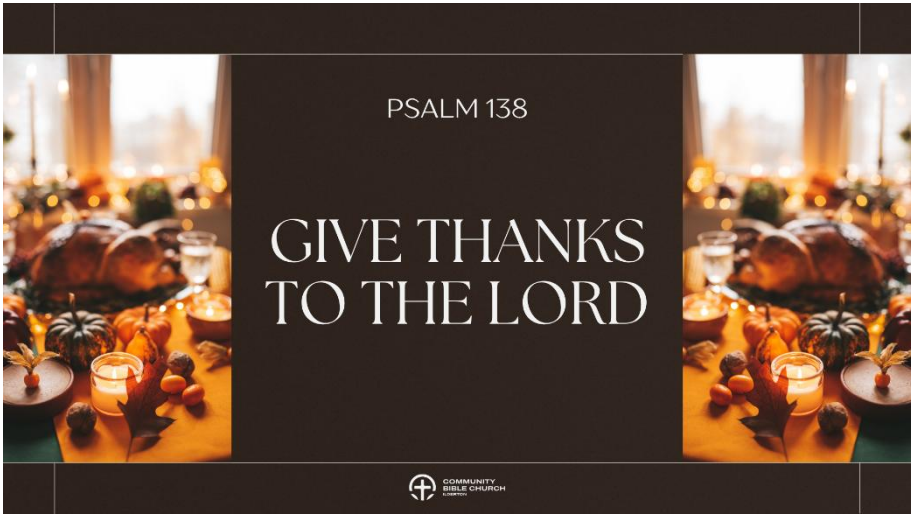


INTRO

Are you thankful this morning? Rain is a good test case for thankfulness, isn't it? Because rain can cancel plans, but farmers are always happy with rain. So we thank God for the rain because it is good for *some*one, if not for us.

This is, of course, Thanksgiving Sunday. In our culture, we set this day aside to give thanks. This tradition has Christian roots, and this makes sense. As we've seen in numerous Psalms and in the NT as well, giving thanks to God is constantly interwoven into Scripture's narrative. As I mentioned in a previous sermon, a life of gratitude results in both spiritual and physical benefits.

This morning, we'll look at another Psalm about giving thanks to the Lord. First, because he exalts himself above all things. Second, because he regards the lowly. Third, because he preserves his people in the midst of trouble.

1. Thank the Lord Because He Exalts Himself Above All Things (vv. 1-3)

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

Has someone ever started a conversation with you with thanks, and you just knew a "but" coming? "I just want to thank you for filling out those reports. I really appreciate it… but… you did it all wrong." That's not the kind of thankfulness David is expressing here.

This is whole-hearted thankfulness. Complete thankfulness. This is not thankful "but" or thankful "except." This is unreserved thankfulness.

I can tell you what half-hearted thankfulness looks like… I do not generally find it hard to be thankful, but I always seem to hedge. I struggle to give thanks with my whole heart, to be unreserved in my thankfulness.

Years ago, when we lived in Aylmer, we had a small backyard and just beyond our fence was a three-story apartment complex, with balconies... people sitting on balconies, smoking, talking, looking at us... Quite a view, right?

Well, a few years later, we had the opportunity to move out of that house and into a house in the country owned by my in-laws. This house has a 20-acre backyard lined with trees. When I looked out the back window, I could see horses, a field, trees, a windmill, and we often saw deer as well. What a view! If you don't already have a view like that, wouldn't you like to have that kind of view?

But here is what I also saw: My father-in-law, who owned the property and likes to collect... stuff... had also parked an old school portable in the middle of all that, and it partially obscured my view.

By partially, I mean I could still fully see everything, but if I looked in the direction of the portable, I could see that, and it aggravated me! So, for the first couple of years we lived there, that one slightly less-than-ideal condition was too often the focus of my attention. I would regularly say something like, "What a great view - except for that stupid portable!"

And I realized: How ungrateful is that?! I was surrounded by so much space and beauty, yet I focused on one ugly exception. That's half-hearted gratitude at best, but it is really closer to ingratitude.

