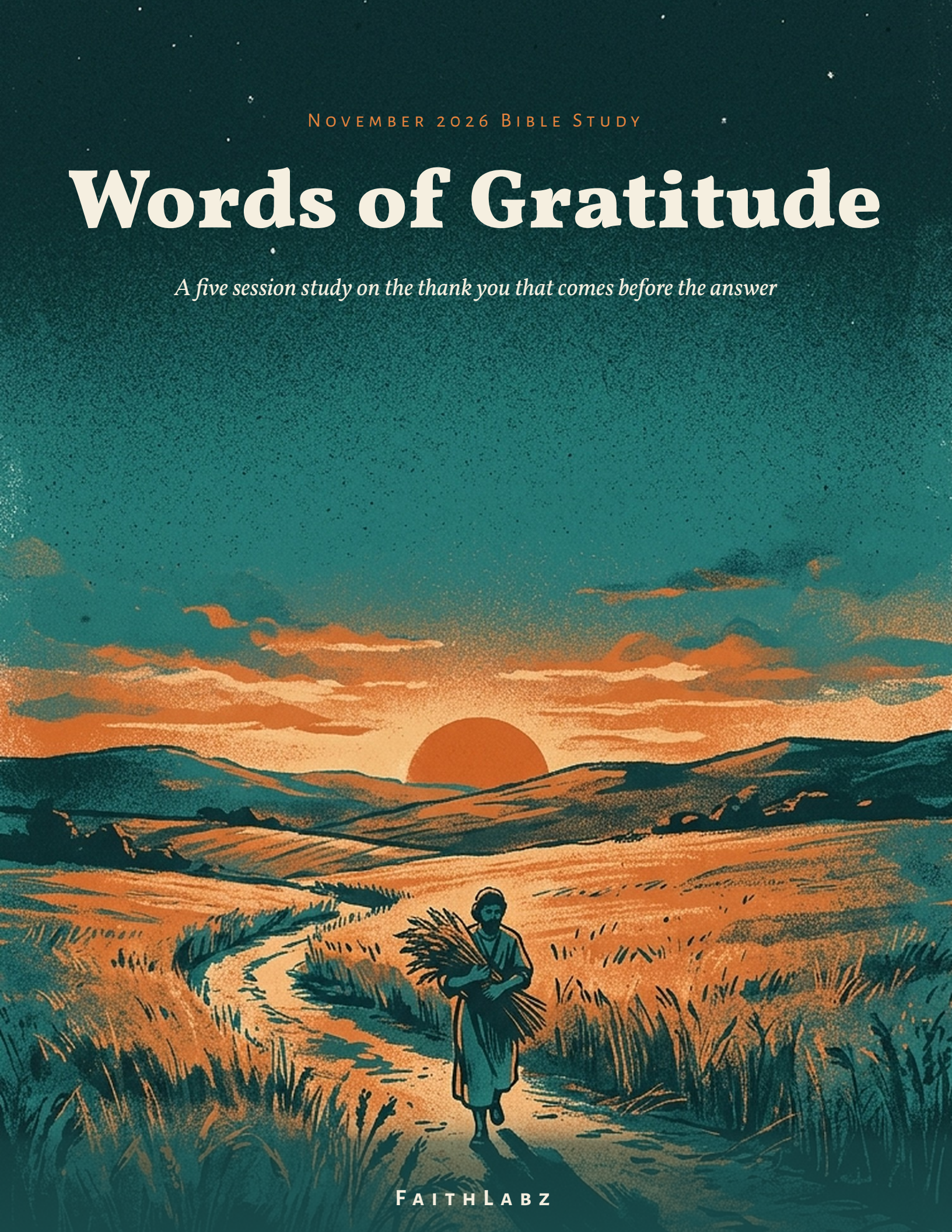
November 2026 Bible Study

Words of Gratitude

A five session study on the thank you that comes before the answer



FaithLabz

Welcome to Words of Gratitude

October was a war. Four people in four stories who found themselves outnumbered, and not one of them won by swinging a sword. Job sat in the ashes. Paul sat in a chain. Jehoshaphat sent the choir out first. Elisha fed the army that came to arrest him. The month gave you two verbs, stand and pray, and one sentence underneath them: the battle is not yours.

Here is the question that sentence leaves behind. If somebody else fought it, what do you do on the morning after?

The Bible's answer is short, and it is harder than it sounds. You say thank you. Out loud, to God, by name, for what he did. And the Bible is not talking about manners. It is talking about something closer to a sacrifice, and some of the people in it paid for their thank you with the most precious thing they had.

That is what this month is about. Not a holiday mood, not a gratitude list on the fridge, though those are fine. The thank you in the Bible weighs more than that. It is a woman walking her only son up a hill and leaving him there. It is a king who watched a man die for touching the wrong thing, and three months later danced in the street with all his might. It is two men with their backs torn open and their feet locked in wood, singing at midnight. And it is Jesus, holding a boy's lunch in front of five thousand hungry men, giving thanks before there was enough.

Four stories. In every one of them, the thank you comes before the answer, or in the middle of the loss. That is the thing to watch for.

Each week has its own Hebrew or Greek words, sitting right where the Bible puts them. The word for thanksgiving turns out to be the name of an offering you could eat. The word for bless shares its letters with the word for knee. The word Paul used for his own death is the word for wine poured out on an altar. And the word for Jesus' fullness is the same word Mark uses for the twelve basketfuls. The words matter more than usual this month, because gratitude is one of those things everybody assumes they already understand.

How to Use This Study

This guide works for a small group or for one person with a cup of coffee. Each session runs about forty five to sixty minutes together. Don't rush it. If a question opens up a real conversation, let it run long. That's the study working, not the study getting off track.

For small groups. Have one person read The Story aloud, or take turns by paragraph. Then work the Discussion Questions together. The Observation questions are the warmup and everybody can answer them. The Interpretation questions are where the room starts to think. The Application questions are where it gets personal, and those are the ones to protect time for. Don't skip them because you ran long.

For individual study. Go at your own pace. Read The Story slowly, sit with the word cards, and use the Personal Reflection prompts for journaling. The Weekly Practice at the end of each session is the part that leaves the page and gets into your week.

What You'll Need

A Bible in whatever translation you love. We quote the ESV here, and we'll tell you the Hebrew or Greek when it changes something. Something to write with. And a willingness to say thank you in the middle of something you would rather complain about. That is the real homework this month.

A Note on the Hard Parts

This month opens with a woman who could not have children and was mocked for it every year at a religious feast. If that is your story, or the story of someone you love, please hear this before you start. Hannah's story is not a promise that everyone who prays hard enough gets the child. The Bible never says that, and plenty of faithful women in your church prayed for years and never held a child of their own. What the story does promise is different, and better, and session one tries to say it carefully.

And week two has a death in it that troubles almost everyone who reads it. A man named Uzzah reaches out to steady the ark of God and dies on the spot. We are not going to skip it. David did not skip it either. He was angry and he was afraid, and the Bible records both, and the dancing only makes sense once you have sat with him there.

Four People, One Month

October was about what to do when something fights back. November is about what comes out of a person on the other side of it.

There are four sessions and then one more that ties them together. Each session is one story, told whole. You can read them in any order and each one stands on its own. But they were built to be read in this order, because they are four answers to one question: what does a thank you cost?

1. **The Woman Who Gave Him Back.** Hannah. A barren wife mocked at the feast every year, a prayer with moving lips and no sound, a priest who thinks she is drunk, a vow, a son, and the day she walks him back up the hill and leaves him there.
2. **The King Who Danced.** David. A first attempt to bring the ark home that ends with a man dead, a king angry and afraid, a house blessed for three months, and then a king dancing in the street with all his might while his wife watches from a window and despises him.
3. **Singing at Midnight.** Paul and Silas. Beaten with rods, feet in the stocks, singing hymns at midnight, an earthquake, a jailer with a sword in his hand, and a meal served at an hour when no one eats.
4. **Enough.** Jesus and the five thousand. A hungry crowd on a hillside, a boy's lunch, a prayer of thanks over five loaves and two fish, and twelve baskets left over.
5. **Grace Upon Grace.** Integration. What a mother, a king, two prisoners, and a boy with five loaves all gave back, where it came from in the first place, and what to do with it on Thanksgiving week.

