

Thanksgiving, 2009

Thanksgiving: A Way of Praising

November 21/22, 2009

Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

Thanksgiving: A Way of Praising

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: Several

Introduction

In his book *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann makes the following startling observation:

The fact that there is no word for “to thank” in Hebrew has never been properly evaluated. The ignoring of this fact can be explained only in that we live so unquestioningly in the rhythm between the poles of thanks and request, of “please!” and “thank you!”, and the thought does not occur to anyone that these concepts are *not* common to all mankind, have *not* always been present as a matter of course, and do *not* belong to the presuppositions of human intercourse nor to those of the contrast of God and man. We are compelled to imagine a world in which petition plays a thoroughly essential and noteworthy role, but where the opposite role of petition is not primarily thanks but praise. And this praise is a stronger, more lively, broader concept which includes our “thanks” in it. Thanking is here included entirely within praise...

Perhaps it will be easier to understand this if we remind ourselves that even today none of our children learns on his own to express thanks. He has to be told a hundred times, “Say thank you!”, and he still does not say it without being reminded. In addition, where the polish of good upbringing disappears, the expression of thanks soon falls by the wayside. In male society, the harder the life is, the less expression of thanks there is. I have established this point again and again in the war and as a prisoner. Even under the worst circumstances someone will always beg ... but he very quickly forgets to say thank you...

...In the Old Testament...there is as yet no verb that means only “to thank.” *Hodah*, which is usually translated as “to thank,” is not used in the Old Testament a single time for an expression of thanks between men. Thus it is clear from the start that this *hodah* cannot be equated with our “to thank,” which can be directed equally to God or to man. In those places in the O.T. where our “thank” as something taking place between men is most clearly found, the verb used is *berek*, which does not have the primary meaning of “praise” but means “bless.”

In view of these facts, it is clear that the O.T. does not have our independent concept of thanks. The expression of thanks to God is included in praise, *it is a way of praising...*

...Thanking presupposes that the community is no longer primary and no longer self-evident. It presupposes that the community is no longer prior to the individual. The differentiation of thanks from praise presupposes a certain development of individualism... What makes this word so valuable to modern man is just that element in which it differs from praise or goes beyond it. We speak of “thankfulness,” and this is the main thing. Spoken thanks is only an externality, the expression of the feeling of thankfulness. The important thing is the thankful attitude. All this cannot be expressed by the vocabulary for praise. Surely the main difference lies here. The thankful attitude has its origin in a gift or in a helping or saving deed which someone does for me. It can then be expressed in a great variety of ways, by a word, or by a deed, but the decisive factor is the permanence of the thankful attitude.

In primitive thought it is otherwise. For us thankfulness stands in a line; for the primitive man only the first and last points of this line are of interest. Both of these appear more sharply in primitive thought. That is, the beginning and end of what we call thankfulness are contained in the vow and the performance of the vow. (This is the reason why the vow at the end of a petition is an essential, inseparable part of the prayer)

This occurs from time to time in a relationship; thankfulness, the line between these two points, is something that I have, or that I have in me; it is something that I possess as a feeling or as an attitude. For primitive man an attitude does not exist except in its expression, for man does not exist “in himself,” but only in community with

other men (the Hebrew *'ādām* means “mankind”). The same holds true for the relationship of man and God. Modern individualistic thought has interpreted the rejection by the prophets and many of the Psalms of specific cultic acts as meaning that it is not a matter of outward works, but of the “attitude of the heart.” This interpretation does not have any basis in either the prophets or the Psalms. *In the place of sacrifice the Psalms placed praise and obedience, not an attitude, but activity directed toward God.*

In relation to God, the concept of thankfulness and that of giving thanks are liable to be misunderstood when they are divorced from the concept of praise. The vocabulary of praise never expresses anything like an attitude or a feeling of gratitude. Where a worshiper in the Psalms says, “I will praise the Lord...,” he does not mean, “I will be thankful to God,” but, “I will respond to Him for what He has done for me.”¹

Personally, this discovery gave me reason for pause. We usually associate thanksgiving with words or heart-felt attitudes. But the Old Testament raises the standard higher: it requires response in some *concrete* fashion, especially in the form of obedience. And, it places the onus not only on the individual, but on the whole community. This is why *sacrifice* appears frequently as the concrete expression of praise, and in this regard comes closest to the idea of thanksgiving as *thank-offering*. All of which seems appropriate to consider on a weekend when we renew our faith promise pledges to missions. In praise of God who gave Himself for the salvation of His creation, we devote a portion of His loving gifts to us by way of pledge and offering.

