

Psalms of Thanksgiving

There are several sub-groupings or types of psalms that can be distinguished but today we come to the last of the major groupings, psalms of thanksgiving. Next week we will talk about some of the other categories, but the three categories of lament, praise, and thanksgiving are the major groupings and account for most of the psalms.¹

Similar to the lament psalms, the thanksgiving psalms deal with pain, injustice, and suffering but unlike the laments they do not express the heart of the psalmist in the midst of the struggle. Rather, they are reflections on the faithfulness of God in the past to intervene. They are reflections upon past experience and praises for God's graciousness. Therefore, they contain references to struggle like a lament as well as expressions of praise like a praise. Thanksgiving psalms contain much the same kind of language as a praise psalm, but they will also include a clear and specific reference to a previous struggle from which the psalmist has been delivered.

Before we proceed it is important once again to remember that when reading the psalms that you are working with poetic literature. Not every single psalm of the same type works exactly the same way. The elements may be in a different order, one or more may be missing, or they may be combined. Often, it is the variations on the form as much as the form itself that provide clues as to the author's emphasis. Just like in modern music and poetry the author will play around with form as part of the creative process. Despite this poetic flexibility, several common elements can be observed.

1. **Introduction:** A testimony about God's faithfulness. Usually in the form of a praise and often with a brief summary of how God has helped.
2. **Distress:** A summary of the trouble for which God provided help.
3. **Appeal:** A recounting of the appeal the psalmist made to God.
4. **Answer:** Description of the way God answered the appeal.
5. **Discourse:** Additional information on the character of God or the thankfulness of the psalmist or others in response to God. Sometimes there will also be additional references to history or prophesy.
6. **Praise:** The psalmist praises God for His help. This may involve vows or pledges for offerings and obedience.

As usual, let's look at a few examples. I will walk you through 2 examples and then we will do one together. You will then do one on your own as homework. In the notes, I have highlighted the various elements according to the following key:

1. **Introduction** = Bold
2. Distress = Boxed
3. Appeal = Underlined
4. *Answer* = Italics
5. Discourse = No formatting
6. Praise = Double Underline

¹ Depending upon how the groupings are made (structure, content, etc.) some psalms may fit into multiple sub-groups. Also, some of the psalms such as Psalm 40 appear to be a mixture of elements and others such as Psalm 67 are difficult to classify.

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116 I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD:
“O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!”

⁵ *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.*

⁶ *The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.*

⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully
with you.

⁸ *For you have delivered my soul from
death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;*

⁹ I will walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁰ I believed, even when I spoke:
“I am greatly afflicted”;

¹¹ I said in my alarm,
“All mankind are liars.”

¹² What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?

¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

¹⁶ O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your
maidservant.

You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷ I will offer to you the sacrifice of
thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

30 A PSALM OF DAVID. A SONG AT THE
DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

¹ I will extol you, O LORD, for you have
drawn me up
and have not let my foes rejoice
over me.

² O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.

³ *O LORD, you have brought up my soul
from Sheol;
you restored me to life from among
those who go down to the pit.*

⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his
saints,

and give thanks to his holy name.

⁵ For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

⁶ **As for me, I said in my prosperity,
“I shall never be moved.”**

⁷ **By your favor, O LORD,
you made my mountain stand
strong;**

you hid your face;

I was dismayed.

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8 To you, O LORD, I cry,
and to the Lord I plead for mercy:
9 “What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?
10 Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me!
O LORD, be my helper!”

11 You have turned for me my mourning
into dancing;
you have loosed my sackcloth
and clothed me with gladness,
12 that my glory may sing your praise and
not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to
you forever!

HOMEWORK

Like the previous homework I want you to choose another praise psalm and see if you can identify the elements on your own. Keep in mind they may not be in the same order in every psalm. Please choose one of the following:

104, 107, 66, 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, 136, 138

Then considering our lesson and discussion select one of the example psalms from above or the one you chose for the first homework assignment and pray that psalm throughout the week using the following approaches. Try to use each approach at least once during the week.

Each time read the entire psalm and then proceed with one of the following.

1. Offer the actual words of the psalm as a prayer.
2. Use the organization of your psalm to structure a prayer mostly in your own words.
3. Use the organization of your psalm to structure a prayer for someone else (call them to praise).
4. Use the organization of your psalm to structure a prayer for the Church.

*Please be sure to email any questions while working through the homework. I am here to help you and others may benefit from your question as well. Don't worry about getting everything right, just do your best to get a feel for the flow of the psalm you are working with and how it "works".