

Notes for the Ones Called–Out to Meet

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Joy, Celebration, Praise and Thanksgiving

by Dan Trygg

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now *all the ones believing were being upon the same thing* and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ And they began selling their property and possessions and were distributing them to all, as anyone was having a need. ⁴⁶ And every day they were devoting themselves with one purpose in the temple complex, and breaking bread from house to house, eating food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding the ones being saved daily *upon the same thing.*” Acts 2:42-47

“Oh give thanks to Yahweh, call upon His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples. ⁹ Sing to Him, sing praises to Him. Speak of all His wonders. ¹⁰ Glory in His holy name. Let the heart of those who seek Yahweh be glad. ¹¹ Seek Yahweh and His strength. Seek His face continually.” I Chronicles 16:8-11

“Devote yourselves to prayer; watching in it with thanksgiving, praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ...” Colossians 4:2,3

We have been examining the recipe for discipleship employed by the early church in Jerusalem. We identified and examined the *four disciplines*, or strategies for growth, that they “devoted themselves to”. They gave themselves daily to *learning and discussing the teachings of the apostles*, to *openly sharing with one another* their insights, joys, needs and struggles. *They took meals together*, in order to facilitate their communication, and to foster a sense of unity and celebration. Another key ingredient of these meetings was to *go to God together in prayer*. Earnestly seeking God’s face together creates another, deeper dynamic of sharing and oneness than what can be obtained in a discussion or in a social interaction. **As they applied themselves to these activities, they experienced another important ingredient for spiritual growth, ...joy.** They were learning exciting new concepts, ...hearing about the depths of God’s love for them, ...discovering the fulfillment of ancient prophecies and the hidden meanings of symbols and practices they had grown up with all their lives, ...experiencing an intimacy and reality of God’s activity in their lives that they had not known before, ...finding a faith-family that, for many of them, accepted them and valued them more than their own natural families ever had, ...*and* they were seeing God answer the cries of their hearts in a way they had not known before. How could they *not* be excited!?! How could they not be filled with gladness, as they recounted their discoveries and victories because of God’s love and faithfulness to them? **Their hearts were full to overflowing, and they naturally found themselves giving thanks and praising God.** It was *infectious!* Other people took note, and were attracted to their positive, joyful exuberance.

The concept and word usage concerning thanksgiving in the Bible is interesting. *It only occurs in a couple of contexts* in the book of Leviticus, in reference to a “thank offering” (Lev. 7:12,13,15; 22:29), ...*until we come to David.* Then, the word usage practically explodes! **David himself not only gave thanks to God (II Sam. 22:50), but he assigned others (the Levites) to sing songs of thanksgiving and praise each morning and evening** in the sanctuary (I Chron. 16:4-8,35-41; 23:26-31). He also assigned three Levitical families to offer thanksgiving to God in the temple by singing and music (25:1-4). **David clearly understood that every blessing that Israel enjoyed was from the hand of God, and therefore he offered praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh for all His provisions** (I Chron. 29:11-16). David was known for his many songs, and was referred to as the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (II Sam. 23:1). **It is not surprising that over a third of the expressions of thanksgiving in the Bible are found in the Psalms**, either written by or patterned after David’s heart. **In David’s mind, God dwells or abides in the praises of His people** (Psa. 22:3).

The next time the notion of giving thanks to Yahweh is in II Chronicles 20, where God sovereignly promised Jehoshaphat to deliver Israel from their enemies. **The singers and musicians were to precede the armies of Israel to the battlefield, giving thanks and praise for God’s faithful love** (vs. 21). When they got there, the enemy armies had turned upon each other and destroyed each other. This confusion and self-annihilation *started* “when they began singing and praising the Lord” (vs. 22). **As they raised their voices in praise and thanksgiving, Yahweh rose up and routed their enemies.**

During the revival under Hezekiah, the king restored the stations of the Levites that David had instituted for singing songs of thanksgiving and praise to God, along with musical accompaniment (II Chron. 29:25-31). During the feast of Unleavened Bread, the Levites offered songs of praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh during the seven-days. The text indicates, “their voice was heard and their prayer came into His holy dwelling place in heaven (30:21-27). Later, when Hezekiah took initiative to *cleanse the land of idolatry* and *restore the worship of Yahweh*, **he restored the Levites to their role of singing praises and giving thanks as a key part of his campaign** (II Chron. 31:2).

Praise and thanksgiving were next offered by Ezra and Nehemiah. When the *Temple foundations were laid*, the priests and Levites, according to their assigned roles, offered songs of praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh in celebration for what He done to restore the remnant to the land of promise (Ezr. 3:10,11). Nehemiah also sought out the Levites to *celebrate the dedication of the wall to Yahweh*, with songs of thanksgiving and praise (Neh.12:27,28). **Part of the response to the revival was to restore the tithe to support the Levites, so that they would be able to be dedicated to the songs of thanksgiving and praise that David and Solomon had prescribed** (Neh. 12:44-47).

