

Ps 105:1-7

The first Thanksgiving proclamation issued for the new nation of the USA came in 1789. Congress had approved the Bill of Rights as amendments to the Constitution, and it then recommended a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to render thanks to God for blessing the new nation. President Washington declared Nov 26, 1789, as the first national day of prayer and thanksgiving to the Lord.

Seventy-five years later, after the Civil War ended, President Abraham Lincoln established the last Thursday in November as a day to acknowledge “the gracious gifts of the Most High God” bestowed upon America. Every president did the same until 1941 when Congress officially made Thanksgiving a national holiday.¹ Presidents since then have continued to make Thanksgiving proclamations virtually every year.

Long before America became a nation, the people of Israel were celebrating God’s goodness to them.

Ps 105 is a long Hebrew hymn celebrating Israel’s history, from the sojourn in Egypt to the Conquest of the Promised Land.² The main point of the psalm is that God has been faithful to his promises. God takes care of his people.

The first seven verses of this psalm serve as an introduction and invitation to render praise and thanksgiving to God for his faithfulness.

We should note for whom this psalm is written—vs. 6: *O seed of Abraham His servant, ye children of Jacob, His chosen*. This expression of thanksgiving is appropriate for the Jews, the children of Israel, God’s chosen people.

¹ Legal E-Alert: The True Origin of Thanksgiving. Christian Law Association.

² Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 664. Some of the material in this message comes from this commentary.

Of course, we are not the nation of Israel, but we acknowledge that God has “shed his grace” on our nation. America, like Israel, was established on God’s promises. The first Europeans settled here so they could enjoy religious freedom. For many decades, America prospered because it respected Christian principles. America became a great nation, largely because it affirmed biblical values.

Like Israel of old, it is fitting for us to render thanks and praise to God. The first seven verses of Ps 105 highlight several things that would be appropriate for us to do as we consider God’s faithfulness to us.

What are some things that would be appropriate for us to do as we approach Thanksgiving Day?

I. Express thanksgiving verbally.

David encourages us to verbalize our thanksgiving. Notice all the ways we can express our gratitude out loud:

A. .1 Give thanks.

1. The words “give thanks” (הִתְּחַלֵּף) means “to express praise, extol,” i.e., make a *public* confession of God’s attributes and acts of power (2Sa 22:50; 2Ch 30:22); to confess, to admit.³
2. The nature of thanksgiving is that we not only *feel* it internally; we also *express* it publicly; we confess it; we admit it so others hear us.
3. Thanksgiving is a perfect time to express our feelings of gratitude to God. It’s an appropriate time to express praise and confess our thanks to God.
4. Of course, we express our thanks to God when we pray. But we should also tell others that we are thankful to God.

B. .1 Call on his name.

1. Of course, we call upon God’s name in prayer.

³ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

Ps 18:3 *I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

Jeremiah 33:3 *'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'*

2. The Thanksgiving season should be a time of extra prayer. Devote some time on Thanksgiving Day to extended prayer. Public prayer is certainly appropriate on Thanksgiving Day.

C. .1end Tell others what he has done.

The OT repeatedly encourages the Jewish people to make known what God has done for them.

Ps 89:1 *I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.*

Ps 145:11-12 *They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.*

Thanksgiving may offer us opportunities to speak to others about the Lord and what he has done. The holiday naturally provides an occasion to tell others why we are thankful to God.

As NT Christians, our particular interest is telling people what God has done in Christ to save us from our sins. I.e., tell people the Gospel message. Thanksgiving celebrations give us opportunities to express our thanks to God and to tell others what God has done for us in Christ. Perhaps you'll have opportunities to do that this year.

D. .2 Sing songs.

1. We've already sung several hymns that include expressions of thanksgiving to God. No doubt, hundreds of hymns of thanksgiving are available for us to sing.
2. We can sing personally/privately, but we should also do this congregationally. We should participate in the congregational singing of the great hymns of thanksgiving.

