GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD

Psalm 107:1–43

Key Verse: 107:1

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Have you ever felt desperate? Did you wonder how you got into that situation? What did you do? In today’s passage we find four kinds of people in desperate situations. In each case they cry to the Lord, and God answers. And in each case, they’re encouraged to give thanks. Through their unique stories we learn who God is, what he’s like, and why we should thank him. Each of us has a personal story. But it’s important for us to have a personal story with God. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

Read verse 1. This verse introduces the psalm and tells us what it’s all about. Here God is called “the Lord.” It means he’s in ultimate control of the world and of our lives. Some people try to control everything, but they’re not the Lord. It says the Lord is “good.” This word can also be translated as “joyful, pleasant or desirable.” To say that he’s good basically means he’s not evil, and he’s not even indifferent; he has good intentions for each of us. Though we may not treat him well, though we may be evil, he’s still good to us. It also says that “his love endures forever.” In Hebrew the word for “love” here is “hesed” and it literally means loyalty. In this psalm God’s love is repeatedly described as the best part of him, and it’s always this same word, “hesed.” It tells us that God loves us faithfully, even when we’re unfaithful to him.

Read verse 1 again. Because he’s the Lord, because he’s good, and because his love endures forever, we should give thanks to God. It’s repeated in verses 8,15,21 and 31: “Let them give thanks to the Lord.” To give thanks means to appreciate God, and to express our appreciation through both our praise and our lives. Giving thanks means actually speaking thankful words and also, showing our appreciation by our deeds.

Giving thanks, though, isn’t natural for us. If it were, we wouldn’t have to be repeatedly reminded to do it. God is so good and so loving, but we don’t really appreciate him. Why? Ever since the first human beings sinned against their Creator, we’ve all inherited a sinful nature. And one of the worst parts of our sinful nature is that it makes us ungrateful. It might be the greatest human tragedy: when we’re blessed, we don’t appreciate what we’ve been given. It applies to basic things, like just being alive and healthy, being able to enjoy a walk in nature or taste delicious things or sleep in a warm, comfortable place. It applies to having privileges other people don’t have, or having good, caring people in our lives. Ultimately it applies to God. We have a God who’s so good, so loving, who’s always there for us, and yet we take him for granted. We ignore or neglect him. We act like he’s not even there, or that we’re alive and well due to our own efforts or abilities.

Because we have this sinful nature that leans toward ingratitude, we need to be reminded all throughout our lives to give thanks. The Thanksgiving holiday is a good reminder. But if we’re only thankful once a year, it’s really not enough; we might be living for several months like an angry monster. Psalm 100:4 says, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” Originally, it meant for Jewish men to show up at their three annual festivals in Jerusalem throughout the year with a thankful heart, and probably, a thanksgiving offering. Three times a year is better than one. But to us, to “enter his gates with thanksgiving” means to show up at church every Sunday prepared to thank and praise God. It means to come to church willingly, taking time to prepare my heart to really express my gratitude to God, not because I have to go to church or just to please someone else. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us, “…give thanks in all circumstances…” This means not just on Sundays, but each and every day, in all circumstances, all throughout the day, give thanks! Recently, scientists have found that being thankful not only makes us feel like a better person; it’s good for our health. Showing gratitude is powerful. It even overpowers a complaining spirit.

So, if it’s so *good* for us, and it’s so *right* to do, so *deserving* of God, and if it’s *commanded*, **how** can we give thanks? Read verse 2. One key word here is “redeemed.” It means to be bought back from slavery. God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt and from Babylonian Captivity. God redeems all Christians from slavery to sin and Satan through the precious blood of Jesus. Each and every true believer has a story of being redeemed. It may not necessarily be dramatic. But it’s a story of how God opened my eyes and became real to me, and how he helped me stop ignoring him and start loving him truly. To be thankful, we need to take time to remember our own story. Who was I and what was my life like when I was living apart from God? How did God redeem me? Often it was through his servants who made personal sacrifices to help me. Ultimately it was through the death of his Son, who suffered and died on the cross and shed his blood to set me free from my sins and darkness. Colossians 3:16,17 describes the thankful Christian: “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” What a beautiful life! May God help each of us to have our own personal story of his great redeeming love for us in Jesus, so that our hearts may be filled with thanksgiving to him.

Let’s take a few minutes to look in this psalm at the four different kinds of people described. Read verses 4–9. These were people wandering in the desert. A city to settle in is repeated. In Genesis, sin made Cain like a restless wanderer. In all our lives, sin makes us restless, and hungry and thirsty spiritually. We may have many material things and plenty of food, but our souls can still be so dissatisfied, even bored. When we feel so restless, so empty and meaningless in life, what can we do? Verse 6 says, “Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble…” Often we have no human being to turn to, no one who can really understand us or help us. But whoever we are and wherever we are, we can cry out to the Lord. We can pray and ask him to help us. So many people try to depend on themselves for everything. They’re too proud to ask anyone for help. But if we would only humble ourselves, we could turn to God.

