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## IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD

Psalm 92

By

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Bruce and Jan Benson are Bible translators, serving in Peru. Several years ago, they were driving down an Andean road with their 14 year-old son when they came around a switchback and came bumper to bumper with a truckload of people. Suddenly, these people brandished rifles at the Bensons, who realized that they had encountered the brutal terrorist organization, Shining Path. Jan thought, "This is it! This is the end of our lives!"

The terrorists forced them out of their car and transported them to a nearby town. On the way, fearful and bewildered, Jan felt the need to pray and even to sing praises to God. Jan described it,

It began as a trickle. A presence that said, "The Lord inhabits the praises of His people." "But Lord, I don't know how to praise you right now." "Sing," came the thought. "At least you can sing." The words were there as I needed them: "You are my hiding place. You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid I will trust in you... Trust and obey... Jesus, name above all names... Emmanuel, God is with us..."

Suddenly I felt as though I was the only person alive on earth, just me and God. The others were simply part of an unreal puppet play, dangling from the strings of the Enemy... I felt an all-encompassing love. God reassured me that He was in control, that nothing could remove me from His loving presence—not even death itself.

That night the terrorists unexpectedly released the Bensons—but not without first confiscating their car, their portable projection equipment and film reels of the "New Media Bible," which is based on the book of Luke (the same film material that makes up the "Jesus" film).

One year passed. The Bensons had moved to the capital for safety and to take on administrative roles. Jan received a phone call. One of their captors had become a Christian and wanted to meet

with them. Face-to-face he told them he was an experienced killer, and that he and the others had planned on killing them all. But, for some reason they just could not do it and instead released them.

He told Bruce and Jan that soon after arriving at their base, the rebels set up the projector and watched the film, eventually many times. At one viewing, several hundred terrorist rebels were watching! The Word of God in the film, understood in their own language, reached into the men's hardened hearts. Many were so moved that they wanted to lay down their arms right there and leave "The Shining Path." Now, standing before them as a fellow believer, their former enemy asked forgiveness for what he had done to them that day. Eventually, Bruce and Jan were able to go back into the mountains to do a final "read through" of the entire New Testament in the Huamalies Quechua language, the last key step before it went to press (told by Roy Peterson, Wycliffe Bible Translators newsletter, 11/27/2001).

Sometimes it is very difficult to praise the Lord. Sometimes you just don't feel like it. Probably none of us have ever been in the kind of frightening, life-threatening situation the Benson's were in. But even in the most difficult of situations, the psalmist would still tell us (Ps. 92:1), "It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High." You may wonder, "Why is it good to give thanks to the Lord when you face difficult trials? Why is it good to sing praises to His name when evil people seem to be prospering?" The psalmist here gives us three reasons:

It is good to give thanks to the Lord because of who He is and what He has done; because He will triumph over the wicked; and, because He causes the righteous to flourish.

He makes the first point in verses 1-5; the second point in verses 6-9; and, the third point in verses 10-15. We don't know the author of the psalm. Many think that it was David. Others think that it was written after the exile, when the Jews returned to the land. It is titled, "A Psalm, A Song for the Sabbath day." I'm not sure why *this* psalm was better suited for the Sabbath than many other psalms, but the rabbis designated it to be sung especially on that day when the Jews gathered for worship. Derek Kidner observes (*Psalms 73-150* [IVP], p. 334), "This *Song for the Sabbath* is proof enough, if such were needed, that the Old Testament sab-

bath was a day not only for rest but for corporate worship ... and intended to be a delight rather than a burden." John Calvin (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], on Psalm 92, p. 493) says, "The Psalmist would teach us that the right observance of the Sabbath does not consist in idleness, as some absurdly imagine, but in the celebration of the Divine name."

The psalm addresses the problem of the prosperity of the wicked, a frequent theme in the Psalms (37, 49, 73). But here, rather than being troubled by it (as was the author of Ps. 73), the psalmist confidently portrays the wicked as growing up like grass, flourishing briefly, and then being destroyed forever. But the righteous will flourish into old age to declare God's praise. The solution is the same as in Psalm 73. There the author was troubled by the prosperity of the wicked, until he came into the sanctuary of God, where he perceived their end of destruction. Here, the author is in the temple already, praising God from the vantage point that the earlier psalmist had to struggle to attain.

1. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord because of who He is and what He has done (92:1-5).

*Good* seems like too weak of a word for giving thanks and praise to the Most High God. In what sense is it *good*? It's good in the sense of Psalm 147:1, "Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and praise is becoming." Or, Psalm 33:1 exclaims, "Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones; praise is becoming to the upright." C. H. Spurgeon said (*The Treasury of David* [Eerdmans], 4:263), "It is good ethically, for it is the Lord's right; it is good emotionally, for it is pleasant to the heart; it is good practically, for it leads others to render the same homage." J. J. S. Perowne (*The Book of Psalms* [Zondervan], 2:178-179) said, "It is a good thing, *i.e.* a delightful thing, not merely acceptable to God, but a real joy to the heart." The psalmist gives us five ways that it is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord:

- A. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord because He rightly deserves it.

