

Psalm Genres (Part One): Psalms Of Thanksgiving

Words and Acts of Gratitude

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Those of you who have been around for a while know that I really like the Psalms. There is just so much there that is interesting, that intrigues my mind, and I have liked it so much that to date I have given about 40 sermons on various aspects of the Psalter. Most of those Psalms messages that I gave were part of my very long-running series—I guess it was a series in five parts that I gave at various times—but they were on the five books of the Psalms. But I have also done a couple, a few, several deep dives into particular psalms. Like I did the sermon on Psalms 22 through 24, how it compares to what happened at Christ's death.

I have done four sermons on Psalm 51, a Bible study on Psalm 55. I did another one on Psalm 83. I did four different sermons at various times on Psalm 90, which is my favorite. I have done sermons on the Hallel, which is Psalms 113 through 118. I have done three sermons on Psalm 119. I have done a sermon or so on the Psalms of Ascent, which is 120 through 134, and I did a Bible study that I gave around everywhere I travel on Psalm 133.

I just am intrigued by them. I guess maybe it is my literary background. They are all poetry. They are all very imaginative, metaphorical, and just bring out a lot of different ideas and emotions. So, like I said, there is just so much to learn from them. But I thought I would go back to my normal introduction when I do something about the Psalms because I find that having this understanding makes it easier to place things in the Psalms.

So I am going to give you a very quick run-through of how the five books of the Psalms are arranged, theologically as well as just as it is in Scripture. But like I said, the Psalms are divided into five books, and they correspond to the five seasons of the Hebrew year. Now, you would think spring, summer, fall, winter, that is four. Well, how do the Hebrews get five? Well, their seasons were mostly centered around the various feasts of the year, so they cut spring into two basically, if you want to put it that way.

So you had the Passover season, which was the first, then you had Pentecost season, the second, then you had summer, which is the long dry season of the year. Then you had the fall festival seasons with Trumpets, Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, and the Eighth Day, and then you had the winter months centered around the Feast of Purim. They also correspond, that is, the five books of the Psalms, to the five books of the Pentateuch, the five books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And each one of the Psalms has a corresponding festival scroll.

In Hebrew, they are called collectively the Megillot. They are the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. And finally, the last five psalms—146, 147, 148, 149, and 150—are the summary psalms collected at the end of the final book of each book in order. So the first book of Psalms corresponds to the summary Psalm of 146. The second book of Psalms corresponds with 147, and so forth.

So because you have all these correspondences between these various things, we can perceive general themes that run through the five books of Psalms. These same themes are the same themes as the seasons of the year, the festivals that are in that season, the books of the Torah that match that particular book, the festival scroll that matches that book, and of course the summaries that are linked to it. For instance, just give you an example: Book One, which is linked with the Passover and Genesis and the Song of Songs, deals with beginnings and deliverance and salvation and sacrifice. Book One also includes several prophecies and allusions to Christ's human life, several Messianic psalms there in the first book.

For another example, Book Three, which is the summer book, corresponds with Leviticus and its content and the book of Lamentations. The main, I would not call it a holiday or festival, but the main day in that summer season that the Jews observe is the Ninth of Av, and that day is when the Temple fell, twice. And it is a day of mourning, of lamentation, of grief over the loss of the Temple, and you can see how that might fit with especially the festival scroll of Lamentations. It is right there in the name. So Book Three tends to say a lot about correction and tribulation and devastation, and it has a lot in there too about the Temple and the Tabernacle.

So there are ways to study these books one by one, along with the particular festival and festival scroll and the book of the Pentateuch as well, to really pull out a lot of guidance, instruction from the particular books. This approach makes for a tidy package and a real workable method of understanding the book.

However, we are going to add another layer here to this, this time, and talk about types of psalms or genres of psalms. These genres or types are throughout the five books. None of them have a corner on any of the types of psalms, but they are another way to approach the study of the Psalms. These are literary categories. When commentators or scholars of one stripe or another look at the Psalms, they try to categorize it as a certain type of psalm. And there are dozens or more of these categories.