The Thread, Before You Start

Watch what people let go of. Hannah lets go of her son. David lays down his dignity and goes out in a linen garment like the Levites. Paul and Silas have their clothes torn off them before they ever sing. A boy hands over his lunch. In every story somebody lets go of something they had every right to keep, and in every story God turns out to be the one who was holding it all along. Session five pulls it together, and it turns on one sentence an old king prayed over a pile of gold he had just given away: of your own have we given you.

Watching Along

Twenty four of the words here also get their own short video the morning of, Tuesday through Sunday, with a longer story video on Wednesdays and the podcast on Sundays. There's a full day by day map at the back of this guide, so the study works whether or not you ever press play.



Session One

The Woman Who Gave Him Back

HANNAH | 1 SAMUEL 1 TO 2 | WEEK OF NOVEMBER 3

Every year a man named Elkanah took his family up to the sanctuary at Shiloh to worship, and every year one of his two wives went home crying. Hannah had no children. Her rival had several and made sure she never forgot it. This session tells the whole story: a prayer so quiet a priest thought she was drunk, a vow that sounds impossible to keep, a son named for asking, and the morning she walked him up the hill, handed him to the old priest, and went home without him. And she sang.

Opening Question (5 minutes)

Think of the thing you prayed for longest. Did you get it? If you did, what did you do with it? If you did not, what did you do with the asking?

Scripture Reading

Read aloud: 1 Samuel 1:1 to 28, then 1 Samuel 2:1 to 2.

Reference passages: 1 Samuel 2:1 to 11 (Hannah's song), 1 Samuel 2:18 to 21 and 26 (the little robe), Psalm 50:14 to 15 and 23 (the sacrifice of thanksgiving), Psalm 100 (enter his gates), Psalm 113:5 to 9 (the barren woman's home), Psalm 116:12 to 19 (what shall I render), Ecclesiastes 5:4 to 5 (pay what you vow), Luke 1:46 to 55 (Mary's song), 1 Thessalonians 5:16 to 18 (in all circumstances).

The Story (read aloud, 10 to 15 minutes)

About eleven hundred years before Jesus, Israel had no king. Twelve tribes lived scattered across the land with no capital and no palace, and the one place that held them together was a tent: the tabernacle Moses had built in the wilderness, with its curtains and its courtyard and the ark of the covenant inside. It had come to rest at a town called Shiloh, in the hill country about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, which was not yet an Israelite city. By this time the text calls it the temple of the LORD, and it had a doorpost and a seat beside it, and an old priest named Eli sat there.

Once a year a man from the hill country of Ephraim made the walk up to Shiloh with his whole family.

> There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.
>
> 1 Samuel 1:1 to 2

That last sentence is the whole problem. In that world a woman's future was her children. Sons were your name after you died, your field after your husband died, your bread when you were old. A wife without them was not just sad. She was unprotected, and everyone could see it.

Elkanah loved her, and he showed it the only way the feast gave him to show it.

> On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb.
>
> 1 Samuel 1:4 to 5

The sacrifice at Shiloh was a meal. Part of the animal went to God, part to the priest, and the rest was eaten by the family in front of the LORD. So the feast was a family meal in front of God, and every portion was handed out where everyone could see it. Peninnah's plate, and one for each of her children. And Hannah's, which was double, and which everyone at the table could see was for one.

The Bible does not soften the next part.

> And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.
>
> 1 Samuel 1:6 to 7

Year by year. Every trip to worship God was a trip to be humiliated, at the holy place, at the holy meal, in front of God. And twice the text says who closed her womb. Not Peninnah. Not bad luck. The LORD. The Bible does not explain why. It just refuses to pretend he was not involved.

Her husband tries.

> And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"
>
> 1 Samuel 1:8

It is a kind question and it is the wrong one. Four questions, and the last one is about him. He loves her. He cannot fix it, and it seems he cannot bear not being able to fix it, so he asks her to let him be enough. Anyone who has tried to comfort somebody in a grief they cannot touch knows exactly what that sentence feels like from both sides.

So Hannah gets up from the table. She walks to the house of the LORD, where Eli is sitting by the doorpost, and she prays.

> She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."
>
> 1 Samuel 1:10 to 11

She vowed a vow. In Hebrew that is the same root twice, the verb *nadar* and then the noun *neder*, the way English says she sang a song. A vow in Israel was not a mood. It was a promise made to God, usually in trouble, usually with an if, and it was binding. The law said you did not have to make one, but if you did, you paid it.

And listen to what she promises. If you give me a son, I will give him back, all the days of his life. No razor on his head: the sign of a person set apart to God, and she promises it for life. Whatever bargaining is in it, she is asking for a child she will give away. And three times in one breath she asks for the same thing: look at me, remember me, do not forget me.

Then the priest gets it wrong.

> As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you."
>
> 1 Samuel 1:12 to 14

In that world people usually prayed out loud. A woman at the doorway of the sanctuary, lips moving, no sound, after a feast where there had been wine, looked to an old man like exactly what he thought she was. The priest at the door, the man whose job was to help people come to God, looked at the most honest prayer in the building and saw a drunk.

Her answer is one of the great sentences in the Old Testament.

> But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation."
>
> 1 Samuel 1:15 to 16

Pouring out my soul. That is what prayer looked like for her. Not a speech. A cup turned upside down. And Eli, to his credit, hears it.

> Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.
>
> 1 Samuel 1:17 to 18

Slow down on that verse. Nothing has changed. She is not pregnant. She has no promise from God, only a blessing from a priest who five minutes ago thought she was drunk. And she goes back to the table and eats, and her face is no longer sad. The thing she asked for had not come. But she had asked. She had poured it out, all of it, before the LORD, and she left it there.

The next morning they worship and go home. And then the text says it plainly.

> And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD."
>
> 1 Samuel 1:19 to 20

The LORD remembered her. It is the word she used in her prayer, and the narrator hands it back to her. And she names the boy for the asking. The Hebrew verb for ask is *sha'al*, and it runs all through this chapter. The name Samuel is its own word; Strong's reads it as "heard of God," and scholars still argue over it. But Hannah's reason for it plays on the sound of asking, and the asking stays with him. This is the one I asked for.

Now comes the part any parent reading this has been dreading.

When the next yearly trip came, Hannah stayed home. Not until the child is weaned, she told Elkanah, and then I will bring him, so that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever. In that world children were nursed far longer than now, by most accounts two or three years. So for two or three years she had him. She fed him. She learned his face. She knew the whole time what the end of it was.

And then she took him up.

> And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young.
>
> 1 Samuel 1:24

And the child was young. In Hebrew it is two words, the boy a boy, and the Bible lets them sit there. A small boy, a bull, a sack of flour, a skin of wine, climbing the hill to the same doorway where his mother had once been taken for a drunk. They kill the bull. And she walks up to the old priest.

> And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.
>
> 1 Samuel 1:26 to 28

Here the Hebrew does something English cannot carry. Petition, made, lent: underneath all three is the same root, *sha'al*, ask. Granted is the ordinary verb for give. Read it that way and she is saying: the LORD gave me my asking, the one I asked of him, and so I have handed him over on request. Lent is the asking word turned

around. She asked God for the boy, and now she gives him back the same way she got him. And the word in "he is lent" is spelled in Hebrew exactly like the name Saul, the first king of Israel, the man this boy will one day pour oil on.

At the door she does not say she gave him away. She says lent. He is not lost to her. He is exactly where she promised he would be.

What God gives you was his before it was yours. Thank you is the sound of handing it back without letting go of him.

And then, with her son standing next to an old priest and her arms empty for the first time since he was born, Hannah prays again. And this time she sings.

> And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation."
>
> 1 Samuel 2:1

She had wept and would not eat. Now her heart exults. Her horn is exalted: the picture is a strong animal with its head held high. Her mouth, which once moved with no sound, is wide open over her enemies; that is literally what the Hebrew word for derides means, wide. And the last verb is the everyday Hebrew word for joy, *samach*, to rejoice, to be glad. I rejoice in your salvation.

Notice what she is not singing about. She does not mention the boy, not once in ten verses. She sings about God.

> There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.
>
> 1 Samuel 2:2

The rest of the song is about a God who turns the world upside down: the bows of the mighty broken, the full hiring themselves out for bread, the hungry no longer hungry, the barren woman bearing seven.

