

# "Give thanks to the Lord" Psalm 138

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[0:00] Of David I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart. Before the gods I sing your praise. I bow down towards your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

For you have exalted above all things your name and your word. On the day I called, you answered me. My strength of soul you increased. All the kings of earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth, and they shall sing the way of your mouth.

All the kings of the Lord. For great is the glory of the Lord. For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hands against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands. Now it's common to hear a critique or a common thought within Christianity, and then also with it outside of Christianity, is that I've tried praying to God. I've tried to give him my concerns, my desires.

I've tried to speak to him about this privately. But he doesn't seem to answer my prayers. Maybe you've experienced this, or it seems you are currently experiencing it.

[1:28] It appears that God is nowhere to be found. You might be thinking to yourself that he's asleep, he's on vacation, or listening to someone else. Perhaps you feel you've been left out to dry, and you don't want to give him praise anymore, because you don't trust him, because it seems like he's not answering your prayers or listening to you.

So, the psalm that we're looking at this morning lays a framework before us on how to give God thanks and praise when it seems like it's hard to do so.

Turn with me to Psalm 138, if you haven't already. It's very helpful to have it with you, in front of you, because we're going to work through it. And it's always good to see, and to make sure, I'm actually saying the words that are in the psalm, and not just my own words.

See, the psalms, the thing about the book of psalms is that it's a book of poetry. There's many parts of the Bible that is poetry, but the whole book of psalms is poetry. And in the psalms, there's these things called stanzas.

A stanza is a section of the psalm broken up. So you see in Psalm 138, if you have your Bible in front of you or on your screen, you can see there's three stanzas, three sections.

[2:40] And each stanza contains a certain topic within it. Every psalm has this within it. If you look at a different translation than what we have, the ESV, they might be a little bit differently, but there's stanzas within it.

And this is a direct way of writing poetry. The psalms, this psalm has three. And it's broken up into three in this way. The first is worship and remembrance. The second is future hope and glory. And the last one is present help and faithfulness. Worship and remembrance, future hope and glory, present help and faithfulness.

This psalm marks the beginning of an eight-psalm section within the Psalter, the book of Psalms, that's attributed to David. And this is the last psalms that he wrote.

That are put into the psalm book. So as we read this psalm together, we must reflect on David's life. Because those who write poetry or do art, what they do very much embodies their life.

[3:47] The life of the author is poured into what they write. It's all about, sorry, so it embodies the author and what they've experienced. A good example of this is Psalm 23.

Most of us know this psalm. Even those who don't go to church have heard this psalm and kind of know it, parts of it. Especially the Lord is my shepherd. I walk through the valley of the shadow of

death. But Psalm 23 is David's writing it.

And it's about being led by a shepherd. David was a shepherd. So he knows firsthand what it means to be led by a shepherd to peaceful meadows. He leads his flock. He leads his flock to still waters, peaceful streams to water them, to give them drink.

And then gives them protection from attacks. David knew this. And David also knew what it was like to be attacked by people. Because he was one of the kings of Israel, the great king of Israel of that time.

Everything has been attributed to David. David is often referred to as one of the shepherds of the people. He was a shepherd before being a king. And he was a king who experienced much warfare.

[4:51] So let's look at the first point. Worship and remembrance. Look with me at verses 1 and 2. I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart.

Before the gods I sing your praise. I bow down toward your holy temple. And give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness. For you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

Here we see David is in a temple setting. He is in the temple. The place where God's presence dwelt. The holy sanctuary. And you may have noticed this interesting phrase that he says, Before the gods I sing your praise.

Now when I first read this, I thought it meant about the gods of the world. A quick reading. It's easy to think this. That I thought it was about money. Or sex. Or pagan worship.

Or spirituality. But a commentator, Bruce Waltke, who is a great commentator on the Psalms and Proverbs. And anything really in the Old Testament. Points out that he's actually referring to the Ark.

[5:56] The Ark of the Covenant. See the gods that he's referring to, lowercase g, are the cherubim. Those who are resting on top of the Ark cover.

And this is where God's presence dwelt. On top of the Ark. Within the Holy of Holies. Because the temple setting is split into two. There's the one holy place.

And then there's the Holy of Holy place. Where the high priest would only go once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel. And within the Ark, there's the two tablets of the law and then Moses' staff.

The Ark was in the temple area where the high priest could only go. He continues, David, in this language of humble worship, of thankfulness and praise. By bowing towards the temple.