Early on they tried to group them into a few categories and found after more study that they did not fit real well. You had to shoehorn some of them in there. After a while they said this psalm needs a whole other category, and there are these other five, six, eight, twelve psalms that are a lot like it, more like it than these other ones that we have been placing in these categories.

So let me just give you twelve. I will give you a dozen of these genres or categories of psalms, and I think you will be impressed to see how wide-ranging they are, how different they can be.

We will start with on a downer. There are psalms of lament. Another, going to the other side of the spectrum, there are psalms of praise. There are psalms of thanksgiving. That is three. There are psalms of petition. That is four. Then, like all Israelite things, there are psalms of complaint. That is five.

There are also (this is six) imprecatory psalms. Now that is a word that you need your Latin roots for, but basically imprecations are curses or request for divine destruction upon one's enemy. So you plea, you make a plea to God to destroy your enemy. So that is imprecatory psalms or curse psalms.

Number seven is penitential psalms or psalms of repentance. Eight would be royal psalms, psalms of the monarchy, psalms having to do with David and

his line. Number nine is psalms of trust or faith—psalms that show reliance upon God. Number ten is psalms of wisdom, where the psalmist is trying to teach you more practical things about what to do.

Eleven (this is probably one that you had in mind) is psalms of Messiah, Messianic psalms. And then there are several historical psalms where the psalmist sings about things that happened in Israel's past and comes to a conclusion urging the people to have faith in God. Oftentimes these psalms talk about God's sovereignty over the nations, also about His creative power and His miracles in behalf of Israel. So that is the twelve.

I will go through them very quickly: lament, praise, thanksgiving, petition, complaint, imprecatory or curse psalms, penitential or repentance psalms, royal psalms, trust psalms, wisdom psalms, Messianic psalms, and historical psalms. And believe it or not, they can be divided into even more categories. I gave you a dozen, but scholars are continually adding subcategories or other categories to these lists. They have added in the last couple decades Torah psalms, creation psalms, enthronement psalms, prophecy psalms, Zion psalms, pilgrimage psalms, and others.

The ways of people categorizing the Psalms is, I think, endless. What makes it worse is that these categories often go by various names—two, three, four different ways that they describe them—but they are the same psalms. So that is why I said penitential psalms, repentant psalms (that is a pretty easy one) where they would call them two different very similar names and make it even more confusing. Many of these psalms are placed in multiple genres, multiple categories, since the categories overlap a great deal.

For instance, some psalms you can place in the royal, the Messianic, and the historical categories because they have elements of all of them. Some psalms have praise, thanksgiving, and trust all through them. Where do you put them? Well, throw them in the one they think it is the most valid for that, but you know, it is just very personal. The same has to do with lament psalms, imprecatory psalms, and penitential psalms. They are often put in the same categories.

But there is a reason for this. We have to understand that the Psalms are not academic. Even though the commentators and the scholars and the

intelligentsia among the theologians try to make them academic, the Psalms were meant to be used. The Psalms were meant to be sung. The Psalms were meant to be studied by God's people, and wisdom taken from them.

And just as life throws different problems and situations at us, the Psalms give us diverse songs to help us through them because they are eminently helpful, especially to our emotional state when we are going through various situations in life. And one Protestant pastor that I read an article from suggested, as had his website called *Restitutio*:

The best way for you to use the Psalms is to ask yourself how you're feeling. What are you going through? Are you in desperate need for deliverance? Read the psalms of petition. Are you sad and looking to boost your confidence? Read the psalms of trust. Are you seeking to expand your praise vocabulary? Look for psalms in the praise or enthronement categories. Are you having an existential crisis and asking why God doesn't help you? That's what the psalms of complaint are for. You get the idea.

