

Give Thanks to the Lord

Introduction. In Jewish tradition Psalm 136 is often known as the Great Hallel (“the Great Psalm of Praise”). It was associated with the Feast of Passover, and it celebrates the enduring nature of the Lord’s love; each verse ends with a refrain, the only psalm that does so.

This literary form is called an antiphonal hymn. Possibly, in public worship, a priest or a group of Levitical singers led in singing the first part of each verse, with the congregation or the Levitical singers responding with the refrain (1 Chronicles 16:41; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3, 6; Ezra 3:11). The refrain repeats the psalm’s main theme, which can be overlooked because of its repetition, but it has deep significance for the psalm.

Psalm 136 recounts Israel’s history and reminds them of the many ways God had blessed them. Warren Wiersbe provides an outline that offers an interesting study with a focus on who God is and what He had done for them:

- The Creator: He brings forth (vv. 1-9).
- The Redeemer: He brings us out (vv. 10-12).
- The Shepherd: He brings us through (vv. 13-16).
- The Conqueror: He brings us in (vv. 17-22).
- The Deliverer: He brings us back (vv. 23-25).

While the text applies to Israel, it’s not difficult to consider this in our own lives and see God’s providence, and realize how He’s provided, protected, and blessed us in so many ways. The word “thanks” is found 75 times in the Bible. “Thanksgiving” is found 32 times. And 4 times we find the words “thankful” or “thankfulness.” It’s obvious from Scripture that God wants us to have a thankful spirit.

It’s easy to be unthankful, to focus on yourself, to look at your life negatively instead of positively, to complain instead of be thankful, and to focus on what you don’t have instead of what you do have. We need grateful hearts, and “to give thanks unto the Lord,” I want to offer these suggestions.

I. Regularly Practice Giving Thanks

- A. Every day thank God for your blessings. Thank Him in the morning, at noontime, at meal time, and at bed time. Take time to say, “Thank you, Lord.”
- B. David prayed three times a day, like Daniel (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10). David furthermore said that he thanked God seven times a day (Psalm 119:164).

II. Express Gratitude Regardless of the Situation

- A. The Bible admonishes, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- B. Even in the most difficult situation, there’s always something for which we can be thankful. The story is told of Matthew Henry, the 17th century preacher and Bible expositor, who was once robbed. In reflecting on 1 Thessalonians 5:18, he related his experience in his next sermon and offered this insight: “First,” he said, “I’m thankful I have never been robbed before. Second, I’m thankful he took my money and not my life. Third, I’m thankful he did not take more; he

could have taken my horse and my clothes as well. Next, I'm thankful that what I had stolen from me really did not amount to very much. Then I'm grateful that what I lost, in time, could be replaced. But, finally, and most importantly, I'm thankful that I was the one robbed and not the robber!"

III. Praise God When All Is Well

- A. This is honestly something that we just don't think about. Too often we can take for granted our blessings, our prosperity, and good health. When everything is going well for us, we may become complacent and forgetful that our blessings come from God.
- B. No matter what happens in our life, we're constantly thankful for God's provision of salvation in Jesus Christ and His church (Colossians 2:6-7; Hebrews 12:28). Additionally, we should be thankful for our material blessings, which we use to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 9:12-15; cp. 8:5; 1 Timothy 6:18-19).
- C. Sadly, some begin to take credit for their good fortune, forgetting that not only the Lord but many people often contribute to the success they enjoy in life.
 - 1. Many people constantly refer to happenings in their lives as being the result of "luck," "fortune," or "fate."
 - 2. Time and chance happen to all (Ecclesiastes 9:11; cp. 1 Samuel 6:9; Luke 10:31).
 - a) All phenomena (happenings) aren't attributable directly to God, nor can they ever be attributed to luck. They're situations that simply appear in every life.
 - b) Forget about "luck," "fortune," and "fate."
 - (1) As forces, they're non-entities. Phenomena exist, yes; things happen, but "luck," "fortune," and "fate" don't control anything.
 - (2) Suffering for the cause of Christ isn't "bad luck," but rather a blessing from God for which to be grateful (Acts 5:40-41; 1 Peter 4:16).
 - c) In attributing God's blessings to luck, we rob God of the praise that's due Him for His works of grace in our favor (cp. Proverbs 3:5-6).
 - d) If anything, we should deeply consider how God's providence can order our chances (cp. Ruth 2:3; Esther 2:12; 4:14). Think about it: Because of divine revelation, we don't look at the lives of Ruth and Esther and say that they worked out well "as luck would have it."

IV. Learn How Bad Experiences Can Make You More Grateful

- A. The apostle spoke his suffering in ministry: beatings, stoning, imprisonment, and mental and emotional burdens in his care of the churches (2 Corinthians 11:22-29).
- B. If this weren't bad enough, Paul suffered some type of "thorn in the flesh," for which he prayed for relief.
 - 1. When Paul prayed for it, God's answer was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."
 - 2. Paul's magnificent response was, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses,

for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

- C. Be thankful even in tough times. Let them make you better, not bitter (Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15).
 - 1. In fact, one of the ways to chase bitterness away is to fill your heart with gratitude.
 - 2. We don't know when Psalm 61 was written, but some scholars theorize that it fits David's time in exile from Jerusalem when his son Absalom seized his throne (2 Samuel 15-17). The words "thanks," "thankfulness," "grateful," "gratefulness," or "gratitude" never occur, but the idea definitely runs all through the psalm.

V. Make Gratitude a Part of Your Interactions

- A. This attitude of gratitude should be reflected in our relationships. Taking the small step to express thankfulness to others who serve us, help us, encourage us, or brighten our lives trains us to be more thankful.
- B. Paul said "thank you" to individuals and churches on a regular basis (Romans 16:4; Colossians 1:3). When you repeatedly express "thanks" it becomes ingrained as an action habit and soon becomes an attitude.
- C. And you'd be in good company, because the Bible has several wonderful examples of people who made gratitude a part of their interactions with God and other people:
 - 1. Job (Job 1:20-21).
 - 2. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:26-28).
 - 3. David (Psalm 100:4-6).
 - 4. Mary (Luke 1:38, 46-55).
 - 5. The leper (Luke 17:15-19).
 - 6. Jesus (Matthew 15:36; 26:26-27; Mark 8:6; John 6:11; 11:41-43).

Conclusion. In Luke 19:40, after Jesus had entered the city of Jerusalem the last time, there was a great excitement among the people. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to calm them down. In a striking saying Jesus affirms that the shouting is inevitable. If the people were to keep quiet the very stones would cry out. In short, praise to God on this occasion couldn't be stopped.

But I want you to think about your life in the same way. Your praise, thanksgiving, and gratefulness to God should never stop. Think proverbially that if anyone would try to dissuade you, you would still cry out that the Lord is good.

I'll close with one final thought from Melody Beattie: "Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and more."

I am deeply indebted to Ken Weliever for the use of his material.