God is Yahweh, the covenant-keeping Lord. Yahweh is used seven times in this psalm for the seventh day. He is also the Most High, which translates the Hebrew, *EI Elyon*, a name frequently

attributed to God. Melchizedek, the mysterious king who blessed Abram, was a priest of "God Most High, the Possessor [or, Creator] of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:18-19). Psalm 97:9 proclaims, "For You are the Lord Most High over all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods" ("gods" refers to idols or demons).

This leads me to ask, "Is the Lord God *your* Most High?" Is He the highest, most important, most central and controlling Being in your life? If not, why not? He is the one who spoke the universe into existence. It all belongs to Him. He is over every created thing. If you do not thank and praise Him as *your* Lord Most High, you are guilty of horrible ingratitude! He alone rightly deserves all praise and glory because He is the Lord Most High.

B. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord at all times.

"To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning and Your faithfulness by night" (92:2). That is a poetic way of saying that it is good to declare God's praise at all times. Calvin (p. 494) notes that we never lack matter for praising God, unless we're too lazy to see it, because His goodness and faithfulness are incessant. Begin your day by declaring God's loyal love to you as the thought to govern your day. End your day by thanking Him for His faithfulness as He showed it to you by getting you through the day.

C. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord for His lovingkindness and faithfulness.

God's lovingkindness (His loyal covenant love) and His faithfulness are frequently mentioned together in the Psalms as reasons to praise Him. There are many others, but note just three:

Psalm 36:5, "Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies."

Psalm 57:10: "For Your lovingkindness is great to the heavens and Your truth [same Hebrew word as *faithfulness*] to the clouds."

Psalm 89:1: "I will sing of the lovingkindness of the Lord forever; to all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth."

If you think daily about the Lord's loyal love and His faithfulness towards you, you will have abundant reasons to praise Him.

D. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord musically, with instruments and voice.

Verses 1 & 4 mention singing with our voices and verse 3 mentions different instruments: "With the ten-stringed lute and with the harp, with resounding music upon the lyre." Somewhat strangely (in my opinion), both Calvin and Spurgeon opposed the use of instruments to accompany congregational singing. That tradition goes back as far as the middle of the fourth century, as reported by the church historian Eusebius (Spurgeon, 4:271). Matthew Henry expresses his view that while there may be accompaniment, it should not be too upbeat (his word was *gay*), but had to be solemn and grave (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* [Revell], 3:591)! But I agree with James Boice (*Psalms, Volume 2* [Baker], p. 757) that these men were simply expressing a preference, not a biblical mandate. Psalm 150 pulls out the stops and commands praising God with every conceivable instrument! But the instruments should not drown out the words, which should express the truth about God's greatness and love.

E. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord because His great works have made us glad.

"For You, O Lord, have made me glad by what You have done, I will sing for joy at the works of Your hands. How great are Your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep" (92:4, 5). Note three things:

(1) God's great works include creation, salvation, and providence.

The title of the psalm hints at the work of creation, since it was on the seventh day of creation that God rested from His works. Even unbelievers should marvel as they study the intricate design and beauty of God's creation, since it displays His invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature (Rom. 1:20). God's work of salvation or redemption is implied by His lovingkindness, His loyal covenant love towards His people. And His work of providence is seen in how He destroys evildoers (92:7, 9, 11), while causing His people to flourish (92:10, 12-14). Contemplating God's great works in creation, salvation, and His providential care for you should make you sing for joy and be glad.

(2) God's great works stem from His deep thoughts.

"Your thoughts are very deep" (92:5b). As Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" Or, as Paul exclaims (Rom. 11:33), "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

Here the psalmist is especially referring to the way that God allows the wicked to flourish for a time, while the righteous suffer. We would not govern the world in this way. If God would only let us be in charge, we'd fix this injustice! Why doesn't He listen to us? But the psalmist says that if we think that way, we are senseless and stupid, because we are forgetting that the wicked only sprout up and flourish for a short time, only to be destroyed forever. And, we're forgetting that God reigns on high forever (92:6-9).

(3) God's great works make us glad.

This is the bottom line: When we think about God's great works in creation, salvation, and providence, and we contemplate His unsearchable judgments and unfathomable ways, it makes us glad, so that we sing for joy (92:4). Thus the psalmist's first point is that it is good to give thanks and praise to God because of who He is and what He has done.

2. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord because He will triumph over the wicked (92:6-9).

These verses make two points, that the wicked will perish and that they in no way threaten the Lord, who reigns on high.

A. The senseless wicked, who will shortly perish, do not understand God's ways (92:6-7, 9).

"A senseless man has no knowledge, nor does a stupid man understand this: that when the wicked sprouted up like grass and all who did iniquity flourished, it was only that they might be destroyed forevermore" (92:6-7). "For, behold, Your enemies, O Lord, for, behold, Your enemies will perish; all who do iniquity will be scattered" (92:9).

