

The How and Why of Giving Thanks

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Date: 10 October 2021

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[0 : 00] I don't know if you noticed, but as I read Psalm 100 this morning, our psalmist is full of joyous praise and thanks, isn't he? In fact, the Psalm 100 is called the Jubilate because it's full of, you know, jubilation, you know, thanks and praise.

But I wonder if that's how you're feeling today. Every time it seems we turn on the news, whether TV, radio or Facebook, there's more news about vaccinations or protests or border issues between states or COVID case numbers.

I mean, our numbers yesterday broke our national record for the whole pandemic. Yay, Melbourne. And of course, you may have heard that last Monday, Melbourne officially became the world's most locked down city, beating Buenos Aires, who had the title.

As the article says on the subheading there, that we've traded the title for world's most livable city for this unenviable title. And by the time the pandemic finishes, this might be a bit small for you to see, but it says by the time it opens up, we will have spent 45% of the pandemic in lockdown. That's a long time. And so at this point of the pandemic, you may not be feeling full of thankfulness, but full of fed upness.

[1 : 34] Especially if you're having to live on your own or having to deal with stress, extra stress, whether at home or work or just in life because of this pandemic.

And so when we heard Psalm 100 read before, you may have thought that the psalmist wrote this psalm when he was having a good day. Perhaps his parcel in Australia Post finally turned up or that he's just about to be let out of lockdown like New South Wales tomorrow.

But however you're feeling at the moment. Giving thanks is something that ought to characterize our life as a Christian. And we saw this from our second reading where we are encouraged to continue to live our lives in Christ.

You know, built up in his likeness, strengthened in the faith. And notice what Paul adds at the end. Out of all the things he could have added to this summary, he adds overflowing with thankfulness. You see, thankfulness is meant to mark our lives as Christians. But how and why? Well, our psalm today tells us both.

[2 : 51] You see, the title of the psalm, which is part of the original Hebrew text of the Bible, actually calls this psalm a psalm for thanksgiving.

It's for giving thanks. Because the psalm teaches us how to give thanks, why to give thanks, and was sung by Israel as a way to give thanks.

And not that I'm going to be singing it for you this morning. And so there's something you can be thankful for already, isn't there? But I am going to take you through it using the headings of how and why.

In fact, the psalm itself seems to be structured around those headings. And so on your screens, we have three commands in yellow, which talk about how, where to give thanks, followed by a command to know why, where to give thanks.

And then it kind of repeats almost exactly the same. Three commands about how to give thanks, followed by a reason why. But I'm going to group the hows together and then the whys.

[3 : 58] So beginning with the how of thanksgiving. So point one, verse one. The psalmist writes, Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

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. The next three commands are in verse four. He goes on to say, enter, that's the command, his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name.

Now for Israel, all of this took place at the temple. And that's where God especially dwelt. And so that's where you would come if you're Israel to come before God at the temple. That's where he was. That's where his gates and courts were. It's the gates and courts of the temple. And so that's primarily where they would sing this psalm and do these things to give thanks. [5 : 12] In fact, this is where the psalmist calls all the earth to come to. Notice back in verse one, the psalmist actually commands all the earth to shout for joy to the Lord, who is at the temple.

And so there's this evangelistic edge to the psalm. Of course, there is no more temple in Jerusalem. 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 we come to God by coming firstly to Jesus, believing in him.

And when we do, we are given God's spirit such that we are united together with Christ and become God's temple too.

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

[6 : 18] For example, we can give thanks, first one, by shouting for joy to the Lord. Or as the New Testament puts it, to rejoice.

Just as we sung with our first song, you know, rejoice. I'm not going to sing it, sorry. Now, I know for most of us, we don't like to show too much emotion. But it is okay to shout joyfully in thanksgiving, to rejoice.

I mean, have you ever lost your wallet or purse or perhaps phone? You know, it's got all our credit card details or our license, you know, our lives in there that someone can steal. And so you start to look for it and after a while you start to panic because you can't find it and it could be stolen. And then we pray and usually a bit later than we should have prayed, but we pray, please God, help us find it.

