

**The Big Picture**

Psalms of thanksgiving are not just lists of things for which we are grateful. They are the response to God's rescue, the next chapter after our laments, if you will.

**Biblical Text**

Psalm 30 (All scripture quotations taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.)

**Preparing for the Lesson**

When we think of a “psalm of thanksgiving,” we may think of a litany of items for which we are grateful, much like a child looking around the dining room praying: “...and thank you for the chair ... and the meatloaf ... and the picture on the wall...” That may be part of it, but we also find many examples of psalms of thanksgiving that are direct responses to situations for which we have offered our lament. In other words, our psalms of thanksgiving go more like this: “God, I was at the end of my rope, and you came and rescued me. Thank you!”

In the lesson today, I am asking you to do two things. First, I want you to read Psalm 30 and point out the ways the psalmist describes the times God has been at work, even when the psalmists was “in the depths” or spared from “the pit.” This is the key element of the thanksgiving psalms. The writer was in a bad place, but God has acted on his or her behalf and he or she is now in a good place. Bruueggemann calls these psalms of “re-orientation,” which are really more a confession of God's faithfulness in reorienting the writer.

We should note that often, the psalmist does not say specifically what has caused the original problem for which the writer lamented. Instead of a blow-by-blow description, we get general statements, things like “you lifted me out of the depths.” The point, I think, is not to share the story of trouble as much as it is to share the story of rescue. Having said that, we should also realize how closely the psalmist ties his rescue to the actions of God, which relates to the next part of this.

So second, I think it is important for us to “complete the loop,” if you will. We are often good at expressing “truths” about God, as we see in the psalms. We also understand, first hand, what it is to find our world coming undone and crying out to God. We do not always stop to say, however: God, you were the reason I was rescued. When my life was off-track or I was in the pits, it was not coincidence that things came together; it was YOU who rescued me. So, I want you share with one another ways you have seen, both in your own life and in the life of others, God at work.

One of the challenges, I think, is that we do not always think in terms of “God rescued me.” We more often think: things were bad, but they got better. Or we may have *some* of our struggles that God dealt with, but some other ones that just were fixed on their own. We will try to understand why that is in the Discussion Questions.

I want you to spend some time in reading and discussing this psalm. I especially want to encourage you to spend some time with the last question, in which we will in some ways be writing our own psalm of thanksgiving.

**Possible Lesson Outline**

Read Psalm 30.

### Possible Lesson Outline (cont.)

Spend time discussing the questions below.

Especially spend time on the last question, allow people plenty of time to process the things for which they are thankful.

If your group engaged in good discussion, let your prayer time be a time where people say thank you to God for the specific things that God has done in “rescuing” them.

### Lesson Activities

Although it is not a separate activity, per se, be sure to spend some time having people talk out ways that God has “rescued” them, following the example given in Psalm 30. The point is not to rehash what was going on at that time, but rather, to praise God for his working. Remind your group that in doing this exercise, they too are writing a psalm of thanksgiving.

### For the Kids

I think it is important for our children to hear us attribute things that happen in our life to the working of God. If we never discuss God and his presence, how are our children going to be thinking in terms of “God is at work in my life and I need to be looking for his ‘fingerprints.’” For this reason, I would encourage you—as their age allows—to include your children in this time of discussion.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Lord praised in Psalm 30?
2. The psalmist does not specifically say what it was in his life that was “the pits.” (We usually want all the juicy details, don’t we!?) Why do you think the psalmist did not give more detail here?
3. In verse 4, the writer draws his friends into this time of praise and thanksgiving. How important is it to include others in our thanksgivings? Why is it especially important in times when we are “coming up out of the pit?”
4. How comfortable are you with the psalmists describing his time of trouble as a time when God “hid his face” (v. 7)? Was the psalmist wrong in saying that?
5. If you remember our discussion about psalms of lament from last week, you know that the psalmist often gives God a motivation for why he should act on behalf of the wronged party (the writer of the psalm.) Here, the psalmist rehearses what motivations he gave. What were they? Would you ever use those motivations in your prayers to God today? Why or why not?
6. The psalmist gives God the credit for acting on his behalf, for being the one who rescued the psalmist. Do we see God working in the same way today? Do we attribute our times of “rescue” to him? Why do you think it is so easy for us to assume that the resolution of our problems are just the logical ebb and flow of life and God really did not have anything to do with it?
7. Write your own psalm of thanksgiving. In what ways has God rescued you during times of despair or times “in the pit?”

### For Further Reading/Study

The two works I have been using for these lessons are:

Bellinger Jr., W. H. *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1984.

### What's Next

Next week will continue to look at the Psalms with a study of one of the psalms of praise.