

Cultivating a Thankful Heart

Psalm 50:7-15

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To help us prepare for this week's celebration of Thanksgiving, I want you to turn with me this morning to Psalm 50. Psalm 50. Until Tuesday morning of this week, I had not planned to preach on this Psalm. But as that morning, as I was going through this Psalm just in my own life and my own time with the Lord and working my way through it for my own benefit, it struck me that the central stanza of this Psalm is absolutely perfect as we begin this Thanksgiving week. And so, I want to examine that stanza together.

Now, let me first back up and give you some context of Psalm 50. You'll notice that it begins with the title "A Psalm of Asaph." This is the first of twelve Psalms that were written by this man. The others would be Psalm 73 through 83. Asaph was one of the three choir leaders of Israel during the time of David. He led Israel's corporate worship. In fact, it's appropriate that in 1 Chronicles 16:4 we're told this was his job description: "To celebrate and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel." And so, it's appropriate that here there's a focus in this Psalm on thanksgiving. This Psalm then was written almost certainly by Asaph; if not, it was written by one of his descendants who continued the same task in Israel.

Now, this powerful Psalm describes a court scene in which God summons the entire world to hear His case against His covenant people Israel; a case in which He is both the plaintiff and the judge. He first presents His case against the righteous ones among His people. He has a problem, a concern with them. And then He presents His case against the wicked among His people; that is, those who are not true believers at all but who are a part of the nation.

Let me give you a sort of outline, a structure of the Psalm. We're not going to cover the entire Psalm, but just so you understand where it goes. In the first stanza, verses 1 through 6, God summons heaven and earth as His witnesses in a court case against His people. Then in verses 7 through 15, the second stanza, God confronts the righteous among His people. The third stanza is verses 16 to 21, God confronts the wicked among His people. And that becomes clear, by the way, when you get to verse 16, it says, "But to the wicked God says." And then He says, "What

right have you to tell of My statutes... to take My covenant in your mouth?" So, these are people connected to the nation of Israel, and yet, verse 17, they "hate discipline", that is, verbal instruction. They even cast God's words behind them. They ignore what God has said. And they go on, verses 18 to 20, to sin against God and against His Law. And they thought God—this is one of the greatest indictments of all time, verse 21: "You thought... I was just like you," *because you did what you did and I kept silent. You thought I must be OK with it. God says, I'm not.* And then the the final stanza in verses 22 to 23, God declares His verdict on both the righteous and the wicked. So that's sort of the flow of the Psalm as a whole.

But for the next few minutes, as we prepare our hearts both for Thanksgiving and for the Lord's Table, I want us just to consider that center stanza, verses 7 to 15, because here God confronts and corrects His true people. Let's read it together. Psalm 50, beginning in verse 7:

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you;
I am God, your God.
I do not reprove you for your sacrifices,
And your burnt offerings are continually before Me.
I shall take no young bull out of your house
Nor male goats out of your folds.
For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.
I know every bird of the mountains,
And everything that moves in the field is Mine.
If I were hungry I would not tell you,
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.
Shall I eat the flesh of bulls
Or drink the blood of male goats?
Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
And pay your vows to the Most High;
Call upon Me in the day of trouble;

I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.”

Now, in that paragraph God presents two corrections for His true people. He confronts them, and He corrects them. And specifically, there are two corrections here that we will look at together. First of all, God diagnoses the the sinful thinking among His people that destroys their thanksgiving, and then He prescribes the simple changes that will restore to His true people a grateful and dependent heart. So, it's, as you can see, very appropriate for this Sunday.

So, let's consider, then, God's corrections. The first one is a correction of our thinking. Let's look in verses 7 to 13 at the sinful thinking that destroys gratitude. The sinful thinking that destroys gratitude. When thanksgiving is either infrequent or, frankly, nonexistent, God says I want you to consider My diagnosis of the real problem. If we struggle with a thankful heart, God here, for us, is helping to diagnose one of the most common sets of problems. It has to do with our thinking. The real problem, God says, with your lack of thanksgiving is this: it's how you think about Me. That's the real problem. So, what are the sinful thoughts about God that lie buried here in God's diagnosis of the thoughts of His people? Let's look at them together. There are several patterns of sinful thinking that destroy, ultimately, a thankful heart.

