

# THANKSGIVING, PRAISE AND WORSHIP

## ***Thanksgiving - expressing appreciation***

In Psalm 100:4 we read “enter his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise” The writer of this psalm uses the analogy of a palace to give us a picture of entering the presence of God - like going to see a king. We must qualify to enter the gates just like we must have a ticket to enter a cinema or a sports arena.

Thanksgiving is the qualification to enter the gates, or entry point to the presence of God. What do we mean by this. I feel that the attitude of thanksgiving is a requirement to be in God’s presence - it is an attitude that recognizes where honor is due, it is a humble heart. God has always looked on the heart - he shows this a number of times in the Old Testament . . .

*The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Isaiah 29:13*

*But the LORD said to Samuel, `Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. Samuel 16:7*

The qualification to enter God’s presence is a humble heart of thanks for what Jesus did on the cross for us - we are sinners saved by grace. No amount of working at it can qualify us, only the acceptance of God’s forgiveness for our sins can cleanse us to be qualified

*Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. Psalm 24:3,4*

It’s not the brilliance of our musicianship, the eloquence of our words that God accepts, he looks at our hearts to see who he lets through the gates for a touch of the reality of his divine presence.

Musicians often talk about the need for excellence in worship. Unfortunately they are speaking usually of musical excellence - but God is looking for excellence of heart. “Worship is too important a ministry to be left to musicians”. God wants us to try our best with music, but music isn’t worship. We need to be trained in the specific skills needed in worship leading, not just in music. Excellence in worship has a different set of criteria to excellence in music!!

When we approach our worship times with the attitude that there’s nothing we can add to the work of the cross, we realize the incredible grace that God offers us that we are able to “enter boldly into the throne room”. The acceptance of our worship by God depends not on how it sounds or how well the people respond, but on our humble heart towards his work on the cross. I don’t feel God is impressed with our music - he is the inventor of music after all - a father is not impressed specifically with the artwork when his 3 year old paints a picture for him - he is impressed more with her heart of love.

This does not mean we should offer up sloppy work in our worship, we still must do our best - a heart of love and appreciation will definitely show itself in an effort to do well. But God is looking at our hearts, he wants reality, he detests fake worship (Isaiah 29:13), no matter how good it sounds.

Thanksgiving begins with a heart attitude, but it doesn't end there. There is power in remembering what God has done and speaking it out. The children of Israel often forgot what God had done - I find it amazing that they would forget miracles like the Red Sea parting - but they did (psalm). We are just like that. We easily forget what God has done in our lives and in those around us.

Thanksgiving guards against pride, unbelief, murmuring and criticism. When we forget who needs to take the credit, we tend to take the credit ourselves and this leads to pride. Moses (Deut 8) warned the people of Israel to give thanks to God when they became prosperous in the promised land. He said that if they didn't thank God, then their hearts would be lifted up in pride and take the credit for their success instead of thanking God. When we forget what God has done we can lapse into unbelief or complaining when we are faced with challenges and obstacles in our walk with God. But when we give thanks to God, we are built up in our faith because we are concentrating on God's ability, not our own. When we remember how God has provided for us in the past, and thank him, we are encouraged to believe he can and will do it again!!

### ***Praise - expressing admiration***

Psalm 100:4 continues "*and into his courts with praise*". For those of us who have entered his gates with thanksgiving, we are faced with the beauty of the one we adore, the one who has saved us and loves us. He deserves all the praise we can give. As we praise him, we become even more aware of his greatness, his mercy and love. So what is praise?

The Hebrew word most used in the Old Testament is "halal". It is the same word that "hallelujah" is based on. It means to boast. It simply means that to praise God is to boast about how good God is, to say what he's like. This is just the same as the way we use the word praise in English. We praise movies, our favorite bands, clothes etc. we even praise computers, saying how fast they are or how much data they can store. When we praise like this, we mention the characteristics of the object we are praising. We say about a movie: the special effects were great, the ending was surprising, the acting was really believable etc. etc. We might just say that it was great!!

When we praise God, we can say "God is good, he's faithful, he's loving" etc. Psalm 145 is an excellent example of praise. After 2 verses of introduction, the writer starts out "great is the Lord and greatly to be praised". He then continues right up until the last verse speaking out, in poetic language, the attributes he has discovered about his Lord.

Too often in our praise and worship, we join in by just singing the the words of the songs without really concentrating on what they mean, or if we get really excited, we may shout out "praise the Lord" or "hallelujah" or even "praise you, Lord". We rarely think about what we're saying and normally let the music give us good feelings about God. We need to think a bit more about how to give God the praise he deserves.

There's two verses in Paul's letters that mention singing, Col 3:16 and Eph 5:18-19.

