

Thanksgiving Psalms

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

Lord, open our hearts and our minds
By the power of your Holy Spirit,
That as the Scriptures are read
And your Word is proclaimed,
We may hear with joy
What you say to us today.
Amen.

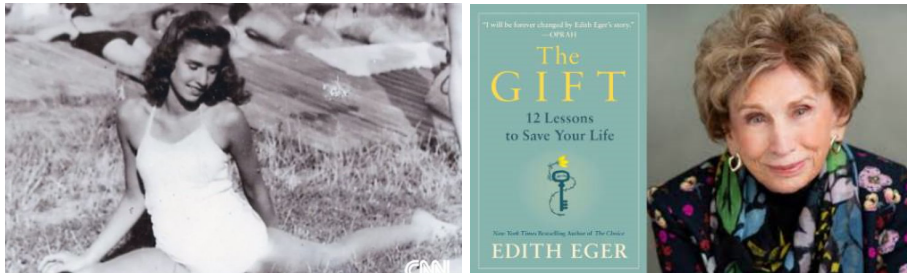
Scripture: Psalm 30:1-12 (NKJV)

I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up,
And have not let my foes rejoice over me.
O Lord my God, I cried out to You,
And You healed me.
O Lord, You brought my soul up from the grave;
You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.
Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.
For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for life;
Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning.

Now in my prosperity I said,
"I shall never be moved."
Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong;
You hid Your face, and I was troubled.
I cried out to You, O Lord;
And to the Lord I made supplication:
"What profit is there in my blood,
When I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise You?
Will it declare Your truth?
Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me;
Lord, be my helper!"
You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,
To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Thanksgiving Psalms



It was 1944 in Kassa, Hungary and Edith was 16 years old. Jews already were wearing the yellow star on their coats. Edith was cut from the Olympic gymnastics team because she was Jewish. Then on a cold spring day in April, Edith, her family, and others were imprisoned and then loaded into a cattle car headed for Auschwitz.

The first day they arrived, her parents were murdered in the gas chambers. That night, the SS Officer, Josef Mengele, called The Angel of Death, singled out Edith in the selection line after looking over her papers. "Dance for me." The same man who ordered her mother's death hours earlier, now wanted her to perform. Edith stood on the cold cement floor of the barracks, frozen in fear. The camp orchestra began to play "The Blue Danube." "Dance for me now." Edith then heard her mother's voice: No one can take from you what you've put in your mind. So, she closed her eyes, and retreated into another world. She was no longer in a death camp. No longer, cold, hungry, and destitute. She was transported to the Budapest Opera House. She was in the role of Juliet in

Tchaikovsky's ballet. Dancing before a packed auditorium. From the deepest resources of her being she willed her arms to lift and her legs to twirl. She found the strength to dance her way out of hell on earth. Edith Eger survived Auschwitz. She went on to have a family, emigrate to America, get a college degree at 42, and a doctorate in clinical psychology at age 50. She's been treating survivors of trauma in her practice for over forty years to this day.

In her second and moving book *"The Gift,"* Edith Eger says that the worst prison was not the prison that the Nazis put her in. The worst prison was the one she built for herself afterwards.

Over the decades she was able to escape this second, more high security and brutal internal prison. So she helps us unlock our mental prisons of:

victimhood, avoidance, self-neglect, resentment, rigidity, guilt and shame, paralyzing fear, and hopelessness.



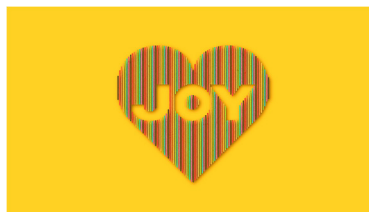
Our Psalm tells us further what that prison key is: Gratitude to God. Gratitude moves us from prison to praise. A divine exchange takes place:

Our dingy sackcloth is taken, and we're fitted for garments of joy.
Our weeping is returned, and rejoicing received.
Dancing is exchanged for grieving.

The book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that there's *"a time to mourn, and a time to dance."* We need both in our lives. And, we need to express our emotions. As Edith Eger says,

"The opposite of depression is expression."

The emotions we let out of us won't hurt us. Unexpressed emotions that stay in us, make us sick. It's the power of gratitude that frees us up to change, to let go of the unhealthy, and embrace wholeness. The psalmist personifies our human emotions here. Weeping is a guest that stays only a night. Weeping hits the road before sunrise.



But Joy—joy is a beloved member of the family of God. Joy is here to stay for the long-haul and the long-run. Joy comes in the morning. Day in, day out. A permanent fixture in the household of God.

A life of gratitude and thanksgiving is crucial because it helps us discern the ways God is at work—even in the hard times. We may find ourselves saddened to say good-bye to loved ones. Ticked off at the delta variant and the pandemic. Discouraged about nagging health concerns. Or aching from relationship troubles. Yet gratitude helps us see that God is at work, even in that.

- Gratitude gives us proper perspective.
- Our suffering is real but it's temporary compared, as Paul says, to *"the eternal weight of glory"* that outlasts and overpowers our afflictions.
- God can bring about a reorientation of our disorientation.
- We can persevere, persist, and press through.
- Gratitude cultivates grit.



Gratitude to God helps us change out of our tired and worn outfits and outlooks, soiled attitudes, skewed interpretations of events, and tired and predictable ways. Gratitude helps us to slip on and grow into our robes of righteousness tailored for us by the Lord. We're free to respond rather than react—to see life as a dance. We remember not only our **previous distress**, but also recount our **present deliverance**.

God empowers and encourages us to make the choice—the choice to praise rather than pout. We unapologetically send our regrets to the pity party we've been invited to once again. "Sorry, I have a previous commitment to gratitude. Can't make it."



Gratitude also reminds us that everything is a gift, and more specifically a gift from God. God did it, not me. Not luck. Not the universe. God. Gratitude protects us from getting full of ourselves. Gratitude is a powerful testimony to God's goodness. A witness that God was with us and is with us. We can't keep it to ourselves. We have to share the good news. It's contagious and magnetic.

Instead of our life song being a dour funeral dirge—verse after verse about the death of our dreams or the death of God—gratitude changes our tune. We've been given a new song. Now we bear witness that once we were rejected, but Christ moved us from rejection to restoration. Before, maybe we felt like God was avoiding us, or giving us the cold shoulder, but as the psalmist says, your disfavor is short, but your favor is for a lifetime. And if it hasn't happened yet, we're believing for it. We draw others, not into our drama, but into our praise. Gratitude puts the divine PR... into PRAISE. Immanuel, know who you are. We're a people of praise. A properly lived life is a life of praise. Let's be known for that.

God, when I was going down the drain, you drew me up from the bottom of the pit. Now I'm filled to overflowing with your living waters. It's my turn now God, and I'm going to lift you up in praise, because you raised me up from the grave.

You see, gratitude helps us see God more accurately as our Deliverer, not our Accuser. Our life is a living thank you note, signed, sealed, and delivered to our Deliverer. From mourning to morning, day by day, we trust God. And sometimes day by day is too long. Then we trust God day by night. Night by day. Other times, we just trust moment by moment. Either way, joy—joy comes in the morning.

No matter how we're feeling, we say YES to life, and YES to God. I WILL sing your praises God, even in prison. I will not cave in, give up, stay down, or stay silent. In Christ, I will arise and rejoice.

Our crucified and risen Christ Jesus holds the key. Your dank and dark prison door is open wide. Walk out into God's fresh air and freedom.

Amen.

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