

Give thanks for God's Enduring Love

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Date: 19 October 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as many of you know, last year my daughter got a dog and she loves him so much that she does anything for him, including even letting him sleep in her bed under the covers.

The things people do for love. Another example of the things people do for love. Earlier this year in June, a guy's proposal went viral and has been seen by more than 32 million people.

This man, Luke, took his girlfriend, Lauren, for a candlelight concert with an orchestra and he hired an actor to pretend to be the official photographer. And during the intermission, the photographer came up and said, look, can I take some photos of you?

Let's come in onto the stage where the concert hall is and get some shots for the advertising and so on. As they were taking photos, the orchestra suddenly returned and started playing with the candles burning in the background.

And then Luke got down on one knee and said, Lauren, will you marry me? And Lauren said, a million times, yes. And all the ladies amongst us go, oh.

[1 : 1 6] And all the guys go, way too much effort. The things people do for love. And yet, as we'll see today, all of that is nothing compared to what God has done for love.

But first, today is Thanksgiving Sunday and our psalm begins and ends with a command to give thanks. And in between, it gives us three big reasons why we are to give thanks.

God's character, creation and salvation. And there's a bit of a structure to it. So the psalm character starts off in verses 1 to 3 and then it talks about God's creation in verses 4 to 9.

And then in the middle and the longest part is God's salvation, verse 10 to 20. The tone changes a little bit in verse 23 where he summarizes God's salvation.

The psalmist includes himself and starts using the word us. But then it goes back briefly as the psalm ends to God's creation, verse 25. Then God's character, verse 26.

[2 : 2 1] But behind it all is a fourth reason to give thanks, which is God's love. It's mentioned in every verse to highlight it, that we might especially give thanks for it.

Now we'll come back to this later. First, let's see why we're to give thanks for God's character. So point 1, verse 1, and I'll just read the verse rather than the refrain. Verse 1 says, Give thanks to the Lord.

Why? Well, for he is good. He would give thanks for God's character, firstly in terms of his goodness. You see, we could have been created by a bad God for sport, as it happens in other religions and some mythologies.

After all, people today in our world sadly live under dictators, don't they? And so it is conceivable that we could have lived under a dictator God, but we don't.

The true God, our God, is good, which is a great relief, isn't it? And it means he's incapable then of doing bad.

[3 : 31] And so we can trust him to only work for good in our world and in our lives, and to bring good out of the bad. And so when we suffer because of sinful people or because our world is beautiful, yes, but broken, we can still trust that God will work only for our good through those situations.

Even when he doesn't give us what we pray for, it is still for our good. For example, I would love a million dollars, although a million dollars doesn't get you much in Doncaster, does it?

So let's go with 10 million. But if I prayed for that, God, I'm pretty sure, would not give that to me, but it would be for my good.

Because I would, I'm sure, trust in the millions rather than in my God. Or I was speaking with a member of our church two weeks ago about how God gives good gifts, and he added, and even when he does not give us gifts, it's still for our good.

And that struck me because I remember when he had cancer and we were praying for his healing and it looked like God would not give it to him.

[4 : 47] And yet as he looked back, he could see that that was for his good too. For it grew his faith in God as he was forced to trust God, trust that God had a good reason for not answering his prayer at that point for healing.

Like the reason to grow his faith, for example. Interestingly, once he trusted God and was content, God did give him healing. The point is God is good.

And so he will only work good in our world and in our lives. Even if we sometimes have to wait to heaven to be able to look back and see it.

And so the fact that God is good is worth giving thanks for, isn't it? Of course, it's one thing to want to do good. It's another thing to be able to do good, isn't it?

I remember my daughter needed help doing her makeup for her dance concert, which is coming up next month. Now, I wanted to help, but my ability to do makeup is zero, right?

[5 : 51] I don't know the difference between blush and foundation and everything else in her bathroom. And so if I tried to do good, I would only end up doing bad. But God is not like this.

He not only wants to do good, he is able to do good. But God is not just good, he is greater than all. So verse 2 goes on to say, give thanks to the God of gods.

He is greater than all so-called gods. Verse 3, give thanks to the Lord of lords. He is greater than all earthly lords. And verse 26 at the end, give thanks to the God of heaven.

He is above all, therefore greater than all, you see. And this greatness includes the power to be able to bring good through bad in our world and in our lives.

And so God is both willing and able to work good for us. And so it's really worth giving him thanks, isn't it? As is for his creation, point 2 verse 4 to 9.