Well, since we have just celebrated another Thanksgiving Day (we are just two days away from that), I decided to give you some meat in due season and speak about psalms of thanksgiving. We will by no means get through all of them. In fact, we are not even going to scrape the surface of psalms of thanksgiving, but I hope at least to get your feet wet, as it were, in this genre of Psalms by touching on a few of them. And we are actually going to go outside the Psalms and look at one or two that are elsewhere. They are really not psalms of thanksgiving. They are more like prayers or songs of thanksgiving because they are not in the Psalms. That just makes a whole lot of sense.

There seems to be a general consensus that Psalms 18, 30, 32, 40, 66, 92, 107, 116, 118, and 138 should be considered psalms of thanksgiving. Others like Psalm 4, Psalm 9, Psalm 34, Psalm 64, Psalm 124, and a few others are also found on various genre lists as thanksgiving psalms, but I am going to concentrate on that first list because those are the ones that are the consensus picks as psalms of thanksgiving. Now the reason for the disagreement is the differences in the definition of what thanksgiving is or what a thanksgiving psalm should look like. So when you have different people and they define

things differently, they are going to come up with different conclusions on which psalms are thanksgiving psalms. But I gave you the ones first that have the most picks, as it were, what most people think are actually thanksgiving psalms. So some fit the criteria better than others.

All scholars seem to agree that a thanksgiving psalm includes some form of thanks. Is that not incredible? They agree on that. Some sort of thanks or gratitude, usually it is for an answered prayer or some sort of deliverance. They are in a tough spot and they cried out to God, and God gave them an answer. He heard from His throne and bent down and helped. And so the person who has been helped feels obligated then to give thanks. Obviously when somebody does something nice for you, you should give thanks. Children should be taught that from an early age to say thanks or thank you to people who do them a service. We taught our kids even before they could speak. We gave them the American Sign Language for thank you. We told them you do that to people who give you something. We taught them how to say thank you.

But sometimes in the thanksgiving psalms it is not enough just to try to find the word thanks or thank you or thanksgiving or gratitude or some sort of word of appreciation in the psalm because sometimes it is not there—which of course now you understand a little bit better why some people think psalms are psalms of thanksgiving or psalms of something else when they do not see the word thanks in there. So we have to remember at this point that the Psalms are poetry. I mean, just face it, you hated poetry in high school. You did not want to read Shakespeare or Walt Whitman or some other English poet like Lord Byron. And so you have this feeling of near hatred for poetry. *grumble, grumble* . . . who likes poetry?

But a lot of the Bible is poetry, and you have to have at least some understanding and knowledge of how to read poetry and interpret poetry so that you can get the most out of it. So as poetry, the Psalms in their wording or expression of gratitude, it is not always cut and dried. You know, Dear God the Father, thank you very much for what You did. It sounds like a card we might send somebody giving us a gift.

You are not going to find that in the Psalms. It is not going to be that plain or pedestrian. It is going to be something more colorful, more imaginative.

David is great at blowing up something. We will read one a little bit later where God intervened for him. Yet David treats it like God did so many miracles. He was right there on the scene. He rode a cherub to get there and then the earthquake and all these miracles were done. You know, He smote his enemies, all this stuff. We will see it (that is in Psalm 18 when we get to it) but it uses such high language that you have a hard time seeing the gratitude in it, because of all the description and the way he is talking about what God did.

Sometimes, I would say we could say frequently, the thanks in a lot of these psalms takes the form of actual praise, where the word of thanks or gratitude is not even mentioned, but you know, "I will praise Thee, O Eternal." That has an element of thanks in it, even though it on the surface looks just like giving God glory.

So it is either a form of praise, a form of giving God glory, a form of blessing, "I will bless Thee, Most High," but it does not ever, very rarely say "I will thank You." Because it is put in a little bit different way. And we will get to some of the reasons for this later on. So you are very infrequently going to see any kind of common thanks. It is going to be a little bit higher level.