The first sinful thought about God that acts in that way is this: God is pleased with my worship and obedience even if it's solely external. This is verses 7 and 8. Now the previous verses, verses 1 through 6, are really just introduction. They set the scene as God calls heaven and earth as His witnesses, as He launches His case against His people. But now in verse 7, God speaks. And notice what He says, “Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God.” Now when you read that verse (if you're thinking at all) it should send a little shiver up your spine, because it reminds us that God then and God now is inspecting the lives and the worship of His people. God was scrutinizing the worship of His people Israel in the time of Asaph, and He does ours as well. In fact, think of it this way - we can give thanks to God this week or think we are, and it can be woefully inadequate, just as the worship of God's people in the time of Asaph was. And God here confronts it.

So what is God's problem with their worship? Verse 8: "I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before Me." In verse 8, He's not yet telling us why He's concerned about His people, He's telling us why He's not. This is not the problem. God's indictment of His people was not for their failure to worship Him externally in the way He had prescribed. In fact, verse 8 says they do so consistently. In fact, they did so every morning and evening with the burnt offering that was required every day of the year. They did so on every weekly Sabbath. They did so at the monthly new moon festivals. They did it at the annual feasts. Sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice. Externally, they were engaged in the worship of God. God's problem was not with their external worship. God's problem was with their attitude, with their thinking, especially toward Him. And at the core of their sinful thinking was that God was only concerned with the externals.

And let me just say, this is a very common, human temptation, to think all God cares about is what happens on the outside. But this isn't who God is. He tells us again and again that He looks inside the heart. First Samuel chapter 16, verse 7, you remember He says to Samuel, listen, don't look at David's older brother and think he's the next king. You're just looking at the appearance. That's where man looks. But God says, I look on the heart. Or consider what David says to his son Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:9. He says, "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, [and listen to this] and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind." That's what God expects. A whole heart and a willing mind. "For [because, here's why, Solomon, you ought to do this] the Lord searches all hearts." There's a sermon right there. The Lord searches all hearts. That's your heart, and that's my heart. Let this sink into your mind for a moment. God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows what's going on inside your head. And David goes on to say, "And [He] understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever." God looks at the human heart, at your heart and my heart, and He responds, not on the basis of what's happening externally, but on the basis of what's happening inside.

By the way, ultimately, this is why we all need the gospel of Jesus Christ, because God looks on the heart. That means we can never meet God's standard. We can never have the only righteousness which would make us acceptable to God, and that is perfect, internal

righteousness. Maybe you're here this morning and you're banking on the fact that God's going to let you into His heaven because you're a pretty good person. You better let this sink into your mind. God isn't external in His evaluation. He knows every thought you have ever had. He searches all the hearts, and He will make His determination based on the reality that He finds there. Your only hope, and my only hope is Jesus Christ, that He was punished on the cross in the place of everyone who would ever repent of their sins and believe in Him. Short of that we have no hope. He is our hope.

But for us who are in Christ, this verse here in Psalm 50 reminds us that God is never pleased with solely external worship and obedience. He wants our worship and obedience only if they come from a whole heart and a willing mind. Now, I assume most of us here this morning, all of us who are in Christ, would say amen to that. So, let me just give you a little test, as I have to test myself. How have you done so far with your worship this morning? Did you sing from your heart to the Lord when we sang? When we prayed, have you engaged your mind in praying along with the person who's leading in prayer and addressed your prayers to God? Now as we study God's Word, are you forcing your mind to listen to and to respond to God's Word? If you have to say no to any of those questions, then understand this: you are as guilty this morning as the people God confronts in this Psalm. If your body's here but your mind is a thousand miles away, then this stanza is for you, as it is for all of us. And here's the problem. When we think the external is all that matters, it always destroys a heart of gratitude. Why? Because gratitude by its very nature is something that begins inside. It begins in the heart. And when the heart doesn't matter to us because we don't think the heart matters to God, gratitude dies.