> The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world.
>
> 1 Samuel 2:6 to 8

The ash heap. October began in the ashes, with Job scraping his sores, and Hannah sings that God lifts people out of them. Then she ends her song with a title the Bible has not yet given to any king, because Israel had no king to give it to.

> The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.
>
> 1 Samuel 2:10

His anointed. In Hebrew, his messiah. A woman who has just given away her only son sings about God's anointed king. Her boy will anoint the first two kings of Israel, and the second one, David, will be the ancestor of the last one. More than a thousand years later a young woman in Nazareth, pregnant with that last King, will sing a song so much like Hannah's that it is hard not to think she knew it by heart.

> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant."
>
> Luke 1:46 to 48

He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. That is Hannah's prayer. If you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant. Same request, more than a thousand years apart, and the same answer.

Then the narrator gives two details about what happened after, and they are the most tender lines in the chapter.

> And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD." So then they would return to their home.
>
> 1 Samuel 2:19 to 20

Every year, a little robe. The text does not say more than that, but any parent can guess what it means to sew for a child you only see once a year. She never stopped being his mother. She just stopped holding him. And the same old priest who once called her drunk now blesses her every year, and he uses her word again: for the petition she asked of the LORD. The asking had become the name of the thing.

The word for bless there is *barak*, and in Strong's dictionary it sits right next to the word for knee. Whatever the history of the word, it is a good picture of what blessing is: someone lower receiving from someone higher. An old man blessing a mother every year, in the same place where she once stood and poured herself out.

> Indeed the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.
>
> 1 Samuel 2:21

Five more. She gave one away and God gave her five. And it would be easy to turn that into a deal: give to God and he gives you more. Do not do that to this story. Hannah did not know about the five when she walked down the hill. She vowed the boy away before she ever had him, she gave him away with no promise of anything else, and she sang about God, not about what she would get. The five are the same thing the boy was. A gift, from a God who looks.

Psalm 113 could have been written about her.

> He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!
>
> Psalm 113:7 to 9

And another psalm, written later, gives a name to what Hannah did on that hill.

> The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!
>
> Psalm 50:23

Thanksgiving there is *todah*, and in the law of Moses a todah was an actual offering, an animal brought to the altar to say thank you for what God had done, often after he had rescued you, and eaten that same day. The thank offering was a meal. And God says the one who brings it glorifies him: the one who says thank you, at the altar, out loud, with food on the table.

Hannah's song is that kind of offering. The bull went on the altar, the boy stayed at the door of the house of the LORD, and the thanks came out of her mouth on the day she went home without him.

The New Testament says it in one line, written by Paul to a young church in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas had been run out of that city, and the believers they left behind were still suffering for it.

> Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
>
> 1 Thessalonians 5:16 to 18

In all circumstances. Not for all circumstances. Paul does not tell anyone to be thankful that a rival mocked them, or that a son has to stay at Shiloh. He tells you to give thanks in the middle of it, with it still going on. The Greek word is *eucharisteo*, from the words for good and grace. Hannah ate before anything had changed, and she sang on the day she gave her son away. That is in all circumstances.

> **The thank you God calls a sacrifice is the one that costs you something. Hannah sang hers with nothing promised in her son's place.**

Word Study Spotlight

נֶדֶר neder *(NEH-der)*

Strong's H5088

Meaning A vow. A promise made to God, and sometimes the thing promised.

Appears 60 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant..." 1 Samuel 1:11

Hannah's verse opens with the verb and the noun side by side, nadar and neder, she vowed a vow. Nobody in Israel had to make one; Ecclesiastes says it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. But a vow made was a debt owed, and the psalms keep coming back to paying them, often with thanksgiving in the same breath. Hannah's vow cost her the only thing she had asked for. She paid it on the day she said she would, and sang.

תּוֹדָה todah *(toh-DAH)*

Strong's H8426

Meaning Thanksgiving. Praise that confesses what God did. Also the thank offering itself, and a thanksgiving choir.

Appears 32 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God! Psalm 50:23

In the law a todah was a real offering, eaten the same day it was brought, so a thank you to God was also a meal with people. The word grows from yadah, to give thanks, and it carries the sense of saying out loud what God did: some lists gloss it as confession. Jonah, inside a fish, promises it: with the voice of thanksgiving I will sacrifice to you. God says in Psalm 50 that this is the sacrifice that honors him. Not the bull. The thank you.

יָדָה yadah *(yah-DAH)*

Strong's H3034

Meaning To give thanks, to praise, to confess. Strong's says it began as holding out the hand.

Appears 114 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse **Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!** Psalm 100:4

Strong's links this verb to yad, the hand, as if thanks began as a hand stretched out; the older lexicon BDB thinks the link is uncertain, so hold it loosely. What is not uncertain is how it is used. It is the same word for confessing sin and for thanking God, because both are telling the truth about what happened. Its command form, hodu, give thanks, is the opening of Psalm 136 and the line Jehoshaphat's choir sang in October.

בָּרַךְ barak *(bah-RAHK)*

Strong's H1288

Meaning To bless. Of God blessing people, a gift given; of people blessing God, praise. Strong's adds a rare sense, to kneel.

Appears about 330 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse **Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD."** 1 Samuel 2:20

The word runs both directions. God blesses people and people bless God, and this session does both: Eli blesses Hannah, and Psalm 100 tells you to bless his name. A handful of times it means to kneel, and the Hebrew word for knee, berek, sits right beside it in Strong's. Blessing is something received from above, and given back up. It is also the word in Deuteronomy 8 for the blessing said after a full meal, which is session four.

שָׂמַח samach *(sah-MAKH)*

Strong's H8055

Meaning To rejoice, to be glad. Strong's suggests the picture of a face brightening.

Appears about 150 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse **My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.** 1 Samuel 2:1

Hannah's first line has four strong verbs and only the last is this one: exults, is exalted, derides, and then, plainly, I rejoice. The other three are about what joy does to her; this one is the joy itself. Notice its object. Not my son. Your salvation. Hannah's gladness on the day she gave him back is pointed at God, which is the only reason it survives the walk home.

εὐχαριστέω **eucharisteo** *(yoo-khar-is-TEH-oh)*

Strong's G2168

Meaning To give thanks, to be thankful. Built from eu, good, and charis, grace.

Appears 38 times in the New Testament (39 in some manuscripts)

Key verse **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.** 1 Thessalonians 5:18

The word the church later gave to the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, because at the table on the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread and gave thanks. Paul tells a church under pressure to do it in all circumstances, with the pressure still on. Jesus does it in session four over five loaves before anyone has eaten. Hannah did it over a son she had just handed to someone else.

שָׁאַל **sha'al** *(shah-AHL)*

Strong's H7592

Meaning To ask, to inquire, to request. In one form, to grant what was asked, to lend.

Appears about 175 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse **For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD.** 1 Samuel 1:27 to 28

The thread of the whole chapter. Eli prays God would grant the petition she asked; she names the boy because I have asked for him; she says the LORD granted my petition that I asked; and then, I have lent him, the same verb turned around. The noun for petition, she'elah, comes from it. The boy named for asking is handed back with the word for asking, and the word for lent is spelled like the name Saul.

Discussion Questions (20 to 25 minutes)

Observation | What does the text say?

- In 1 Samuel 1:4 to 8, list everything that happens at the yearly feast. Who is at the table, who gets what, and what does Hannah do?
- Read Hannah's vow in 1:11. What does she ask God to do, how many times, and what does she promise in return?
- Compare 1:18 with 1:20. In 1:18 she eats and her face is no longer sad. What has changed in her by then, and what has not changed yet?

Interpretation | What does it mean?

- Twice the text says the LORD had closed her womb. Why would the Bible say that so plainly instead of leaving God out of it? If God closed it, what does that make possible when the story turns?
- Hannah promises to give the son away before she has him. What does that say about what she was really asking for?
- She says she lent him to the LORD, not that she gave him away. What is the difference, and what did she keep?
- Hannah's song never mentions Samuel. It is all about God. What does that tell you about where her joy was pointed, and why it could survive the walk home?

Application | What do I do?

