

Thanksgiving 2011 Thanksgiving Prayers

The way it was told to me, the family four-year-old named David often asked if he could say the blessing on the family meal. Consequently, when he asked to pray before the Thanksgiving dinner this year, everyone agreed.

The family members bowed their heads and David began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food.

He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the Cool Whip.

Then he paused, and everyone waited -- and waited.

After a long silence, little David looked up at his mother and asked, "If I thank God for the broccoli, won't He know that I'm lying?"

This is the weekend before Thanksgiving and I've got a question for you: Doesn't God know that we're lying? Open in your bibles to Psalm 100 with me, would you? It is Thanksgiving weekend and I want to read the psalm in our bible that was given the title, in the Hebrew bible, "A Psalm for the Thanksgiving." Let's read **Psalm 100: 1-5...Prayer**

This is a psalm for giving thanks. Is anybody here thankful? The scripture here said: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving." "Give thanks to him." In other words: **"As you enter in to the house of God, lift up your thanksgiving."** I have always believed in practicing what we preach. So let's do that for a few moments today. **I would like all of you to enter his courts with thanksgiving.** I want you to share with us your thanksgiving. Now, I need to ask your forgiveness and for you not to be offended by what I am about to say. But I need to ask, like little David: **Doesn't God know we were lying?** Before you think I'm crazy, I need to share something with you that the Lord shared with me this week and asked me to share with you. It has to do with thanksgiving and prayer. It has to do with offering our thanksgiving in such a way that God knows we're not lying. Again, I really do not mean to offend anyone in particular. I will admit right here and now that I want to discomfort everyone in general. So here's my question: Did you notice just what it was on which our thanksgiving was just focused?

Did you notice any common themes in our words? Is it not true that We tend to focus on what we get from God, rather than on what we give to God. Is it not true that our thanksgiving tends to focus on our good? And yet, as I read this psalm of Thanksgiving this week, I realized that the bible tells us to focus on God's glory. I feel that I need to talk to you this morning about not lying in our thanksgiving. Or maybe it would be better to put it this way: I want to talk about how we get our thanksgiving all mixed up, and **we focus on our good rather than God's glory.** But when we do that, we are not giving a genuine offering of thanksgiving. When we do that, our prayers are more than just a little mixed up. *As two young children were walking through a field one day, they spotted an enraged bull. Instantly, they darted toward the nearest fence. The storming bull followed in hot pursuit, and it was soon apparent they would not make it.*

The oldest one, the sister, was faster and so she reached the fence first.

When she turned to look at her brother, she realized that he was not going to make it. And so she yelled at him, "Run, Johnny run!"

As he approached the fence, she yelled, "Slide, Johnny slide." Well, Johnny slide alright, and got his jeans caught up in the fence.

There he was stuck and the bull was bearing down. So his sister yelled again, "Pray, Johnny, pray."

And so Johnny prayed the only prayer he knew how to pray: "O Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful."

Obviously Johnny needed more experience in offering up prayers of thanksgiving. I will be honest with you today, I'm afraid we need more experience in offering up our thanksgiving. As I prayed about it this week, it just seemed like the Lord was telling me that **we need to discover what God considers genuine offerings of thanksgiving.** So let's look again at this psalm of thanksgiving and let me share with you the two questions on thanksgiving that Psalm 100 answers.

1) Question #1 is very simply, **why should we offer thanksgiving to God?**

If we ever expect to learn how to offering genuine thanksgiving, I think we need to begin with the more basic question of why we should offer thanksgiving. Now, look at this Psalm of thanksgiving again and let me show you the two reasons it gives to us as to why we should offer up prayers of thanksgiving to God:

1) Because of Who God is. Notice vs. 4-5 again: *Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation. (Ps 100:4-5)* The psalmist begins by telling us three attributes of which God is for which we should thank him and which should fill our offerings of thanksgiving.

First, we see that **God is good**. At the core of his being, God is good. As opposed to everything that is bad in a sinful world, God is good. So here is where it starts: Why should I give thanks to God? It is because God is good, even when my world is not. And **God is good, even when I am not**. Life is not always good. I am not always good. But God is always good; and the reason I must give him thanks is because when I glorify him for his goodness it will keep me from forgetting the wonder of who he is: For he is good.