There's a second pattern of sinful thinking that destroys gratitude here in this stanza. It's this: God demands from me what is really mine. God demands from me what is really mine. Verses 9 and 10. Notice verse 9. God says, "I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds." Now, bulls and male goats were usually the sacrifices that were offered in the Old Testament system. And together here they probably are intended to represent all of the sacrifices that were offered to God. And God says I don't want your sacrifices. Now, don't misunderstand. God is not saying in verse 9 that the people of Israel were no longer to offer

those sacrifices that He Himself required in the Old Testament law. Instead, He's making two points to the people.

First of all, He's making the point that sacrifice offered externally without the right heart was not acceptable to God. It's not enough. In fact, turn over just a page to Psalm 51, one of the most famous Psalms. David, as he confessed his sin with Bathsheba, he understood this. Verse 17, he says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." You want to know what sacrifice you can offer God? Start with a broken and a contrite heart, a heart that recognizes your sin and humbles yourself before God. That's what David says. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." Listen, if you'll come to God humbly broken over your sin, God won't despise you. He'll receive you. He'll welcome you. But even as David acknowledges that you have to come with a right heart and that matters more than sacrifice, he goes on to underscore that in that Old Testament system they were still to offer sacrifices. Look at verse 19: "Then you will delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then young bulls will be offered on Your altar." So He wasn't saying that there were to be no sacrifices. He was saying they have to come with the right heart; with a right heart. This was true, you remember, even back in Samuel. Samuel said to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22, he says, "Has the Lord as much delight in... [sacrifice] as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" No. No is the answer.

And there a number of passages in the Old Testament that underscore this. One famous one (in our culture) is Amos 5. I want you to see this. Amos 5. You could turn to Isaiah 1, and there are other places (Micah 6), but look at Amos 5:21. God says to His people, "I hate..." Boy, that's strong language. "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies." All those festivals that I told you to have? I hate 'em.

"Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.

Take away from Me the noise of your songs;

I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.

[And then He says,] But let justice roll down like waters

And righteous like an ever-flowing stream.”

What does that mean? He’s saying, listen, if your life is not a life that’s characterized by obedience to Me, then I don’t want your sacrifices. That’s what He’s saying. Don’t bring ’em. Such passages as Amos and Isaiah, these passages anticipated the doing away with the animal sacrificial system once the permanent sacrifice of Jesus Christ had been made. That’s the point of the Book of Hebrews. But these passages also primarily make the point, that sacrifices that were offered without the heart engaged and without a life that matched in obedience, those sacrifices are unacceptable to God.

But there’s a second point that God is making back in Psalm 50, and I want you to see it. Look at the difference between verses 9 and 10. In these two verses God intentionally contrasts the pronouns “your” with “Mine.” Notice in verse 9 the psalmist talks about the young bulls in your house and the male goats in your folds. Now what’s God doing here? Well, you got to understand a little bit about the culture in which the children of Israel lived. All the countries that surrounded them also made sacrifices, but they worshiped idols. And they had these awful ideas about why sacrifices were made. In pagan religion the sacrifices served several purposes.

First of all, they they were a kind of a payoff of the god’s anger, because in pagan religions the gods are capricious, they’re temperamental; all it takes to tick them off is a bad hair day, and wow, you’re suffering as a result of it. That’s the gods of the pagan nations. And so you offered sacrifices to kind of pay them off; keep them from carrying out their temperamental, capricious anger on you.

A second reason the pagans offered sacrifices was as a bribe of their god’s favor. Again, in pagan religion, the gods were miserly, they were harsh, they were not generous, and so you kind of had to grease the slide a little bit. You had to sort of give god something in hopes that he would give you more. You were bribing him.

A third reason that the pagans made sacrifices to their gods was actually as a provision of their god’s needs, because their gods were completely dependent on the generosity of the people. In

fact, Moses mocks this in Deuteronomy 32:37-38. He talks about, you know, having to feed the gods. In fact, this was so common in Mesopotamian religion in the ancient world that one of the great archaeologists wrote a book called *The Care and Feeding of the Gods*. That's how people thought about their sacrifices. Now understand with pagans, in each case, the idolater thought like this. He thought, I am being forced to payoff, to bribe, or to provide for my god out of what really belongs to me and not to my god. That's how he thought.

Sadly, the people of Israel had begun to think like their pagan neighbors. And when they offered their sacrifices, they had begun to think, God is taking from me what is rightfully mine. And so to correct this sinful thinking, God underscores His universal ownership of all things. Look at verse 9:

“I shall take no young bull out of [notice this] your house
Nor male goats out of your folds.
For [because, here's why] every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.”

