

**"God Is Always There"
(Psalm 119:145-152)
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(Psalm 119:145-152)

¹⁴⁵ I call with all my heart; answer me, LORD,
and I will obey your decrees.
¹⁴⁶ I call out to you; save me
and I will keep your statutes.
¹⁴⁷ I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have put my hope in your word.
¹⁴⁸ My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,
that I may meditate on your promises.
¹⁴⁹ Hear my voice in accordance with your love;
preserve my life, LORD, according to your laws.
¹⁵⁰ Those who devise wicked schemes are near,
but they are far from your law.
¹⁵¹ Yet you are near, LORD,
and all your commands are true.
¹⁵² Long ago I learned from your statutes
that you established them to last forever.

Happy thanksgiving, everyone.

Thanksgiving is serious business for all people, but especially Christians. Our country makes a big deal out of Thanksgiving, but nothing compared to our neighbors down south. When I was growing up in America, Thanksgiving was a really big deal. It was so engrained in my wife and me that when we first immigrated to Canada, it seemed very odd to celebrate Thanksgiving in October. So we made it a point to celebrate American Thanksgiving near the end of November. That only lasted about two years as the busyness of life got the best of us. But in the States, Thanksgiving was the only holiday where you got two days off. You got Thursday and the Friday off. I believe that weekend is still considered the busiest travel day of the entire year. Thanksgiving was equated with football. There was always two afternoon games on TV. Then came the feast of the year, the only time, as an immigrant family, that we'd cook a full blown American turkey dinner, with all the trimmings (plus kimchi). After dinner, we'd loosen our belts and fall asleep while watching TV.

When Friday came around we'd call up our friends and have our annual Turkey bowl tackle football game in the park, to work off all the food that we had eaten the night before. And then, at least when I was growing up, the Friday after Thanksgiving was the first official day of Christmas shopping. Now a days, I think it's sometime in August. Isn't that when Costco brings out the Christmas stuff? And then you'd have Saturday to sleep in, rake the leaves, and then we'd go to church on Sunday morning. Mom would always prepare for my brother and me an extra offering envelope that was the special Thanksgiving offering. We'd have another Thanksgiving meal at church. And that's how we spent Thanksgiving.

Now, we don't make as big a deal of it as our American neighbors, but it's still a pretty important holiday for us Canadians, but for the Christian, regardless of which country you grew up in, Thanksgiving is real serious business. How so?

Well, the Bible actually commands us to be thankful to God. Repeatedly, in the Bible, (I counted 9 times) the command, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever." I'm not aware of any other religion where it's actually a command to be thankful.

Another verse in the Bible tells us that we are to give thanks in all circumstances. Think about that for a moment. Give thanks in ALL circumstances. Christianity does not mess around with thanksgiving. It takes thanksgiving to the highest level. Whether we find ourselves in good circumstances, trying circumstances, suffering circumstances, we are commanded to give thanks in all of them.

The same verse tells us that giving thanks to God in all circumstances is actually God's will for us in Christ Jesus. When we think of God's will, we usually think of whom we should marry, what to study in university, what career path to choose, whether to take this job or that job, and things like that. As much as all those things are a part of knowing God's will, Christianity takes the knowing of God's will to the fundamental duty of giving thanks. That's how important thanksgiving is to Christians.

As well for Christians, thanksgiving is a huge part of our spiritual life of prayer. Over and over in the Bible we see God's people offering up prayers of thanksgiving to God. Thanksgiving is so central to our faith that we go so far as to say that the one who is giving thanks to God is the one who is growing as a Christian and the one who doesn't give thanks to God is the one who is not growing. That's why the 'T' in the prayer acrostic ACTS is there. 'A' stands for adoration. 'C' stands for confession. 'T' stands for thanksgiving and S stands for supplication. The T comes before the 'S' for a reason. Before we go through our list of things we want God to do for us, we first remember all the things he's already done for us.

Let me say one more thing about thanksgiving. Christians take giving thanks to God so seriously that in the letter to the Romans, we are told that not giving thanks is as bad as not giving glory to God. It's on par with idolatry. And not giving thanks or being ungrateful to God will result in the judgment of God, where he gives us over to our most base and sinful desires. Grumbling against God is the same as lacking faith in God.

So, if there is anyone who should care, really care about Thanksgiving, it's Christians.

In this section of Psalm 119 we are given three reasons for why we should be thankful. Let's go through them one by one.

The first reason for why we are to be thankful is because **God is near**.

"Yet you are near, Lord" (151)

What does that mean? The nearness of God is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. If you've been keeping up with the chronological Bible reading plan, you noticed that we just finished the Old Testament and have just this week begun the first few chapters of the gospels. Well, we often think of the nearness of God as a New Testament idea. Jesus, the Son of God, became flesh and dwelt among us. He lived with us. Paul tells us that he's in us. And to top it off, we have the ever-present Holy Spirit, which God gave to us at Pentecost. He lives in us.

Yet, the presence of God, the nearness of God was there from the very beginning. It was one of God's special gifts to us. When Adam and Eve were created they enjoyed fellowship with God while walking with Him in the garden. His nearness was felt when God spoke to his chosen people directly or through angels. Later when the Israelites left Egypt and camped at Mount Sinai, do you remember how they were to set up the entire camp? There were three tribes to the north, three to the south, three to the west and three to east. And what was at the center? The tabernacle, the house of God, the place where God's people could meet with him. Later on, after they settled in Jerusalem, King Solomon built the temple of God, and at the dedication ceremony do you remember what happened? Here's the account.