[6 : 57] The psalmist goes on to say, To him who alone does great wonders, who by his understanding made the heavens, who spread out the earth upon the waters, who made the great lights, the sun to govern the day and the moon and stars to govern the night.

God created our world out of nothing by his word. Now, yes, Christians sometimes disagree about exactly how his word did it.

But the point is that his word did it. And what a world he created. I mean, have you ever been away and seen a sunrise or a sunset and be struck by the beauty?

Or perhaps been visiting other places and seeing these incredible scenes, like Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe? Or perhaps the lavender fields of Provence in France, which kind of matches the flowers behind us.

So well done, whoever did those. Or Banff Park, National Park in Canada. Or the beaches we have here in Australia. The list goes on, doesn't it? But it's not just beauty.

[8 : 01] There's also variety. I mean, that was just a variety of environments that we can enjoy. There's also a variety of animals to appreciate, like a child's prayer who once wrote, Dear God, did you mean for a giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?

No, Norma, it was not an accident. It's part of God's generous variety to us, you see. And there's also ordered regularity. And I think that's what the words in verse 8 and 9, the word govern seems to highlight.

There's order to it. Order so that we know roughly when the seasons come. I say roughly because this is Melbourne, right? But this ordered regularity of night and day helps us to plan and pace ourselves so that we don't just work during the day, but we get a chance to rest at night.

All of this helps us to enjoy life. God gave us all this, as well as verse 25, food for every creature, including us.

You see, in God's generosity, he has given us beauty and variety and regularity and every dietary thing we need, and then some as part of his creation.

[9 : 17] I don't know about you, but sometimes I forget to thank God for God's generosity to us in creation until it stops, of course, until we need the rain, or we have too much rain, or something on the shelves is empty at the supermarket.

Only then do we remember how good we've got it. But God has been very generous to us in creation, and that's worth giving God thanks for, isn't it? As is God's salvation, point three.

I hear the psalm draws special attention to God's salvation for his people because it stands in the middle of the psalm and is the longest part of the psalm.

So, verse 10, I'm not sure why it's all in italics now. To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt and brought Israel out from among them with a mighty hand and outstretched arm.

To him who divided the Red Sea asunder and brought Israel through the midst of it, but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea. To him who led his people through the wilderness, to him who struck down great kings and killed mighty kings, Sion, king of the Amorites, and O, king of Bashan, and gave their land as an inheritance to his servant Israel.

[10 : 37] And then in verse 23, he summarizes it. He remembered us in our low estate and freed us from our enemies. The psalmist traces God's rescue of Israel, doesn't he?

From slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea to life in their promised land. In the words of verse 23 and 24, God remembered Israel in their low estate of slavery and freed them from their enemies like Pharaoh to bring them to life with him in their promised land.

And this was the great act of salvation for Israel. And so they were especially to give thanks for it. Of course, this part of the psalm is different for us, isn't it?

We can apply the other parts directly to us, so we ought to give thanks for God's character and his creation like Israel. But unlike Israel, our lowest state is really slavery to sin.

And our great enemies are death and the devil. And yet God has saved us and freed us from them, hasn't he? For as you know, Jesus died in our place to pay for our sin.

[11 : 54] And then he rose again to prove that he'd done it, that he had defeated death and he had defeated the devil. The devil has power to accuse us of deserving judgment, of paying for a debt.

But Jesus paid that debt in our place. And so the devil doesn't have a leg to stand on. He can't accuse us anymore. Our sin's paid for. And not only that, Jesus didn't just free us and save us from that.

He then gave us life with God now in this world, with purpose and meaning, with peace and hope. And then life after death with God in heaven and then life to the full in the world to come, our promised land, as we've been hearing through numbers, where there'll be no more suffering or brokenness or death.

See, God's greatest act of salvation was at the cross of Christ, wasn't it? And this is especially what we are to give thanks for. Meet Zoe.

She was addicted to drugs, enslaved by drugs. Addiction is a kind of slavery, if you like. But the Sir David Martin Foundation in New South Wales paid money for her to attend the Triple Care Farm, where she got clean.

[13 : 13] She was saved from drugs and given new life. She says on her bio, this is too small for you, let me read it. I can honestly say with firsthand experience, I've seen what drug addiction can do to a person's capacity to mature, to grow and to love.