The second attribute that the psalmist gives to us as to why we should give thanks to God is because **God is loving**. Notice vs. 4-5 again: *Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation. (Ps 100:4-5)* The Hebrew word here is one of the richest words we find in the OT. The word is hessed, it is translated, "loving kindness," "steadfast love," "grace," "mercy" and it takes all of those things in. It describes God's strong, steadfast loving kindness expressed towards us, even though we don't deserve it. Even though we cannot reciprocate it. God has committed himself to us, because his loving-kindness endures forever. Don't you think that is reason enough to give thanks to Him, and that ought to fill our offerings of thanksgiving

But there is more. We should give thanks to God because of who he is not only because God is good, and God is loving, but also because **God is faithful**. **Vs. 4-5 one more time:** *Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation. (Ps 100:4-5)* You can count on him. He won't cut and run. He won't be one thing one day and be something else the next. He won't give up on you. He won't wear out and give in. God is faithful. *As I understand it, a new pastor in a farming area went out to call on some of the people. He came to one farm house that has a weathervane on the roof. (You know what that is, don't you?..)*

Well, what made this weathervane so interesting is that the farmer had inscribed across it: "The Faithfulness of God."

Well, the pastor thought that was rather inappropriate and said to the farmer: "Do you mean that God's faithfulness depends on the direction the wind is blowing?"

"Oh, no," said the farmer, "that's not it at all. It means that regardless of which way the wind blows, God is faithful."

And family that is true, the truth of the matter is that alone is reason enough for us to offer real thanksgiving. However, that is just one reason why we should offer up our thanksgiving says the psalm.

2) We should be thankful not only because of who God is, but also Because of What God has done. Now look at vs. 3: *Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are his people, the sheep of His pasture. (Ps 100:3)* I find the psalmist sharing with us the two key actions of God for which we should forever be thankful:

He is my creator. It is he who made us. (Ps 100:3) God not only created all that there is, He created me. Have you ever stopped to consider that? God created you. That means you are not a mistake. Tell that to your neighbor. We keep from lying when it comes to our thanksgiving by thanking God for what he has done. He is my creator.

He is my shepherd. We are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Ps 100:3) I belong to him. He is my shepherd. As such: He protects me. He provides for me. He disciplines me. He is my shepherd. **If I want to keep from lying to God when I offer up thanksgiving, I need to do it by focusing my attention on who God is and what he has done. Instead of focusing on who I am and what I have done!**

Anybody feel convicted besides me? Most of our thanksgiving focuses on: Who we are. We thank God for our family. We thank God for our heritage, and what we have done. Our home, our job, our blessings...If I want to keep from lying when it comes to giving Thanks to God, then I need to remember just what it is that I should give thanks. *I remember hearing about one family just before Thanksgiving. The son came home from kindergarten, eager to tell what he'd learned about the Pilgrims.*

"They sailed across the ocean to find freedom in America," he declared thoughtfully. "And their boat was called the 'Cauliflower'."

That kid has Thanksgiving all messed up. If we want to keep from lying when it comes to giving Thanks to God, then we need to focus our attention on who he is and what he has done, because that is why we are to offer thanksgiving.

2) There's another question this psalm answers for us on this thanksgiving weekend: Not only does it tell us why we should offer thanksgiving to God. It also tells us: **How should we offer thanksgiving to God?**

Let me quickly suggest to you three ways to offer proper thanksgiving to God, according to this psalm.

Pray it loudly- Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. (Ps 100:1) Don't mumble it. Pray it out loud! Why is it that we mumble our thanksgiving prayers? Why is it we are afraid to pray them out loud? For some of us, the only time we raise our voice with God is when we are telling him what we want out of Him? Maybe that's why so many of our prayers never get anywhere! When it comes to offering up genuine thanksgiving to God, say it loudly!

