

Give Thanks for God's Lovingkindness (Ps. 107:4-9)

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At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. What is God's Lovingkindness?
- III. Example of God's Lovingkindness
- IV. God's Lovingkindness to His Own
- V. Conclusion
- VI. Questions for Further Thought

These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Give Thanks for God's Lovingkindness

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Finding Lunch at Reality Student Apologetics Conference

1. Last weekend Caleb and I went to a conference designed for junior high and high school students at Grace Church in Eden Prairie. Grace is one of, if not the largest, church in the state of Minnesota. This was our first time going to this annual conference which meant we needed to figure everything out because we hadn't experienced any of the activities before which created a few challenges.
2. One difficulty we had was trying to find where to get our lunch. When I registered us for the conference, I purchased premade boxed lunches that we could get on site. I wasn't sure we'd have enough time to run out and get something to eat and I didn't know what restaurants were in the area either so I figured this would be the best option.
3. The trouble? I didn't see where to pick up these boxed lunches advertised anywhere. There were a lot of people at this event and trying to walk around was like walking around Lambeau right after a Packers game. The crowd was difficult to get through. In fact, I lost Caleb a few times due to all the people even though he tried to stay one step behind me. Simply moving around the main areas was a challenge even if you know where you were going.
4. After wandering around and trying to follow larger groups within the crowd, assuming most people also purchased these lunches, we eventually found where they were providing these lunches—in the children's area of the church. We entered through the exit only to turn around after going through the doors. We learned their serving process through error.
5. When we found the set of doors that was the lunch entrance, we still ran into trouble. There were three different lines depending on what you ordered. Apparently, those who ordered a boxed lunch were given a second wristband in their registration bag. Well, when we registered the day before, we only got the general entrance bands, no lunch wristbands were in our bags. These lunch wristbands were different colors depending on what lunch was ordered.
6. I wasn't sure we'd be able to get our lunch without these lunch wristbands. I informed the workers who were overseeing the lunch distribution that I ordered our boxed meals online but we didn't receive any wristbands in our registration bags. They said they'd let us go through the line anyway. We figured out which line contained the sandwiches we ordered and got our lunch.
7. We took our boxed lunches to the worship center, sat down, and got ready to eat. Just as we were getting our food out, a person up front said eating was not allowed in the worship center. We had to put our food back in our boxes and go eat somewhere in the hallway outside the worship center. Eventually after all that, we finally had lunch.

- B. Caleb and I were unfamiliar with this conference along with the locations and process for how activities operated. We were learning on the fly. Finding our way wasn't easy and we made several mistakes along the way. For the first breakout session, we ended up in the wrong classroom only to look for the topic we wanted elsewhere.
- C. I'm sure most of us are familiar with the feeling of getting lost and wandering around in an unfamiliar place—perhaps when traveling. This imagery is used to describe our spiritual condition prior to following God. In Psalm 107, being lost in the wilderness is a description of the type of life that God rescues us from which is a reason to be thankful.
- D. In this passage of Scripture God's people are both commanded and encouraged to express a thankful attitude toward God because God expresses His lovingkindness to those who belong to Him. Those who desire more motivation to be thankful toward God can learn much about how to be more thankful from Psalm 107:4-9.

II. What is God's Lovingkindness?

- A. This Psalm uses the history of Israel to paint a picture of all people who have been spiritually rescued by God. While the Psalmist (writer/author of a Psalm—song) is speaking about real events that happened in the past, he is using these events to point to spiritual realities that are true of the people of God. There is a double meaning that is present throughout this psalm.
- B. It is intentional and significant that Psalm 107 starts with giving thanks to God because He is good and interacts with His people according to that goodness (v. 1).¹ It is as though the Psalmist is telling God's people to have a default attitude toward God that is filled with thankfulness because of who God is. Not only is thankfulness our default attitude toward God, it is expected and required by God which is why giving thanks is also a command. God is not being egotistical and narcissistic here, thankfulness is the proper response to God both because of who God is and because of what God has done. God doesn't demand gratitude arbitrarily; He expects it because He's earned it. This strong emphasis on thankfulness will become much more meaningful as the Psalm progresses. Even though there are very difficult situations being faced, those situations should not diminish the attitude of thankfulness toward God.
- C. From the command to "give thanks to the LORD" (v. 1) by those who have experienced God's goodness (v. 2), the author immediately jumps into adversities coming at the people of God from all sides. The enemies of God's people had taken them captive from the east, west, north, and south (v. 3). Yet, despite of the adverse circumstances, God brought all His people back to a place of blessing. This is the introduction of this Psalm. Following this introduction are four situations out of which God rescues His people (vv. 4-32). In each circumstances the difficulties of disobedience are outlined while the benefits of obedience are listed. There is a description of what we can learn from these types of situations and the consequences of either faithfulness or unfaithfulness toward God (vv. 33-42). Lastly, there is an encouragement to be wise (v. 43).
- D. It is as if the Psalmist wants the people of God to give thanks to God no matter what is happening in their life. Even if they are facing difficulties from all sides, they can still be thankful because God is good and acts according to His faithful love in all situations. The reason and