Do you do this as well? Do you look at your property, or maybe the conditions of your life, and fail to offer God whole-hearted thanks because you see one or two unsatisfactory conditions?

That's not what David does here. He proclaims his whole-hearted worship. I am positive that not everything was perfect in his life either, but he gives thanks with his whole heart. He is praising God, showing his gratitude in every area of his life.

Before the Gods

Even in the part of his life that he lived in public. He lived near other nations who worshiped false gods, and God's people were often tempted to join in worshipping these false gods. Indeed, as you read the OT, they often did, in fact, succumb to these temptations. But David doesn't hesitate to publicly sing praise to the one true God. He is not ashamed and not afraid.

Some of Israel's kings, out of fear or a desire for acceptance, were not faithful to God. They attempted to appease the surrounding nations by worshiping their gods or at least mixing together the worship of false gods with the worship of Jehovah. When they did

this, the outcome was always bad. A lack of trust in God will always lead us down a path of destruction.

But King David thanks and trusts God with his whole heart. And he is not afraid to flaunt his faith.

Is the same true for us, or are we afraid? We are not surrounded by nations who worship false gods in the same way, but we are surrounded by people who do not worship God and instead give their time, money, effort—their worship— to what is not God, or to what God has created. In other words, we are surrounded by people whose priorities are very different from our own.

David sings his praise to God before the gods. He worships his God, the one true God, in places where people who worship other gods can see and hear him. How bold are we in our public worship of God? Are we confident that our God is superior to the competition out there?

From public worship among pagans, he now turns to worship in the holy temple of God.

> *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.*

He will set an example not only before those who worship other gods, but before those who also worship his God.

The psalmist gives thanks to God for his steadfast love. God's immovable love, love that will stand through trial and adversity and struggle. God's love for us is steadfast. It is firm and unwavering. He thanks God for his faithfulness. His loyalty to us even though we

have often proved our disloyalty to him. David knows how and how often he has failed in his faithfulness, and this causes him to give greater thanks for God's faithfulness.

Why does he thank God for these attributes? Because, "You have exalted above all things your name and your word."

Now, this seems an odd thing to be thankful for. We certainly would not be thankful for this attribute in another human being. Another human who exalts their own name and their own words is unpleasant to be around. We would call such a person conceited, proud, self-centred, arrogant, narcissistic. So why do we not think of God that way when he does the same?

When a human does this, what is being exalted is imperfect and tainted by sin. And when imperfections are exalted, when we take pride in areas of our lives that are out of alignment with God, these sins begin to grow exponentially in our lives and spread like a virus from there and go on to negatively affect those around us. This is, in fact, the key component in the sinfulness of our own society. People have made idols out of their own names, their own imperfect words, their own corrupt ideas and preferences. They've made an idol, a false god of these ideologies, of feelings and of emotions and they are determined to worship these false gods to the exclusion of all others.

God, on the other hand, exalts above all things HIS name and HIS word, and when he does this, what is being exalted is the only source of true perfection and pure holiness. What could be better for us than that the perfectly holy God has revealed himself to us? Not only has he revealed himself, but he continues to reveal himself, to exalt himself, to promote himself and his goodness and his perfection to us. There is no greater good than this. And so this is another reason for us to be thankful.

It is not arrogance on God's part to exalt his name and his word; it is grace. He displays his perfection to us and then freely offers himself to us. This is the highest good possible. And it is for this highest good that the psalmist is thankful.

Now this was written before the coming of Christ. So we have reason for additional gratitude, because not only do we have his word, we have the Word made flesh. It should grow our gratitude to know that those to whom this was originally written would envy our position. They looked forward to the one who would come as the embodiment of God, but they couldn't fathom exactly what he would accomplish. We, on the other hand, know who Jesus is and all that he accomplished. To know the one who was the word of God, the perfect representation of God - that is a great blessing and something to be thankful for!

