

## God's Great Ballad | The Flow of the Psalms

### Say "Thank You"

#### Psalm 107 (Consummation)

8.2.20

1. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting. <sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the LORD say *so*, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary <sup>3</sup> And gathered from the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south.

2. <sup>4</sup> They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; They did not find a way to an inhabited city. <sup>5</sup> *They were* hungry and thirsty; Their soul fainted within them. <sup>6</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses. <sup>7</sup> He led them also by a straight way, to go to an inhabited city. <sup>8</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! <sup>9</sup> For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.

3. <sup>10</sup> There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery and chains, <sup>11</sup> Because they had rebelled against the words of God And spurned the counsel of the Most High. <sup>12</sup> Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; They stumbled and there was none to help. <sup>13</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. <sup>14</sup> He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart. <sup>15</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! <sup>16</sup> For He has shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder.

4. <sup>17</sup> Fools, because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. <sup>18</sup> Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. <sup>19</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. <sup>20</sup> He sent His word and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. <sup>21</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! <sup>22</sup> Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His works with joyful singing.

5. <sup>23</sup> Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters; <sup>24</sup> They have seen the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. <sup>25</sup> For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. <sup>26</sup> They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; Their soul melted away in *their* misery. <sup>27</sup> They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, and were at their wits' end. <sup>28</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, And He brought them out of their distresses. <sup>29</sup> He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. <sup>30</sup> Then they were glad because they were quiet, So He guided them to their desired haven. <sup>31</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! <sup>32</sup> Let them extol Him also in the congregation of the people, and praise Him at the seat of the elders.

6. <sup>33</sup> He changes rivers into a wilderness and springs of water into a thirsty ground; <sup>34</sup> A fruitful land into a salt waste, Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it. <sup>35</sup> He changes a wilderness into a pool of water and a dry land into springs of water; <sup>36</sup> And there He makes the hungry to dwell, so that they may establish an inhabited city, <sup>37</sup> And sow fields and plant vineyards, and gather a fruitful harvest. <sup>38</sup> Also He blesses them and they multiply greatly, And He does not let their cattle decrease.

7. <sup>39</sup> When they are diminished and bowed down Through oppression, misery and sorrow, <sup>40</sup> He pours contempt upon princes and makes them wander in a pathless waste. <sup>41</sup> But He sets the needy securely on high away from affliction, and makes *his* families like a flock. <sup>42</sup> The upright sees it and are glad; But all unrighteousness shuts its mouth.

8. <sup>43</sup> Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, and consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD.

We're looking at the Book of Psalms...If you've been with us up to now you've heard that the 150 Psalms were collected into five books. And we're looking at the rationale the editors used to compile the books as they did...the themes in all five books seem to form a story.

This final theme could be called "consummation"; Book Five radiates with this sense of trust... It's the book of praises where God is seen as completing His work and putting the world right and His people are resting and secure and full of wonder and joy! Consummation.

This long Psalm (107) is a Psalm of praise or gratitude; it starts on that note (v. 1 "Oh give thanks...") and it's repeated throughout the Psalm.

Gratitude is, in our society, pretty much considered as a universal GOOD. We like to be around genuinely thankful people. We want to BE GRATEFUL PEOPLE and we even recognize that there's some connection between gratitude and happiness. ON THE OTHER HAND, gratitude is a little like humility: we may be more interested in looking humble than in actually BEING humble...or in looking grateful rather than in actually BEING grateful.

How does a person become a genuinely grateful person? Why does God command it? HE COMMANDS US TO PRAISE HIM AND TO GIVE HIM THANKS – how do we understand that? Why would He do that (so often especially in the Psalms)? And is there something the basic message of Christianity (the Gospel) can do for us to make us not just saying the right words but actually genuinely grateful?

Let's look at –

- 1) The Gratitude Commands
- 2) The Ground of Gratitude
- 3) Happiness & Gratitude (what's the connection?)

We start pretty early training our children to be grateful but... I hope we recognize that when we tell the little child, "Say 'thank you' to the nice man" that at least at the start the child complies because he's afraid he'll have to return the nice man's cookie.

And there MAY be something to "priming the pump" and we all hope that what's imposed and what's probably motivated by fear will eventually become sincere thankfulness... We may be doing the "fake it til you make it" thing. On the other hand, maybe we're inadvertently teaching them to be fake and to be people-pleasers... POINT IS: keeping telling your kids to say thank you but please understand that it doesn't guarantee that they'll be grateful people.