In this week's study we will explore some of the words used in the Bible to express the notion of thanksgiving as *a way of praising* God. As such we become immediately aware that thanksgiving-as-offering is an essential part of worship. Through its concreteness, in the act of giving, thanksgiving properly takes its place at the center of our hearts.

"Thanksgiving" in the Old Testament

The word *thanksgiving* is in quotes above as a reminder that technically there is no separate word for this concept in the Old Testament, for the reasons suggested in Westermann's book. However, the emphasis still falls on the "giving" portion of the term. If our English word derives from the German *denken*, which means "to think," then in the acts we call "thanksgiving," we are *giving* some concrete *thought* about God through what we do. That is, we want to make it known that God is like this or that. Our actions in this respect are revelatory both of God Himself and of what we truly think about Him. Which brings us to the first important Hebrew verb form we'd like to consider.

Yādah (see Genesis 29:35; Leviticus 26:40; Psalm 32:5; 1 Chronicles 16:4; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 2 Samuel 22:50; 1 Chronicles 16:34)

In this Hebrew verb appears the notions of "acknowledge" or "confess." Certain variations of this verb mean "throw, cast." When the Jewish scribes translated their Bible into Greek (the *Septuagint* or *LXX*), they commonly chose the Greek word *exomologeō* to handle this Hebrew form: "to speak out commonly," or "to confess externally." There is nothing at all private about either word group. God's people hold deep beliefs about their God, Yahweh, and they are determined *to get those beliefs out there for others to see and know also*. We use the expression "put it out there" or "get it out there" when we want to expose ideas to the consideration of other people. The word *yādah* carries those meanings.

Interestingly, the word can apply to confessing sin to God as well as confessing God to others. Confession of sin was a very public affair in Israel, and it reached a concentrated level on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:21) with the national confession of sins. This is also evident from other passages (Daniel 9:4, 20; Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 1:6; 9:2-3). The New Testament takes up this notion in 1 John 1:9. Confession is an outward action of contrition which seeks restored relationship with God. The Greek form, *homologeō*, could be taken to mean

¹ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1981, pp. 25-29.

"to say the same thing": in this case, to say the same thing about *sin* that God says about it. In so doing, we have no secrets with God, since our lives are laid open and bare before Him.

Confession, in the sense of thanksgiving, moves toward expressing publicly *who God is* and *what He has done*. By concrete actions, we declare the character of God — a frequent theme in the *Psalms*: (89:5; 105; 106; 145; see also 1 Chronicles 29:13). This emphasis blurs the common distinction we make between praise and thanksgiving; a distinction absent from the original Hebrew idea. While we might find it convenient to speak about *praise* in terms of who God is, and *thanksgiving* in terms of what He has done, that is wholly artificial in Hebrew terms. For the Hebrew mind, there is no isolating the character of God from his actions. When God identified Himself to Moses as "I am" (*'eyeh*) "who I am" (*'asher 'eyeh*), he was literally combining concepts of *being* with those of *doing*. Or, perhaps more accurately, He was not separating *being* from *act* by calling Himself by this designation. The word *Yahweh* derives from this complex of verb forms and is the covenant name for God in the Old Testament. God seems to be telling Moses "I am myself in my act, and in my act I am myself." So it is with the praise/thanksgiving of God.

The name of God (Yahweh) is regularly the object of praise/thanksgiving (Psalm 97:12; 99:3; 136:1-3, 26). Those who acknowledge God in this way are the living and not the dead (Isaiah 38:18-19; Psalm 6:5; 30:9; 88:10). When we ask the question, "Who praises/thanks God?" we receive the following answers:

1. The righteous ones (Psalm 140:13).
2. Israel (Psalm 106:47)
3. The nations (Psalm 45:17)
4. The kings of the earth (Psalm 138:4)
5. The heavens (Psalm 89:5)

Acts of praise are commonly public, whether before the nations or within the community of Israel (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 35:18). Normally, these expressions of thanksgiving assume a verbal form (Psalm 109:30; 34:1; 40:3; 71:8), and musical instruments accompany them (2 Chronicles 5:13; Psalm 33:2; 43:4). Designated leaders directed these displays within the setting of the house of God at regular intervals (Psalm 100:4; 122:4; 1 Chronicles 16:4; 1 Chronicles 23:30). Though outwardly declared, the roots of praise/thanksgiving were found in the heart which must be right with God (Psalm 7:17; 86:12; 111:1; 119:7). And it must be continuous and forever (Psalm 30:12).