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

He goes on to express that he is thankful that God listens and that he responds. God hears us. Charles Spurgeon remarks that, "Our heavenly Father is able to interpret tears, and cries, and he replies to their inner sense in such a way as fully meets the case."[1] God hears what we say, but he also hears what is going on in us that we don't even fully understand or have difficulty expressing. Paul would later say it this way in Romans 8:26: *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."*

God responds to us, and for this we should be thankful. And not only does he respond, he strengthens our souls by his responses. He

[1] The Treasury of David, Vol. 3, p245

enables us to persevere through hardship, to endure the inevitable trials and temptations that we know will come.

When it comes to burdens, to the heavy loads we carry in life, which is better, for a burden to be removed or for strength to be given to bear the weight of the burden? Of course, at times the relief of a burden removed is just what we need. But while it is nice at times to have a burden removed completely, this does not increase our strength in preparation for the next burden we'll need to carry.

Those who exercise and lift weights know how this works with our bodies. If every time we encounter a weight that is making movement more difficult, we simply avoid the weight, we will never build enough strength to lift that weight. If, however, we are determined to lift that weight repeatedly, we will soon find that, due to our increased strength, an even greater weight is now necessary to challenge us.

It is in this same way, in my experience, that God builds our spiritual strength, and with it our capacity to carry greater weight. Strength is not built by inaction, so we should be thankful for the challenges that come our way that offer opportunities to build our strength. Again, Paul had a deep understanding of this, as he shows when he writes in Romans 5:3-5, saying, *"...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*

Spurgeon points out this truth when he says: "It may not be best for us that the trial should come to an end; it may be far more to our advantage that by its pressure we should learn patience. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and our prudent Father in heaven will not

deprive us of those benefits."[2] Another way of saying that God has his way and his timing for the strengthening of our souls. Sometimes his way is a period of testing or a particular trial.

He exalts himself above all things so we will know that he will sovereignly bring good out of every trial and affliction. Jesus clearly demonstrated the same in his time on earth. Even in the story we looked at last week about him calming the storm, we see his sovereignty. He is above all things, natural and supernatural, and this is for our good.

2. Thank the Lord Because He Regards the Lowly (vv. 4-6)

The psalmist now switches from looking inward to looking outward

> *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.*

He looks to the future universal acknowledgement of God's greatness by the kings and rulers of the earth. They will hear the words of God's mouth and give thanks to God. Kings and rulers, politicians and Prime Ministers are converted in the same way as everyone else: faith comes by hearing, the Bible says.

Imagine if that happened in our land. Imagine the changes we'd see if those who govern us would seek God and his word as their primary source of wisdom. Imagine the changes in our laws and in our

[2] The Treasury of David, Vol. 3, p24were5

society if God's wisdom were held as the supreme source of guidance for action.

If this happened, the pattern of thanks and singing praise would be replicated on a national scale! Then their response would be the same as King David's: they would give thanks and sing.

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

The Bible consistently teaches that God gives grace to the humble, but he opposes the proud. God is close to the meek but distant from the brash and arrogant.

Think again of God's perfection. Why is our humility before God so important? One aspect of humility is acknowledging our imperfection in view of his perfection. When we properly understand his sovereignty and authority over us, then we are in the realm of humility. We are set free to be used by him by accepting the truth that he is infinitely superior to us.

Pride, then, is our putting ourselves forth as somehow comparable to him in perfection. This is a losing battle in this life and for eternity if we continue to fight.

When a young child play-fights with his father, the difference in size and strength is obvious. The child won't win the fight anytime soon, but someday he will grow to be more powerful than his father. But as God's children, we never grow in strength in this way compared to God. He is infinitely more powerful, and he is *eternally* infinitely more powerful. We may strive against him all our lives and never make a single step of progress in our ability to overcome him. We will never overcome him; he cannot be overcome.

This is why pride is a particularly damning sin, and is at the root of other sins. Unless we repent of pride, and then continually repent of our ongoing pride, life will be one long unwinnable struggle against God in this life, while his arms remain open, and an eternally unwinnable struggle against God in the next life when repentance is no longer an option.