What complicates this is that God seems to do it. In the Psalms especially, God tells us to praise Him and to say, "thank You." And for many Psalm-Readers this seems kind of weird – IS God somehow insecure and does He need us to tell Him how great He is?

It was that way for C.S. Lewis, the Oxford/Cambridge scholar who was an atheist and then became a Christian (helped by J.R.R Tolkien et al) and Lewis was struck by how often in the Psalms we're told BY GOD to praise and thank God.

Then Lewis came to see two neglected truths. First, this is NOT a God who needs anything, least of all our compliments or tributes. That idea comes from looking at the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God as if He were like us... and He's not. He needs nothing.

And Lewis began to recognize that God, in calling us to praise Him is calling us to admire infinite beauty. He is the source of all truth, beauty and goodness. And the same way we want to share the experience of joy with others...and the joy is ONLY complete when it IS shared... So, God's joy is His own infinite beauty is completed by sharing it with us – calling us INTO His own admiration of Beauty Himself.

When you see the Grand Canyon... or a stunning sunset or an unusual orchid or a work of art the enJOYment of that thing is incomplete until you share it with someone else. That's why we can't stop praising things – "UH! This tiramisu is crazy! Best I've ever had – here, try this!"

God, isn't getting something from us, as we worship Him or thank Him – He's GIVING something. He's sharing the experience of ultimate worth and value and beauty that He is with US!

Here's the quote from Lewis:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed... The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever". But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.

And this is why John Piper says that God is glorified in US to the degree that WE are satisfied in Him. The more we enjoy God – the more overjoyed and fulfilled we are in our vision of God the more glorified He is in us. It's just like when your wife says, "WOW! That tiramisu really IS the best!" and my joy is then completed.

And that brings us to this Psalm or gratitude/praise: God is not simply commanding us, "Say thank you to the nice man." He's giving us a grounding for our gratitude, a glimpse of God's own character and His doings to rescue His people – He's inviting us to see beauty so we're moved to genuine gratitude.

There's an introductory stanza: "Oh give thanks to the LORD – (and then the ground) – FOR He IS good and His hesed/lovingkindness is everlasting."

The word “lovingkindness” is NOT found in the English dictionary. It’s a made-up word to translate this untranslatable Hebrew word, “hesed”. Sometimes it’s translated “covenant loyalty” or mercy or kindness or even grace. It means that God has made a promise sealed in blood and unbreakable. He has promised to do for His people what they cannot do for themselves and what they don’t deserve – because He is good.

He says to everyone who trusts in His hesed, His promise to save everyone who trusts Him, “Let the redeemed of the LORD say so!” That’s what it means to give thanks! To celebrate your redemption and your Redeemer!

And then there are four case-studies (stanzas 2, 3, 4 & 5) that show how God’s covenant-loyalty has been shown to His people in their long history. Each stanza has these repeated elements to give us the ground for gratitude. There’s the trouble, the turning, the intervention and the thanks.

Stanza TWO is saying, “calling all wanderers” – Abraham was a wanderer. Jacob was a wanderer. Joseph and his brothers wandered to Egypt. Moses led the people out of Egypt to wander in the wilderness 40 years. They were taken to Babylon far away from Jerusalem and they wandered home after the exile: the TROUBLE.

Hungry and thirsty and far from home, discouraged and their soul fainted within them but then they TURNED to YHWH the Lord of the Covenant. “Then they cried out to YHWH in their trouble and He ‘snatched’ them out of their distress.” That same sentence is found in all four of these stanzas. “Then they cried out to YHWH in their trouble and He ‘snatched’/saved/brought them out of their distress.” This is the God who INTERVENES, He saves, rescues, leads out, liberates.

Then this command – but really it’s a kind invitation: “Let them give thanks to YHWH for His hesed (His loyalty to His promise) and for His wonders to the sons of men!” In the Hebrew parallelism of this repeated sentence “hesed” and “wonders” are connected – the lovingkindness or mercy of God plays out in some inexplicable miracle or divine intervention called a “WONDER”.

This first stanza calls out to all God’s people with a kind of implied question: “HEY! Have YOU ever wandered into a place where there was nothing but TROUBLE, need and hunger? And did YOU TURN to YHWH (Lord of the Promise) and did He not meet you and INTERVENE to rescue you? Then celebrate it – let the redeemed of the LORD say so! Share this experience with others and with the Lover of your soul – give thanks to YHWH for His hesed and the wonderful way He worked it out in YOUR life!” It’s repeated four times – (stanza 2) the hungry and thirsty wanderers whom He fed and satisfied and led them back home!