- Is there something in your life you prayed for, received, and are now holding too tightly? Name it. What would it look like to lend it back to God without letting go of him?
- Elkanah meant well and asked the wrong question. Eli was doing his job and got her wrong. Who in your life have you comforted badly, or judged too fast? What would it cost to go back and say so?
- Give thanks in all circumstances. Name one circumstance you are in right now that you would rather complain about. Say out loud one true thing you can thank God for inside it.

Cross References

Psalm 116:12 to 14 What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? The psalmist's answer is to lift up the cup of salvation, call on his name, and pay his vows in front of everybody. The way to repay God turns out to be receiving more from him, and saying so in public.

Ecclesiastes 5:4 to 5 When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it. Hannah could have found reasons to wait. He was small, and he was hers. She went up as soon as he was weaned, just as she said.

Luke 1:46 to 55 Mary's song, more than a thousand years later, with Hannah's bones all through it: the humble lifted, the mighty brought down, the hungry filled with good things. Jesus' mother sang Samuel's mother's song.

Personal Reflection (solo journaling)

- Write the prayer you have prayed the longest, the way Hannah prayed hers: no speech, just pouring it out. Then write what it would look like to get up, eat, and go home with your face no longer sad, before anything has changed.
- What is the thing in your hands you know is really God's? Write the sentence: I have lent it to the LORD. See if you can mean it.
- Hannah made Samuel a little robe every year. How do you still care for someone or something you have had to let go of? Write about it, and thank God for it.

Weekly Practice: The Todah Table

In Israel the thank offering was eaten the same day, with other people. This week, make thanks a meal.

Day one. Write down the one prayer you have prayed longest. Do not add anything. Just name it, and put it somewhere you will see it.

Day two. Read 1 Samuel 1:9 to 18 slowly. Pray the way Hannah did, silently, holding nothing back: sit before God and pour it out. Then eat something, and notice whether your face is any different.

Day three. Read Psalm 100 out loud. When you walk into church on Sunday, walk in the same way: with thanksgiving, on purpose.

Day four. Name one thing God gave you that you are holding too tightly. Say it out loud to God: it was yours first.

Day five. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16 to 18. Pick the hardest circumstance in your week and write three true thanks you can say while you are still in it.

Day six. Have someone over, or call someone, and before you eat, tell them one specific thing God did for you this year. That is a todah. It was always meant to be shared over food.

Keep the paper from day one. You'll want it in session five.

Closing Prayer Prompt

As you close, pray about these three things. Out loud if the group is willing.

- The long prayer. Pour it out again, the one you have prayed longest, and ask God to look on you, remember you, and not forget you.
- The thing you are holding. Name it, and lend it back to him.
- The song. Thank him for something that cost you, and tell him who he is, the way Hannah did, before you tell him what you need.



Session Two

The King Who Danced

DAVID | 2 SAMUEL 6 AND 1 CHRONICLES 15 TO 16 | WEEK OF NOVEMBER 10

David has a new capital and he wants God in it. So he goes to get the ark of the covenant, the gold covered chest that had sat in a private house for twenty years and more, and he brings it home on a cart with a band playing. Then the oxen stumble, a man reaches out his hand, and the music stops. This session tells the whole story: the death, the anger, the fear, three months of waiting while somebody else's house got blessed, and then a king in a plain linen garment who danced in the street with everything he had while his wife watched from a window and despised him for it. It is the Bible's answer to a question a lot of people are too polite to ask: why does God want to be praised?

Opening Question (5 minutes)

When was the last time you threw yourself into something in front of other people and felt foolish doing it? Did you stop? What would it have taken to stop caring how it looked?

Scripture Reading

Read aloud: 2 Samuel 6:1 to 23.

Reference passages: Exodus 25:12 to 15 and Numbers 4:15 (how the ark was to be carried), 1 Chronicles 15:1 to 3, 11 to 16, and 25 to 29 (the second try), 1 Chronicles 16:7 to 10 and 34 (the first thanksgiving choir), Psalm 24 (lift up your heads), Psalm 98 and Psalm 150 (the songs), Ephesians 5:18 to 20 and Colossians 3:15 to 17 (singing in the church), Luke 19:37 to 40 (the stones would cry out).

The Story (read aloud, 10 to 15 minutes)

About a thousand years before Jesus, the boy Hannah gave back had grown old, anointed two kings, and died. The first king, Saul, was dead too. The second, a former shepherd from Bethlehem named David, had finally been crowned over all twelve tribes, had taken a hilltop fortress from the people who held it, and made it his capital. The city of David, the Bible calls it. Jerusalem.

He had a palace. He had an army. What he did not have was the one thing that had always been at the center of Israel: the ark.

The ark of the covenant was a chest, about four feet long, made of acacia wood and covered in gold, built in the wilderness in Moses' day. On its lid were two golden cherubim facing each other with their wings spread, and the space between them was the place God said he would meet with his people. Inside were the stone tablets of the law. It was not a good luck charm. It was the footstool of the throne of God.

And it had been lost. In the days of the old priest Eli, from session one, Israel had carried it into battle like a weapon and the Philistines had captured it. When the news reached Eli at his seat by the road, he fell over backward and died. The Philistines found out within months that the ark was not something you could keep as a trophy, and they sent it back on a new cart pulled by cows. It ended up in a town called Kiriath-jearim, in the house of a man named Abinadab, on a hill. And there it stayed, for twenty years and more, while Saul was king and hardly anyone asked about it.

David asked.

> David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:1 to 2

Baale-judah is another name for Kiriath-jearim, the town where the ark had been waiting. Thirty thousand men to escort one chest. That is how much it mattered to David. But they moved it the way the Philistines had, on a brand new cart, with two of Abinadab's sons, Uzzah and Ahio, driving the oxen. And the whole thing turned into a parade.

> And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:5

Celebrating. Hold on to that word, because David will use it again at the end of the chapter in a very different mood. In Hebrew it is *sachaq*, and it means to laugh, to play, to make merry. Strings, drums, rattles, cymbals, and a king and his people laughing and playing in front of God all the way up the road.

Then they came to a threshing floor, a flat open place where grain was beaten out, belonging to a man named Nacon.

> And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:6 to 7

That is the verse that makes people close the Bible. A man reaches out to keep the most holy object in Israel from falling in the dirt, and God kills him. It feels like the worst kind of unfairness, and we should not pretend it does not.

But the people on that road had been told something most of us have never read. God had told Moses exactly how the ark was to be moved. It was built with rings on its sides and poles through the rings.

> And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it.
>
> Exodus 25:14 to 15

Carried on poles, on the shoulders of a particular family of Levites. Not on a cart. And even those men were warned in so many words what touching it would mean.

> And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, lest they die.
>
> Numbers 4:15

Lest they die. It was not a secret. It was in the instructions, and the instructions had been ignored from the start. The ark had most likely been put on a cart because that is how the Philistines had moved it, and somewhere along the line Israel had started copying people who did not know God. Uzzah had most likely grown up with the ark in his father's house. It had become furniture. When the oxen stumbled he put his hand out the way you would steady a lamp.

The text calls it his error, a rare word whose exact sense is uncertain. But the picture is clear enough. Nothing here says Uzzah had a bad heart. What it shows is a familiar hand. The holiness of God had become something you could handle.

The Bible records David's reaction too, and it is not pretty either.

> And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?"
>
> 2 Samuel 6:8 to 9

Angry, and then afraid. In that order, on the same day. Perez-uzzah means the breaking out against Uzzah. The parade is over. The instruments are silent. And the king, standing at a threshing floor next to a dead man, asks the question every honest person asks at some point: how can this God come anywhere near me?

So he does not bring it home.

> So David was not willing to take the ark of the LORD into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:10 to 11

A Gittite usually means a man from Gath, one of the Philistine cities, though some think this Obed-edom was a Levite from a town with a similar name. Either way, the ark goes into somebody else's house, and for three months the same presence that killed Uzzah blesses Obed-edom and all his household. The God who

broke out against Uzzah is the God who blessed Obed-edom. Same God, same ark. Nothing about God had changed between the threshing floor and that house. What David still had to learn was how God is approached.

And word got back to the king.

> And it was told King David, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:12

This time he did it right, and the writer of Chronicles, who tells the same story from the side of the priests and singers, lets you hear David explain it to the Levites.