Let us go to Psalm 30 and just see this in the first four verses of Psalm 30. This is actually a kind of a template for a lot of the songs of praise, at least these first four verses. Now this actually has two instances of David saying thank you to God or saying that he would say thank you to God, but it does not appear right away.

Psalm 30:1 I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up,
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

So God has done something here. He has lifted David up so that he would be over his foes. He would prevail over his foes, and instead of saying thank you, he says, I will extol You.

Psalm 30:2-3 O Lord my God, I cried out to You, and You have
healed me. O Lord, You have brought my soul up from the grave.
You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

Here he has been sick, and God has heard his prayer and He has healed him.

Psalm 30:4 Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His [and here it is, finally], and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

So we do get here an actual word of thanks where it is right there in the scripture, and we cannot avoid it. Obviously, this is a psalm of thanksgiving.

Now, let us go to verse 12, and we see this repeated in a way.

Psalm 30:12 To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

I just wanted to go here because this is a psalm where it plays out really easy to understand that it is a psalm of thanksgiving. So thanks are in there in some of these psalms but not in others.

Another thing to be aware of in thanksgiving psalms is that they are closely tied to giving offerings and making vows. Now you have to know something about the Hebrews, Hebrew language, and that sort of thing. The Hebrews were big on actions rather than words. They would express their thanks by doing something.

Now, what can you do for God? I mean you could be obedient and that sort of thing, and sometimes that is mentioned in these thanksgiving psalms. But if they were going to show it and show it publicly, the thing that they would most likely do would be to bring a thank offering before God. And so, in a lot of thanksgiving psalms you see the people expressing their thanks not by saying, "Oh thank you, thank you, thank you God! I'm really grateful for what You've done." No, they would actually bring an animal for sacrifice and thank God with this offering, this sacrifice of praise Him and thank Him for something that He has done in intervening in their lives.

So they were more inclined to *show* their thanks than necessarily to express it with their mouth. This is another reason why the words we expect in a

thanksgiving psalm like thanks or gratitude or some sort of thankfulness may be absent because of the general Hebrew personality where the thanks is expressed in an action, not in a word.

Now you have to understand, I have mentioned this several times down through the years, that Hebrew is a very solid, concrete language. It is grounded in the physical, in natural imagery, and natural action. There are not many words in Hebrew that express total mental ideas and notions, concepts. They are usually described in concrete terms. You know, we would think like, I will just pull one out of my head, the process of sanctification. You are not going to find that in the Old Testament, those words. You may find make holy or sanctify every once in a while, but that is because we are influenced by Greek and we put those words back in to translate Hebrew concepts.

They would say walk or something along that line. That is our path, that is God making us holy, and they put it in terms of something you can see, you can understand. They do this all the time. It is a very grounded language in concrete things, unlike Greek, which is based more on ideas and nuances of thought and emotion and non-material, even physical, philosophical concepts.

And so God balances out His Word with one language that is very physical and grounded, and another language that is very mental and more philosophical, for lack of a better term. So we get both, and both play off the other. And in this way, Hebrew thanksgiving is shown in acts of obligation done because of what God has done. Since God has done something in terms of a blessing or an intervention that brought deliverance, they are then obliged to do an action in return.

They have got to balance the scales, if you will, with another of the corresponding action. They cannot *really* balance the scale, but because this is a covenantal relationship where the two parties are in an agreement for mutual help and support to get to a certain end, well, if one does something, then the other is obliged to do something. So the Hebrews look at it this way, and instead of saying, just out of their mouth, which can be kind of trite after a while, they actually *do* something, and it is usually an act of obligation.

And that act of obligation is usually some sort of sacrifice, some sort of giving up something in order to let God know that you are in it with Him. You thank Him very much.

So thanks may not be spoken, but expressed by explicit action of some sort or another.