Psalm 100:1–2 *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all you lands!
2 Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence
with singing.*

E. .2b Meditate on his wondrous works.

1. The word “talk” (דַּבֵּר) often has the meaning “meditate, muse, ponder, consider, study.”

(It’s the same word used in) Psalm 119:15 *I will meditate on
Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.*

2. To meditate is to reflect deeply on something, to consider it, to be mindful of something, to ruminate mentally. In this case, what we ponder or consider are the wondrous works of God.
3. A phrase that I keep hearing these days is “front/top of mind.” At Thanksgiving especially, we should keep God’s wondrous works in the front of our minds so as to reflect upon them.
4. Thanksgiving Day is supposed to be a time of reflection on and contemplation of the goodness of God and his wondrous works. Take time to ponder, consider, and contemplate God’s wondrous works.

Trans: So the first thing we can do on Thanksgiving Day is to verbalize our thanks to God. We consider God’s wondrous works in our minds, and then we express our thanks to God verbally.

II. .3 Glory and rejoice in God.

A. Glory in his name.

1. The “name” of God is a way of referring to his character or person.
2. Note the word the author uses to describe God’s name—“holy.” He could have said any number of things about God’s name, but he chose to describe God’s name/character as holy.

The Bible uses the word “holy” to describe God’s name 20x.

3. If there is one defining characteristic of God's person/character, it is holiness. To be holy is to be set apart and unique. God is different from us. He's perfectly holy and without sin.

Deuteronomy 32:3–4 ... Ascribe greatness to our God. 4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.

We glorify God by lifting up his holy name.

B. .3b Rejoice in your heart.

1. The whole point of Thanksgiving is to rejoice in all the ways that God has provided for us. As we consider what God has done, it ought to bring us joy and gratitude.

2. For the OT Jews, the sacrificial system included a joyful feast.

De 12:7 And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

That sounds a lot like what most of us plan to do on Thanksgiving Day—eat a lot and enjoy time spent with family and friends. That's a perfectly appropriate thing to do; it's biblical. Eat and rejoice in all the blessings God has provided.

3. And notice that the psalmist tells us to rejoice in our hearts. We can have an internal, deeply seated source of joy, even when the events of our lives are not going very well. Our heart can rejoice even in the midst of suffering.

Trans: Thanksgiving is a day devoted to rejoicing in the Lord.

III. .4 Seek the Lord.

A. Seek the Lord himself.

1. God promised his people:

Deuteronomy 4:29 ... *you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

What does it mean to seek the Lord? It means to follow him, to obey him, to seek to please him and bring glory and honor to him.

Acts 17:27 *they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;*

If you are a Christian, you have found the Lord; or he has found you. But we still continue to follow God's will for our lives. We still seek to serve God and to honor him and seek to please him.

It's a temptation in the Christian life to stop seeking after God. We become complacent and apathetic about our walk with God.

The psalmist here reminds us to continue seeking after God.

B. Seek his strength.

Ps 18:2 *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

We ought to be asking the Lord to strengthen us, and we should rely on God's strength to sustain and help us.

As we go through the difficulties of life, we must rely on God to strengthen us and help us persevere.

C. Seek his face.

1. Of course, God does not have a literal face. God is a spirit; he has no physical body.
2. The "face" of the Lord is something like his name. To seek the face of someone means to please him or honor him.

3. The “face” of the Lord suggests an intimate relationship with God. When you are in someone’s face, you are very close; you are in the personal zone.

We come face to face only with a small group of people. Being close to someone’s face implies warmth, closeness, and intimacy.

Our desire should be to enjoy a close, personal relationship with God. Seeking God’s face is drawing near him, seeking fellowship with him, walking along with him.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Trans: Thanksgiving Day gives us another opportunity to draw near unto God, to express our gratitude to him, and to glorify his name. As we consider all the good things God has done for us, it should motivate us to seek after him and live for him.

IV. .5 Remember what he has done.

Thanksgiving is naturally a time of remembrance. We call to memory all the things we have to be thankful for. We think back about how God has provided for us and brought us through the difficulties of life. We think back and count our blessings. The remainder of this psalm is an account of how God took care of the nation of Israel.

A. .5a Remember his marvelous works

Psalm 40:5 Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.