This entire section is steeped in humble worship. But why? If you look again at verse 2, it says this. I bow down toward your holy temple.

[6:58] I give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness. For you have exalted above all things your name and your word. Your name, your word.

What are these? See, anytime we hear the name of the Lord, it's referring to God and how he's revealed himself. His very person. How he's revealed himself to humanity.

See, God normally reveals himself through creation. You can look around you and see it. It's like when you go hiking and you enter into a vista area and you see a beautiful scene before you.

God speaks through that. It points to the creator. Or if you are a scientist and you look at a molecule and how much it's orderly designed. You see how there's order to it. And God, that speaks to God and his creation.

Or, God speaks through his acts. Through his word. He speaks through, an example of this, and this is what David would have been reflecting on, is Moses. See, the staff of Moses is within the ark.

[8:03] What he's bowing towards. So, in his mind, he's thinking about how God worked through Moses. And how this staff signified it. And how God worked through the staff. Turning it into a snake before Pharaoh.

It budded. He used it to hit the rock. To give water. To give provision to the people. This is what's being talked about here. This is what David would have been remembering within the temple.

Bowing towards. How God has worked through his name. By what he's revealed. But what about the word? What does it mean? Well, on the tablets within the ark is the law.

We think of the law. We hear the Ten Commandments. But there's other parts of the law. That's God giving his word. And God also gives his promise. Just a good example is to think of Abraham in the book of Genesis.

Who's attributed as the father of the people of Israel. The father of the faith. God led him out before creation at night. To look up at the stars.

[9:04] To see how they are endless. And then he promises him. That I will make you a great nation. And yet his wife Sarai at that time is barren. And they are well advanced in age.

So the promise seems so ridiculous. But God follows through with the promise. And Sarai becomes pregnant. And Isaac is born. These are the things that are going through David's mind.

As he reflects and writes this. As he worships in the temple. That brings him to great worship. But if you look with me at verse 3. There's something that's very important about this stanza.

Look with me at verse 3. On the day I called you. You answered me. My strength of soul you increased. See David is remembering his prayers to God.

What we need to realize though. Is that these aren't prayers. These prayers that David is giving. Aren't prayers that he can just sit back. And wait for God to follow through.

[10:03] David is remembering a time. When he prayed. That when he went to battle. He was victorious. That God led him through battle. But most likely at that time.

It probably felt like. He was probably intimidated. It probably felt hopeless. In a sense. Because there's many instances. That you read about. Where they are greatly outnumbered. Most of us I'm sure.

Have never been in a battle setting. So it's hard to relate to this. But we can think of battles of our life. That we face every day. Whether for some. It's the addiction of working. Of overwork.

For others. It might be family issues. That things that just seem so difficult. Or it's for us all. The things that dwell within us. The sin that dwells so deeply within us.

These wage war on us. And it's only through prayer. Reliance on the finished work of Christ. That these can be overcome. Now you might be thinking right now. That this sounds so simplistic.

[10:59] It sounds so moralistic. Just try harder. That's not what I'm getting at here. What I'm getting at here. Is that you try to fix issues. The things that turn your eyes from Christ.

That they will fall immediately. They'll fall now. Or they'll fall later on. But as when you come to God. Humbly. As you see David doing here.

God will work in your life. He'll begin to work in your life. But the thing is that. What we need to realize. Is that. When we pray to God. When we worship him. And we ask him to work in our lives. For something that might be plaguing us. Or for something that's happening. Outside of our means. God will normally work. In a way. That we actually didn't ask him to work. And it might be.

It's for our benefit. But it might not at the time. Seem like for our benefit. Until we look back. God works in ways. That we can't imagine. That he'll work in our lives. But when we look back.

[11:55] We see his fingerprints. All through it. As David does in verse 3. He's reflecting. See. When he's in the temple. He sees God's work through history. He sees God's work in creation.

The temple is surrounded by works. Of creation art. Within it. On the walls. On the tapestry. And then there's the art. Of God working through his word. See.

Humble worship. Focus on God's name. And his word. Leads to thankful remembrance. And we see this in the first stanza. But then we move into the next stanza. In verses 4 to 6.

Look with me at them. All the kings of the earth. Shall give you thanks. O Lord. For they have heard the words of your mouth. And they shall sing of the ways of the Lord.

For great is the glory of the Lord. For though the Lord is high. He regards the lowly. But the haughty. He knows from afar. David now takes our attention.