And then after a while it turns up in some odd place like the washing basket or somewhere else. Well, when it does, or when you get that last car parking spot, or when you get that positive or that good medical result back or that answer to prayer that you wanted, it's okay to let out a thank you, God, to rejoice.

[7 : 40] After all, non-Christians do it all the time, don't they? You know, when something good happens, they go, oh, thank God. In an unbelieving way. Well, let's reclaim that and thank God in a believing way by saying even out loud, thank you, God.

For this is how we can give thanks. But so also is verse two, to worship God with gladness. Now, the word worship here really means serve.

Israel would have served God at the temple. But as God's temple, we're to serve God everywhere. And not just on Sundays, but every day. And notice it says with gladness.

You see, serving God is not meant to be a duty, but a joy. Because it's part of our thankful response to what God has done for us.

The New Testament kind of captures these ideas in Romans 12. He says, In view of God's mercy, what God has done for us. Then serve God.

[8 : 50] Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. And notice this is our true and proper worship. You see, we can give thanks to God by serving God gladly as a joy in response to what he's done for us.

I've been encouraged so much by people who have often done this without even realizing it. Actually, one person said to me, Andrew, if you ever need someone to read the Bible online, please let me know.

It is such a joy to serve. They were her words. Such a joy to serve. Another person said, If you know of anyone in need, please let me know.

I can drop things off to them during the week. I would love to do that, they said. Here are people who serve with gladness in response to what God has done for them.

This is another way we can give thanks. Or verse 2, We can come before God with joyful songs anytime, anywhere. I know a lot of people, particularly from the morning, the earlier morning services, they would watch their nine o'clock stream and then they would turn on songs of praise on TV afterwards and kind of hum along, praising and thanking God in that way.

[10 : 13] For younger generations, it's worth having some Christian music on your playlist. It's much more edifying than the secular music out there. I know it's not always easy to find good Christian music.

If you're having trouble, ask us and let us know. But this is a way that we can give thanks to God. Of course, singing joyful songs out loud can feel a bit weird, can't it?

Especially if you're on your own. In our house, almost every Sunday, Michelle, my wife, will sing out loud to the songs that are on the online service.

And almost every Sunday, our kids would tease her for it. Not because she can't sing, I hasten to add, but because it is a bit weird, isn't it?

Singing is better together, isn't it? For then singing encourages one another as well as thanking God.

[11 : 12] As Colossians says on your screens there, that we are to teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns and songs. Here's the encouragement and teaching for one another.

But also singing to God with, notice, gratitude in your heart. And so we can thank God by coming before him with joyful songs.

Which will be so much easier when we can come back together, won't it? And verse 4, we can also thank God by entering his gates with thanksgiving and praise.

Of course, not literally because the temple isn't there, but through Jesus we can enter God's very throne room with thanks and praise.

Giving thanks to him and praising his name. We're to enter in by prayer to his throne room to do this. Now to praise his name really means to praise his character, his greatness and goodness.

[12 : 22] But it's also another way of giving thanks because when we praise his character, we often at the same time are thanking him. For example, we might pray, thank you God for your sovereign control over our world.

We're praising his sovereign character and thanking him for it at the same time, aren't we? Of course, we can enter in prayer to his throne room simply to give thanks for all the things he gives us.

Are we going to do that in a little while as we share things we're thankful for? In fact, the Bible encourages us every time we pray to pray, notice, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.

Present your requests to God. And so whenever you pray, why not always try and add one point of thanks in your prayers every time you pray that we might learn to be overflowing and practicing that overflowing with thankfulness.

But here's the how of thanksgiving, to shout or rejoice, to worship or serve, to come before God with joyful songs, to enter his throne room by prayer, to give thanks and praise his name.

[13 : 43] Now that covers quite a bit, doesn't it? But that's because like the psalmist, we're meant to overflow with thankfulness. But why? Point two.