Tōdāh (see Psalm 42:4; 50:23; Joshua 7:19; Ezra 10:11; Jeremiah 17:26; 33:11)

In its noun form, the emphasis is on "confession" but with the unique aspect of the "thank-offering." Even when the confession had to do with sin, there was an accompanying "sin-offering" or "peace-offering" (Leviticus 7:12-15; 22:29; Jeremiah 17:26). The object of this offering was the glory of God revealed in His forgiveness of sin while simultaneously maintaining His own righteous character (Psalm 50:23).

Joy enters the picture at the offering of the sacrifice (Psalm 95:2; 33:11). So does the *magnifying of God* (Psalm 69:30). The Hebrew word for "magnify" comes from *gādal*, "to grow up, become great." Of course it is primarily true that God *is* great, and the act of "magnifying" God in no way adds to His character. However, the purpose of praise/thanksgiving is to allow that greatness *to be seen*. Even our English word "magnify" has this shade of meaning: a magnifying glass does not make something larger, but it does cause it to be seen as larger. Our acts of thanksgiving reveal and make visible the true nature of God. Those who witness the giver of thanksgiving see God more clearly as a result. They are led to ask, "Who is this God who receives such accolades of praise and sacrifices of thanksgiving?" In so doing, one main goal of thanksgiving is attained.

Music gives voice to the greatness of God (Psalm 147:4).

Making a vow to God often preceded a prayer for deliverance, and these together found expression in sacrifices of thanksgiving at the house of God (Psalm 56:12; 116:17; Jonah 2:10; 2 Chronicles 33:16).

Hālal (see 1 Chronicles 16:4, 10; Nehemiah 12:24; Psalm 34:23; Isaiah 38:18; 45:25)

Our English word "hallelujah" derives from the Hebrew verb form *hālal*. In this case, the focus is on "making clear, showing, boasting, raving, or celebrating." The verb itself has two general meanings: 1) shine; 2) praise. It is not hard to see how the more basic idea of "brightness" underlies the concept of praise. Light makes things visible and clear. "In your light we see light" (Psalm 36:9), writes the psalmist. Jesus knew intimately this connection when he gave the Sermon on the Mount: "Let your light shine before others, so that they might see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Notice how something we are or do throws the spotlight on the character of God. Or, perhaps better said, "Allow the light of God to shine forth in unmistakable ways." A certain irony exists here: Is there any light brighter than that of God Himself? Does not His light shatter all forms of human light and surmount them? Yet, mysteriously, we are called upon to "glorify" God through acts of praise/thanksgiving.

The *Psalms* call for God's people to praise Him. In so doing they draw proper attention to Him. Yahweh alone is God (Psalm 102:21); that is the meaning of "declaring the name of Yahweh; declaring his praise." How is this declaration expressed?

1. Through the community (Psalm 146:1).
2. By choirs, musical instruments, speaking, and dancing (Jeremiah 31:7; Psalm 69:30; 149:3).

The whole creation is invited to share in this thanksgiving of praise (Psalm 148:1ff; 150). In the future, a "new song" will shape the joyful worship by creation (Isaiah 42:10), a theme picked up in the New Testament (Revelation 5:9).

God alone is worthy of this kind of praise (Psalm 65:1; 147:1; Jeremiah 17:14). The very existence of God requires praise (Psalm 109:1; 22:3; Deuteronomy 10:21). Life itself depends on the praise of God (Psalm 119:175), and death, not yet defeated, silences it (115:17). Praise is the celebration of life (Psalm 84:4).

One specific aspect of *hālal* is its use for "boast." While boasting about *oneself* is criticized, the opposite is true with God. Precisely because only God is worthy of praise, should His people boast only in Him (Psalm 105:3; 64:10). His praise fills creation itself (Habakkuk 3:3), and is depicted as proclaimed (Isaiah 42:10), rehearsed (Psalm 78:4), and growing (Psalm 71:14).

