on your screens. Now, there are some no-name food, which is fine, and some which is actually even great. But these never tasted right.

And so when she finally bought the real deal, the Kellogg's Cocoa Pops, we were so thankful as kids, because they actually tasted like Cocoa Pops.

[14:36] Well, when it comes to God, a no frills God is no God at all. They can't do anything, really. But our God is the true God.

And if you don't have him as your God, then you need to come to Jesus to believe in him. And for us who have, then we're to know we have the real deal.

Our God is actually able to help us. He's able to keep his promises to us. And on it goes. That's worth giving thanks for, isn't it?

We're not wasting our time following this God. And as the true God, he made us. It is he who made us, and we are his.

He made us firstly by creating us. Indeed, he created everyone. That's why the psalmist back in verse one, tells all the earth, remember, to shout for joy.

[15:37] Because God created all the earth. And so all the earth owes him our lives. Occasionally, mothers remind children to be more thankful to them because they gave birth to those kids.

But how much more so to God, who enables those mothers to give birth? In fact, who enables our lungs to keep breathing? We think we are owed things in life.

But we don't, we didn't create this world or our lives. No, no, God did. And so we owe him. And since God created all things, then every good gift we enjoy is from him.

And we can see that on from James chapter one. I like the beautiful sunny day we enjoyed yesterday. How glorious was that? A member of our 9 a.m.

congregation here at Doncaster has since moved interstate. I used to come though to my men's Bible study group. And whenever it came time to pray, he would almost always begin by saying, I'm so blessed.

[16 : 52] I just want to give thanks. You see, he knew everything he enjoyed in life was from God. And so he continued to thank God every day of his life.

Each day of our lives is from him. And so we too are to thank him each day. But God didn't just make us people by creating us.

He has also made us his people by saving us. And he continues to care for us. And so the rest of verse three goes on to say that we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

So you see, he made us not only by creating us, but saving us for Israel. He saved them from Egypt. For us, he saves us from sin's judgment.

But he doesn't just save us and leave us. No, no, no. He continues to care for us. We are his precious people, the sheep of his pasture.

[17 : 59] He continues to care for us like a shepherd. It's been so encouraging, actually reading the messages from different people, from different services, some of which we'll read soon.

Many of them speak of God's care for you over this past year, whether it's, you know, a safe arrival of a grandchild or some sort of provision for health, or even the fact that COVID came at a time in history when we have this technology so that we continue to hear God's word and join together as a virtual church.

All reasons to keep thanking him, aren't they? And the point is, know who God is, the one who creates, saves, and cares for us.

And if you know that, you'll have plenty of reason to overflow with thanks, won't you? And in case that's not enough, the psalmist gives us more in verse five, where he gives us some explicit reasons to thank God again for his character.

He says, for, because the Lord is good, his love endures forever, and his faithfulness continues through all generations.

[19 : 20] Now, because of time, let me focus particularly on the first one. And notice the psalmist doesn't say that the Lord does good, which is true. He starts by saying the Lord is good.

It's his nature. It's who he is. And so he is incapable of doing bad, which means he can only do good, like giving good gifts, just as Jesus said.

You know, if even sinful fathers know how to give good gifts, how much more does your father in heaven know how to give good gifts?

You see, his goodness means he is incapable of giving bad gifts. And is that not a relief? Is it not worth giving thanks for? At Christmas, as Christmas time approaches, there's always a chance that a relative will buy a gift that they love, but you, eh, not so much.

But God doesn't give us meh kind of gifts, does he? He's incapable of doing so. Of course, some of his gifts might seem bad or meh at the time.

[20 : 38] You know, allowing us to suffer things in this fallen world doesn't seem like a good gift, does it? But when we look back on this life, whether we look back from this world or the world to come, we'll see how he used it for good.

And we'll see that it was a good gift. I remember one year getting a gift that I thought was a bit meh. It was this cheese slicer. Here it is here. I'd never seen one of these before. This was about 20 years ago before they became popular. And so I said, thanks.

In here, I went, eh, kind of thing. But over time, as we used it, you kind of slide along here. Here's my bigger, strong and bitey. You slide it across here and it makes perfect cheese slices.

And so as I look back on that gift, I realized it was a really good gift. Whether we think God's gifts are meh or not, they are always good.

[21 : 47] We just sometimes have to look back and see them with the perspective of time. For the Lord is good. He is incapable of being bad.

So he can only give good gifts. And that is reason in itself to give thanks, isn't it? Indeed, for the Psalmist, his goodness seems to lead to his love that endures forever and his faithfulness that continues through all generations.

His love that endures even when we don't love him. His faithfulness that continues to us.

Even when we're not faithful to him. Are they not things worth giving thanks for? Of course, we see God's goodness and love, especially at the cross.

As we read in the New Testament, at one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, and so on. But when, notice, the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of

regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs to the hope of eternal life.

[23 : 23] Here is God's goodness and love. That while we were foolish sinners, he mercifully saved us through his son, Jesus.

For at the cross, God forsook his son, so that he would never forsake us. Isn't that extraordinary? But instead, he would give us life eternal.

Is that not worth giving thanks for? The Washington Post reported a story coming out of Afghanistan last month about the brother of Mohammed.

Mohammed was in the US when the Taliban took Kabul, the capital, and he tried to get his wife and kids out, but the Taliban would not let them enter the airport to catch one of the last remaining flights out.

And the reason was, but because his wife did not have her guardian, her husband, and Mohammed was in the US. And so Mohammed's brother, who is not named, pretended to be her husband to help save his brother's family.

[24 : 41] But here's the rub. To do so, to help his brother's wife and kids board the plane, he had to go on with them and forsake his own family and leave them behind.

Knowing full well that he did not have a green card, and so when he landed in the US, he would probably be sent back. And yet out of love, he forsook his family to save Mohammed, his brother's family.

As the news article report goes, Mohammed says that his brother sacrificed everything to save his family. He says, what he did for me, I cannot repay.

And when they landed, Mohammed was reunited with his family while his brother was taken away on a bus by US immigration because he did not have a green card.

The point of the story is that out of goodness and love, the brother forsook his own family to save his brother's family, to give them new life in the US.

[25 : 56] Well, God forsook his family, so to speak, his only son and to save millions of other families and to give us not life in the US but life eternal.

Is that not something we're to be thankful for? Something that we can never repay? You see, we have every reason to be overflowing with thankfulness.

Whether by shouting or rejoicing, by worshipping or serving, by praising in song or simply giving thanks in prayer. We have every reason to be overflowing with thankfulness, even in the world's most locked down city.

So let's start giving thanks. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, through Christ, we come before your throne to give you thanks.

For you are the true God who created us, saved us, and continues to care for us. Our God who is good and whose love and faithfulness continues forever.

[27 : 13] May we know who you are and so continue to overflow with thankfulness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Every Christ and