> Because you did not carry it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule.
>
> 1 Chronicles 15:13

We did not seek him according to the rule. David had gone looking for God with thirty thousand men and a band, and had not opened the book. Three months of waiting, and the news of Obed-edom's blessing, sent him back to it. So the Levites consecrated themselves, and they lifted the ark on poles onto their shoulders, as Moses had commanded. And six steps in, they stopped.

> And when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:13

Six steps. Nobody died. And the king stopped the whole procession to worship. Chronicles says it plainly: God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark.

Then this.

> And David danced before the LORD with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:14

The Hebrew word for danced here is *karar*, and it shows up in only one place in the whole Bible, this chapter, twice. It means to whirl, to spin round. The king of Israel spun in the road in front of the ark with all his might. And he was wearing a linen ephod, which was a simple priestly garment, a sort of short linen vest or apron, the kind the boy Samuel wore at Shiloh. Chronicles adds that he was clothed in a robe of fine linen, like the Levites who carried the ark. Nothing he wore that day said king.

> So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:15

Many readers have heard a psalm in that procession. Psalm 24 is a song for a king entering a city, and interpreters have long linked it to the day the ark went up into Jerusalem. Its title in Hebrew is two words, of David, a psalm, and the word for psalm is *mizmor*, a song set to music.

> Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!
>
> Psalm 24:7 to 8

Lift up your heads, O gates. Picture it: a city full of people, horns blowing, a king spinning in a linen vest, a chest going up the hill on the shoulders of Levites, and the whole crowd answering the question with a shout. Who is this King of glory? Not David. The LORD.

And then the camera goes up to a window.

> As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:16

Notice what the narrator calls her. Not David's wife. The daughter of Saul. And notice the window, because this is not the first window in Michal's story. Years earlier, when they were young and she loved him, she had let David down out of a window at night to escape her father's soldiers. Then her father gave her to another man while David was on the run. When David was king in Hebron he demanded her back, and her second husband followed her down the road weeping until he was sent home. Whatever Michal felt for David by now, it was complicated, and nowhere in the story does anyone ask her.

What she sees from that window is a king acting like a fool. And she despises him. The word is *bazah*, to look down on, to treat as worthless. She does not say it yet. She waits.

David finishes the day. He sets the ark inside a tent he had pitched for it. He offers burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. He blesses the people in the name of the LORD of hosts. And then he gives every single person in the crowd, men and women both, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to take home. The king who danced fed the city.

And then he goes home to bless his own household, and she is waiting.

> **And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!"**
>
> 2 Samuel 6:20

Every word is sarcasm. Honored himself. The servant girls saw you. You looked like a nobody. Whatever exactly a linen ephod looked like, a man spinning in one with all his might was not dressed like a king, and Michal's word for it is uncovering. Her charge is simple: kings do not do that.

David's answer starts with her father. It was before the LORD, he says, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to make me prince over his people. And then he uses the word from the beginning of the chapter, the one for the parade before Uzzah died: I will celebrate before the LORD. *Sachaq*. I will play. And then he goes further.

> **I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.**
>
> 2 Samuel 6:22

In other words: you think that was undignified? I am just getting started. And the servant girls you are so embarrassed about? David says they will honor him for it. They seem to have seen what Michal could not: a king who knew who the real King was.

And then one more sentence, and the chapter ends.

> **And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.**
>
> 2 Samuel 6:23

Session one was about a woman who could not have a child, and who ended up singing. Session two ends with a woman who watched the dancing from a window, despised it, and had no child to the day of her death. The Bible does not say whether this was God's judgment, or David's distance, or both. It sets the two women a few pages apart and lets you look.

You can only dance before a God you have been afraid of. Praise is what comes out of you when you have seen how holy he is and learned he wants to live in your city anyway.

Now the question underneath this whole story, the one plenty of thoughtful Christians wonder about and never say out loud. Why does God want this? If a human being demanded that everyone tell him how great he is, all day, forever, we would call that vanity. So what is God doing?

The writer of Chronicles gives you the first part of the answer by telling you what David did next.

> Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD by Asaph and his brothers.
>
> 1 Chronicles 16:7

Asaph's family of musicians is the same family that, generations later, produced the Levite who stood up in October's session three and told King Jehoshaphat the battle was not his. David built it on purpose: a standing choir whose whole job was thanksgiving. And the first song they sang has in it the line that choir would still be singing, more than a century later, in front of Jehoshaphat's army.

> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!
>
> 1 Chronicles 16:34

The word for praise that the Psalms end on is *halal*, the root of hallelujah, which is just halal with God's short name on the end: praise Yah. The last psalm in the book is six verses long and uses it thirteen times. Its first line sets the scale.

> Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!
>
> Psalm 150:1

And its last line says who is supposed to join in.

> Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!
>
> Psalm 150:6

Everything that has breath. That is where the answer begins. Praise, at bottom, is saying out loud what is true about something good. Nobody thinks it is vain for a sunset to be admired, or for a great piece of music to be applauded. The applause is not for the music's ego. It is what a person does when they have seen something

good and cannot keep quiet about it. C. S. Lewis, who wrestled with this very question, wrote in his Reflections on the Psalms that he finally saw it: we praise what we enjoy because the praise does not merely express the enjoyment, it completes it. A delight you are not allowed to say out loud is only half a delight.

So when God commands praise, he is not fishing for compliments. He is commanding you to enjoy him all the way to the end. He is telling you the truth about what you are looking at and inviting you to stop pretending you did not see it. And he is the one being in the universe for whom the most extravagant praise is not exaggeration. Psalm 50, the same psalm that named Hannah's thank offering, says it from God's own mouth: he does not need anyone's bulls, because every beast of the forest is his. What he wants is the thanks.

Michal looked at the same procession as the servant girls and saw a man embarrassing himself. That is the other option. You can watch the ark come into the city and see only how the king looks. In this story, despising does not take hating God. It only takes deciding that dignity matters more than delight.

The New Testament takes David's choir and hands it to every Christian in every kitchen. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus:

> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
>
> Ephesians 5:18 to 20

Making melody is *psallo*, which first meant to pluck a string. It is where we get the word psalm. Paul puts it in the heart. And look at what he sets it against: do not get drunk with wine. Hannah was accused of that at Shiloh. Two ways to be filled, wine or the Spirit, and you can tell the second one by its symptoms: singing and thanks.

He says it again to a church in Colossae, nearly word for word.

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
>
> Colossians 3:16

Songs there is *odai*, the plural of *ode*, the plain Greek word for anything sung. It is also the word Revelation uses for the new song sung in heaven. You do not need a band. You do not need a good voice. You need the word of Christ living in you richly enough that it comes out.

And then one more scene, a thousand years after David, in the same city. Jesus is riding down the road from the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem, the Son of David coming into David's city, and the crowd does what the crowd did for the ark.

> the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"
>
> Luke 19:37 to 38

Praise there is *aineo*, the plain Greek word for praising God. And some of the religious leaders in the crowd, like Michal at her window, want it stopped.

> And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."
>
> Luke 19:39 to 40

That is the last answer to the question. God does not have to squeeze praise out of anyone. It is what happens when the King of glory comes through the gates, and if people refuse, the rocks will do it. David seems to have known that, which is why he did not care how he looked. Something was coming into his city that the stones themselves would shout about. The only question was whether he would be quieter than a rock.

> **God does not need your praise. You do. It is the truth about him said out loud, and if you keep quiet, the stones will say it for you.**

Word Study Spotlight

הָלַל halal *(hah-LAHL)*

Strong's H1984

Meaning To praise. Also to shine, and to boast. The root of hallelujah.

Appears 165 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!
Psalm 150:1

Hallelujah is two Hebrew words, hallelu, praise, and Yah, the short form of God's name. The same root can mean to boast, and that helps: praise is boasting about God, the way you brag about someone you love. Psalm 150, the last psalm, is six verses long and says it thirteen times, in the sanctuary and in the heavens, with horn and harp and cymbal, and then hands it to everything that has breath.

מִזְמוֹר mizmor *(miz-MORE)*

Strong's H4210

Meaning A psalm. A song set to music, probably to instruments.