For His people who have been redeemed and saved by His mighty acts of deliverance, praise becomes the natural outlet to let this be known (Exodus 15:11; Psalm 78:4; 106:47). In this regard, God receives praise for honoring His covenant with His people. But this is not limited to the elect, the chosen. Looking toward the future, the prophets celebrate in advance when the whole world will praise, give thanks and rejoice over God's promised salvation (Isaiah 61:11; 43:21; 62:7; Joel 2:26).

These latter texts direct our attention to the coming Messiah.

By way of summary: the idea of thanksgiving as only an inward feeling of gratitude is absent from the Old Testament. In its place are variations on the theme of praise, especially outward expressions or actions which draw attention to God who is worthy of praise. Approximating thanksgiving, however, is the "thank-offering," a concrete sacrifice to God of material things, calculated to attract attention to the goodness and greatness of God who is "the giver of all things." At harvest time, for example, Israel brought firstfruits as signs of Yahweh's faithfulness to His people.

"Thanksgiving" in the New Testament

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15). Paul wrote those words to a church which boasted of having everything gift imaginable. However, the gift Paul references is none other than Christ himself. When the New Testament talks about "thanks," it does so largely with Greek words derived from the

basic root *charis*.² This word commonly translates as "grace" in the English translations, but in this passage it usually is taken to mean "thanks." *Charis* is what "delights, charms." In turn, *charis* has roots in the verb *chairō* which means "to rejoice, be joyful." As a collective, these various terms suggest expressions of joy growing out of a rich experience of God's favor. When Paul calls on the Corinthians to be thankful, he does so on the basis of God's own gift in Jesus Christ. That thanksgiving should take the form of actual gifts to meet the needs of others (see the context of 1 Corinthians 9). God graces us, and, in response, we should grace others. Such concrete actions draw attention to the favor of God.

One particular Greek word commonly used for "thanksgiving" or "to thank" is *eucharisteō*. Secular Greek often translated it simply as "pleasant," but it comes to mean "grateful" in the sense that a person shows favor to another. Thanks is something "given," and so has a tangible and usually material form. The ancients also employed this expression when conferring "honor" by decree. Among writings in praise of Alexander the Great, this word is associated with *megalopsuchon* which means "greatness of soul." Later, the church fathers picked up this term, and, in the case of Chrysostom, encouraged persons who were materially poor to still be great in their souls.³ A certain reciprocal action is involved: A does x for B, and so, in turn, B gives back to A. No doubt this is why our English word *thanksgiving* contains "giving" at its core. When the pagans wrote letters, they invariably included sections in which they gave thanks to the deity.

Although the Hebrew Bible does not use a unique word for thanksgiving (see above), the Hellenized Jewish culture adapts the "prayer of thanksgiving" model. This appears in the New Testament (John 11:41; Acts 28:15; Revelation 11:17), and applies to thanks at meals (Mark 8:6; Matthew 15:36; John 6:11, 23; Acts 27:35). We find cases in Second Temple Judaism where a blessing is pronounced over each food.

Perhaps the most prominent use of *eucharisteō* is in the account of the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:22-23 and Matthew 26:26-27). Here we find both the word for *thanksgiving* and the word for *blessing* (*eulogeō*). This latter word means "to speak well" but also "to invoke a benediction upon." Comparing Luke's account with Mark's, we find the interchangeable use of these terms. The invocation of a blessing and the act of thanksgiving seem to be closely related. When I bless God, I also have reason to bless His good gifts of food and the like, thereby blessing them as signs of His goodness.

When we arrive at Paul's letters, we are confronted repeatedly with "I give thanks to God for..." As rhetorical analyses of the letters reveal, thanksgiving language commonly introduces the main themes of the letter. Sometimes the thanksgiving and the main body of the letter merge together (see *1 & 2 Thessalonians*). Paul would often follow his use of "I thank" with participles indicating *how* he did so (see 1 Thessalonians 1:2ff; Philippians 1:3ff; Philemon 1:4ff; Ephesians 1:15ff). Alternately, he would follow "I thank" with the word "that" (Greek: *hoti*), indicating *what* provoked his gratitude (see 1 Corinthians 1:4-5; Romans 1:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:3).