[12:50] Out of the temple courts. And moves the scene. To a future scene. Where the whole world. The kings of the world. Are giving the Lord thanks and praise. How does this happen?

And when will it happen? That probably comes to our minds. See. No one can say when it will happen. You may read on. You may see online. These videos. That people are predicting. When the end of the world is going to happen.

It never happens. No one can predict it. No one can say for certain. When it will happen. But one thing that we can say for certain. Is that it will be a time. Of unbelievable worship.

That Christians from around the world. Will sing together. Praises to God. It will sound like. It will be a sound. That's never been heard before. We can't even imagine it.

It's unimaginable. It will be glorious. And David wants his readers. And those who hear this psalm read. To think about this. To think about this in the psalm. Of the future hope.

[13:45] Of when God will call his people to himself. But how does this happen? Well look again at verses 4 and 5. All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks O Lord.

For they have heard the words of your mouth. And they shall sing of the ways of the Lord. You notice here it says. They have heard the words of your mouth. They shall sing of the ways of the Lord.

We see it again. God's name. God's word. Are being praised and thanked. Without a focus on God's word. His name. His name. Sorry.

With God's word and his name. True worship can never happen. The heart will never be stirred. To sing out thanksgiving and praise. To use an example. I use it at the 830 service.

My son John. He's 16 months. And every time he wakes up. Either from the night. Or from a nap. The first thing he wants is a book. His whole focus is on a book.

[14:46] He shakes. He gets so excited. Until he gets that book. And then he looks through it. And his whole focus is on it. That is what's being talked about here. Is that the worship.

The worship on God's name. And God's word. As the whole focus of all creation. In this section. The kings are so focused on it. Brother Lawrence. Who is a very famous monk.

He wrote a book. Practicing the presence of God. And the concept of this book. Is that everything you do. In your life. You do in prayer. And you do in worship. There's the famous section.

What most people will quote. Is that when he washed dishes. He would sing praises. And people would hear him. But the thing about Brother Lawrence. Is that he did this in a time. Where it seemed like no one.

Wanted to give God praise. Committedly. And no one wanted to pray to him. Committedly.

Everyone had a cold heart to him. He says in his letters. No one was praying. And no one had devotion.

[15:42] To reading the word. Friends. This is you. And I put myself in this. Because there's weeks. Where I feel so cold. Reorient yourself. To hear God's word. Notice his ways.

Notice how he's revealed. His name to you. And to everyone else. Don't just settle. For checking the church box. And moving on with your week. Take the time. To sing God's praises.

To him. Through his word. And focusing on his name. Because if we look again. At verses four to six. We see something also else. In it. All the kings of the earth. Shall give you thanks.

O Lord. For they. For they have heard. The words of your mouth. And they shall sing. Of the ways of the Lord. For great. Is the glory of the Lord. For though the Lord is high.

He regards the lowly. But the haughty. He knows from afar. Glory. Is shown through mercy. Mercy. Mercy is shown.

[16:39] The one. Who all the kings of the earth. Are singing praise to. The one. Who everyone is given thanks to. Stoops down. And regards the lowly. The destitute.

The one. Who can barely hold up their heads. The one. Who can barely say. Because of the weight. Of their sin. And the torment. Of certain things in life. Lord. Have mercy.

On me. A sinner. The one. Who is overlooked. By the world. The king of the universe. Regards the lowly. With high esteem. This is the complete opposite. The way the world works.

In our world. The woe. Those who have influence. Are put into power. Those who have many followers. Are given platforms. And what they say. Is taken as. As fact.

At face value. Even though. They may have no idea. What they're talking about. An example of this. I think I've used it before here. But I'm going to use it again. Leonardo DiCaprio. We all know him.

[17:34] He's a famous actor. He has many movies. He was filming a movie once. In Calgary. Which is. Calgary is right at the base. Of the city. He's right at the base. Of the mountains. And he was in the plains.

Right at the beginning. Of the mountains. And he was filming. He was in winter time. And then.

During his filming. All of a sudden. It got really warm. And the snow started to melt. And he actually went online.

And started talking about. How this is an act. Of global warming. But what it actually is. Is just a Chinook. He had no idea. What he's talking about. But he has influence. And he has a platform.

So it's given to him. And he is raised up. See. But here's the thing. Both sides of the spectrum.

Have this problem. If they were seen. To give regard to the lowly. They would lose their status.

Or be accused. Of doing it. Just for views. But here. The God of the universe. Regards the lowly.