Well, here we come to verse three. The psalmist says, firstly, know that the Lord is God. And to help us give thanks, the psalmist says, know who our God is.

Often we think only about what God has given us. But here we're told to know who God is first. Know our Lord is the God.

You see, in Israel's day, the question in society was not, is there a God? It was, who is the true God? And the psalmist is saying here, our personal Lord is that true God.

He is the real deal. In fact, we can know this with even more certainty because Jesus has made known God to us.

[14 : 50] But having the true God as our God is worth giving thanks for because we're not wasting our time. We've got the real deal. When I was a kid, my mum would buy us the breakfast cereal Cocoa Pops for a holiday treat.

But when she started doing it, she got the no frills version from Franklin's. Now, there's some no name food, which is quite good.

In fact, some of the no name food is better than the other food. But these things never tasted right. So when she finally bought the real deal, you know, the Kellogg's Cocoa Pops, we were so thankful because they actually tasted like Cocoa Pops.

Well, when it comes to God, a no frills God is no God at all. They don't taste right. They can't do much, can they? If anything.

But we have the real deal. The true God who can do everything, who is able to help us, who is able to keep his promises. We're not wasting our time.

[16:00] This is something worth giving thanks for, isn't it? And as the true God, he made us. It is he who made us, and we are his people.

He made us firstly by creating us, and then saving us. He created us as people. In fact, he created everyone. And that's why back in verse one, the psalmist tells all the earth to shout for joy, because God created all the earth.

We owe him our lives. Occasionally, mothers remind their kids to be more thankful because the mothers gave them birth. Or how much more so to God who enables mothers to give birth. Indeed, God who enables our lungs to keep breathing. Sometimes we think we are owed things in life, but we didn't create this world, nor our lives.

God did. No, no. We owe him. It's interesting that the New Testament suggests not giving thanks is actually at the heart of sin. In Romans on the screen there, it talks about the fact that although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, notice, nor gave thanks to him.

[17:23] You see, at the heart of sin is not just, you know, not letting God be God, but also not thanking him for being God. That's how important giving thanks is.

Just think, if Adam and Eve in the garden were more thankful for all the gifts they had rather than looking at the one bit of fruit they couldn't have, don't you think they would have ignored the servant, glorified God, and not sinned?

You see, thankfulness helps keep us from sinning. In fact, it even helps us from becoming envying and becoming bitter.

we don't have time to unpack that now. And since God created all the earth, then it means every good and perfect gift is coming down from him.

Like the beautiful day we had yesterday and it looks like the sun is out again today. Now, there are things we can give thanks for because that's from God.

[18:28] a member of our nine o'clock service who has since moved interstate used to come to my men's Bible study group and whenever it came time to prayer he would almost always begin with saying I am so blessed I just want to give thanks.

Almost every time we prayed he'd say I just want to give thanks I'm so blessed. You see, he understood that everything he had, every good thing he had was from God and so he knew he had much to be thankful for.

Each day of our lives is from God and so no wonder each day of our lives we're to thank God. But God didn't just make us people by creating us he also made us his people by saving us and by continuing to care for us.

And the rest of verse 3 goes on to say we are his people the sheep of his pasture. Now the way he saved Israel of course and made them his people was by saving them from Egypt.

And the way he makes us his people is by saving us from sin's judgment. But he doesn't just save us and then leave us no no he continues to care for us as a shepherd cares for his sheep the sheep of his pasture.

[19:56] It's been so encouraging reading the messages from different services that people have sent in as some of which we'll read to you soon. Many of them speak of God's care over this past year and whether it's the safe arrival of a grandchild or some sort of provision for of work or health or an answer to prayer or even the fact that COVID came at this point in history when we have the technology to keep running these services all of which are examples of how God continues to care for us aren't they and that's worth giving him thanks for.

The point is know who God is the one who creates saves and cares and if you know that you'll find plenty of reason to continue to give thanks which is similar to verse 5.

Here the psalmist explicitly gives us some reasons to thank God and again he focuses on God's character. He says for like give thanks because the Lord is good and his steadfast love endures forever.