1. Acknowledging God as Creator gives thanksgiving its true background for Paul (see Romans 1:21 in the negative sense of this; also 1 Corinthians 10:30-31; Romans 14:6). The idea here is that God has given His creatures all things to enjoy. Notice how the original root idea of *chairō* — joy — comes through this form of thanksgiving.
2. Worship themes are frequent settings for thanksgiving in the New Testament, and Paul writes about them in various places (see 1 Corinthians 14:16-17).
3. In passages like 2 Corinthians 1:10-11, we discover the reciprocal relationship between "the gracious favor granted us" (*charisma*) and the fact that "many give thanks" (*eucharisteō*). Theologians sometimes write

² From Hans Conzelmann, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Editors: Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; English translation by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eerdmans, 1974, pp.359-415. We draw from the studies of *chairō*, *charis*, and *eucharisteō*.

³ See his *Homily 21 on Romans*. He wrote this in conjunction with giving alms.

about *oratio infusa*: grace given by God flows back to Him through thanksgiving (see 1 Thessalonians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 4:15; 9:11-12).

4. The goal of thanksgiving is the glory of God (*doxa*) (2 Corinthians 4:15).
5. Thanksgiving, joy and confession appear together in Colossians 1:12.
6. Christ himself is the basis for thanksgiving in Colossians 2:7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
7. The expression of worship through music results in "giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).
8. Thankful prayer is also *watchful* with respect to the future (Colossians 4:2; Philippians 4:6).

By the time the church fathers start to write, the word *eucharisteō* acquires its connection to the Lord's Supper or the *Eucharist* — the "great thanksgiving." The elements (bread and wine) are called "the gifts of God for the people of God." Through the Supper, God gives His Son to His church under the signs blessed by the priest at the communion altar. The liturgy invites the receiving of the elements along with the admonition, "...and be ye *thankful*..."

The close connection between *charis* (grace) and *eucharistia* (thanksgiving) is not accidental. From this relationship comes the idea of "gratitude," the returning of *thanks* for *grace*. In giving thanks to God, we are acknowledging His grace and our debt to God for His good gifts to us. Failure to "give thanks" lies at the heart of sinful unbelief and unbelieving sin:

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:21).

To honor God *as God* means to give Him supreme credit for everything good and right in our lives. Our successes, achievements, possessions, enjoyments, health, and well-being are not of our own making, but come from the hand of God. When we claim the credit for what God has done, we are guilty of the sin of *ingratitude*. The sin of the rich man lies not in his riches but in his failure to attribute their origin and his possession of them to God.

Thomas Aquinas reflected on this when he wrote:

It would seem that the ingratitude, whereby a subsequent sin causes the return of sins previously forgiven, is a special sin. For, the giving of thanks belongs to counter passion, which is a necessary condition of justice. But justice is a special virtue. Therefore this ingratitude is a special sin. Thanksgiving is a special virtue. But ingratitude is opposed to thanksgiving. Therefore ingratitude is a special sin.⁴

Here we are indebted to God's words to Israel just prior to their entrance into Canaan. Instructing Moses, Yahweh said:

¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' ¹⁸ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

Proper covenant faith begins with this principle: "It is he [Yahweh your God] who gives you power to get..."

Concluding Thoughts

We began this brief study with the reminder from Westermann that thanksgiving is but *a way of praising God*. In each act of giving thanks, the spotlight falls on God, and He receives proper acknowledgement. Herein lies an antidote to spiritual pride, and a refusal to take credit for something God has accomplished. As the Psalmist admitted:

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! (Psalm 115:1).

⁴ QUESTION CVII.: OF INGRATITUDE. - St. Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas Ethicus*: or, the Moral Teaching of St. Thomas, vol. 2 (*Summa Theologica - Secunda Secundae* Pt.2) [1274].

The reputation of God was constantly on the line for ancient Israel. How the people of God conducted themselves was a radical reflection on the nature of their God, Yahweh. Witnessing the overt forms of grateful sacrifice, the nations around Israel became keenly aware of who this God was to whom a whole nation devoted itself.

For us, each act of thanksgiving should simultaneously become an anthem of praise:

We offer God our tithes: God be praised!

We offer God our thoughts: God be praised!

We offer God our lives God be praised!

As a reminder of this, George Herbert (1593-1633), Welsh poet and priest, penned these lines:

Thou that has given so much to me,
Give one thing more -- a grateful heart;
Not thankful when it pleases me,
As if Thy blessings had spare days;
But such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise.

To this we add the wisdom of Henri J. M. Nouwen:

Gratitude goes beyond the 'mine' and 'thine' and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.

When the world sees the thankful community of God, it bears witness to something which, in turn, has great *influence*. We close this study with an extended selection from a sermon delivered by Charles G. Finney.⁵ In it, Finney reflected on the *influence* which the praising and thankful church might have on those around it.