Appears 57 times in the Hebrew Bible, every one in the title of a psalm

Key verse A Psalm of David. Psalm 24, title

It never appears in the running text of the Bible, only at the top of psalms, as a label that says this one is meant to be sung with music. It comes from zamar, to make music. Psalm 98's whole title is this one word. Psalm 24, the song of the King of glory coming through the gates, opens with it, and in Hebrew order it says, of David, a psalm. The king who danced also wrote the music.

זָמַר zamar *(zah-MAR)*

Strong's H2167

Meaning To sing praise, to make music. Strong's suggests touching the strings.

Appears about 45 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Psalm 98:4

Not to be confused with September's zamar, to prune a vine. The two are spelled the same and numbered side by side, and Strong's wonders whether they were once one word, both about a quick striking touch. Psalm 98 says it twice in two verses, sing praises, and then names the lyre. This is music made on purpose, with hands and instruments, for God, and David's choir in Jerusalem was set up to make it every day.

ψάλλω psallo *(PSAHL-loh)*

Strong's G5567

Meaning To sing, to make melody. First meaning, to pluck a string.

Appears 5 times in the New Testament

Key verse addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. Ephesians 5:19

This is where our word psalm comes from. It began as a finger pulling a string and came to mean making music to God. Paul says where the string is now: in your heart. James uses it too: is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. And Paul says he will do it with his spirit and with his mind. The instrument is you.

ᾠδή **ode** *(oh-DAY)*

Strong's G5603

Meaning A song. The general word for anything sung, especially in praise of God.

Appears 7 times in the New Testament

Key verse **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** Colossians 3:16

Outside Paul's two letters it appears only in Revelation, and every time there it is a song sung in heaven: the new song to the Lamb, the song only the redeemed can learn, the song of Moses and of the Lamb. Paul puts it in a church in a small town in what is now Turkey, in ordinary people's mouths, and says it is how the word of Christ lives in them.

αἰνέω **aineo** *(eye-NEH-oh)*

Strong's G134

Meaning To praise. Specifically, to speak or sing praise to God.

Appears 8 times in the New Testament (9 in some manuscripts)

Key verse **the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen.** Luke 19:37

A plain word, and in the New Testament nearly always about God. On the road down from the Mount of Olives a crowd does it at the top of its lungs, and some Pharisees want it stopped. Jesus says if they were silent, the stones would cry out. Its cousin, the noun ainesis, is the praise in Hebrews 13:15, the sacrifice of praise, which is session three.

כָּרַר **karar** *(kah-RAHR)*

Strong's H3769

Meaning To whirl, to dance by spinning around.

Appears 2 times in the Hebrew Bible: 2 Samuel 6:14 and 6:16

Key verse **And David danced before the LORD with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod.** 2 Samuel 6:14

A word used for exactly one moment in the whole Bible. When Chronicles tells the same scene it uses more ordinary words, dancing and celebrating. The king of Israel spinning in the road with all his might, in plain linen, is the only time Scripture needed this verb. Some kinds of joy only happen once in a book.

שָׂחַק sachaq *(sah-KHAHK)*

Strong's H7832

Meaning To laugh, to play, to make merry. Also, in a different mood, to mock.

Appears 36 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. 2 Samuel 6:5

The chapter opens with it and David closes with it. Celebrating, on the road before Uzzah died, and then, to Michal, I will celebrate before the LORD. It is play, and in another mood the same word means laughing at someone. Michal looked down on him from her window. David chose the other sense. After the fear and the death, he went back to playing before God, and this time he knew exactly who he was playing in front of.

Discussion Questions (20 to 25 minutes)

Observation | What does the text say?

- Compare 2 Samuel 6:3 to 5 with 6:12 to 15, and add 1 Chronicles 15:13 to 15. List every difference between the first attempt to bring the ark and the second. What did David change?
- In 6:8 to 9, what two things does David feel, in what order? What question does he ask?
- In 6:16 and 6:20, what does Michal see, what does she call it, and what does the narrator call her both times?

Interpretation | What does it mean?

- Uzzah reached out to keep the ark from falling. Why does the text call it an error? What had the ark become to the people around it?
- God strikes Uzzah down beside the ark, then blesses Obed-edom for three months for keeping it. What does that say about God? What was different?
- David tells Michal, I will make myself yet more contemptible than this. Why would a king choose to look foolish? What was he seeing that she was not?
- Why does God command praise? Try to answer without making him sound vain. Does C. S. Lewis's idea that praise completes enjoyment help?

Application | What do I do?

- Where has God become furniture for you, something you handle without thinking? What would it look like this week to take him seriously again, with the right kind of fear?
- What do you hold back in worship because of how it might look? Be honest about whose window you are worried about.
- What has God done in your life lately that you have not said out loud to anyone? Say it to the group now, plainly, before the stones have to.

Cross References

1 Chronicles 15:1 to 3 The second time, David prepares a place, pitches a tent, and says no one but the Levites may carry the ark. The joy in the street came after he went back and read the instructions.

Psalm 98:1 Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. Praise is always an answer. The new song is sung because of what he has already done.

Revelation 5:9 The ode word again, in heaven: a new song sung to the Lamb who was slain. That is where every song in this session is headed.

Personal Reflection (solo journaling)

- Write about a time you were afraid of God. Not anxious; afraid, the way David was at the threshing floor. What did it do to your worship afterward?
- David came out dressed like the Levites, not like a king. What would you have to set aside to praise God with all your might: a title, an image, a reputation? Name it.
- Write a short psalm, five or six lines, about one marvelous thing God has done for you. No rhyme required. Read it out loud when you are done.

Weekly Practice: All Your Might

David danced with all his might. This week, practice praise that costs a little dignity.

Day one. Read 2 Samuel 6:1 to 11 and sit with the fear. Write down one way you have treated God as familiar.

Day two. Read Psalm 150 out loud, at full volume, somewhere you might be heard. Notice what you feel when you get to the cymbals.

Day three. Sing one song to God by yourself, all the way through, out loud. Ephesians 5:19 says to make melody with your heart. Let your voice come along with it.

Day four. Make a list of ten things God has done for you. Then read Psalm 24:7 to 10 out loud, and answer its question with your list: who is this King of glory? The one who did these.

Day five. Do what David did at the end of the day. Feed somebody. Bread and meat and raisins, or a coffee, or a meal. His day of praise ended with everyone carrying food home.

Day six. Read Luke 19:37 to 40. Name one thing God has done that you have kept quiet about. Say it out loud to one person before the stones do.

Closing Prayer Prompt

As you close, pray about these three things.

- The fear. Ask God to make you afraid of him in the right way again, and to forgive you for every time you handled him like furniture.
- The window. Name the person whose opinion keeps you from praising him freely, and hand that opinion over to him.
- The song. Praise him, out loud, for one specific thing, as plainly as you would brag about someone you love.



Session Three

Singing at Midnight

PAUL AND SILAS | ACTS 16 AND PHILIPPIANS | WEEK OF NOVEMBER 17

Two men free a slave girl from the spirit that owned her, and for it they are beaten with rods in public and thrown into the deepest cell of a Roman prison, their feet locked in wood. At midnight they are singing. Then the ground moves. This session tells the whole night, from a vision of a man begging for help to a jailer with a sword in his hand to a meal served at an hour nobody eats. Then it follows the church born that night into a letter Paul wrote it from another prison about ten years later, a letter that says rejoice more often than almost anything else he wrote. And it goes back to the altar, where Israel first learned what it meant to give something wholly to God.

Opening Question (5 minutes)

What is the worst place you have ever tried to be thankful? Not in theory. An actual room, an actual night. What came out of your mouth there?

Scripture Reading

Read aloud: Acts 16:16 to 34.

Reference passages: Acts 16:9 to 15 (the call and Lydia), Acts 16:35 to 40 (the morning after), Philippians 1:3 to 7 and 12 to 14 (the letter back), Philippians 2:17 to 18 (poured out), Philippians 4:4 to 7 and 11 to 13 (rejoice, and the secret), Leviticus 1:1 to 4 and 9 (the burnt offering), Hebrews 13:15 to 16 (the sacrifice of praise), Romans 12:1 (a living sacrifice), Mark 7:9 to 13 (Corban), 2 Timothy 4:6 to 8 (already being poured out), Luke 15:20 to 32 (the father's party).