Let us see a great example of this. It is not in the Psalms; it is in I Samuel chapter 2. This is one of those songs of thanksgiving done by Hannah after she bore Samuel. We are going to read Hannah's prayer here. It is a prayer of thanksgiving, and it should teach us a lot about the Hebrew mind and the way that these thanksgiving psalms work. We are going to read the first 11 verses.

I Samuel 2:1-11 And Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord, and there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by His actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble.

"The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He has set the world upon them. He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed."

Then Elkanah [that is Hannah's husband] went to his house in Ramah, but the child ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest.

This is Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving for God opening her womb and bearing Samuel. Notice how she dwells on God, about how He changes things. He takes the low and makes them high. He takes the poor and makes them rich, and vice versa for both of those.

He is the agent of change, as she sees Him here, because He is sovereign. He can do everything. He can see what is needed to happen, and by her petition to Him, He was made aware, if you want to say, of her lowly condition. She was feeling humiliated. She had no sons, and she asked Him to change that, and He did. He took her from being barren to being a producing mother, and that changed her status in society at the time.

And so she is praising Him, but did you notice any word of thanks? Zilch, not one in that whole prayer. No, she said she would praise Him, right? And her heart was rejoicing because of what He had done, but there is no thanks, no gratitude as we would see it.

Now we get a hint of it in verse 11, but if we want to see it fully, let us go back to chapter 1, verse 20. This is after she had actually prayed to God and Eli had seen her and thought she was drunk, but she was praying this prayer that she would have a son.

I Samuel 1:20-28 So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked for him from the Lord." And the man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned. Then I will take him, that he may appear before the Lord and remain there forever." And Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him, only let the Lord establish His word." So the woman stayed and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, "O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore [notice that therefore, because of what God had done] I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be lent to the Lord." So they worshiped the Lord there.

Remember what I said about Hebrews and their wanting to do things, do specific actions, explicit actions, rather than just say thank you. That was not enough. They felt a great obligation after especially a miracle of this consequence. And so Hannah deemed it worthy of a sacrifice of a bull—that is a *big* sacrifice. So they came and brought it there before the Lord at Shiloh and offered it to Him there. But she went a step farther than that, and she gave *her son* to God—the one who had come from her womb as a blessing because she had been barren.

Talk about a sacrifice! Talk about expressing your gratitude! I asked for him. You gave him. Now I am going to thank You by giving him back to You. Hannah was a remarkable woman. The entire series of events we see here in chapter 1 is her act of gratitude, her act of expressing her gratitude to God.

She came to Shiloh. She came and appeared before God. She gave an offering, and then she gave her son in service to God at the Tabernacle for his entire life. Would you be willing to give that much in gratitude? Makes you think, does it not? All of that was her expression of thanks, and in her prayer of thanksgiving, she does not even mention thanksgiving. She just talks about how happy she is and how much she loves God for all that He does. Puts a different emphasis on things, I think. And this is shown in some ways in the psalms of thanksgiving in the Psalms itself.

If you read a thanksgiving psalm, then, and do not see a word of gratitude within that psalm, if you read it close enough, you do not even necessarily

need to read between the lines, I do not think, you will see that the attitude of thanksgiving is there and it is probably shown as some sort of physical action or some verbiage of praise and rejoicing as they extol the Lord.

Now we are going to look at one of these thanksgiving psalms before we finish. We are only going to Psalm 18. Now if you look at Psalm 18 (and it has 50 verses), do not quail and say we will be here till midnight. I am not actually going to go over all the verses here. I just want to give you the gist of what we are dealing with in the thanksgiving psalms. Let us just start out by reading the first three verses.

Psalm 18:1-3 I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.

This is the introduction to this psalm.

Now, if you know anything about these psalms, you might know that this psalm also appears in II Samuel 22. And the commentators are just about unanimous that Psalm 18 is a thanksgiving psalm despite the fact that the only word of gratitude is in verse 49, which we see here:

Psalm 18:49 Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name.

And in the parallelism, giving thanks and singing praises are parallel, so they kind of mean the same thing.