Now, notice what belongs to God here. Look at verse 10: “Every beast of the forest is Mine.” God says all of the wild animals that roam at large, all those that man has not claimed or tamed, they're Mine. Verse 10 goes on to say, “The cattle on a thousand hills” is Mine. The Hebrew here, by the way, is a little ambiguous. Literally, the Hebrew reads this way: the cattle on the mountains of a thousand of Him. It may mean the cattle that roamed by the thousands on all the hills of Israel, or more likely (the way it's translated here in our Bibles) the cattle on a thousand hills. But either way, the point's the same. You get the point? God's saying, I own all of the domesticated animals on this planet. I hate to tell you this, but your cat, your dog, is not yours. It's God's. It's what He's saying. Verse 11: “I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine.” Now, you put those two verses together and notice what belongs to God: every wild animal, all domesticated animals, every bird, and everything that moves in the field. And the psalmist could have added everything that swims in the seas as well. But don't miss the point: all of the wild animals and all of the domesticated ones as well.

Now look back at verse 9. That means the bull out of your house and the male goat out of your folds isn't really yours at all. It's God's. That's why you have Psalm 24:1, which says, "The earth is the Lord's." You want to look anywhere on this planet you want to look, it's God's. It belongs to Him. There's nothing on this planet that isn't His. It goes on to say, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains." None of the animals. None of the plants. Nothing! The oxygen. It's His. And then he adds, this is Psalm 24:1: "The world, and those who dwell in it." I want you to look around this room this morning and realize that every person in this room belongs to God as Creator. You belong to God as your Creator. God says, "The world, and those who dwell in it." There isn't a single person on this planet who isn't God's, in the Creator sense. So, make sure you correct your thinking. God is not invading our rights when He claims anything that we possess. And God is not invading our rights—and this is more difficult—when He decides to take any of those things that are valuable to us.

Now, not many of us own bulls or goats. I won't ask for a show of hands. But, is this how you think about all those things that God has allowed you to steward, that you call your own? Let me just give you some categories. When you think about your time and how you use it, do you really, truly think that's God's, that's God's time? Or what about your gifts and abilities? Your job? Your career? When you think of your possessions (your car, your house, your money, your iPhone, your investments), when you think about your health, your family, your spouse, your children or even your life itself, ask yourself this question: Do you really understand and believe that God looks at everything you have in all of those categories (and the ones I haven't mentioned) and God rightly says, "Mine"? It's Mine. If that's not how you think, then God says, I don't want your worship. I don't want it. In verse 9 He says, I don't want your sacrifices as long as you think they're coming out of your house and your flocks and your folds. In other words He's saying, as long you as you think you are giving me what is yours, I don't want it. I will only accept it if you understand that you are simply giving back to Me what is Mine and what I have allowed you to be a steward of for a time.

And let me say it the other way. If you think that anything in your life truly belongs to you, I can guarantee you, you will never be thankful for that thing. You'll never have a thankful heart for that. Instead you need to foster, we all need to foster, the spirit in 1 Corinthians 4:7, where Paul

says, “What do you have?” Here’s a great question for Thanksgiving. OK? “What do you have that you did not receive?” You came into this world as I did with absolutely nothing. What do you have that you didn’t receive? Or James 1:17: “Every good thing given, and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” Let me tell you how you’ve contributed and how I’ve contributed to our lives. Sin. Trouble. Heartache. Every good gift, every good thing you enjoy in life, came to you from God. You had no responsibility for it whatsoever.