Isaiah prophesied that the restored remnant will thank God for turning away His anger toward them, and comforting them. They will proclaim, “Give thanks to Yahweh, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples” (Isa. 12:1,4). **The prophet also thanked God for fulfilling His sovereign plans through history**, plans conceived in faithfulness and established with wonderful works (Isa. 25:1). **Jeremiah also prophesied that God will restore a remnant from their exile, and they will give thanks to Yahweh for His steadfast love** (Jer. 30:19; 33:11).

Daniel offered thanks for a specific revelation given in answer to prayer (2:23). **Daniel was quick to recognize and acknowledge God’s personal responses to him.** Part of his daily discipline was to pray and give thanks to God three times each day (6:10). **Offering thanks to God was a significant part of his deep spirituality.**

In the NT, Jesus thanked the Father **for answered prayer** (Jn. 11:41). On six occasions, Paul thanked God **for those who had come to faith** (Rom.1:8; I Cor.1:4; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; I Thess. 1:2), praising God for each one. He gave thanks **for the spiritual insight and personal growth they received** (Rom. 6:17; I Thess. 2:13; II Thess. 1:3; Philem. 1:4), and **for spiritual gifts and blessings** (I Cor. 14:18; Rom. 7:25; Col. 1:12; I Tim. 1:12; Philem. 1:4,5). He thanked God **for leading them in victory in Christ** (I Cor. 15:57), **and revealing Jesus through the lives of His people** (II Cor. 2:14). Because of this, the grace of God was spreading to more and more people, which resulted in an abundance of thanksgiving to God (II Cor. 4:10-15). As an example of this, the offering for the poor, which Paul helped to collect, was not only a *demonstration of their faith*, but *would produce much thanks* to God, who had so richly provided grace and resources (II Cor. 9:11-15). Paul taught us to **give thanks in all circumstances** (I Thess. 5:18), because God is with us, and we can ask for His help and provision. We are also to **give thanks on behalf of everyone** (Eph. 5:20 – This is mistranslated in some versions. It is *not* saying we are to give thanks *for* everything. Some things are evil. We are not asked to thank God *for* evil circumstances, or the work of evil. We can pray *for* everyone, and thank God that He can work-together even evil circumstances to produce a good result in our lives. Cf. I Tim. 2:1) **Praying with thanksgiving to our personal, loving Father is an important component for obtaining, and walking in, a calm peaceful heart** (Phil. 4:6,7; Col. 3:15-17). We have the strong precedent of **offering thanks to God for our meals** (14x in the NT! Matt. 15:36; 26:27; Mk. 8:6; 14:23; Lk. 22:17,19; Jn. 6:11,23; Acts 27:35; Rom. 14:6 [2x]; I Cor. 10:30 [2x]; 11:24). This is an important discipline, because it keeps God in front of our minds repeatedly throughout each day. Finally, in the Revelation, **God is thanked and praise for being our Creator** (4:11), ...and **for giving salvation and victory** to those who come out of the great tribulation, who have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb of God (7:9-15), ...and **for taking over the kingdom of this world**, and reigning over the nations, meting out judgment to the wicked and rewards to His servants (11:15-18).

Thanksgiving is a natural response of the heart to an act of kindness, graciousness or service from another. The Hebrew word, *yadah*, literally means to “throw” or “cast”, most likely referring to the natural response of throwing up one’s hands when confronted by a wonderful gift. The Greek word, *eucharisteō*, has an interesting background. The basic word root, *charis*, means “grace, graciousness”. The manifestation of this in a tangible expression is to offer a “gift” (*charisma*). When a good gift is received, it inwardly produces “joy” (*chara*) in the heart of the recipient. The outward response of joy is an exclamation, a *eucharistia*, which would be literally translated as “GOOD-GIFT!!” (or, “WOW!” in our vernacular). *I think it is valuable to meditate on the relationships between these words to get a better grasp of what thanksgiving entails.* The point of it is that **thanksgiving is a response to the one who gave you the gift, or act of service. It is an acknowledgment of appreciation for their service, kindness or graciousness.** Our English word, *thank*, comes through German (*danke*). Both of these words mean to “think, recognize or acknowledge”. When we compare this to Romans 1:21, we see that **those who are diverting from God cease to acknowledge Him or give Him thanks.** “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Again, in verse 28, Paul wrote, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a *depraved* mind.” **If we want a renewed mind, it is vital for us who profess to be following God to do all we can to recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate His activity and presence in our lives.** We will begin to recognize more and more of God’s activity in our lives when we consciously acknowledge His blessings in our day-to-day experiences of life. **Paul commanded us to be devoted in prayer, being watchful in it with “the WOW! response”** (my paraphrase for “thanksgiving”). **God is a person, like we are.** (We are like *Him*, made in His image.) **He responds when we acknowledge and value His efforts to communicate and share Himself with us.** If we honor Him, He will honor us with more of Himself. If we ignore Him, He will withdraw from us, and leave us to ourselves (I Sam. 2:30).