

Thanksgiving

A Psalm for Thanksgiving.
 Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth.
 Serve the Lord with gladness;
 Come before Him with joyful singing.
 Know that the Lord Himself is God;
 It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
 We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
 Enter His gates with thanksgiving
 And His courts with praise.
 Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
 For the Lord is good;
 His lovingkindness is everlasting
 And His faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 100:1-5



Rainbow Colors

There was a time when I drew a sharp distinction between three aspects of our communion with God. There was a time when I would not permit the supremacy of “worship” to become diluted with the more pedestrian yet imperative “thanksgiving”; “praise,” for me, dwelt somewhere in-between. It was my considered position that these three pathways of upward expression should never intermingle. To do so would be the mark of a lazy, too-casual relationship with God.

My approach was incremental. *Thanksgiving* was the first step on the ladder rising toward heaven. It was earthy, soil-bound, bearing a faint whiff of selfishness. It expressed gratitude for what the Lord had done in a life—but was contingent on His actually *doing* something for me. It centered on the tangible, demonstrable benefits of having a relationship with an all-powerful God. Thanksgiving was a courteous, appropriate—indeed, *dutiful* expression of

appreciation. It was higher than, but in the same vein as saying “thank you” for a birthday gift, a helping hand, a return of change at the checkout stand.

I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
 Wonderful are Your works,
 And my soul knows it very well.

Psalm 139:14

Praise was the next rung on the ladder—higher than thanksgiving, but still lower than worship. Praise, for me, was worship tinged with the gratitude of thanksgiving, or thanksgiving ratcheted higher because of the fragrant aroma of a rising offering. Praise was a lower grade of worship, based on the Lord’s *deeds*, rather than on Him alone.

From birth I have relied on you;
 you brought me forth from my mother’s womb.
 I will ever praise you.

Psalm 71:6 NIV

The third and highest rung on this (rather short) ladder was undiluted worship: *pure* worship, bearing no trace of appreciation for God's deeds, but focused entirely on adoration of Him. Real worship is an act of *giving*—giving reverence and honor and glory to a superior being. For the Christian, that superior being is the triune God. We do not *get* in worship—or, put more precisely, we do not worship in order to get, or because we have gotten. We do not worship out of gratitude, to say “thank you” for something pleasant done for us, but we worship to adore our God strictly for who He is—detached from what He has done for us.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
worship the Lord in the splendor
of his holiness.

Psalms 29:2 NIV

Blending

Imagine my surprise, then, when I discovered that in the Old Testament the words translated “thanksgiving” and “give thanks” (*towday* and *yadah*, respectively) are unambiguously associated with reverent worship. The concept of thanksgiving in the New Testament is more akin to our modern

idea of “giving thanks,” but the words so translated in the Old include the picture of a supplicant worshipping with outstretched hands.

Thanksgiving and praise go together,
because the Lord reveals Himself both
in His perfection and acts.

Willem A. VanGemeren

[“Thus says the Lord, ‘Yet again there will be heard in this place] the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say,

‘Give thanks to the Lord of hosts,
For the Lord is good,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting’;
and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the Lord. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first,’ says the Lord.

Jeremiah 33:11

Rising Higher

The Lord is a God of order and reason. If there were only one color to our relationship with Him, then there would be only one all-encompassing word for thanksgiving/praise/worship. But there is not. A believer's relationship with God is painted in a rainbow of hues. There are, indeed, differences between thanksgiving and praise,

between praise and worship, so there are different words assigned to these separate but related concepts.

But we needlessly restrict our communion with God when we erect impermeable walls to segregate these rainbow colors, for all three have in common the same beginning point—us—and the same end—Him. Look at a rainbow; can you tell where one color ends and the next begins?

Here in the midlands of the United States the colors of Thanksgiving are warm: trees painted deep, radiant oranges and yellows, burnished umber and glowing reds. It is a time of harvest, with mounds of orange pumpkins, variegated winter squash, fields an endless stream of yellowed and parchment dry corn waiting to be gathered in.

One cannot dwell in a land of such bounty without giving thanks. The beauty and abundance of the harvest lift us out of ourselves to express appreciation for a God so generous and kind.

But as we lift our gaze heavenward, does not our thanksgiving flow naturally into praise, and then, as we contemplate the character and holiness of a God who would so graciously pour out His blessings upon us, does not our praise rise higher, even into worship?

*The thought of God, the thought of Thee,
Who liest in my heart,
And yet beyond imagined space
Outstretched and present art,—*

*The thought of Thee, above, below,
Around me and within,
Is more to me than health and wealth,
Or love of kith and kin.*

*The thought of God is like the tree
Beneath whose shade I lie,
And watch the fleets of snowy clouds
Sail o'er the silent sky.*

*'Tis like that soft invading light,
Which in all darkness shines,
The thread that through life's sombre web
In golden pattern twines.*

*It is a thought which ever makes
Life's sweetest smiles from tears,
And is a daybreak to our hopes,
A sunset to our fears;*

*One while it bids the tears to flow,
Then wipes them from the eyes,
Most often fills our souls with joy,
And always sanctifies.*

*Within a thought so great, our souls
Little and modest grow,
And, by its vastness awed, we learn
The art of walking slow.*

*The wild flower on the mossy ground
Scarce bends its pliant form,
When overhead the autumnal wood
Is thundering like a storm.*

*So is it with our humbled souls
Down in the thought of God,
Scarce conscious in their sober peace
Of the wild storms abroad.*

*To think of Thee is almost prayer,
And is outspoken praise;
And pain can even passive thoughts
To actual worship raise.*

Frederick William Faber