Jesus, too, was and is for the humble and against the proud. Jesus was the ultimate example of humility. Phil. 2:8 - *"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* Jesus was for the lowly, and he proved this over the course of his ministry.

Our humility is rooted in the knowledge that Christ took our place of punishment on the cross and freely offered us salvation. Since this was not our doing, we have no reason to boast.Christ is near to those who cling to this truth and place their faith in him.

3. Thank the Lord Because He Preserves His People in the Midst of Trouble (vv. 7-8)

David turns again to his own life.

> *7 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.*

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble..." Now, that puts him on equal footing with us. We are not reading the words of someone who didn't encounter hardship. But listen to his words of gratitude for God's action in his life in three ways: to preserve, protect and rescue.

1. **Preservation - “you preserve my life”**

This is the season for preserves because it is the season of harvest, and there are a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables around. And so many engage in the process of preserving these fruits and vegetables by canning them. What happens to a cucumber if you leave it out for 6 months? It rots. But if you put it in a jar, pour hot brine in with it, and seal it, you can eat it later, and it will be nice and crunchy, not rotten. We engage in a process of treating cucumbers so they do not rot and become useless.

God engages in a similar process with us. He knows what will result in the preservation of our lives, and this is what he brings into our lives for our good. If a cucumber had emotions, I'm sure it would be terrified at the prospect of being submerged in hot liquid inside a sealed jar. Yet this is what preserves it.

Something like this happens to us as well. And God's ways and his wisdom are so much higher than ours that in some periods of our lives we understand what's happening to us about as well as the cucumber understands what's happening to it when it's being made into a pickle! And yet this is how God preserves our lives.

2. **Protection - “you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies”**

People get angry with us; sometimes they want to see us stumble and suffer. God is able to protect us from the angry outbursts of those who seek to do us harm. For David, the threat of physical violence was very real. For most of us, it's not that real, but threats of other types of harm are real. And God is able to protect us from those threats.

3. **Rescue - “your right hand delivers me**

God is able to protect us from danger, but if we do find ourselves in danger, he is able to rescue us from it. For David, these dangers were often physical and spiritual. We do not often need to be rescued from physical danger, but what about spiritual danger? We can be held captive by sin, often even by sin we willingly submitted to and participated in.

Finally, we read this:

> *8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;*
> *your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.*
> *Do not forsake the work of your hands.*

This is our ultimate hope, our ultimate security: "The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me." This is the same promise in Jer. 29:11. This is not a promise for everyone; it is a promise for those who belong to him. He has a purpose for us. There is a point to our lives. We need to believe this, and we need to be reminded that this is true.

I often preach about resting in God's sovereignty not because it is something of an automatic habit in my life but because I keep forgetting. I get anxious when adversity rears its head, and I forget how faithful God has been through all of my previous adversity.

I live in a cycle: God is faithful, and life is good, and I am thankful. I then move on, forgetting what I was thankful for. But the Psalmists and other biblical writers developed a habit of rehearsing and remembering God's acts of faithful guidance, deliverance, and discipline. I suspect they did this for the reason that they too were prone to forget that God is always good and always at work in our world and our lives.

And God is in the habit of completing what he starts. God leaves none of his work permanently half-finished or completely undone.

He is not like us that way. Think about that. How many half-finished projects have you got going at home? A bathroom half-renovated, a garage half-cleaned, a car half-taken apart, a collection half-sorted, a room half-tidied. These projects are all stuck, and you know, and I both know, that we have neglected them for a long time and that they may never, in fact, get done!

But God is not like that. All of God's projects—and we are his projects—move constantly toward completion and perfection. There is not one day when you are neglected by him. Even in those days when you don't feel his presence, he is slowly but surely moving you toward completion and perfection. During those periods of affliction, he is moving you forward in your sanctification.

You may be an un*finished* project, but you are not a forgotten, forsaken or neglected project. Even though at times we resist him, even then he is on the move for your good and is able to bring good out of what would otherwise be wasted.