B. .5b Remember his wonders

1. God did many marvelous signs and wonders for the people of Israel, many monumental miracles.

2. The most wonderful works that God did for Israel would include the exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, manna in the wilderness, the cloud and fiery pillar, the crossing of the Jordan River, and the conquest of the Promised Land. Throughout that period, God did many marvelous wonders for Israel.
3. Most of us don't have those kinds of experiences; nothing miraculous has happened to us. But God has done wonderful things for us as well. We can say with the psalmist:

Ps 126:3 The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

C. .5end, .7b Remember the judgments of his mouth.

1. The word "judgments" refer to God's commands, statutes, and ordinances. These judgments are included in the law of God.
2. To "remember" these judgments/commands would be to obey them. We call them to mind and we put them into practice.
3. God's judgments often pertain to moral standards. We should seek to apply God's moral standards to our own lives.

The world has largely rejected God's moral standards. Many professing Christians are ignorant or apathetic about the judgments of God's mouth. But we must not be; we must remember God's commands.

4. Jesus said that we express our love for him by obeying his word.
John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.
5. The word of God is, in a sense, directly from the mouth of God to us. Cf. 2 Tim 3:16—"inspired" – God-breathed

Mt 4:4 But [Jesus] said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

6. So as we remember all the good things God has done for us, we ought also remember God's commands to us. God provides for us and promises us many good things. Our obligation is to obey the Word of God—to remember the judgments that have come forth out of his mouth.
 7. It would be hypocritical for us to thank God for his word and yet fail to obey it. To “remember the judgments of his mouth” is to obey them, to put them into practice.
- V. .7 Reflect on who God is.
- A. .7a He's the Lord our God.
1. The psalmist uses God's covenant name here—“LORD” (all caps) is the proper name for the God of Israel—Yahweh, the self-existent, sovereign “I am” – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 2. One of the central themes of the Bible is summarized in the statement: “I will be their God and they shall be my people.” The Bible repeats this statement many times, both OT and NT.
 3. God is calling out a “people for his name.” What a great privilege it is to be among the people of God.
 4. The psalmist reflects the fact that Israel was God's people. But through faith in Christ, all of us can be God's people.
Ac 15:14 ... God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.
1 Peter 2:9–10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.
 5. If you are saved, then the Lord is your God and you are his child, part of his people, part of the holy nation. That alone should be a cause of rejoicing.

6. If you are not saved, then you cannot claim that the Lord is your God. He is not your God if you do not know him through faith in the Son of God. John 14:6 “no man cometh to the father but by me.” The only ones who have the right to call God their Father are those who come to God through the Son, Jesus Christ.
- B. .7b His judgments are in all the earth.
1. God has broader concerns than merely the nation of Israel. God’s judgments are in “all the earth.” God is sovereign over all the nations of the earth.
 2. Jesus said that his Gospel would be preached in all nations.
Mt 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; ...
Mr 13:10 And the gospel must first be published among all nations.
 3. We should be thankful that the biblical message has spread, almost, to “all the earth.” This good news that began on the other side of the planet has reached us, and we should be very thankful for that.
 4. It’s our responsibility to proclaim the Gospel among all nations, or at least support those who do. When others hear and accept the Gospel message, they, too, return thanks to God for sending his word throughout all the earth.

I mentioned at the beginning that President Washington authorized the first national day of prayer and thanksgiving after Congress had approved the Bill of Rights.

From that time forward, nearly every president has issued a Thanksgiving proclamation of some kind. Even our current president has done so. It’s unfortunate that modern Thanksgiving proclamations don’t say much about returning thanks to God for his care and provision. I wish that modern political leaders would encourage the nation to give thanks to God for all he’s done for our country. I pray that the leaders of our nation do as this psalm says—give thanks to God, call upon him, and seek the Lord. It would be wonderful if the current leaders of our nation turned to the Lord like the founders of our nation did.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving Day, we would do well to follow the pattern that we find in the first section of this psalm.

- ✓ Express thanksgiving verbally, through the public giving of thanks and through singing. Tell others what God has done and take time to ponder all the good things God has done for you.
- ✓ Glory and rejoice in the Lord. The good character of God should cause rejoicing in your heart. Rejoice with family, friends, and food.
- ✓ Seek the Lord—follow after him, pursue him, obey him, seek to please him.
- ✓ Remember what he has done. We may not have experienced anything particularly miraculous in our lives, but we have been the recipients of many marvelous and wonderful works.
- ✓ Take time to reflect on God himself. He is our God and we are his people by faith in Christ. We have the judgments of his mouth, and we are responsible to obey God's commands and to tell others about them.