There’s a third pattern of sinful thinking about God that erodes our thanksgiving. It’s in verse 11. God is really not good, not generous, and not loving. Notice verse 11: “I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine.” Now, at first glance, it appears that verse 11 is really just saying the same thing as verse 10 but in a different way. But that’s not true, and it becomes very clear when you take this verse apart in the original language. The primary point of verse 11 is not God’s universal ownership of all things, like verse 10 was. Instead, it’s His universal concern and care of all things. Let’s look at it. First line in verse 11: “I know every bird of the mountains.” The Hebrew word for “know”, there, is a word that implies thorough, comprehensive knowledge, but more than that, an intimate knowledge, a kind of relational knowledge. And God says, I have an intimate knowledge of (and this is staggering) every bird of the mountains. Some of you, like Sheila and I, love the mountains. Just think about that for a moment. “I know every bird of the mountains.” And then He adds, verse 11, “Everything that moves in the field is Mine.” And here’s where we can be led astray a little bit in our translation, because, literally, the second line of verse 11 reads like this from the Hebrew text: everything that moves in the field is with Me. Everything that moves in the field is with Me. They’re never out of My presence. Now, those are astonishing statements. God intimately knows, in the sense that He cares for, every single bird on this planet, and God knows and cares for and provides for all His creatures. They are with Him. They are in His presence. And through the secondary means that He’s established, He personally cares for them. Look at Psalm 145. Psalm 145, verse 15:

The eyes of all look to You [God],
And You give them their food in due time.

You open Your hand
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

It pictures God like one of us at a petting zoo. You open your hand, and You feed everything. Our Lord made the same point. Go over to Matthew 6. In the Sermon on the Mount, He uses the illustration of birds as He helps us deal with the issue of worry and anxiety. Matthew 6:26, He says, “Look at the birds of the air.” Consider the birds. They don’t sow, they don’t reap, they don’t gather into barns, “and yet [Jesus says] your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth... more than they?” Go over to chapter 10 of Matthew. Chapter 10 and verse 29. Again, He comes back to this illustration. He says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent?” That’s the smallest copper coin in existence at the time. Two sparrows for a penny, if you will. “And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.” God is intimately involved in the flight path of every sparrow. That’s how intimate His care is.

Now go back to Psalm 50. Why does God make this point about Himself? It’s because the rest of this passage implies that the people thought about God exactly the opposite. Their thinking about God was kind of like this: you know, God makes a lot of demands on us, and He’s really not concerned about us; He just wants us to measure up to the standard. They were tempted to think that God is really not good, He’s not generous, He’s not loving. And you know what? That is always Satan’s lie. It has been since the garden. Maybe you’re here this morning, and you’ve somehow convinced yourself, because of your circumstances in life, that God is not good. He’s not concerned. He doesn’t care. He’s not loving. He’s not generous. Understand, you’re believing a lie. It was the lie Satan sold Eve in the garden: is it true, Eve, that God said you can’t eat of any of the trees in this garden? You see what he’s doing? He knew. He was magnifying the prohibition. He was making the prohibition look huge. When in reality, God had said you can eat from every tree except one. And then he goes on to say, *oh you’re not going to die. Listen, God knows, He knows in the day you eat of this you’re going to be like God. God’s holding out on you. God is not good. He’s not generous. He’s keeping something from you that’s good.* That’s why Jesus said in John 8:44, Satan “is a liar and the father of lies.”

What does Satan lie about? Well, he lies about everything. He lies about himself. He lies about sin. He lies about reality. He lies to you about you. But he especially lies to everyone about God. And at the root of his lies are, one, God isn't just: you're not going to die, Eve; God's not going to deal with your sin. And his other lie is, God's not good, He's holding out on you. This is the temptation that comes. In fact, James 1:16 and 17, talking about temptation, says, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." How does temptation deceive us? Listen to this, the very next verse: "Every good thing given, and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Here's how temptation, how Satan lies to you through temptation: he says there is good outside of God. It's an attack on the character of God Himself. And so, here in Psalm 50, God says, *Listen! No! I know and I care for every creature that I've made.*

But don't miss the point. God's point in Psalm 50 is not a lesson about God's care for the animals. It's a lesson about us. God is just as generous in His care and His provision for us. And God's generosity is completely undeserved. In fact, a couple weeks ago I told my wife I was sitting in my car at a stoplight somewhere here in the area, and I had an epiphany. Now when I say that, my kids often, you know, want to know if I took something for it. But an epiphany is like this revelation. You come to understand something you didn't before. And I was sitting there—and it's not that I didn't know this theologically or biblically. I did. But it just struck me in a way it hadn't before. I was sitting there at that stop light, and it occurred to me, not one time in my life have I ever received anything I deserved. And neither have you. We haven't received the justice we deserved. God's withheld it. None of us have been treated like we really deserve. And every good thing we've received? We didn't deserve those either. Not one. God is good and generous and gracious and kind, and yet Satan and our own flesh always wants to lie about the nature of God.