¹ Lovingkindness is the primary character trait and attitude with which God related to His people (Ex. 15:13).

motivation for an attitude of thankfulness is God’s goodness; more specifically, God’s lovingkindness to His people. What is lovingkindness? An unfailing kind of love, kindness, or goodness often used of God’s love related to faithfulness to His covenants.² The type of love that God loves His people with is a love that never fails (1 Cor. 13:8). It is a love that is always kind and does what is in our best interest without ever giving up or ceasing. God has an abundance of this type of love (Ex. 34:6-7). God’s love never runs out and it never abandons us, “For His lovingkindness is everlasting” (v. 1). This is the motivation and source of thankfulness. Following the reason for thankfulness, the Psalmist gives specific examples of God’s lovingkindness at work both in the life of Israel and in the life of the people of God.

- E. Is your thankfulness toward God sporadic at best? Is it depending on how you think God is treating you in the moment? Is it dependent on how your life is going? Mature disciples of Jesus learn how to live in an attitude of thankfulness toward God at all times, even in the most difficult moments of life. This will only be possible with a deep and expansive understanding of who God is and how He works in our lives.

III. Example of God’s Lovingkindness

- A. In the first example exemplifying God’s lovingkindness toward His people, the Psalmist puts the faithful love of God in terms of people who are wandering lost in the wilderness:

⁴ They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; They did not find a way to an inhabited city. ⁵ *They were* hungry and thirsty; Their soul fainted within them. ⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses. ⁷ He led them also by a straight way, To go to an inhabited city. ⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! ⁹ For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good. (Ps. 107:4-9)

- B. Remember, the author is not only talking about a historical event, he is drawing our attention to something God has done in the lives of His people which should lead them toward thankfulness.³ Since little is known about the author of this Psalm and the date of writing, although there is plenty of speculation, it is difficult to know whether the author has the time of the exodus out of Egypt in mind or a later wandering in Israel’s history—such as the Babylonian captivity. In either case, a group of God’s people who had to travel through wilderness areas is in view. Traveling in these areas could put people’s lives at risk due to lack of resources such as food and water, as well as other dangers. It was never good to remain in wilderness areas for long periods of time because it put people’s lives in danger.
- C. The people of God were found by God in an unpleasant spiritual condition in which, “they wandered in the wilderness in a desert region” (v. 4). This is a way of speaking of the aimlessness and purposeless living apart from God.⁴ The area in which the wandering is taking place is void of life as it is described as a “desert region”. The necessities of life are not present in such an environment. Food and water can’t be found. The specific destination and path out

² Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Ps. 107:8 “lovingkindness”

³ Wandering can communicate the idea of rebellion against God (Ps. 95:10, 119:110).

⁴ The idea of rebellion against God and His ways is made explicit in verse 11.

of this wasteland is not known which is why they “wandered”. While technically free, the people are trapped by their way of life.

- D. Plenty of people go through life with a lot of activity. They don’t feel aimless. They are pursuing many passions that they think will make them happy and lead to life such as family, career, money, sex, achievement, success, reputation, fitness and health, etc.⁵ However, the reality and outcome of these pursuits is that they don’t deliver the life they were hoping for. Even when a person achieves what they set out to achieve, their accomplishments don’t lead to satisfaction and fullness of life like they expected. While some people may even think they are satisfied with these things, the quality of life offered in God’s way of life is far superior. God provides deeper satisfaction and fullness of life compared to any other way of life. This can’t be adequately explained; it must be experienced. Through our obedience and faithfulness to God, He pours His life in us so that we become full on the inside. The satisfaction that results is incomparable. People living apart from God often don’t realize it but they are aimlessly wandering in the wilderness looking for satisfaction that can only be found in God. We are looking for soul satisfaction.
- E. As a practical result of living apart from God, the people, “did not find a way to an inhabited city” (v. 4). In this spiritual condition the people separated from God are not able to understand how to live in order to find fullness of life. They aren’t capable of finding the source of their deepest needs being met. An inhabited city provides everything that is needed to sustain life including safety, shelter, food, water, and clothing. It is much easier surviving in an inhabited city verses being in the wilderness. In the wilderness life is at risk, in the inhabited city, life is protected and flourishes. Even if an enemy attacks an inhabited city, there is strength in numbers and the fortified walls. A sense of discontentment and frustration is being communicated in this statement about not being able to find an inhabited city. Those who are wandering struggle to find what they are looking for.
- F. Individuals who live apart from God and His way of life are looking for something they will never find. There will always be an internal unrest and discontentment that they are trying to resolve. They will attempt to fix this lack of fulfillment in many different ways but these strategies will fail. At best, they will be able to suppress their internal discontentment temporarily for a time before it creeps back to the forefront of their consciousness. The strategy used won’t matter, they will all ultimately fail. It is impossible to find the true source of life and the quality of life we are created for apart from God.
- G. Another consequence of this purposeless living is the people living this way, “were hungry and thirsty” (v. 5). There is a lack of resources when it comes to living in rebellion against God and His ways. A person’s soul will come up empty eventually.⁶ No matter how hard they look, what they need to sustain their life and satisfy their soul, will be missing. A person’s most important needs will not be met apart from God. When life gets challenging individuals living apart from