And so she says, words cannot express my gratitude at being saved from it. We were addicted, if you like, enslaved to sin, which stopped us from having any capacity to love God and to grow as one of God's people.

And it steered us towards judgment eternal. Yet not a foundation, but the person of Jesus paid not money, but his blood to set us free, to get us clean.

And not from drugs, but from sin that we might be made righteous in God's sight and given life eternal with him. So how much more so should we be filled with gratitude?

If those three things are not enough to give thanks, then behind them all is God's love, point four. The refrain, his love endures forever, is like the chorus of the psalm that sings of another reason to give thanks.

[14 : 32] But it's also the chorus that stands behind the verses, giving us another reason for the verses. You see, our translations are missing an important word at the start of that refrain, the word for or because.

The refrain should say, for his love endures forever. And so God is who he is and does what he does in this psalm because his love endures forever.

Other parts of the Bible give other reasons, but this psalm gives love as the reason. And so yes, God is good and greater than all others simply because God is good and greater than all others.

But his love gives us an additional reason. God is good because his love endures forever. It's another reason why God is good, you see.

And God is greater than all other gods and lords because his love endures forever. It outlasts all other gods and lords, which is an additional reason that makes God greater, you see.

[15 : 46] And it's his love that's the reason behind creation and salvation. This is what God has done for love. You see, God didn't have to create us.

It's not as though God was lonely, was he? God is three persons in one. And so he would have been content to live for eternity as Father, Son, and Spirit.

What's more, he knew what would happen if he did create us, that humanity would reject him, effectively spit in his face.

And yet he created us anyway. Why would you create a world when you knew it would reject you and cause you grief? Why? For his love endures forever.

That's why. Indeed, why would you create a world when you knew it would cost you your only son to save people in that world? Well, because his love endures forever.

[16 : 45] That's why. This is what God has done for love. Our problem is we hear about God's love so often that our gratitude for it can wane, can't it?

It's like during our Bible reading, we started off all enthusiastically saying, his love endures forever. And about verse 14, I noticed, his love endures forever. You know, and the refrain, I'm sure we were thinking, this is going on forever, you know.

Now the solution is to periodically take time to ponder it then, rather than simply repeating it. To take time to reflect on it, like now.

To realize, for example, that the Hebrew word for love here is one I've told you about before, as Andrew Reid has as well, I think, at Chesed, and it talks about God's deep or abundant, his unmerited or undeserved, gracious and kind love.

You need to add all these adjectives to it just to grasp a sense of it. That's how great his love is for us. It's an out-of-this-world kind of love. In our second reading, the pinnacle of human love, Romans 5-7, is rarely someone dying for a righteous or good person.

[18 : 00] And it is rare, which is why it makes the news when it happens, like the news last week. Last week, the BBC published an article about two Nepalese students who were studying and working in Israel when Hamas attacked two years ago.

And during the attack, Hamas threw a grenade into a kibbutz, a kind of dwelling, and one of the students, Bipin, on the right, threw the grenade back, saving his fellow student who was next to him on the left, only to be captured then by Hamas and become one of the 250 hostages that was taken into Palestine and soon after was killed.

I mean, that's a pretty extraordinary act of bravery and love for his fellow student, isn't it? But imagine for a moment, inside the kibbutz was not a fellow student, but another Hamas soldier.

And Bipin was an Israeli who then still threw the grenade back to save that Hamas soldier. I mean, they're enemies, right?

What kind of crazy love would you have to have to save an enemy who would later capture you and then kill you? It'd have to be an out-of-this-world kind of love, wouldn't it?

[19 : 19] That's precisely God's love for you and me. And the rest of that is seen, sorry, the rest of that reading, our second reading kind of explains that.

Verse 8, God demonstrates his own love for us in this. A couple of verses later on, it uses the word enemies. Why were we still enemies?

Christ died for us. While we spat in God's face despite him giving us this world, while we rejected and rebelled against God as his enemies, while we were doing that, God gave his son to die for us.

God allowed his enemy, humanity, to capture his son and kill him at a cross to save us. And Jesus willingly went.

That's how much God loves us and will continue to love us for his love endures forever. God will love you that deeply forever.

[20 : 24] Under the depth of his love afresh. That you might not wane in gratitude, but be filled with thankfulness.

And so, we are to give thanks for God's character of goodness and greatness. God's creation with its beauty and variety. God's salvation from slavery to sin to life with him.

God's salvation from slavery to sin to life with him. And for his love that endures forever. Let's start doing that now.