

# THEN SINGS MY SOUL | *Capturing the spirit of worship from the Psalms for Today*

## Lesson 5 | The Thanksgivings We Sing

In our previous Psalms study, we took the two primary Psalm structures of lament and praise and grouped them in the following groups: Hallelujah Psalms, Lament, Confidence, Thanksgiving, Wisdom, Historical, Messianic, Penitential/Imprecatory, Hallel and Shepherd Psalms. In this lesson, we will consider the modern songs we sing that mirror the Psalms of Thanksgiving.

**“O give Thanks to the Lord for He is good...”** (Psalm 107:1). Martin Luther said of the psalms: “The Psalter is the favorite book of all the saints ... [Each person], whatever his circumstances may be, finds in [the book] psalms the words which are appropriate to the circumstances in which he finds himself and meet his needs as adequately as if they were composed exclusively for his sake...” The Psalter was a picture book of the human heart. And as we sing today – the songs we choose to worship God should likewise manifest this same multifaceted picture of the complexities of emotions and declarations we offer in worship.

Thanksgiving is more common in the psalms than anywhere else in Scripture. There are more than twenty psalms that command, or invite, Israel to sing songs of thanksgiving. *“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good”* is a common refrain (107:1; 118:1; 136:1).

The function of Thanksgiving psalms was to praise God for something regarding these three views: 1) praise for a past act of God’s or the Psalmist’s past experience with God; 2) immediate praise for a present act of God 3) and a reason for joyful celebration. When the thanksgiving is linked to God’s acts, worshippers are exhorted to glorify God with thanksgiving (69:30), come before him with thanksgiving (95:2), enter his gates with thanksgiving (100:4), sing to the Lord with thanksgiving (147:7). And it is notable that most cries for aid and laments conclude with thanksgiving (individual cries for help in 7:17; 28:7; 35:18; 52:9; 54:6; 86:12; communal cries in 79:13; 106:47). The real impact of Psalms of thanksgiving is that God is acknowledged as the source of all goodness in life and that is why these Psalms were both individual and community songs. So today, when we come to the Thanksgivings we sing, we should sing them with the same rubric of the human heart.

Father of Mercies, day by day  
My love to Thee grows more and more;  
Thy gifts are strewn upon the way  
like sands upon the great seashore,  
like sands upon the great seashore.

Father of Mercies, God of love,  
Whose gentle gifts all creatures share,  
The rolling seasons as they move  
Proclaim to all Thy constant care,  
Proclaim to all Thy constant care.

Father of Mercies, may our hearts  
Ne’er overlook Thy bounteous care,  
But what out Father’s hand imparts  
Still own in grateful praise and prayer,  
Still own in grateful praise and prayer.

**Father of Mercies | Frederick Faber.** In our songbook as a Thanksgiving song, Father of Mercies is sung as a prayer to thank God for all of His mercies and comfort. It is hybrid of two poems. Verse 1, originally entitled “Mother of Mercies,” was written by Frederick William Faber (1814-1963), perhaps best known for his hymn “Faith of Our Fathers,” and was first published in his *Jesus and Mary—or Catholic Hymns for Singing and Reading* of 1849. Verse 2 and 3 was written by Alice Flowerdew, wife of a British official in Jamaica, Daniel Flowerdew, who returned to England after the death of her husband in 1801 and kept a ladies’ boarding school. She was a member of the General Baptist Church. The verses were penned perhaps as early as 1803 and first published as a hymn beginning, “Fountain of Mercies, God of love,” in 1811 in the third edition of her *Poems on Moral and Religious Subjects*. The word “Fountain” was changed to “Father,” and perhaps other changes made, in Murray’s Hymnal

of 1852. The word “Mother” in Faber’s stanza was altered to “Father,” and the combined hymn, with two of Flowerdew’s stanzas, was introduced in 1937 in *Great Songs of the Church*, Number 2, by editor Elmer Leon Jorgenson. Yet, it is has a long litany of reasons for which we thank the greatest Father of the greatest mercies. When we were children, we often “gave thanks” before meals with “God is great, God

# THEN SINGS MY SOUL | *Capturing the spirit of worship from the Psalms for Today*

is good, Now we thank Him for our food." We outgrow these repetitions but we should never outgrow the numerating of blessings from which we sing that God is the source of them all.

## Count Your Many Blessings | Johnson Oatman, Jr.

So we know every "good and perfect gift is from Above" (James 1:17) says and with this song, we remind each other. It was a childhood favorite of mine. Johnson Oatman, Jr., (1856-1922) admired his dad who was both a local merchant and regarded by many as "the best singer in town" with a rich, powerful voice. Young Johnson didn't sing as well as his father but later made his contribution in writing over 5000 songs by the end of his life. He first worked in the family business, then seeking ordination in the Methodist Episcopal churches for a time. But in his mid 30s, he started writing about 200 songs a year that allowed him "to preach" every Lord's day to the people in the pew. Some favorite hymns of his are also, "Higher Ground," "No, Not One," and the "Last Mile of the Way." Our hymn today was added to a young people's hymnal which shared to a younger generation the powerful optimism that Johnson was said to have had and the way you and I can generate in ourselves the very rock-bed of giving our life fullness – gratitude.

1. When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings; name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

[Chorus]

Count your blessings; Name them one by one.  
Count your blessings; See what God hath done.  
Count your blessings; Name them one by one.  
Count your many blessings; See what God hath done.

2. Are you ever burdened with a load of care?  
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?  
Count your many blessings; ev'ry doubt will fly,  
And you will be singing as the days go by.

3. When you look at others with their lands and gold,  
Think that Christ has promised you his wealth untold.  
Count your many blessings; money cannot buy  
Your reward in heaven nor your home on high.

4. So amid the conflict, whether great or small,  
Do not be discouraged; God is over all.  
Count your many blessings; angels will attend,  
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

The next three songs are modern songs we sing. The first, GIVE THANKS WITH A GRATEFUL HEART, by Henry Smith (1978). This song was his only published worship song out of 300 unpublished compositions. It was written after university when he could not find work. He also suffered from a degenerative condition that eventually left him legally blind. While at his church in Williamsburg, Virginia, his preacher inspired him with a reference to how Jesus made himself poor to make others rich

Give thanks with a grateful heart,  
give thanks to the Holy One;  
give thanks because he's given Jesus Christ, his Son. (Repeat)

And now let the weak say, "We are strong!"  
Let the poor say, "We are rich  
because of what the Lord has done for us!" (Repeat)

Give thanks. Give thanks.

There is a redeemer,  
Jesus, God's own Son  
Precious Lamb of God,  
Messiah, Holy One

Jesus my redeemer,  
Name above all names.  
Precious Lamb of God,  
Messiah, Oh, for sinners slain.

When I stand in Glory,  
I will see His face  
And there I'll serve my King  
forever,  
In that Holy Place

Chorus:  
Thank you, oh my Father,  
For giving us Your Son  
And leaving Your Spirit,  
'Til the work on Earth is done

through him. When Smith performing the song, a visiting United States Military officer took the song to Europe, from where its popularity spread and in 1986, Integrity Music published the song on their *Hosanna!* Audio cassettes.

The second is THERE IS A REDEEMER, written by Melody Green and whose husband, Keith Green, made popular after it was first released. It was published in Keith's album in 1982 called, Songs for the Shepherd, which was the last album to be released before he died in a plane crash. The final verse was added by Keith.

The center of our gratitude, as Christians, is of course the gift of grace in Christ Jesus the Lord. *"For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father... so that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints... to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge... Amen!"* (Eph 3:14-20).