

The Spiral of Thanks

Psalm 69 (30-33 for scripture reading)

Mike Hagan

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Introduction

1. I want to share some helps for the kids to make their Thanksgiving special. Tell these to your grandparents (and hear them groan).

- **Pedro:** If pilgrims were alive today, what would they be known for?
Pee Wee: I have no idea.
Pedro: Their age!
- **Kevin:** What do you call a turkey on the day after Thanksgiving?
Jake: I don't know. What?
Kevin: Lucky.
- **Pee Wee:** Can a turkey jump higher than the Empire State Building?
Pedro: Yes, of course! A building can't jump at all.
- **Chas:** What kind of music did the Pilgrims listen to at the first Thanksgiving feast?
Tom: What kind?
Chas: Plymouth Rock!
- A lady was picking through the frozen turkeys at the grocery store for Thanksgiving Day but couldn't find one big enough for her family. She asked a stock boy, "Do these turkeys get any bigger?" "No, ma'am. They're dead."
- **Pedro:** What did the turkey say to the turkey hunter on Thanksgiving Day?
Ordep: What?
Pedro: "Quack! Quack!"

2. What does this have to do with Psalm 69? Nothing, probably, except it brought a smile (and groans) which is what happens in the portion we read this morning. The psalmist praises, gives thanks, and calls on the whole universe to praise the God who saves and is worthy of love (30-36). We have been listening to how the psalmist teaches us to offer thanks in the month of November and this portion says as much.

3. Psalm 69 is pretty long, 36 verses. Its length allows us to find the whole story of the dynamic relationships of worship expressions in one psalm instead of scrutinizing all the possibilities in multiple chapters.

4. Interpreters over the millennia have wrestled with keys to reading the psalms so that we can hear God's voice through the poets of old. In the last

century, even more viewpoints have surfaced. Some interpreters find the key to interpretation in praise (Sigmund Mowinckel *et al*). Indeed, praise can be found in every psalm, except Psalm 88, although sometimes only in a promise to praise. The Hebrew title for the book is *tehillim*, translated “praises.” Other scholars propose the key lies in thanksgiving (Claus Westermann *et al*). Often thanks and praise are too close to unravel. Other experts offer that the key comes in complaint (or lament) or protest psalms, about one-third of the psalms (Walter Brueggemann).

5. In Psalm 69 all these kinds of poetic material unfold, culminating in praise and thanksgiving. The beauty of this psalm is that it shows us that life is circular – there are times in our life-journey when we lament, plea, protest, praise, and thank. John Goldingay proposes that the intention of the psalms is to reflect the whole of life with all the situations that come along with the view that we spiral ever higher and closer to the LORD. Circular but rising in a spiral of trust as we grow more Christlike.

What does the chapter demonstrate that teaches us how to walk closer with the LORD?

1st, it’s okay to voice our despair, our frustration, our fears, in a cry for help.

- Life’s reality is not always positive. Viruses, physical issues, painful interpersonal differences, poor decisions, failures, enemies, death of loved ones, happy families and dysfunctional families and hormonal changes – the list could go on and on – all realities of life.
- For some reason, our modern culture believes that in worship these realities should be ignored or glossed over. We can’t express how we really feel, what is really happening. Hymnals avoid unpleasant songs. Bible readings in some traditions eliminate whole passages or parts of chapters because they display too much reality (my interpretation anyway).
- Not the psalms. Look at what Psalm 69 presents.
- Plea and protest – 4X!
 - #1 Plea and protest – 1-5. > v. 1a, plea – simple; save me. Condition and protest – metaphorical mud, etc.; those who hate me (4).
 - #2 Plea and protest – 6-12. > v. 6, plea is softer – basically he says, don’t let those who are walking with the Lord get sidetracked because of me. The protest (7-12) describes how he has attempted to minister faithfully and has become a joke instead.

- #3 Plea and protest – 13-21. > the third one gives a long plea. Note “answer me” (13), deliver me (14-15), turn to me, hide not your face, make haste to answer me, ransom me (16-18). The protest gives new information but is shorter, too (19-21).
- #4 Plea and prayer – 22-29. Plea and prayer weave together in these verses. His prayer is for the total ruin of his enemies. He finishes with one line for himself (29).
- We might cry out to the Lord, but we wouldn’t state our protests so specifically, especially in a public setting like the psalm. Think about it theologically – the LORD knows how you’re feeling, what you’re thinking. You can’t say anything that he hasn’t heard already. Let it out, he can handle it.

2nd, it’s good to persist.

- The NT says “ask (and keep on asking, present imperative), seek (and keep on seeking), knock (and keep on knocking)” (Matt 7:7).
- Persistence is rewarded. You get the picture that in the psalmist’s eye “no” is not available in his vocabulary. Four times in different ways he brings his persistent requests.
- I find that if I don’t persist, I get depressed or down, discouraged. It’s like a game where you stop playing before you’ve won or lost. Keep pushing until it’s obvious what God’s answer is. And you don’t really know until the end.
- How important is your plea if you don’t persist? Without persisting, your pleas and protests sound childish. If your situation is dire, persist in making it known to the Lord.
- In all the psalms where the poet complains or laments his or her situation, one thing is consistent – the poet never stops with the plea and protest. Somehow the time passes, perhaps the psalmist is delivered from his crisis or situation, and the poet moves on. We are allowed to voice anything about how we feel, but we are not allowed to get stuck in that rut. I’ve seen people stuck for years; the psalmist always moves on.

3rd, trust concludes our journey.

- We spiral up to the presence of the LORD and express our praise with a song. We magnify him with thanksgiving (30). We just don’t move on in life; we move into the presence of the one who delivers.

All the upsetting issues of life lead us to glorify the one who deserves the thanks.

- In fact, the psalmist says this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving is more pleasing to God than sacrifices of oxen or bulls (31).
- Gladness fills the believer's heart; they are revived (32). The turmoil, whatever it might have been, takes a toll on a person. As you place your trust in the LORD you are refreshed.
- The whole universe – heavens and earth – praises him; the seas and all in them as well (34). God will save his people and the future is assured in a place of peace to those who love him (36). Much of the world, even some kinds of so-called Christians, have difficulty with this last line. The Lord has amazing things for those who love him. It is a choice of will and an exercise of a committed life that inherits what God has planned for the future to those who love him. Each must trust in him.
- When you trust, you respond with songs of praise and your thanksgiving magnifies our Lord.

Concluding reflections

In the best of all worlds, we trust all the time and only good comes our way. We don't find ourselves needing to plea and protest over life's struggles.

But once sin entered into the world, negative things happened. It's still a reality of life.

The psalms teach us that we have avenues to journey.

- Plea for God's help. Your feelings, your complaints, your protests – he has heard them before. No surprises with him. If there is anything that surprises him, perhaps it would be how seldom we are honest with him.
- Persist.
- Spiral up to trust. Tell everyone so that the LORD receives the credit, and the door is opened for others to walk the same path.
- When issues come again, hopefully you have spiraled higher and the trust comes sooner. Someday we will live eternally in his presence and our songs will rise to him in a chorus of thanks.
- In the meanwhile, be thankful to the Lord in all things.