There's a fourth pattern of sinful thinking that destroys gratitude. Verses 12 and 13. God needs me and my worship. God needs me and my worship. Look at verse 12: "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains." Now, lying behind that statement is the implication that God's people thought God needed their sacrifices, that somehow, like the pagans, if they didn't feed God He was going to suffer from malnutrition. He needed His three

meals a day, and that's what the sacrifices provided. To that mistaken, tragically mistaken idea, God says listen, if I ever needed anything, and I don't, I would never ask you to supply it; I made and own everything that exists, so if I were to ever have a need, and I don't, I could fully and completely supply it from what is Mine. Verse 13: "Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats?" Really? You think I'm like that? God says don't you dare think of Me like the pagans think of their gods. One commentator writes this:

God does not need our worship, but we need to worship God. God would still be God if we offered Him nothing, but we would not be truly human if we did not make an offering to God. Sacrifice should have been food for thought, not food for God.

Here's the bottom line. God never takes anything from us in order to meet His needs. Instead, exactly the opposite is true. He cares for us, and He richly supplies all our needs, just as He does all of the animals on this planet. Let this be a bedrock principle of your understanding of God. He needs nothing from you. Instead, you need everything from Him, and He generously and graciously and lavishly has given you good thing after good thing.

This is the message of Acts 14:17. Paul says God didn't leave Himself without a witness in the world, even where there wasn't His Word. Here's how He did it. And this is really what we celebrate this week in Thanksgiving. "In that [God] did good and He gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, [I love this] satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." You know, whatever joyful, good times you experience this week that aren't sinful, those good things are from God Himself. They're from God Himself. In Acts 17, Paul says listen, God doesn't need anything; don't think that you're giving something to God, but "in Him we move we live and move and [have our being.]" First Timothy 6:17: "God... richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."

Now look at that list of sinful thoughts. Those sinful patterns of thinking extinguish every flicker of thanksgiving from the soul. So, we've seen the sinful thinking that destroys thanksgiving, but God doesn't stop with the diagnosis. He also provides a treatment plan.

Notice He explains the simple changes that restore gratitude, the simple changes that restore gratitude to the hearts of those who are His. We find this in verses 14 and 15. There are three of them. Let's look at them briefly.

Number one: change your routine patterns of thinking. Change your routine patterns of thinking. In other words (we've just seen the sinful ways to think about God), we have to train ourselves to think exactly the opposite of the sinful thinking in verses 9 to 13. We must understand and preach to ourselves these truths about God. Number one, God is only pleased when my worship and obedience are wholehearted. Number two, God owns all things, and He has given me all that I have, and He only demands from me what is already really His. Number three, God is truly good and generous and loving, richly supplying me with all things and graciously receiving me in Christ. And number four, God is not dependent on me in any way, but I am totally dependent on Him for everything. You need to change your pattern of thinking if you're going to cultivate a heart of thanksgiving, because those other, those sinful thoughts will destroy and extinguish thanksgiving. These will develop and build them.

There's a second simple change that will restore gratitude: you must cultivate a real heart of thanksgiving. Cultivate a real heart of thanksgiving. Notice verse 14: "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High." Now the context here makes it clear that Asaph is not talking about offering an animal sacrifice of a thank offering. That was one of the sacrifices you could make in the Old Testament. It's clear, because he's talked about, they were already doing that. He's talking about something different here. He's saying in verse 14 that thanksgiving, itself, is the spiritual sacrifice we are to make to God. And by such an offering of thanksgiving we are—notice what he says: "and pay your vows to the Most High." You see, some of the thank offerings were made to fulfill a promise that was made when asking God to do something. So, this is really one and the same idea. He's saying the real offering that God requires of us, and without which all other worship is vain and worthless, is a sincere thankful heart where you offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving or you fulfill the vow of thanksgiving for all God has done for you. Because thanksgiving is the essence of true worship. The Old Testament sacrifices were meaningless without a heart of thanksgiving, either for God's forgiveness, if you were offering the sacrifice for God's forgiveness, or with thanksgiving for the way God had

enriched your life and blessed you and become your God. So, if you want to cultivate a heart of thanksgiving, you have simply got to begin the practice of, in your heart, making a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. The way the New Testament puts it very directly is “give thanks to God.” This isn’t brain surgery. This week take time to give thanks to God, to offer Him the sacrifice which is your thanksgiving.