Some smart people won’t turn to God or to others because they don’t want to be obligated to have to do anything after being helped. Others feel fake, like they’re only trying to use God or others to receive help in an emergency situation, and they don’t want to bother others with their troubles. God surely knows us. He knows that so often, we’d never turn to him unless we were really in trouble. Yet he doesn’t say, “Oh, I see. Now you need me.” When we cry out to him in our trouble, it says, “…and he delivered them from their distress” (6b). It’s a vivid illustration of God’s goodness. Even though we’re evil, God wants to show his goodness to us, if only we’ll turn to him.

Read verse 6 again. It tells us the good news that God answers prayer. He may not always do things the *way* we want, or *when* we want, but he always answers prayer. God is not far removed from us; he’s near us, and he actually hears us. He wants us to pray to him and experience his help and his answer. No matter what problem we’re facing, or how discouraging things may seem, we can tell God about it and ask his help. There are things we may only be able to talk to God about, but we shouldn’t just suppress and bury them; we should take some personal time to really talk to God and tell him everything. He won’t even charge us a counselling fee. He may not always take the problem away from us, but often the answer will be that he’ll help us grow deeper in our relationship with him and in true inner peace. When we experience God’s answer to prayer, we need to be intentional about giving thanks to him. To really do this, some people keep a prayer journal, writing out both their personal prayers and their thanks to God when they see his answers to their prayers.

Read verses 10–16. These verses describe people in prison. They’re suffering in iron chains, in bitter labor, shut behind gates of bronze and bars of iron, meaning there’s no way to get out. We also notice why they’re there. It says “…because they rebelled against God’s commands and despised the plans of the Most High” (11). They were too proud to submit to God; they wanted to do things their own way. It tells us that often, we get into trouble not because of others, but because of our own sins against God. Life may seem free humanly, but spiritually it can be like a prison. Especially when sin enslaves us, we can feel so helpless. We get into such a miserable spiritual state when we rebel against God. In order not to rebel, we need to be listening to God, ahead of our own ideas and desires. But even though these people deserved to be imprisoned, when they cried to God, he brought them out of prison. This doesn’t tell us that God will always answer the prayer to get out of a literal prison. But it does tell us that God will graciously answer and help those who sincerely want out of their prison of sin. If we really want to get out of being enslaved to sin, we need to cry to God, and he can break any kind of bondage. It’s a testimony to the mighty power of God. When God sets us free from slavery to sin, we need to be intentional about thanking him.

Read verses 17–22. These were people who got really sick. But it was due to their own foolish, rebellious ways (17). It’s the story of many of our lives. We make ourselves sick due to our own foolish, rebellious ways. Our culture glamourizes rebellion and makes it look so free. But actually, after the thrill is gone, we get spiritually sicker and sicker. Yet even though these people got so sick they didn’t even want to eat, when they cried out to God, he helped them. How did God heal them? Verse 20 says, “He sent out his word and healed them…” Spiritual healing comes from the word of God. When we really pray, God will often give us very vividly a word from the Bible that speaks deeply to us. This is why we read, study and teach the Bible. Sometimes we feel too sick to be healed. But God’s word has healing power to cure the deepest sickness. When he heals us through his word, we need to be intentional about thanking him. Verse 22 tells us we especially need to express our thanks to God through offering and singing joyfully among his people. Offering and joyful singing might even deepen our spiritual healing.

Read verses 23–32. These were people who experienced a fierce storm on the sea. It says, “…in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits end” (26b,27). It’s a metaphor for people whose situation gets so bad they become overwhelmed with fear, and nearly driven crazy. This time, they didn’t get into this situation due to their own sins, but they still experienced the power of prayer. God answered their cry and brought them to safety and peace. Again, they’re encouraged to give thanks to God among his people. It’s especially important to testify that God is greater than any storm, greater than any ship, greater than any body of powerful people. Sometimes it takes a terrible storm in life to help us stop depending on ourselves, things or people and truly depend on God and experience his living power. All four stories of differing people in this psalm tell us that God can help the most restless, the most enslaved, the sickest, the most fearful, overwhelmed people, and that he’s always there to hear our cries and answer, no matter how sinful we are. It shows us his enduring love and goodness, and why we should thank him.

In verses 33–42 the author shows us that God is the Lord who can completely change any situation. He can make even the best situation turn bad, and the worst situation turn good. God takes away blessings when we’re wicked and proud, and he blesses us when we’re humble and upright. Read verse 43. Here, the “wise” person is the one who remembers who God is and who reveres him with awesome respect. This psalm was written to help us pay attention to these lessons and deeply think about God’s loving deeds. Sometimes we get so busy in life that we’re just running around from thing to thing without any wisdom. But as we heed what happens to us when we’re rebellious and ponder God’s loving deeds, we become wise. Giving thanks to God is wise.

Read verse 1 again. May God teach us to give thanks to him for who he is. May he help us to have a personal story of his unfailing love in our lives, and turn to him in prayer and thanks each and every day.