Although the wicked often seem to flourish, we need to keep the eternal perspective. They flourish for a brief moment, but their misery will be forever. The destruction of the wicked does not mean that they will be annihilated and cease to exist. Jesus makes it clear that they will go into eternal punishment, whereas the righteous go into eternal life (Matt. 25:46). He uses the same word to describe both states. If eternal life is eternal, then so is eternal punishment. It is senseless and stupid to forget eternity and live in rebellion against God for a few fleeting years of pleasure in sin!

B. God on high is not thwarted in any way by the wicked (92:8).

Verse 8 is a single line that serves as the hinge verse of the psalm and the central fact on which the entire psalm rests: "But You, O Lord, are on high forever." Perowne points this out and then adds, "This is the great pillar of the universe and of our faith" (p. 179). God is the Most High. He is on high, not worried about the schemes of the wicked. As the humbled Nebuchadnezzar declares (Dan. 4:35), "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

Thus, it is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord because of who He is and what He has done (92:1-5). It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord because He will triumph over the wicked (92:6-9). Finally,

3. It is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord because He causes the righteous to flourish (92:10-15).

The theme of these final verses is that God will cause the righteous to flourish, not for a short time like the wicked, but for many years. Note four ways that the righteous flourish:

A. God grants the righteous strength and refreshing renewal (92:10).

"But You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil." The horn was a symbol of strength. It was also used as a container to pour out the oil of anointing. This anointing oil was used to consecrate the priests for service and to anoint the king to office. It was also a picture of soothing re-

freshment and joy (Ps. 23:5; 45:7; 133:2). If you know the Lord as your Shepherd, then you have experienced His strength and renewal when you have been weary and oppressed.

B. God grants the righteous victory over his enemies (92:11).

The psalmist rejoices, "And my eye has looked exultantly upon my foes, my ears hear of the evildoers who rise up against me." God did not protect the psalmist from having any enemies. Rather, after some unspecified period of trial, he could now say that God had vanquished his enemies. As believers in Christ, we are not guaranteed a peaceful existence in the sense of not having to fight against the evil forces of darkness. Rather, we are promised victory in the battle as we put on God's armor and trust in Him.

C. God grants the righteous stability, growth, and spiritual fruitfulness (92:12-14).

Kidner explains (p. 337), "The *palm tree* is the embodiment of graceful erectness; the *cedar*, of strength and dignity." Both are evergreens, picturing year-round stability. Both are planted in the house or courts of the Lord. The houses in Israel were often built in a square, with an open courtyard in the middle. Trees planted there were protected from harsh winds and freezing temperatures. They provided shade from the summer heat. The psalmist adds (92:14) that these trees "will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green."

Spurgeon has an entire sermon on these verses, but I must limit myself to saying that the overall picture is that God causes the righteous to flourish, even into old age. I would encourage those of you who are younger in the Lord to sit in the shade and get to know some of the older "palm trees and cedars" who have been planted in the courts of the Lord's house and are still bearing fruit for Him. You will be blessed!

D. God grants the righteous the joy of declaring His praise (92:15).

These old, flourishing trees in God's house "declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." *Declare* is the same word used in verse 2, thus forming an inclusion, bringing the psalm full cycle. The testimony of God's being upright, with no unrighteousness in Him, is in light of the

momentary flourishing of the wicked. They do not detract from God's absolute righteousness, in that they will show forth His perfect justice in their damnation. Those who have walked with God for years will declare that He is their rock, the firm foundation that has enabled them to stand firm through many trials. And as they pass through the waters of death, with Hopeful (in *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan [Spire Books], p. 141) they will cry out, "Be of good cheer, my brother; I feel the bottom, and it is good."

### Conclusion

Years ago, there was a Scottish Presbyterian minister who was orthodox in his theology, but very reserved in the pulpit. God blessed him with one woman in his congregation who was exceptionally warmhearted and full of love for the Savior. She was in the habit of exclaiming, "praise the Lord," or "hallelujah," when she was blessed by something in his sermon.

This bothered the pastor, so one New Year's Day he went to her and said, "Betty, I'll make you a promise. If you will stop saying "praise the Lord" and "hallelujah" during my sermons this year, I'll give you the two woolen blankets that I hear you've been wanting." Betty was poor and the offer sounded so good she promised to try. Sunday after Sunday she kept quiet.

But one Sunday the pastor had a guest preacher fill in. This man was bubbling over with zeal for the Lord. As he spoke on the forgiveness of sins and the blessings of salvation, Betty's joy grew brighter and brighter and her vision of the blankets began to fade. At last she could stand it no longer. She leaped to her feet and cried, "Blankets or no blankets, Hallelujah!" (From "Our Daily Bread," 10/77.)

As we gather on the Lord's Day, the psalmist wants us to know (92:1), "It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High." It is good because of who God is and what He has done. It is good because He will triumph over the wicked. And, it is good because He causes the righteous to flourish in His courts.

## Application Questions

1. Is it hypocrisy to praise the Lord when you don't feel like it? How can God command it if, in part, it's a feeling?
2. How can a person who is prone to depression develop a habit of praising God? What practical steps should he take?
3. Does praising God for His triumph over the wicked mean that we gloat when the wicked are judged? What does it mean?
4. How can a non-musical person praise the Lord in song and with instruments? What practical advice would you offer?

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