

Psalm 138 "I give thanks to you O Lord"

Read Psalm 138

1. (vs. 1-2) The psalmist is in the midst of trouble (vs. 7) and yet gives thanks. What can be learned about the object and nature of this thankfulness?

Object

I give thanks to your name – meaning the character of the living God. The things that David singles out however are

- a) God's steadfast love – that his love of us is unconditional - based on his promises alone*
- b) His faithfulness to his word – what he promises he will bring to fruition.*

Nature

- (1) *With his whole heart – heart soul mind and strength – there could be fruit here in discussing what it means to give thanks with your whole heart, mind, will.*
 - (2) *Before the gods – meaning above everything else he could give thanks for*
 - (3) *Bow toward your temple – orienting his entire life – entire trajectory toward the character of God.*
2. (vs. 3) The result of David's thankfulness is that his strength of soul was increased. This means that he was encouraged, emboldened, the stability of his foundation was increased.

Now read Philippians 4:4-7; 10-13. The result of Paul's thankfulness in the midst of his time in prison was a peace that guarded his heart, the diminishment of anxiety and worry, the possession of a contentment which no circumstance could rob him of.

How does the thankfulness you explored in question 1 lead to these realities?

Only the love, grace, and faithfulness of God is unchangeable so we are rooting our sense of self, security, meaning, and purpose in something that will never change.

Thanksgiving prayer takes up the anxiety producing question – How? How will I cope with this? – and answers by pointing to him – his love – his provision – his promises.

Thanksgiving prayer takes up the worry producing question why? Why is this happening to me? And points to the great doer of all who never acts purposelessly and whose purposes never fail.

Thanksgiving prayer directs us toward something that will make our worst times bearable and our best times leave-able (John Newton)

3. Thankfulness is naturally produced when we find a change of circumstance, the removal of our problems. David however is thankful prior to any resolution to his trouble. What does this reveal about the relationship between thankfulness *for* and trust *in* the character of God?

There is the tendency to go to God in prayer already having determined what is best for us, and then specifically asking God for the power to bring it about. To give thanks prior to any resolution is to trust that not only does God have the power to bring about what is best he also has the wisdom to know what is best.

We give thanks for whatever response God brings whenever that might be – even if it is the opposite of what we would have wanted – it will be difficult to swallow but we give thanks because we know that it will be utterly consistent with his grace, love, and faithfulness.

4. (vs. 8) This thankfulness for the character of God leads David to having a lens on his present trouble. The language of this verse gives a picture of God fashioning us into a beautiful piece of pottery motivated by his love alone. How does this image help us to navigate our troubles?

Gives us a trust that God is shaping us into something purposeful, something beautiful. What we are facing right now – even if we don't understand it – is part of that shaping. What others intended for evil, God will use for our good.

We know that this shaping and moulding is only motivated by God's steadfast love.

5. All that David asks is that God wouldn't forsake him (meaning relax the muscles of his hand so as to drop him). What assurance do we have that God will never leave us nor forsake us?

Here is the place to come before the cross where Jesus had every reason to forsake us yet was forsaken for us.

Jesus held us as the full force of sin, death, and hell came down upon him for our sake.

Jesus held us in his loving gaze as he endured the cross for we were the joy that was set before him (Hebrews 12:1-2)