

Psalm 138

INTRODUCTION

We are in the Psalms for the 4th summer in a row (started this in 2022)

- book of Psalms is often referred to as the Psalter.

The book of Psalms is a collection of prayers sung by God's people.

- They offered Psalms/Songs to God in public worship.
- Think of the Psalter as a hymnbook of prayers.

The Psalms teach us to pray, giving us godly words for our fallen nature.

- Christopher Ash says, "They are Bible prayers. They are not just response; they are authorised response, the words God gives us with which to speak 'up' to Him. In other words, they teach us to pray."
- The Psalms are authorized prayers
- Athanasius wrote that the Psalms 'have a unique place in the Bible because most of the Scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak for us.'
- Jesus IS the Word, Jesus is the sum and subject of the Bible including Psalms, He tells the two on the road to Emmaus that that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled..." So... in a sense He is the Song leader of the Psalms.
- If Jesus is the Song leader of Psalms, we then are the choir!
- Augustine said, 'When you sing the Psalms, you are actually singing the songs of Jesus, with Jesus as your song leader.' Rather than listening to a choir of many singers, you are joining the choir. 'His song is being performed, and the rest join him in singing it.'
- Calvin said 'Christ is the great choirmaster who tunes our hearts to sing God's praises'
- Today we are looking at Psalm 138: The theme of this Psalm is thanking God with your whole heart.

OPEN

Have you ever thought, "I wish I could change the make up of my mind?"

***Vs 1** I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;*

- Gratitude has been shown to have profound impacts on brain function, often leading to positive changes in mindset and behavior, which can be contrasted with entitlement.

1. ****Brain Activity and Gratitude Practice:**** - A study by Brown and Wong (2017) at Indiana University used fMRI to observe brain activity in individuals who practiced gratitude through writing gratitude letters. They found that three months after starting this practice, these individuals showed greater activation in the medial prefrontal cortex when experiencing gratitude. This area is associated with learning, decision-making, and self-referential processing, indicating that gratitude can reshape how the brain processes emotions and social interactions over time.

2. ****Neural Mechanisms of Gratitude:**** - Research, such as that by Zahn et al. (2009), has identified that moral judgments involving gratitude activated the right anterior temporal cortex. ~~This suggests that gratitude is not just an emotional response but also involves complex cognitive processing related to moral and social evaluations.~~

3. ****Gratitude and Mental Health:**** - Emmons and McCullough (2003) pioneered much of the modern research on gratitude, finding that gratitude interventions can significantly improve well-being. Their work suggests that gratitude can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, partly by fostering a positive outlook and reducing negative thought patterns.

4. ****Long-term Effects on Brain Sensitivity:**** - The research by Brown and Wong also suggests that practicing gratitude may train the brain to be more sensitive to grateful experiences, potentially leading to long-term improvements in mental health. This is akin to neuroplasticity, where repeated behaviors can reshape neural pathways.

- “This shift is not just psychological but also neurological, with tangible changes in brain activity that support improved mental health and social interactions.”
- This can lead to a more positive feedback loop in the brain, where gratitude enhances feelings of well-being, which in turn encourages more grateful behaviors. –
- The Bible is not scientific study, it’s the word of God and is our highest authority – science, in these cases, are only saying what the Bible has been saying for centuries.

Vs 1b with my whole heart;

Psalm 86:11–12 (ESV) 11 *Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. 12*

- A divided heart steals away our gratitude which then robs us of mental stability.

Wholehearted thanksgiving transforms your mind

Vs 1c *before the gods I sing your praise;*

before the gods. This could refer to the angels, as the Greek Septuagint took it and the setting is worship in the temple, others suppose these are human rulers/judges, while still others think these are false deities.

- Bottom line... all other gods are little 'g' gods compared to the LORD
- When our heart is whole toward the LORD all other gods are little g gods and we burst into praise.

Vs 2 *I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.*

Deuteronomy 12:5 (ESV) *5 But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go,*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV) *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Colossians 3:15-17 (ESV) *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Ephesians 5:18-20 (ESV) *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Philippians 4:6 (ESV) *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- Application: start a gratitude journal

Vs 3-5 *On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased. 4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth, 5 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.*

- “Mueller had over fifty thousand specific recorded answers to prayers in his journals, thirty thousand of which he said were answered the same day or the same hour that he prayed them.”
- “If I say that during the fifty-four years and nine months that I have been a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ I have had thirty thousand answers to prayer [each meticulously recorded in his journal], either in the same hour or the same day that the requests were made, I should not go a particle too far.”
- What is keeping you from praying? A divided heart?
- Even kings are changed when they recognize His Glory

Vs 6 *For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.*

1 Peter 5:5 (ESV): Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

- One way to humble yourself is to give thanks to God!

****Contrast with Entitlement:**** - Entitlement, often characterized by a sense of deservingness without reciprocal gratitude, has been linked to different neural and psychological patterns. Studies, such as those by Campbell et al. (2004), indicate that entitlement can lead to increased stress, dissatisfaction, and strained relationships due to a focus on self-interest rather than appreciation of others' contributions.

Vs 7-8 *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. 8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.*

- David “walked in the midst of trouble” during the greater part of his life. When the persecution of Saul was over, he had trouble from foreign enemies (2 Sam. 5–12); when these were subdued, his domestic troubles began (2 Sam. 13–19; 2 Kings 6:33). God, however, from time to time “gave him a reviving.”
- We should be thankful (with a whole heart) in the both good times and bad times.

Colossians 2:15 (ESV) 15 *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

Question 1: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

CONCLUSION

- Giving thanks for the ultimate gift – salvation. The Love of God (hesed), crushing our enemy, rescuing and redeeming our souls fulfilling his purpose. AND it endures forever.

Practice together through praying the psalm

God, I thank you for _____

Vs 3 On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.

Lord, increase the strength of my soul in the area of _____,

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

1. Have you been in a funk, anxious, fearful, depressed, etc. lately? How does thanksgiving to God change that?
2. Take time to practice praying Psalm 138 and giving thanks.