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."  
Col 3: 16*

It speaks of content and meaning when it says "let the word of God dwell in you richly" as you sing. The verse in Ephesians talks about being filled with the spirit as we sing. We not only need content, but feeling as well.

*"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,"*

Often we are confusing praise with exhortation (encouraging others to do something). The word "hallelujah" means "praise the Lord". It's an encouragement to praise; it's like saying "come on people, lets praise the Lord". It's an exhortation, just like Psalm 150 is a wonderful motivation to praise God. This psalm encourages us to praise God with everything we have. It's main theme is exhortation, not praise. When we say hallelujah, we're encouraging others to praise. When we say "praise the Lord", we're not saying anything ABOUT God, we're merely telling others that they should praise. One really confusing observation I made was the phrase "praise you, Lord." I looked at what this might be expressing and concluded that it can only mean that we're asking God to praise himself!! Surely this is not not what we want to be saying. We're obviously not thinking too hard about what we're saying!!

There's so many better ways to praise God than to repeat "praise the Lord" over and over. Psalm 145 (and many other psalms) gives us a wonderful example of the way we can put content and meaning into our expressions of praise. God deserves it and we can benefit greatly as we call to mind the incredible aspects of God's nature and character. Our personal problems always seem smaller as we focus on God's greatness and his ability to work in our situations. Psalm 22:3 (KJV) says that God "inhabits the praises of Israel". When we call to mind his attributes, we become more aware of his presence.

As we enter his presence with thanksgiving, lets also fill our mouths with the things we know about God, statements about his character and the wonderful being that he is - the creator and sustainer of the universe, who's almighty in power, yet who loves us and is tenderhearted and merciful.

### **Worship - expressing adoration**

The main Hebrew word used in the OT is shachah - it means to prostrate oneself, esp in homage to royalty or God. The NT word has a similar meaning - proskuneo in the Greek. Other words have been translated worship but they often have a the meaning of service. It is important that we gain an understanding of worship from the main biblical words and not from one particular verse that may use a word not normally translated as worship e.g. Romans 12:1

We should not only look at the definitions of the biblical words, but also we should look at the biblical examples of worship to find meaning. We need to ask who is worshipping, what were they doing? Why did they worship, when and where did they worship? By doing this we gain a better understanding of the overall biblical idea of worship.

Groups or individuals worshiped by bowing, kneeling, standing etc. and it was often not in the temple e.g. David worshiped on top of a hill, others where they were standing at the time. They worshiped for a variety of reasons; hearing God speak, feeling his presence or going through a rough time etc.

The examples of worship in the bible all show a special encounter with God, not necessarily in the temple, but wherever they were at the time. God can meet us in special ways wherever we are, not just in church.

So what did these people do? It seems they had a special touch or revelation from God and stopped what they were doing to express something of their love and devotion in a specific way. It's a bit like giving a special gift to someone you love - you stop what you're doing, look them in the eye and give the gift. A special exchange takes place - love, respect and closeness are expressed in the giving. You could send a gift in the post, but there's nothing like that moment when you're being given something special by someone you love.

But we're not just spending time with a friend when we worship God, He is the king of kings, the creator of the universe. The Lord loves for us to give the gift of our special focussed attention to Him. He appreciates our service to Him throughout the day, but there's something special about stopping and putting all our focus on expressing our love and devotion directly to Him, face to face. Jesus appreciated Martha's service but he also said that Mary had chosen the better thing *"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."* Luke 10:41-42

One of the aspects of worship that is expressed in these biblical examples is bowing in submission to the King. We express that he is Lord and that we give our lives to serve him. He not only wants us to serve and obey Him all the time, but He wants us to stop and acknowledge that he is Lord. I think the Sabbath is a time when we learn that God wants us to stop and consider how we have been serving Him, just as God considered what he achieved in creation.

But it's not just a formal Sunday thing. God wants us to have regular times where we stop and come aside from our normal day to day serving and focus on Him - and not only that, He appreciates any spontaneous expression of love that we may express. Some people are inspired by a beautiful sunset or a majestic mountain scene, for others it might be seeing someone come to know Jesus for the first time or finishing a work of art or hearing a symphony, whatever makes us want to pour out our hearts in love and appreciation for Him. One of the most common ways is when the people of God come together especially to worship Him, it's in times like this that God says that he's right there where two or three gather.

Worship involves expressing a yielded will to the King of kings, offering our lives afresh to Him. Our hearts often wander and we need to keep coming back to express why we are doing what we're doing, that it's all for Him. We so easily forget and slip into serving our own interests - in worship we remind ourselves of His Lordship over every area of our lives and renew and reaffirm our service and commitment to Him once again.