⁵ Read the book of Ecclesiastes for a list of common pursuits where people try to find life, happiness, and satisfaction.

⁶ That the Psalmist has the soul in mind, instead of physical hunger and thirst, becomes obvious in the phrases, “thirsty soul” and “hungry soul” as God’s response to these individuals in verse 9.

God will reach their limit and run out of character, mental fortitude, or emotional capacity. The lack of inner soul nourishment will be felt in the lifestyle of the wilderness.

- H. If a person lives long enough separated from God they will become internally exhausted, “Their soul fainted within them” (v. 5). Like a person who engages in daily intense physical exercise without eating, a person who lives their life apart from God and His ways will run out of soul energy. The brave face they put on in front of others will no longer be possible. Pretending to be okay when they are not will cease because the resources required to do so will be gone. It may feel like their very life is being sucked dry. Those living inconsistently with God’s ways will have their life’s energy spill out when difficult circumstances enter their life. They won’t be able to cope with the challenges of life anymore. They will fall apart.
- I. In their desperation, individuals living in the wilderness will finally be humble enough to admit their need for God and His help, “Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble” (v. 6). It is the difficulties of life and the suffering involved that God uses to turn people’s hearts to Him. While people are content to ignore God when life is going well, they aren’t able to do so when life is painful. Through suffering, God helps people feel and understand their spiritual needs. He does this because He loves us. When life hurts, people turn toward God out of necessity—at least those who are open to it. Many wouldn’t do this under any other circumstance which is why they continued to live in the wilderness up until their soul faints in their trouble. As long as a person can rely on themselves, they are content ignoring God. Only when they are faced with a situation they can’t handle do they finally cry out to God.
- J. God’s lovingkindness is seen in the fact that He meets us right where we are when we are humble enough to cry out to Him in genuineness. Some people will “cry out to God” but only want to use Him to get out of the discomfort they are facing. They want God to use His abilities and authority to change their circumstance from unpleasant to pleasant. Then, when the situation changes, they immediately go back to living the way they were before: ignoring God. However, those who truly and authentically cry out to God and start living according to His ways, will be heard by God. He will respond to them not with indifference or condemnation but with compassion and assistance.

IV. God’s Lovingkindness to His Own

- A. How does God respond to all this? Does He abandon people when they get themselves into trouble by not doing what God tells them to do? He meets their cry for help with His lovingkindness. Every lack a person has while living in the wilderness, God gives to them in His loyal kindness and goodness. What we could not do on our own, God provides.
- B. God begins by moving people out of the difficulties they have created for themselves, “He delivered them out of their distresses” (v. 6). God rescues us from ourselves. The way of life in the wilderness will lead to problems and negative consequences. It brought these wanderers to a point of their soul fainting from hunger, thirst, and trouble. God rescues people from many of the negative consequences of living in rebellion against Him. Through God’s way of life, individuals are brought out of the wilderness and its corresponding issues. There is a lot of pain and heartache we cause ourselves by not knowing, ignoring, neglecting, or intentionally rebelling against God’s good advice found in the Bible.