A third simple change that we need to make, in order to restore thanksgiving to our souls, is in verse 15. Develop a constant spirit of dependence. Notice verse 15: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.” You know what God is saying? He’s saying remember that I’m not dependent on you, but you are dependent on Me; so when you get into trouble, express that dependence by asking Me to help. Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and God says, I will rescue you. I will come to your rescue. It may be in this life that God will come and rescue you from that circumstance, or it may be that He will rescue you by eventually taking you into His eternal presence. But He will come to your rescue.

Notice, “Call upon Me.” That’s prayer. You see, prayer is primarily how we express our dependence on God. It’s put that way in Psalm 62:8. It says, “Trust in Him at all times.” Depend on Him at all times. How? “Pour out your heart before Him; [for] God is a refuge for us.” Or in 1 Peter 5, it says submit to God. How? Submit yourselves under God’s mighty hand. How? “Casting all your [care] upon Him, [for] He cares for you.” You see, the measure of your dependence on God or your independence from God is the measure of your prayer. Prayer reflects our dependence.

Now why does he throw dependence or trust into this paragraph that’s dealing with thanksgiving? It’s because they’re not really separate. They’re really opposite sides of the same coin. Think about it this way. When you realize that God alone has already provided for a need that you have, you will be thankful to God. When you realize that God alone can provide the need you still have, then you will be dependent on God. So really, it’s one and the same. Dependence comes before God meets the need; thanksgiving comes after God meets the need. But it’s the same spirit. It’s everything comes from God. That’s why we’re to call upon Him in the day of trouble and wait for Him to act.

So, those are the simple changes. When we change our routine patterns of thinking, when we work at developing a real heart of thanksgiving by simply giving thanks, when we develop a constant spirit of dependence on God for the needs that have not yet been met, then notice verse 23, because it tells us what the results will be. “He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me.” It glorifies God when You thank Him for all that He’s done, when you realize that everything you have comes from Him, and you thank Him. “And to him who orders his way aright I will show the salvation of God.” God says I’m going to intervene in that person’s life, both temporally, saving them from the troubles of this life as I choose in My providence, but eternally, saving them from the consequences of their sin.

It’s appropriate that, as we celebrate Thanksgiving this week, that we begin this week celebrating with the Lord’s Table, because it is the significant way that we give thanks to God for His greatest blessing, His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Prepare your heart as the men come.

Our Father, as we come to the Lord’s Table today, we come acknowledging that too often we have harbored the very sinful thoughts that You confront in this passage, sinful thoughts about You. Lord, forgive us. Forgive us because of what Jesus did. Forgive us not because we deserve to be forgiven, but because Christ earned our forgiveness on the cross by satisfying Your justice even against our ingratitude. Father, I pray that You’d help us to think rightly. Help us to remember that You are only pleased when our worship and obedience are wholehearted. Even now as we engage in the Lord’s table, help our minds and hearts to be engaged. Father remind us that You own all things, and that You have given us as a stewardship, all that we have, and You only demand from us, or at times choose to take from us, what is really Yours. Father remind us that You are good, that You’re generous, that You are loving, that You richly supply us with all that we need and receive us in Jesus Christ. Father, even as we take of the Lord’s Table and we remind ourselves that You met our needs spiritually, remind us that we are fully and totally dependent on You for everything, while You are not dependent on us in any way. Father forgive us for our sinful thinking about You. And Lord, we also pray that You’d forgive us for all of our other sins. We don’t want to come to the Lord’s Table as those who have confessed Christ as Lord and Savior and do so in a way that demeans His sacrifice by treating sin lightly, the very

sin for which He died. And so, Father, we confess our sins individually and personally, specifically. And we ask that You would forgive us, again, not because we deserve it, but because Christ earned it. He satisfied Your justice for the very sins we seek Your forgiveness for now. We bless You and thank You for His gift and the gift of Him to us. Receive our worship as we engage our hearts even now. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.