Now it follows the format of other psalms of thanksgiving that the textual studies by literary scholars have discovered. This is a template you might say—like the other one we saw, Psalm 30—very similar in the way they are arranged.

So thanksgiving psalms typically begin with an expression of praise. Here it is, "I will love You, O Lord." And the other one we saw was, "I will extol You." Others say I will praise You or something along that line. Very often it is not "I will thank You."

Notice, this is another little tidbit of the formatting of these psalms. It says, I *will* praise You. I *will* extol You. I *will praise* You. It puts it in the future tense. It shows that because of what has happened in the person's life—whether it is a blessing or some sort of deliverance—that it has put them under obligation, so they are intending now to do this into the future: I will extol You. I will praise You. I will love You, because of this obligation they have because of what God has done.

So this signals that the psalmist has received some blessing or intervention or help from God, and being now under obligation, he *will* do something. He *must* do something. And here the intended act is to love the Lord. Now this is a strange one actually among the psalms of thanksgiving because this word love here, it is *raham*. It is the only time that word appears in the Old Testament that it is translated as love.

Now it cannot really be translated as anything else in this particular context. *Raham* means—it does mean to have great affection for or care for or loyalty for another—but most of the time when it is used, it is used to have compassion for somebody or to have pity because of their lowly state or their particular circumstance. Now you cannot do that in terms of God. You cannot have pity on God. He has everything. He is the best in everything. He can do anything He wants. You cannot really have compassion on God. He is never in a state where He needs our help. So the only other way you can think about it is that you have affection or you will care for or you will be loyal to God. Now remember that loyalty is part of the covenant. We have a covenant obligation to God—because He is loyal to us, we have to be loyal to Him.

And so normally it is a different word. I am thinking off the top of my head and I cannot think of the word that is normally used. But David used *raham* here and was obviously thinking about this covenant loyalty or love to God. One lexicographer in defining what this word meant here in this particular

place defined it as "to love deeply based upon an association or relationship manifesting in acts of kindness." So he would be kind to the Lord, and he would be loyal to the Lord because of this association or relationship under the covenant that he would have.

So love is better than compassion, or pity as it could be, because it implies a reciprocal obligatory affection or care for due to God's kindness toward David. Because God was kind to David, it was obligatory upon David to be kind to God, to have this affection. And the way you are kind to God is to do what He says and to be loyal and faithful to Him. And so this is the idea that is brought out here.

Now the word is modified a bit in verse 3 by the word "call." He says, "I will call upon the Lord." So in verse 1, he says, "I will love You, O Lord," and then he says, "I will call upon the Lord." This is part of his future action that he is going to do, and it is to come before God and ask Him for things, and that is a word that there are a lot of ideas expressed by it. It stands for not just appealing to God for help, but engaging in other acts of worship and service.

So when you call upon the Lord, say, that is what Abraham did or Isaac, they called upon the Lord. Well, that does not mean they just asked Him for things or they just praised Him. It also meant that they did all the other things of worship that were necessary under the covenantal relationship that they had. When you see that in Genesis that Abraham called upon the Lord, it just does not mean he spoke to Him. It means a whole basket of other things that he did as God's servant.

Another thing that we should understand here, at least specifically to Psalm 18 because it appears in II Samuel 22 at the end of David's life, most commentators believe it does not thank God for only one instance of help. Rather, it thanks God for a lifetime lived in relationship with Him. And we could see this if we went through every verse in the chapter. He talks about all kinds of things that God has done in his life.

Now, let us think about that for a minute. Think about David. Think about his life. His life is pretty well documented from the time that he was a late teenager. You know, he is out with his father's sheep. He is fighting off bears and lions.