Then stanza 3 (and I’m just going to summarize) – the prisoners, those who rebelled against God and became stuck in some lifestyle that was DEAD: they turned to Him and He DID NOT WAIT

FOR THEM TO PROVE THEMSELVES – He flew to them, like the father in the parable of Jesus ran to His sinful son and kissed him and brought him inside. “He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their shackles apart” (14).

And then – stanza 4 – those who were fools: they traded their health for sin. Sometimes they were so sick in the duress of rebellion and guilt that they couldn't eat. AND again, NOT waiting for them to prove their sincerity or worthiness – they simply cried to Him for help and He saved them out of their troubles. This is the history of God's people from Adam to Abraham right down to the present. We don't measure up – we simply CRY OUT to the God of hesed (covenant loyalty) and by wonders He saves... so let's celebrate!

And then this wonderful stanza 5 (fourth case study) about those lost at sea (“They who go down to the sea in ships”). The sea was often a symbol of chaos and terror and these are people overwhelmed by the storms of life. They cry out to Jonah's God, the Apostle Paul's God... to the God who came and sat in the boat and saw the terror on our faces... the God who was so loyal to His covenant that He became human and consummated the divine part of the Covenant AND AS A REAL MAN finished (John 19.30) the human part of the agreement as well.

This God, YHWH, was incarnated and in Jesus Christ sat in the storm-tossed boat and faced the chaos of the sea... They cried out to Him and He said “peace, be still” and when the forces of nature obeyed Him, the disciples asked “Who then IS this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (Mark 4.41)

Then, this incarnate God... faced the ultimate storm for His people... He was plunged (like Jonah, Luke 11.29) into the sea... not the sea of water but of JUSTICE. And Jesus Christ, was judged in my place... It's the lovingkindness of God – hesed/mercy/grace – it's the Wonder of wonders that the Judge was judged. He died and rose again (as a historical fact) in order to rescue all His people – not good people, but failed and flawed people... like YOU and like me.

In fact that's how the Psalm ends – two final stanzas (6 and 7) which celebrate the truth that this God is the Great Reverser – He humbles the proud and He raises the broken – changes things – changes rivers into a wilderness... and makes the barren fruitful beyond their dreams. And isn't this seen most clearly in Him, Jesus Christ, who reversed death itself and WON us by being defeated...saved us by being condemned?

I'll end now with the bottom line of this long sacred poem – v. 43 – “Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, and consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD.”

See, this is a way of asking, “What IS the key to life? What is the secret/wisdom required to live the right way?” And the answer is to focus, to give heed, to consider the ways that God has saved His people. To live the life God has for us – the successful/wise life is to stay fixated on God's “darling attribute” (mercy or hesed) and how it shows up in these case studies like light

through a prism – a whole spectrum of troubles where God meets us... all rooted in what Jesus Christ did in His life, death and resurrection (that's the central beam).

Someone asked, "Does happiness lead to gratitude OR does gratitude lead to happiness?" To put it in an equation: is it

happiness → gratitude or is it

Gratitude → Happiness ?

And then he suggested, "Maybe it's not an arrow at all...maybe it's an equal sign:

gratitude = happiness.

And see... people in our culture sort of get this. People seem to know that there's a real link. I read a few articles this week about the connection.

Here's the ending of an article from "Harvard Health Newsletter" (Harvard Medical School) called "Giving thanks can make you happier":

**Write a thank-you note.**

**Thank someone mentally.** No time to write? It may help just to think about someone who has done something nice for you, and mentally thank the individual.

**Keep a gratitude journal.**

**Count your blessings.**

**Pray.**

**Meditate.** Mindfulness meditation involves focusing on the present moment without judgment. Although people often focus on a word or phrase (such as "peace"), it is also possible to focus on what you're grateful for (the warmth of the sun, a pleasant sound, etc.).

You may be surprised to know: I think ALL those practices are wonderful (really). But the Gospel offers something UNIQUE – to focus on God's mercy in Jesus Christ and ask yourself – has this mercy found me out? Am I one of God's redeemed children? And if you can answer, "YES", then let the redeemed of the Lord say so. I have NO guilt because in God's Covenant Loyalty my guilt was put to death by Jesus Christ.

This is wisdom to enter the story by faith – see yourself as a wanderer, a prisoner, a person sick and lost at sea/chaos... and then receive the great reversal as Jesus Christ gives you what He deserves and takes what YOU deserve. Give heed to this – once and then everyday: This is the way gratitude (and happiness!) grow organically and authentically from God. Not just words but heart!

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. (Col 2.6-7)