His faithfulness continues through all generations. Now because of time let me just focus on the first one and notice the psalmist doesn't say that the Lord does good even though that's true again he begins with God's character the Lord is good like we sung before oh the goodness of Jesus goodness is his nature it's who he is it means then that he is incapable of doing bad and can only give good gifts as Jesus said on your screens there that if you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your good father in heaven give gifts to those who ask him you see his goodness means he's incapable of doing bad and can only give good

good which is a great relief isn't it and worth giving thanks for as Christmas approaches there's always a chance a relative will buy a gift that they love but you not so much but God doesn't give those kind of kind of gifts does he he's incapable of doing so now I realize that some of his gifts might seem bad or meh at the time like allowing us to suffer things in this fallen world you know it doesn't seem like a good gift does it but when we look back on this life whether in this world or the world to come we can see how he's used it for our good how it is a good gift

I remember one year getting a gift which I thought was a bit of a kind of gift it was some time ago before they were popular in Australia it was a cheese slicer that looked like this and so I'm assuming you've seen one of these but here's my block of bega cheese and you just kind of slice it across here I'm not going to do it now but it comes out with these kind of neat slices of cheese now as I said at the time I said thank you for the gift and kind of thought meh but as I've looked back and realised how good a gift it is I've realised that this is brilliant this cheese slicer is the best thing since sliced bread whether we think God's gifts are meh or not they are always good for the Lord is good so he's incapable of giving bad he can only give good gifts and that's worth giving thanks for is it not 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 always love him and his faithfulness that continues even when we're not always faithful to him

[24 : 27] I mean they're great things aren't they worth giving thanks for of course we see God's goodness and love particularly at the cross as we read in our last verse at one time we too were foolish disobedient and so on but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our saviour 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 saviour so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life here is God's goodness and love that while we were foolish and disobedient he mercifully saved us through

Jesus Christ for at the cross God forsook his son so that he'd never forsake us but instead give us life eternal is that not worth giving thanks for the Washington Post reported a last month a story coming out of Afghanistan about a brother of Muhammad Muhammad is a man who got out and he has a brother who's there now Muhammad was actually in the US when the Taliban took control of Kabul and he tried to get his wife and kids who are still over in Afghanistan out he tried to get them through the Taliban gates onto one of the last flights out of Kabul but when his wife came up to the guards the Taliban guards they would not let her through because she did not have her guardian they said that is her husband with her and so they turned her away and so

Muhammad from the US rang his brother and his brother pretended to be the husband and they went up to the gate again and this time they got through onto the plane and got out of Kabul but here's the rub for the brother to do to he had to forsake his own family and leave them behind knowing that he did not have a green card and would be unlikely to even stay himself in America but he sent back to Afghanistan and as Muhammad went to the airport and reflected on these things the news article says as he thought about coming face to face with his brother who had sacrificed everything to save his family he said what he did for me I cannot repay and when they landed Muhammad was reunited with his family while his brother was taken on a bus by US immigration because he did not have a green card the point of the story is out of goodness and love his brother forsook his family in order to save another God has done so much more for us God forsook his family that is his son if you like forsook his son to save millions of families and to give them new life not in the US but life eternal something we can never repay is that not worth giving thanks for you see we have every reason to be overflowing with thankfulness whether by shouting or rejoicing by worshiping or serving by coming before him in joyful songs and entering before his throne in prayer with thanks and praise we have every reason to do those things to be overflowing with thankfulness for the

Lord is good and he forsook his son for us and so we can still overflow with thanks even while we're in the world's most locked down city let's pray our gracious heavenly father we give you thanks we thank you for your goodness for your love for your faithfulness we thank you that through christ we can come before your throne now to give you thanks and praise for you are the true god who created us saved us and cares for us who is good and whose love and faithfulness endures forever who forsook his own son that we might never be forsaken father please help us to know who you are that we might continue to overflow with thankfulness we ask it in jesus name amen