He gets the call from Samuel to be the next king. He goes out delivering food to his brothers at the battle, and he ends up fighting Goliath, and killing Goliath, and being the great victor, and everybody loves David. And then he starts having trouble with Saul because Saul gets jealous. David has his ten thousands, but poor Saul only has his thousands, and so, he gets a spear thrown at him for his efforts, and he spends all that time in the wilderness with Saul chasing him about.

And then finally Saul dies on Mount Gilboa, and David is made king, but he is not made king of all Israel; he is just the king of Judah. And so he spends—what is it?—seven years as king of Judah before the rest of Israel figures out that he should be king of Israel, and lots of stuff happens there between, like Joab and Abner and all that stuff, trying to put two kingdoms together. And then you have all his sons, and there is (well, let us start at the beginning) all his wives and then all his sons and all the stuff that is happening there.

David fights battles all over the place, expands Israel's borders as far up as the Euphrates River. And, he has great fame. And then he commits the great sin with Bathsheba, and things we see start going down in his life. He numbers Israel. He has Absalom trying to take his throne. Shimei throws rocks at him, and various other things happen in his life. And he has to deal with them.

What I am showing here is that David's life was a series of highs and lows. I mean, probably if he had a week where nothing bad happened or nothing great happened, he was good. It was like a vacation to him. But no, he had a life that looked like the Richter scale during an earthquake. He just had a lot happen.

But Psalm 18 or II Samuel 22 thanks God not just for the highs but for *all* his life. And by the time he was dying—they think that he probably wrote this psalm toward the end of his life—it really hit him that God was with him the

whole way. God may have seemed not to be in the picture at certain parts, but in thinking back to those times, he was made aware how much God actually was with him when he was in the dumps. And He brought him out of the pit time and time again.

When he was sick, God was there. He healed him. He gave him all these wonderful things, and he just saw how much he owed to God because He was there at all times. It did not matter how David was feeling or whether he was high or low or whether he had been blessed or destitute or what have you, God was always there. God heard him.

So the tone of Psalm 18 or II Samuel 22 is this idea of God's constancy in his life. And it is very much like Habakkuk 3. Let us go there. This is another prayer that is also a song of thanksgiving. I just want to read verses 17 and 18 because Habakkuk puts it very plainly here. It is in figurative language, but the idea is the same.

Habakkuk 3:17-18 Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.

Habakkuk is saying it does not matter what life is hurling at me at the moment. It may be the worst of times when we cannot grow a thing and our animals keep dying and just nothing good is happening.

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord." He is saying, "I will thank God for His being with me, for helping me, for blessing me. It doesn't matter what my state is. This is God, and He's been with me. He's been taking me along the road that He wants me to go on, and if He wants me to go on this road that's all rutted and washed out and makes me wish I had changed my shock absorbers, then that's good, and I will rejoice in what He has done for me." That is the tone of Psalm 18.

And what David is telling us, what Habakkuk is telling us, is we need to thank God for His presence even when circumstances do not feel favorable at all. As a matter of fact, that is the best time to do it because once He is aware that you are aware that He is the one that is sovereignly guiding your particular life and your particular circumstances, then He understands that you are humble, that you have given over the responsibility for this to God, and that you will do as He wants you to do. You will follow Him no matter what. That is what He wants to see.

Let us go back to Psalm 18. I do want to read verses 4 through 19 here just to give you a flavor of what David is talking about, how he is expressing his thanks without saying thanks, but just showing what God has done and how astounded he is at what God was willing to do for him.

Psalm 18:4-19 The pangs of death encompassed me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. [He is on death's door. There is just no way he is going to avoid it.] In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears. [That went a long way, that prayer. It did not stop at the ceiling. It went straight to the very throne of grace. Now notice how he describes God's reaction to hearing David's cry for help]:

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also and came down with darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew. He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds in the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire.

The Lord also thundered in the heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished

them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils. He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me.

Now, if you are a tried-and-true literalist, you would have a hard time finding this in history. But this is the Psalms. It is poetry. It is metaphorical. It is exaggerated for us to get a point.

