

session 2 study guide

praise and thanksgiving

starter

PRAISE AND THANKS. The words “praise” and “thanks” are sometimes used interchangeably, but when it comes to our prayer life, it’s helpful to think about them as separate, yet related, concepts. We give God *praise* for who He is and *thanks* for what He does. Praise is the purest form of worship. When we have an attitude of praise, we free our spirits to experience God’s presence and free ourselves to live for Him. We focus on Him instead of ourselves.

Brainstorm as many reasons as you possibly can to offer God your praise. What is it about Him—about His character, His being—that is worthy of praise?

Now brainstorm as many reasons as you possibly can to thank God. What is He doing—in your life, in your family, in your church—that deserves your thanks?

message

Thanksgiving flows naturally from praise, because once we begin to recognize God's presence and goodness, we also begin to see His hand at work in our lives—blessing us, guiding us and caring for us. As we practice thanking God for all He is doing, we become humble and full of joy.

Psalm 150 is a great hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. Read each of the verses from this psalm given below, and then answer the questions that follow.

Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens (v. 1).

1. Where do we praise God?

2. Does our church find times every week to praise Him? How? Where? When?

Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness (v. 2).

3. What are “acts of power”?

4. If God already knows how great He is, why do we need to tell Him?

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals (vv. 3-5).

5. When the psalm was written, these were the instruments people used to praise God. How do you think music helps us praise?

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD (v. 6).

6. Why should everything that breathes praise the Lord?

7. What are three ways you can praise the Lord daily?

1.

2.

3.

Psalm 34 is another great hymn of worship and praise. What's especially interesting about this psalm is the context in which it was written. The Bible records that this psalm was written by David "when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left."

The story of this event is told in 1 Samuel 21. Saul, the king of Israel, was jealous of David and wanted to kill him. But Jonathan, Saul's son and David's best friend, warned him about the plot, and David was able to escape to Achish (also known as "Abimelech"; this was probably a royal title). Achish, as it turns out, was the king of the Philistines. If you remember the story of David and Goliath, you know that the Philistines and the Israelites didn't exactly get along, so, in effect, David was fleeing to one of Saul's enemies for safety.

However, the plan didn't work out as David expected. Some of the servants of the king recognized David and said, "Isn't this David, the king of the land?" (1 Samuel 21:10). When David heard this, he got a bit nervous that it would be Achish who would end his life. In a very real sense, he had jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire.

So, how did David get out of this mess? Well, he pretended he was crazy. He acted like a complete madman, making marks on the doors and letting the saliva drip down his beard. It was a convincing performance, because Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me?" (v. 14). So he had David released. David immediately fled and went to hide out in a cave called Adullam. It was most likely there that he wrote the psalm of praise to God.

Keep this story in mind as you read this psalm, and then answer the questions that follow.

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing (Psalm 34:1-10).

8. Psalm 34:6 states, "This poor man called, and the LORD heard him." What does this tell you that David did when he was in this situation?

9. In what way did the Lord save him out of all his troubles?

10. According to this psalm, how often should we praise the Lord?

11. Summarize, in your own words, what Psalm 34:1-10 and Psalm 150 teach us about praising the Lord.

dig

Over and over again, the Scriptures tell us to be thankful people. No one can read the Psalms and not notice the theme of thankfulness running through the pages of that great hymnal.

Think for a moment: Who are the happiest and most fulfilled people you know? Most likely these people are thankful, grateful people. Rather than constantly wishing for more things or different circumstances, they are delighted by the blessings that they already have.

Christians have so much to be thankful for, yet we all struggle at times with being ungrateful servants in our Father's house. Thankfully (ha!), God's Word also has some wise guidance for us about how to up our thankfulness quotient, even during trying times. For starters, the Bible tells us that *thankfulness is a choice*. This is made clear in the apostle Paul's instructions to the Thessalonian believers when he tells them to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

1. According to this verse, when should we give thanks?

2. Reread 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and notice what it does *not* say. It doesn't say, "Give thanks *for* all circumstances." How is giving thanks *in* all circumstances different than giving thanks *for* all circumstances?

3. What circumstances are you dealing with right now that make it difficult to be thankful? What is one thing for which you can be thankful in that situation?

4. The apostle James went a step further than Paul when he wrote, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:2-3). How is your difficult situation helping you to develop perseverance?

5. Even when circumstances seem to be at their worst, there is always one very good reason for giving thanks: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Does God’s love, demonstrated in Christ’s sacrifice, inspire you to be thankful? Why or why not?

6. How can focusing on God's love as you face tough times help you to practice thankfulness?

apply

It has been said that all the praise we offer this side of heaven is “just practice.” That may be true, but practice is the only way to get really good at anything!

1. Reread Psalms 34 and 150. What are three “praise principles” you can draw from these verses? How can you apply these principles to your prayer life?

Praise Principle 1:

Praise Principle 2:

Praise Principle 3:

2. Praise is something we practice individually and together. What are some creative ways you can praise God with your church, youth group or small group?

3. When you praise, you turn your focus from yourself to God. Is this difficult for you? Why or why not?

4. How can practicing praise have a positive effect on other areas of your spiritual life (serving others, obeying God's commands, resisting temptation, and so forth)?

5. Pick three psalms of praise to read every day during the coming week.

1.

2.

3.

reflect

It has been said that it's much easier to break a bad habit if you replace it with a good one. Are you ready to get in the habit of thankfulness?

1. Why do you think Christmas and Easter are special times of thanksgiving for Christians?

2. Do you think it's easier to focus on the negative than on the positive? Why or why not?

3. Why do thankful people tend to be happier people?

4. List seven things God has done—one for each day of the coming week—that you are thankful for. Set aside some time each day to give thanks for that blessing.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

5. Look up Psalm 100:4 and write it below. If you're up for the challenge, make it your memory verse for the week!

meditation



I will praise God's name in song and glorify
him with thanksgiving.

PSALM 69:30