- C. Instead of wandering aimlessly, “He led them also by a straight way” (v. 7). God provides His people with a flat and intentional path for and to life.⁷ God shows those who belong to Him how life should be lived in order for them to flourish and find true satisfaction. In His wisdom, God knows how to get humanity where it ultimately desires to go. He knows how our lives work in this world. He understands what is beneficial for us and what is destructive to us. The path to happiness looks different from what we think it will. Doing what God wants will lead us to where our hearts ultimately desire to go while doing what we want will not. God’s path is effective and reliable in accomplishing what He intends with it—unlike our way. God’s way is trustworthy.
- D. Doing life God’s way leads, “To go to an inhabited city” (v. 7). Life itself is found and results from doing marriage, work, recreation, life in general, and developing priorities God’s way. The life that people are hoping to find in the wilderness God provides in His way of life. Obedience to God’s instructions and commands result in finding a type of life that satisfies our soul. Internal discontentment is removed. The resources we need for life are found at the end of God’s path. We can have what we need if we find the requirements for life in the resources of God. Life flourishes in connection with God. Our way puts life at risk in the wilderness, God’s way gives the resources for life in a secure environment.
- E. Not only does God bring those who cry out to Him to life, He shows them a wonderful quality of life, “He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good” (v. 9). Peace, contentment, joy, and satisfaction are all experienced when our soul is filled with what is good. Instead of being hungry and thirsty in their soul, the person who cries out to God is both “satisfied” and “filled with what is good”. It is only when we rejoice in what is good that we can be truly satisfied in our soul. If a person delights in what God says is wrong, they may find some happiness or pleasure in their rebellion against God, it will not ultimately satisfy their soul because our souls are not designed to be fulfilled by evil—only good.
- F. God does not give a person everything they want because we want some things that either aren’t good or aren’t good for us even if what we desire is good. A good thing could have harmful effects on our soul and our pursuit of God. Some prayers go without an affirmative answer. Some desires are unfulfilled. Circumstances don’t always turn out the way we expected or hoped. But, in all these realities, God only gives us what is good so that we can be filled and satisfied in what is good. The more spiritually mature and obedient we become, the more satisfied our soul is. Sometimes, letting go of what we want is the very factor that results in deeper satisfaction in God. God’s ways, even when life is difficult, is intended to satisfy our soul in the long run.
- G. I could not have imagined the quality of life God was preparing me to experience when I first set out to follow Him in obedience. I changed the direction of my life to focus on God instead of myself, all while not being fully convinced at the time of the truth that is being communicated by Psalm 107. I only felt as if I was giving up what I wanted and I didn’t really expect to get anything as good in return. I thought God was simply taking the things that I enjoyed away from

⁷ The straight way can communicate the idea of obedience to the ways of God (Ezr. 8:21, Ps. 5:8, Jer. 31:9) which lead to healing (Heb. 12:13).

me. Boy was I wrong! Over the years God has given me an internal quality of life that has filled my soul and is satisfying in a much richer way than I could have imagined. This type of life is not dependent on my circumstances. It is present even in the most difficult seasons of life. The satisfaction of my soul and the joy resulting from it is not determined by life going my way but on God pouring His life into me. This quality of life exceeds the joy that would have been mine even if I got everything I was previously pursuing. The Christian life is full of challenges and burdens but these difficulties do not eliminate the life of satisfaction God provides. I can testify before you today that what the Psalmist is saying is true, I've experienced it in my own life. It doesn't happen overnight or with ease, but it does happen as we remain faithful to God's ways over time.

- H. Even if every area of our life is falling apart and crumbling all around us, disciples still have reason to be thankful to God for the spiritual advantages He has already provided to His spiritually adopted children. The benefits of our salvation are always present and no hardship can ever take them away. Therefore, there is always a reason to have an attitude of thankfulness toward God. This is why thankfulness is commanded in light of God's goodness and lovingkindness to us. This response of God to our cry for help is true of everyone who is part of the "redeemed". Every true disciple has not only personally experienced the lovingkindness of God, it is His constant attitude and disposition toward those who belong to Him. It is how He interacts with us.
- I. Be encouraged to follow the advice of this Psalm in order to be wise, "consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD" (Ps. 107:43). Directing our attention to God's lovingkindness will lead to greater depths of thankfulness toward God. While the Psalmist provides four different examples of God's lovingkindness using Israel's history, this list is not exhaustive. There are plenty of other concrete ways God has acted in and demonstrated His covenant faithful love toward you and me. In what other ways has God extended His loyal love toward me personally throughout my life? How has God satisfied your soul with what is good?

V. Conclusion

- A. My hope is that you will be absolutely convinced, "9 Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments;" (Dt. 7:9). This is a fact that we never have to doubt or question. I want you to be so thoroughly persuaded of this truth that you will cling to it no matter how difficult life becomes.
- B. God is abundantly good and He interacts with His own according to this goodness. God never gives us anything that is harmful or destructive. While we do experience unpleasantness in the Christian life, it is for our good and ultimately the growth and satisfaction of our soul. God uses everything that happens to us to fill us with what is good which makes us become like Jesus. This is why we give thanks to God.

VI. Questions for Further Thought

- A. What is the most meaningful experience of love you have ever had? What made that love good?
- B. How does God's lovingkindness fill the earth (Ps. 136)?

- C. Has there ever been a time when you doubted God's goodness or His good intentions for you? If so, when?
- D. What might be an example of someone valuing or holding onto something that hinders the satisfaction of their soul? What might "wilderness living" look like?
- E. How can a person be filled with what is good?