Again, this is echoed in the New Testament in Phil. 1:6: *"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" God's steadfast love was demonstrated and continues to be demonstrated by the gift of his Son. He is the one who preserves us in the midst of trouble. Not only that, but he rescues us from the eternal trouble of separation from God. That's another promise we can count on and be thankful for.

Conclusion

Now, like me, you're probably quick to affirm these truths: that God is good, that he cares, that he is sovereign and omnipotent and because of that there is no reason for us to fear or have anxiety. We all agree, right?

And then, after affirming this, within days or maybe hours, a cloud of circumstances rolls in over your life, and you are again struggling with fear and anxiety. And you spin your mind around those fears and anxieties as if they are completely on your shoulders, and there is no one more powerful than you who is governing these circumstances and watching over you. We forget often that we are under God's fatherly protection.

And we cannot be truly thankful for that which we constantly forget. When we forget about God's love and care and power, we obviously then also neglect to be thankful for these things. And I think this is probably hardwired into humanity and that it is likely one consequence of the fall. And I believe this is why the Bible is threaded through from front to back with reminders. Remember God, his goodness, his deliverance, his sacrifice, his salvation, his power, his sovereignty, his superiority, his love, his kindness... If you are reading his word regularly, you will be regularly reminded to remember all of these.

Here's a thought... It is good, of course, for us to remember all these things, but how often do you remember and consider his goodness and other attributes and thank God for them while life is going along smoothly and nothing much is going wrong? If you're like me, times when the road is smooth are times when it's easiest to forget. So, could this be one reason God allows affliction into our lives?

As forgetful as we are, when life is good, we steadily become more self-reliant. But when conditions change, and our self-reliance is exposed as a false security, then we move from confidence to worry to anxiety to debilitating stress. When we've tried all the quick fixes, and nothing has worked, at some point we remember again. You remember that God really is sovereign and in control, and because of this you surrender all your self-help and self-reliance and self-soothing, out of frustration that none of it is working! And you

remember again that you have a heavenly Father who is stronger than your fear.

When we forget his goodness, we forget to be thankful for his goodness.

We have so much to be thankful for. We are thankful first and foremost that, as imperfect beings, we have a perfect God who has revealed himself to us and makes himself available to us. Surely we should be thankful

Look, in this one psalm, at all that we have to be thankful for. I find 13 reasons to be thankful in this one Psalm...

- That his love is steadfast
- That he is perfectly faithful
- That he exalts himself above all things
- That he answers when we call
- That he strengthens our souls
- That he has given us his word
- That he takes notice of the humble
- That he stands against the proud
- That he preserves our lives
- That he protects us
- That he rescues us from danger
- That he will fulfill his purpose for us
- That he will finish the work that he has started is us

Give thanks to the Lord is the command. And there is no shortage of ways to obey this command because we are surrounded by his goodness and his blessings this morning.

Let's pray

Questions to Ponder and Discuss

Introduction

1. What usually makes it hard for you to praise God with your whole heart during a busy or stressful week?

Thank the Lord because he exalts himself above all things (vv. 1–3)

2. Why is it an act of grace, not an act of selfishness, for God to magnify his own name and Word above everything else?

3. Can you share a time when God answered a prayer not by changing your situation, but by giving you the grace to endure it?

4. What would happen to your prayer life if you focused more on God's character than on your immediate circumstances?

Thank the Lord because he regards the lowly (vv. 4–6)

5. What does it look like in practice to be "lowly" or humble before the Lord in daily life?

6. In what ways does pride keep us from experiencing God's grace and fellowship?

Thank the Lord because he preserves his people in the midst of trouble (vv. 7–8)

7. How does knowing that God uses trials to refine us change the way we respond to hard seasons?

8. How can we encourage a brother or sister in Christ who feels overwhelmed by a severe trial right now?

Conclusion

9. Why do we so easily fall into cycles of forgetting God's past care whenever new fears or anxieties arise?

10. How can we help one another in this group rehearse God's faithful promises throughout the week?

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, lead pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit: cbcilderton.ca/contact-us