Sing it passionately- Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. (Ps 100:2) Evidently, God is pleased when we offer him songs of thanksgiving. A moment ago, when the songs were sung, did you sing? Did you offering up a song of thanksgiving to the Lord? *It was autumn in Minnesota--time for the State Fair in St. Paul. At one of many lunch counters on the fair grounds a man in a wheelchair and his family were taking time to eat lunch. The handicapped man was joyfully visiting with his wife and family, as he excitedly discussed the good meal and the exciting exhibits they had seen throughout their visit.*

A preacher and his family were seated close to the man in the wheelchair and his family, and the preacher was impressed with the handicapped man's joyful enthusiasm. The preacher was so impressed that he leaned toward the man in the wheelchair and asked him why he was so joyful.

The man answered, "When I first had my accident, which took away the use of my legs and confined me to this wheelchair, I was the most miserable, angry man you could find on God's earth.

"For my wife, for my children, for my relatives, for my neighbors, for myself, I thoroughly made life miserable. I was hateful, spiteful and cruel. And I spent many, many days in anger toward God, but mostly angry at the whole stinking world.

"For a long time I wanted nothing to do with church, and I refused to go. But once in a while I would hear a Sunday television church program which made me realize that my life could be different.

"I love music, and occasionally I would hear a beautiful hymn which would almost bring tears to my eyes, and once again I would have that feeling that there could be a different direction to my life. When I had my legs, I used to sing in choirs and would often sing solos for this or that occasion at my church.

"Well, I finally let my dear wife Irene talk me into going back to church. Once again music began to ring true as the heartbeat of my soul, and I could feel the Lord God working in my heart and soul.

God used that music to change my entire focus in life.

What God told me was this: 'If you stop looking at all you lost, and begin looking at all you still have left, you can once again discover a life full of thanksgiving, and you'll be able to sing once again.'

It may sound simplistic but that did it. I've been happy, at peace and not so full of rage and feeling-sorry-for-myself-moods any longer."

It's the power of proper thanksgiving. Pray it loudly, sing it passionately, and then **show it sacrificially**- Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. (Ps 100:4) The title of this psalm in Hebrew is: todah. It is the same word used here in vs. 4, **the word todah literally means "thanksgiving offering."** It was the term given to the optional sacrifice made to express thanks to God as outlined in Lev. 7:12–15; 22:29). Psalm 100 was the psalm to be sung when offering that sacrifice. As strange as it may sound, in the bible, the way you truly offering thanksgiving to God is that:

**You pray it loudly
You sing it passionately
And you give it sacrificially.**

Now that being said, I will confess to you that there have been many, many thanksgiving holidays where I failed to offer any thanksgiving. What about you? It seems that it is so easy, even as Christians, to reduce thanksgiving to a list of what God has done for me lately.

I heard the story this week of two old friends who bumped into one another on the street one day. One of them looked sad, almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What has the world done to you, my old friend?"

The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars." The other man said, "That's a lot of money."

"But you see, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand free and clear." He other man said, "Sounds like you've been blessed . . ."

"You don't understand!" he interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million."

*Now he was really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?" **"This week . . . nothing!"***

I think little David was on to something. If all we do is offer a few words before our meal that focus on who we are and what we have; **won't God know that we're lying? Won't God know that we're failing to be genuinely thankful?** I want us to close today with a thanksgiving offering. I would like you to come around these altars and join me in a closing prayer. Let's take time to offer up prayers focusing on who God is and what God has done. Let's focus on what God is and what God has done.

Now, go show your thankfulness by making a sacrifice for the Lord this week.

Thanksgiving Prayer
Psalm 100

Two questions about Thanksgiving:

1) _____ should we offering thanksgiving to God?

✓ Because of _____ God is.

Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation. (Ps 100:4-5)

➤ God is _____.

➤ God is _____.

➤ God is _____.

✓ Because of _____ God has done.

Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Ps 100:3)

➤ God is my _____.

➤ God is my _____.

2) _____ should we offering thanksgiving to God?

✓ _____ it loudly.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. (Ps 100:1)

✓ _____ it passionately.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. (Ps 100:2)

✓ _____ it passionately.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. (Ps 100:4)

How will your Thanksgiving be this week?