The Story (read aloud, 10 to 15 minutes)

About twenty years after the resurrection, Paul is on the road again. This is the man who used to be Saul, the one who dragged Christians out of their houses, until Jesus knocked him flat on the road to Damascus and turned him around. Now he is walking the length of what is today Turkey with a new partner, a man named Silas, a leader from the church in Jerusalem and, like Paul, a Roman citizen. A young man named Timothy has joined them. Twice they try to go preach in a new region, and twice the Spirit of God stops them. So they end up at a port called Troas, on the coast facing Europe.

Then one night Paul sees a vision.

> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.
>
> Acts 16:9 to 10

Look at that little word we. Until this verse, the book of Acts has told Paul's story from the outside. Here, without warning, it says we. Most readers take that to mean the writer, Luke, a doctor who traveled with Paul for years, had just joined them at Troas. From here on, for a while, we are reading an eyewitness.

They sail across to Greece and walk inland to a city called Philippi.

> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.
>
> Acts 16:12

A Roman colony was a little piece of Rome planted somewhere else. By most accounts, retired soldiers were settled there, Roman law ran the courts, Latin was spoken in the forum, and the people were proud to be Romans. That kind of town will matter before the story is over. It also seems to have had very few Jews; Luke never mentions a synagogue. On the Sabbath the missionaries go down to the river outside the city gate, where they think there might be a place of prayer, and they find some women there. One of them is a businesswoman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, who sells expensive purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart, Luke says. She and her household are baptized, and she insists they stay at her house. The church in Philippi starts in a riverbank conversation with a woman in the fabric trade.

Then, on the way to the same place of prayer, somebody starts following them.

> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.
>
> Acts 16:16

A girl, a slave, owned by more than one man, with a spirit in her that told fortunes, and her owners made money off it. She was not a person to them. She was a business. And for days she follows Paul and his friends through the streets, shouting.

> She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.
>
> Acts 16:17 to 18

What she said was true. That is what makes it strange. But it was true the way an ad is true, and it came from a spirit that owned her as surely as her masters did. So Paul finally turns around and speaks, not to her, but to the thing inside her. In the name of Jesus Christ, come out. And it comes out, that very hour.

Which means the business is closed.

> But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."
>
> Acts 16:19 to 21

Listen to what they leave out. They do not say these men cost us money. They say these men are Jews, and we are Romans. In a proud little Roman town, that was enough. The crowd joins in, and the magistrates do not hold a trial.

> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.
>
> Acts 16:22 to 24

Stripped in the public square. Beaten with rods by the magistrates' officers, many blows, Luke says. Then the inner prison, by most accounts the darkest and most secure room in the building, and the stocks, a heavy wooden beam with holes for the ankles, locked shut. No way to tend the wounds. Backs torn open, feet in wood, in the dark. All for setting a girl free from the thing that owned her.

And then the verse this session is named for.

> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,
>
> Acts 16:25

About midnight. Not at sunrise, when things might look better. In the middle of the night, at the worst hour of the worst day, in the worst room in the building. Singing hymns is one Greek word, *hymneo*, the root of our word hymn, and Luke puts it in a form that pictures something still going on. This was more than one brave verse. They were praying and singing in the dark, and they were still at it.

And the prisoners were listening. Of course they were. Nobody sang in there. Most of them had likely heard groaning at midnight, and cursing, and weeping. Never this.

Then the ground moved.

> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.
>
> Acts 16:26

Luke never says their singing caused the earthquake. October said it about Jehoshaphat's choir, and it holds here too: a song is not a technique for moving God. God shook the prison. The singing was simply what two men were doing in the dark, with no idea what he was about to do.

Then the story turns on the last man you would expect.

> When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.
>
> Acts 16:27

By most accounts, a Roman guard who lost his prisoners could expect to suffer whatever they would have suffered, and the jailer knew it. He wakes up, sees every door open, and decides it is over. He has the sword out. And from the darkness of the inner cell, the man with the torn back and the open stocks shouts.

> But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."
>
> Acts 16:28

We are all here. Every prisoner. Nobody ran. The doors were open and the chains were loose and the men who had been listening to hymns all night were still sitting there. Whatever had happened in that prison in the dark, it had happened to them too.

> And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."
>
> Acts 16:29 to 31

The man who locked their feet in the stocks a few hours earlier is on the floor in front of them, shaking, asking the question the slave girl had been shouting about for days. The way of salvation. And the answer is one sentence. Believe in the Lord Jesus.

The next three verses are some of the most beautiful in Acts, and the beauty is in the order.

> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.
>
> Acts 16:32 to 34

The word comes first, to everyone in the house. Then, the same hour of the night, he washes their wounds, the wounds his own city gave them. Then he and his whole family are baptized, at once. Then he takes them up into his house and sets a table. And he rejoices. The Greek word is *agalliao*, and it is not a quiet word; it

means to exult, to be overjoyed, and its parts suggest something close to leaping for joy. A jailer, a household woken in the middle of the night, two beaten missionaries, bread on the table before dawn, and a whole house overjoyed.

Two people were singing at midnight. By dawn a whole household was rejoicing.

Thanks sung in the dark is not pretending. It is an offering, and God is not the only one who hears it.

In the morning the magistrates send word: let those men go. And Paul, for the first time in the story, says who he is.

> But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out."
>
> Acts 16:37

Roman law protected its citizens from being beaten without a trial. The magistrates had done it in public to two of them in a Roman colony. Now they are the ones afraid. They come in person, apologize, and ask them to leave town. It does not read like revenge. Most likely Paul said it so that the little church he was leaving behind would not be treated as a gang of criminals. And before he goes, he goes to Lydia's house and encourages the brothers and sisters gathered there. Then they walk away, sore, down the road.

That church never forgot him.

About ten years later Paul is a prisoner again, most likely in Rome, and by most accounts chained to a soldier, the man you met in October writing about armor. And he writes a letter to Philippi. It is short and warm, and it may be the most joyful thing he ever wrote. He starts it like this.

> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.
>
> Philippians 1:3 to 5

From the first day. Surely he is remembering the riverbank and the jail. And he prays for them with joy, *chara*, the plain Greek word for gladness, a close relative of *charis*, grace. Joy is all over this letter. He calls the people in that church my joy and crown. He asks them to complete his joy. And he uses the verb, *chairo*, to rejoice, over and over, until it becomes the thing the letter is famous for.

> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.
>
> Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord, from a man in chains, to a church that began at a riverbank and grew in a jail. Some of them may have sat at the jailer's table that night. They knew what it cost him to write it. And the words in the Lord carry the weight. Paul does not tell them to be glad about prison. He tells them where gladness lives when home is a cell.

He even tells them it was learned.

> Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
>
> Philippians 4:11 to 13

I have learned. Contentment did not come naturally to the man who used to drag Christians to prison. He learned it in places like the inner cell at Philippi. And the famous last line, I can do all things, the one printed on gym shirts, is in context a sentence about being content while hungry. All things includes the stocks.

And then, in the middle of the letter, Paul says something about his own life that sends us all the way back to the Old Testament.

> Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.
>
> Philippians 2:17 to 18

Poured out as a drink offering. To hear what Paul means, you have to stand at the altar in Israel. The Old Testament had several kinds of offerings, and Leviticus, the book of instructions for them, has one word that covers them all.

> The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock."
>
> Leviticus 1:1 to 2

Offering is *qorban*, and it comes from a verb that means to come near, to bring near. You can hear it in the verse itself: when any one of you brings near a bringing-near. An offering in Israel was a way to come close.

And the first offering in the book is the one where nothing came back.

> "If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him."
>
> Leviticus 1:3 to 4

The burnt offering is *olah*, from the verb for going up, and that is what it did. The whole animal went up in smoke. The family ate most of session one's thank offering. Nobody ate any of the olah. It all went up to God. And with it, the law says elsewhere, wine was poured out at the altar, a drink offering, and was gone.

That is the picture Paul reaches for. Your faith, he tells Philippi, is the sacrifice, and my life is the wine poured out on top of it. If they kill me for it, I am glad. And at the very end of his life, in the last letter we have from him, he uses the word again, about himself, in the present tense.

> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
>
> 2 Timothy 4:6 to 7

The word is *spendo*, to pour out as a libation, and Paul is the only one in the New Testament who uses it, twice, both times about himself. By the accounts the early church kept, he was executed in Rome not long after. The man who sang in the stocks at Philippi went out the way he had lived: poured out on the altar, and glad.