¹⁰When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. ¹¹ And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple. (**1 Kings 8:10–11**)

In his temple dedication prayer, even Solomon wondered, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built." He couldn't fathom it. He couldn't believe it. How could God, the holy one, dwell among the common, the dirty, the sinful, and yet, that is what God did and continues to do. The Bible says,

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. (**Deuteronomy 31:6**)

So, what should our response be to the nearness of God?

²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (**Hebrews 10:21–22**)

Our response to God's nearness is that we should draw near to him. That's one reason why we should be thankful?

The second reason given in this psalm for being thankful is because **God listens**.

"I call with all my heart: answer me, Lord" (145)

"Hear my voice" (149)

Have you seen those nature videos where on some icy shore in the artic are hundreds if not thousands of penguins and it's the season to give birth. So there are all these mother penguins guarding their babies, smothering them, trying to keep them warm. And it's fascinating that in the chaos, in the midst of these thousands of birds, the mother penguin is able to 'home in' on her lost baby, locate him, she calls out and they're reunited. Parents are like that too. You're at life group gathering and all the parents are in one room eating or having their discussion while the toddlers are in the next room. And the parents hear a child crying. All the parents' ears perk up and one parent stands up and says, "I think that's mine" and goes to the next room, and nine times out of ten, they're right. Isn't that amazing, that Penguins and Parents have this ability to listen, to identify, to locate, and then attend to their children?

How much more so with God? Look at the intimacy with which the psalmist prays to God.

"I call with all my heart: answer me, Lord" and "Hear my voice." There's this closeness, a child-likeness in his prayers. He doesn't have to pretend to have it all together. He doesn't need to act as if he's some kind of super mature Christian. He merely pours out his heart to God in simple faith.

Friends, God is our heavenly father. He knows us better than any human parent or friend or spouse could know us. He can attend to our needs quicker and better than any person could. He condescends to us. He lowers himself to our level, and listens. God never sleeps. He's never away on vacation. He's near to us and he listens.

What is it that you're going through? What's the trouble that's burdening your heart? Is there a problem at school? Is there an issue in the family? Are you struggling with finances? Even if you have been distant from God, still you can go to him, and say, "Lord, draw me close to you." "Lord, come to me." And he will.

There is not a single prayer which God does not hear. There is never a cry that goes unnoticed. There is never a need that is not attended to, if you are a child of God. Now, isn't that a great reason to be thankful today?

So, we give thanks to God because he is near, we give thanks because he listens, and lastly we give thanks because **God saves**.

"I call out to you; save me" (146)

"preserve my life" (149)

When I was a child, probably around ten years old, our family took a vacation to the upper peninsula of Michigan and our grandmother came along. It was the five of us camping on a beautiful island called Drummond Island. What stood out to me was while we were swimming at the beach in Lake Superior our feet kept on stepping on these rocks. They were everywhere. Well, I reached down to get a closer look and to my surprise they weren't rocks at all, they were fresh water clams. Well my mom told my brother and me to gather a whole bunch and that evening we had one of the most delicious Korean spicy clam stews that I can remember.

But was even more memorable was the afternoon that we went fishing. My dad rented a little silver aluminum boat with a small motor on the back, just like any other boat rental. The five of us got in and headed out to go fishing. Well, the wind started to pick up and the waves started to get larger and larger. Our small rental boat was bobbing up and down, up and down. Water was coming over the bow and we were all getting soaked. My dad was trying really hard to control the boat and get us to somewhere safe. And as I'm looking at all of us on the boat, we all have this look of grave concern. I think all of us were thinking whether or not we were going to make it back to land. But then I looked at my grandmother's face and her eyes were closed. I knew exactly what she was doing. I don't think she closed her eyes because she was scared, even though she might have really been scared. She was praying. She was praying for God to save us, to get us back safely. Maybe she was even praying for God to calm the wind and the waves. Well after some time of chugging along, fighting the waves, we came upon a small island, landed the boat, and went on shore until the waves had calmed down.

God is a God who saves. In fact God is the only one that can save. Yes, he can and often does, save us from physical danger. That's why we pray for the safety and health of our children and friends and missionaries. We pray for healing when someone is sick and yes, we pray for our children and friends who are not Christians yet, that God would save them from their sins.

One of the shortest, but most powerful prayers ever spoken was by the Apostle Peter. This story also occurred on a lake. Jesus and his disciples were busy doing tons and tons of ministry for people. And after a day of ministry was done, Jesus sent his disciples ahead of him, by boat, across the lake. It was right before dawn, when Jesus decided to go out to them, walking on the water. Here's how the story continues,

²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

What a powerful cry, "Lord, save me!" That's a prayer we can all pray, and all of us should pray. **(Matthew 14:26–30)**

Jesus came to earth, not just to save a friend that's drowning in a lake; he came to do so much more than that. He came to save his friends that were drowning in their sins. It's sin that's killing us, drowning us and Jesus came to save us from that. He did that by dying on a cross, paying the penalty for our sins. Consider what he went through.

Jesus gave up nearness to God. He left the nearness and closeness of God in heaven and instead came to earth for us. Because he gave that up, we in turn can be near to God.

Jesus gave up being listened to by God. He cried out in agony for the cup of suffering to be taken away, but God said no and Jesus went through with suffering on the cross. So, if we are God's children, he will always listen to us.

When Jesus was dying on the cross, he cried out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?!" In a very real sense, in that moment, in that cry he lost the nearness of the God and the ear of God. God chose not to listen. Jesus experienced all of that in order that that would never happen to us. Trust in Jesus, he loves you, he died for you so that you could become a child of God. God is near you. God listens to you. God saves you and for that, we should be thankful.

Let's pray.