David is telling us here that God was so eager to answer David's prayer that He moved heaven and earth to come to his aid. Nothing was going to stand in His way. He brought the whole force of His power to stand beside David and mow down his enemies because He *loved* David. He delighted in that man. They were friends. They were in a relationship by the covenant, and David was God's chosen king.

And He wanted to do something for him, to take him from that depth of the pit of Sheol and put him, bring him up safe, secure in a broad place where He could bless him. And He did it all because He delighted in him. He was pleased with David. David satisfied Him because he trusted Him, because he looked to Him for the help that he needed. All of this happened, David says, because God felt something for him—delight.

This word is *hapes* or something along that line. It means to delight in or to take pleasure and to be satisfied with. In other words, God supported David because of His affection for the man. He loved him. God's affection and delight in David spurred, then, David's affection and loyalty to God, and it kept going around in a big circle because when God saw his affection and loyalty, He delighted in him some more and blessed him, and David then, you know, back and forth and back and forth. It was a mutual reciprocal arrangement of love and service, one toward the other. It did not end.

You want to know why David was a man after God's own heart? Because he reacted like God. He did not do it perfectly, obviously, but God's heart was a

giving heart where He was going to bless and to give to David, and David reciprocated it. He would bless and give to God what a man can give to God—which is obedience and loyalty.

He had a lot to learn. He had some pretty big mess-ups during his life, but he always came back to God. "I've sinned. I've done wrong. I owe You. I have a great obligation to You, and I'm going to do that by praising You, by extolling You, by obeying You, by being loyal to You." Like he says in the end of Psalm 51: "I'll preach about You." You do not want sacrifices and all that. You want a broken heart. I will give that to You. I will do all these things because I am obligated to You for all that You have done.

So they had a mutual loving relationship. David, as he says here at the beginning, "I will love You, O Lord," and the Lord said to David, "I delight in you, David." And because they loved each other, they did things for each other—good things. The things that God can do for a man and the things that a man can do for God. That was the thanksgiving from David's point of view. He showed his thanksgiving by giving to God what he could. He was obliged to because God had given him so much.

This is why Paul can say in Colossians 3:14 that sacrificial love is the bond of perfection. Let us go read that paragraph.

Colossians 3:12-17 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. [Notice in verse 17]: And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

All of these things that we can do for each other in our own mutual relationship of obligation to one another ends in thanksgiving. Be thankful. You can be thankful when your brethren are supporting you and you are supporting them. And the thanks ultimately goes to God the Father for

calling us and giving us this ability through His Spirit and the example of Jesus Christ to do these things.

It is high-level spiritual life, but that is what we are aiming for as God's people. We are aiming to replicate that covenantal relationship with God that we should have with each other. You cannot separate the two great commandments: love God, love neighbor. It all works the same. It all works together.

God comes first, obviously. He has the greatest power. He has the greatest love. He has the greatest sovereignty. He has all the things that we need, and we love Him and obey Him and do what we can in worship of Him. And then we are supposed to transform that relationship into our relationships with each other. Now it is among equals, and we give and they give back to us. We give thanks. They give thanks. We give kindness. They bestow kindness upon us. We give them mercy. They give us mercy back. We forgive them; they forgive us. You can go through this whole list. It is how it is supposed to work.

Let us finish back in Psalm 18, verses 46 through 49. See how David concludes all this.

Psalm 18:46 [Notice this]: The Lord lives!

Is that not incredible? That was one of his conclusions. He knew God was alive and working. Why? Because He loved him, and David loved the Lord, and it showed, it expressed itself in David's life with God being there at every turn. He says,

Psalm 18:46-49 Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God who avenges me, and subdues the peoples under me; He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me; You have delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name.

God shows His people that He lives through His frequent marvelous acts of deliverance and blessing. It is an amazing thing to be able to say God did

that, and He did it for me. So we, with David, must give thanks to God, and let us all get up and sing praises to His name.