



we  
praise  
you  
*O God*

sermons for  
thanksgiving

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## SERMON

▣ Grace, mercy and peace be to you on this Thanksgiving. The people in the Bible did not celebrate Thanksgiving Day like we do today, of course. There was no such holiday then. But again and again throughout the pages of Scripture, we find people of praise. That is, people who expressed admiration and delight in the Lord at very special or monumental times in their lives. They did not need a specific holiday to praise God. They praised him whenever the desire arose within them to give him thanks. Their praise was not forced or required even; their praise just came forth naturally from their experiences with God.

Take Moses and Miriam for instance. They experienced God parting the Red Sea so that they and all the Israelites could escape Egypt on dry ground before Pharaoh's armies came and were drowned when God made the sea come back together again. Moses sang a song of praise to God, one we know well, and one that explains exactly why he is praising God: "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:1). Moses' sister, Miriam, praised God in a different way for what God had done at the Red Sea. She danced and played the tambourine, leading other Israelite women to do the same.

What can we learn from Moses and Miriam, these early people of praise in Scripture? We learn that we must take the time to stop and celebrate when God has done something great for us. Moses and Miriam could have just kept walking once they passed through the Red Sea. But they realized and recognized that something magnificent had happened to them. They were compelled to stop and give thanks and praise to the God who had saved them from slavery and from most certain death at the hands of the Egyptians. This was not a moment to go along as if

nothing happened. Something happened, and that something had to be responded to joyfully.

As people blessed by God in remarkable and miraculous ways every day, how good are we at being like Moses and Miriam? How good are we at stopping to take a moment to express gratitude to God in song and even dance? Not too good, if we are really honest with ourselves. It doesn't need to be anything fancy. Maybe just sing a song you remember from church or a song you sang as a child. And have you heard of people doing their "happy dance"? That's all that your expression of praise should be, just moving your body around in a joyful manner, whatever that may mean for you.

In 1 Samuel, we read about a woman named Hannah. She was desperate to have a child. She would pray fervently in the temple. She prayed so earnestly that Eli the priest thought that she was drunk. Hannah eventually told God that she would dedicate her child to the Lord, if God granted her that blessing. God, in his great love and grace, said yes to her request. Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a boy named Samuel, whom Hannah brought to the temple, the house of the Lord, to serve there.

It is at this moment, after Hannah has brought baby Samuel to the temple, that she sings a song of praise. She does not express sadness or guilt or anger, only joy and gratitude for this opportunity to give her son to the work of the Lord in thanksgiving for God's answer to her prayer for a child. Hannah's song of praise declares that God is like no other and rejoices that he can reverse the trajectory of a person's life. She saw it at work in her own life. She would go on to be blessed with five more children, by God's grace. In the kingdom of God, the poor become rich, the weak become strong, the lowly are exalted.

This song of praise from Hannah helps us to see that God has given us the blessing of prayer, and he listens to and answers our prayers. How often have we received the answer to prayer that we requested from God, only to just expect it or do nothing about it in return. Hannah helps us to see that we are called to respond to God with praise whenever we have received a gift that only could have come from God, not because of anything we have done ourselves. Hannah offered her son to the work of the Lord in response to God's goodness toward her. So we should offer ourselves to the Lord in praise for what God has done for us in our own lives. Praise like Hannah's is grounded in trust and patience and faith in God. Our praises to God this Thanksgiving should be just as filled with trust, patience and faith.

Later in Scripture, we encounter King David, who was a person of praise in many ways. He wrote many psalms of praise throughout his life and played music on the harp to praise the Lord when he was a shepherd. But it is the scene in front of the Ark of the Covenant, which was recently returned to Jerusalem after the defeat of the Philistines, that brings the most attention to readers of the Bible. In this moment, King David, like Miriam long before him, danced to praise the Lord. He danced in front of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was where God was present. David's dance of praise meant that he was happy to