...the withholding of due praise from God tends to injure his government. For, it should be considered, his government is a moral one, and must be sustained by moral *influence*. To withhold our praise, is to withhold testimony to his goodness, and this is often equivalent to leaving his character under suspicion. For his established order is to employ his people in revealing himself to the wicked. He says to them, "Ye are my witnesses." First revealing himself to them, he depends on them to communicate what they learn of him to their ungodly neighbors. Suppose they refuse to do so. It amounts, practically, to bearing witness against God. This very neglect virtually proclaims--I have known God, but I have nothing good to say of him. You must make your own inference; this is all I have to say. You do not hear me commend God. You must judge for yourself whether I should do so, if I thought he deserved it!

Now, who does not see that, if this took place between a son and his father, this very silence would be a terrible stab? Who could bear it? When Christians take this course towards God, must it not tend naturally to injure his interests among men? If you, young men, were never to speak well of your father, would you not greatly detract from his *influence*? If you wished to sustain and establish his *influence*, could you hope to do it by withholding all due commendation? Suppose you should never speak well of him; could you hope, in this way, to honor him?

In fact, to commend God, is the way to extend his *influence* greatly. This is its natural *influence*. Consequently, to withhold praise, must be an awful sin against God and against his kingdom. Persisting in this sin, do you not deserve to be denied all further gifts? If you will not praise God, why should he continue to load you with his benefits?

...the praises of heaven are not only useful to those who offer them, but are grateful to Him to whom they are offered. They aid him in carrying out his purposes of love, because they lead his creatures to a better appreciation of his character and works. If it be useful to an earthly monarch to have his subjects speak well of him, how much more so to God!

⁵ "On Offering Praise to God," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, December 17, 1856.

...God's *influence* in the universe depends greatly on the praise offered to him by his people, and by all who know him. This praise is the more effective for good because where sin goes, there goes unbelief, and a want of confidence in God. The praises of his people bear a direct testimony against this wicked withdrawal of confidence from God. Then, let us never overlook the fact that God's *influence* is augmented by our testimony to his goodness.

Glory to God. Amen.

Digging Deeper: Thanksgiving: A Way of Praising
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *Thanksgiving: A Way of Praising*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Thanksgiving is not primarily about how we feel about God, but is, instead, a way of praising Him. React to that statement. Be sure to include a definition for "praise" in your answer.
2. Although there is no specific word for "thanks" or "thanksgiving" in the Hebrew Bible, the idea of thanksgiving appears in several places as a form of praise. Sometimes in our English Bibles words for praise are translated by the word "thanks" or "thanksgiving." Based on this fact, read the following Old Testament passages, and explain what they teach about praise/thanksgiving: Genesis 29:35; Leviticus 26:40; Psalm 32:5; 1 Chronicles 16:4, 34; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 2 Samuel 22:50.
3. In what ways do we "declare the character and deeds of God" through praise and thanksgiving? (Psalm 89:5; 105; 106; 145).
4. Who offers praise/thanksgiving to God? (Psalm 140:13; 106:47; 45:17; 138:4; 89:5).
5. What roles do each of the following have in the praise/thanksgiving of God?
 - a. Words (Psalm 109:30-31; 34:1; 40:3; 71:8)
 - b. Music (2 Chronicles 5:13; Psalm 33:2; 43:4; Psalm 150)
 - c. Leaders (1 Chronicles 16:4; 23:26, 30)
 - d. Heart (Psalm 86:12; 111:1; 119:7)
 - e. Offerings (Leviticus 7:12-15; 22:29; Jeremiah 17:26)
 - f. Joy (Psalm 95:2; 33:11)
6. What does it mean to "magnify" the Lord, and in what ways does thanksgiving help us to do so (Psalm 69:30; 34:3)?
7. According to Paul, what should lie at the center of our praise/thanksgiving (2 Corinthians 9:15; Colossians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)?
8. What is the connection between giving thanks and receiving the grace of God (2 Corinthians 1:10-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; 2 Corinthians 4:15; 9:11-12)?
9. In what ways does thanksgiving further the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:15)?
10. Why is ingratitude (the lack of thankfulness) a form of sin, and what are its consequences (Romans 1:21-25; Deuteronomy 8:17-18)?
11. How does thanksgiving orient us positively toward the future (Colossians 4:2; Philippians 4:6)?