And is far from the haughty. Another word for the haughty.

[18:29] Is the prideful. Or self-sufficient. We live in a. We live in suburbia. We meet in a church. That's in suburbia. Right in the heart of suburbia. In Kanata. And at the heart of suburbia.

Is self-sufficiency. The idol. It's the leading idol. And the people who make up the church. Are not free from this either. It says here. The Lord has no place for the haughty.

David was a powerful king. Who had been. Who had God on his side. In many acts. He had all reason to be prideful. No one could stand before him.

But here we see. He is in humble worship. And he's saying. All the kings will give. The ultimate king worship. But David. Is in no way perfect.

Most people know the stories of David. Pride seeps into his life. And he commits awful acts. But the Lord rebukes him. Through Nathan the prophet. And he has to give account for it.

[19:27] And you see it through his family line. Played out. No matter who you are. Pride and self-sufficiency. Will always be an issue. It manifests in many different ways.

This is why the Christian gospel is so profound. God. God knowing the heart of humanity. Became lowly. Through sending his only son into the world.

To take upon himself our sins. To go to the cross for our sins. To die the death we deserve for our sins. So we may be able to truly hear his word. And give thanks and praise for his name.

This also points to the future hope as well. That those who put their faith and trust in Jesus. As their Lord and Savior. Will be a part of the great assembly of kings.

Because we all will be given a status of royalty. And we will shout in unison. Thanksgiving and praise. To the God of the universe. Our Heavenly Father. God's glory is shown through mercy.

[20:27] And we see it most powerfully. In his son on the cross. The psalm now moves into the third stanza. And we see it here. Present help and faithfulness.

Look with me at verses 7 and 8. Though I walk in the midst of trouble. You preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies.

And your right hand delivers me. The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands. David moves the reader now.

And the hearer. From temple worship. To the future heavenly worship. To reflection on God's present help. In everyday life. This is a very common theme in his psalms.

He experienced much war and persecution. But he can say this with confidence. How is the reader or hearer. Supposed to take this section? I think the first two stanzas set us up for this.

[21:27] Through humble worship of God's revealed self. In his son. And his word. And remembrance of times when God worked in our lives. And then through hope in Christ's return. And future worship with all believers.

We can then say confidently. Though I walk in the midst of trouble. You preserve my life. Through Christ's finished work. You stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies.

Through Christ's finished work. And enemies here isn't just warfare enemies. It can be anything that plagues our spirits. And turns our eyes from Jesus. And then we can say.

Your right hand delivers me. Through Christ's finished work. Notice here in verses 2 and 8. It says. Your steadfast love oh Lord. See God's love for his people.

Is always faithful. And endures forever. This isn't a love that's based off performance. Or consumeristic morality or mentality. It's a love that knows no bounds.

[22:23] And it's fully realized in his son Jesus. The deepest love you feel for someone. Is just a glimpse. To just reflect on prayer. I often forget the prayers I give.

When I pray. And I started doing something. Where I keep a prayer journal. And it's not just like. It's not just writing like a diary. It's just I write the prayers down.

That I pray to God. And I've been doing it now. For a couple years. And the thing that I find so profound about it. Is that when you give. When I. When you give prayer. Sometimes it seems like. It's too grand.

Or God. It seems like God is not listening to you. And it feels so cold in the moment. But you can look back on this. On these journals. Years later. And you can see how God has worked through. The fabric of your life. Through things that seem like. That they weren't answers to your prayer. But looking back. They actually are answers to your prayer. I would encourage you to keep a prayer journal.

[23:21] Because it helps you to remember. How God is working through your life. Over the years. Because there's times in life. Where it feels extremely difficult. And it feels very cold. But you can

see how God works in your life.

It helps you to focus your worship. On God's name and word. It helps you to remember. What he has done in your life. It helps you to look to the future hope. Of Christ's return. And have confidence.

That the Lord is with you. In your struggles. His steadfast love and faithfulness. Endures forever. As it says in this psalm. And all through the Bible. But it's only done. When we put the finished work of Christ.

On the cross. And his resurrection. Before us. It's only done through that. If we try to put ourselves. Before it. Or above it. It's never going to happen. We will just turn in on ourselves.

And try to be self-sufficient. But when we put our problems. To the cross. And we ask God. To work in our lives. He will. He will do it faithfully.

[ 24 : 18 ] Because he is steadfast. And it endures forever. Here we go.