Years before, Jesus had watched people use the word for offering to get out of caring for their own parents. Some religious teachers of his day had a rule that let a man declare his money Corban, the same Hebrew word carried over into Greek, meaning dedicated to God, and then refuse to use it to care for his aging parents.

> But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)
>
> Mark 7:11

And with that one word, Jesus says, they cancelled the commandment to honor your father and mother. They made the word of God void by their tradition. The offering had become a way to keep your hands closed. Any offering can turn into that, which is why the New Testament keeps pulling it back to something you cannot fake.

> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.
>
> Hebrews 13:15 to 16

Sacrifice is *thysia*, the ordinary Greek word for an offering on an altar. Through Jesus, the writer of Hebrews says, the offering is now the fruit of lips: your voice, saying his name, continually, and your hands, doing good and sharing what you have. That is the new temple service. It costs something real. Praise in the dark costs more than praise in the light, and sharing costs whatever you share.

Paul says it in one sentence to the Romans, with the whole altar behind it.

> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
>
> Romans 12:1

A living sacrifice. The olah went up and was gone. You are meant to go up wholly to God and keep on living. By the mercies of God, he says first, because it is always grace before the offering, never the other way around. Nobody in this story earned anything. The jailer did nothing but ask. That is why the offering is thanks.

One more scene, from a story Jesus told, because it shows what the jailer's table looked like from heaven's side. A younger son demanded his share of the inheritance while his father was still alive, which many readers hear as wishing him dead, and spent all of it in a far country. When he was starving he came home to ask for a job. And his father saw him a long way off and ran.

> But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.
>
> Luke 15:22 to 24

Celebrate is *euphraino*, to be glad, to make merry, the word for a feast. When the older brother refused to go in, angry that the party was for the son who had wasted everything, his father came out to him too, and told him why.

> It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.
>
> Luke 15:32

It was fitting. Be glad there is *chairo*, the same word Paul would send to Philippi. A meal in a jailer's house in the middle of the night was fitting. A father running down a road was fitting. Wherever someone lost is found, the right response is a table, and the right word is celebrate. The only one who misses the feast is the one who will not go in.

> **The thank you said in the stocks is a sacrifice God accepts. And when the lost come home, God is the one who sets the table.**

Word Study Spotlight

θυσία **thysia** *(thoo-SEE-ah)*

Strong's G2378

Meaning A sacrifice, an offering on an altar. Both the act of sacrificing and the thing offered.

Appears about 28 to 29 times in the New Testament

Key verse Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Hebrews 13:15

The plain word for what was laid on an altar. Hebrews uses it for the sacrifices of the old temple and for Christ's one sacrifice of himself, and then turns it toward you: a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips, and doing good and sharing, for such sacrifices please God. Paul uses it in Romans 12:1 for your whole body, living. Philippians 2:17 sets it right beside spendo: your faith is the sacrifice, and my life is the wine poured on it.

χαρά **chara** *(khah-RAH)*

Strong's G5479

Meaning Joy, gladness, delight. Also the person or thing that is your joy.

Appears 59 times in the New Testament

Key verse always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy. Philippians 1:4

Related to charis, grace, and to chairo, to rejoice. It appears five times in Philippians, a letter written in chains, more joy per page than almost anything Paul wrote. He prays with it; he calls the church itself my joy and crown. In Paul's mouth it is not a mood that rises and falls with circumstances. It is what grace feels like from the inside, and it was there in the stocks.

σπένδω **spendo** *(SPEN-doh)*

Strong's G4689

Meaning To pour out as a drink offering, a libation of wine at an altar. Figuratively, to give your life away.

Appears 2 times in the New Testament: Philippians 2:17 and 2 Timothy 4:6

Key verse **Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.** Philippians 2:17

Only Paul uses it, and only about himself. In Israel wine was poured out at the altar with the burnt offering and was simply gone. Paul says that is his life, and he says it twice: once as a possibility, to Philippi, and once as a fact, to Timothy, near the end. Both times the next words are about joy or about finishing. Wine poured on God's altar was never wasted, and neither is a life.

עֹלָה **olah** *(oh-LAH)*

Strong's H5930

Meaning A burnt offering, the sacrifice wholly burned on the altar. From alah, to go up.

Appears 289 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse **If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish.** Leviticus 1:3

Named for what it did: it went up. The whole animal became smoke, and nothing came back to the worshiper. It is the first offering in Leviticus and one of the most often mentioned, and the law says a hand laid on its head made it accepted for the one who brought it. Paul's living sacrifice in Romans 12:1 sounds like this offering with a twist: you go up wholly to God, and keep living.

קָרְבָּן **qorban** *(kor-BAHN)*

Strong's H7133

Meaning An offering, anything brought near to the altar. From qarab, to come near.

Appears 82 times in the Hebrew Bible, almost all in Leviticus and Numbers

Key verse **When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.** Leviticus 1:2

The general word for every offering in Leviticus, and its root is nearness: Leviticus 1:2 uses the verb and the noun together, bring near a bringing-near. In Jesus' day the word had become Corban, a vow that could lock money away from your own parents in God's name (Mark 7:11). The word meant to bring you near to God was being used to keep your own parents at arm's length. Jesus called that making void the word of God.

εὐφραίνω **euphraino** *(yoo-FRY-noh)*

Strong's G2165

Meaning To be glad, to rejoice, to make merry. Especially the gladness of a feast.

Appears 14 times in the New Testament

Key verse **And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again.** Luke 15:23 to 24

Four of its fourteen uses are in one story, the father who throws a party for the son who came home. Let us celebrate. They began to celebrate. The older brother complains he was never given a goat to celebrate with. And the father answers that it was fitting to celebrate. It is the word for joy with food on the table. The jailer's meal at midnight had the same joy in it, though Luke uses a different word.

ὑμνέω **hymneo** *(hoom-NEH-oh)*

Strong's G5214

Meaning To sing a hymn, to sing praise to God.

Appears 4 times in the New Testament

Key verse **About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.** Acts 16:25

The root of our word hymn. Its four uses are worth knowing: twice for Jesus and his disciples singing a hymn on the night he was betrayed, before they went out to the Mount of Olives; once here, in the stocks at midnight; and once in Hebrews, where Christ himself says, I will sing your praise in the midst of the congregation. Every time it shows up, someone is singing at the edge of suffering.

ἀγαλλιάω **agalliao** *(ah-gahl-lee-AH-oh)*

Strong's G21

Meaning To exult, to be overjoyed. Its parts suggest leaping for joy.

Appears 11 times in the New Testament

Key verse **Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.** Acts 16:34

Not a quiet word. The sources trace it to roots meaning much and to leap, which gives the feel of it even if nobody in the jailer's house was jumping. It is the word in Mary's song, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, the song that echoes Hannah's a thousand years later. In Philippi it is a man who had his sword out a few hours earlier, at his own table in the middle of the night, with his whole house around him.

χαίρω **chairo** *(KHAI-roh)*

Strong's G5463

Meaning To rejoice, to be glad. Also the everyday greeting, the way you would say be well.

Appears 74 times in the New Testament

Key verse **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.** Philippians 4:4

The verb behind chara, and related to charis, grace. It was also the everyday Greek greeting, so every time Paul wrote rejoice, his readers heard the word they used to say hello. Paul's command is in a form that means keep on rejoicing, and he says where: in the Lord. He does not ask Philippi to rejoice in their circumstances. Joy has an address, and it is not the circumstances.

Discussion Questions (20 to 25 minutes)

Observation | What does the text say?

- In Acts 16:19 to 24, list everything that is done to Paul and Silas, in order. What do the owners say out loud, and what was the real reason?
- What are Paul and Silas doing at midnight, and who is listening? What does Paul shout when the jailer draws his sword?
- In 16:32 to 34, list everything the jailer does after he believes, in order. What time is it?

Interpretation | What does it mean?

- Paul and Silas had no idea an earthquake was coming. So why did they sing? What does Philippians 4:4 suggest?
- Nobody ran when the doors opened. Why not? What does it tell you about what the prisoners had been listening to?
- Hebrews 13:15 calls praise a sacrifice. What makes thanks a sacrifice rather than just a feeling? Describe a time thanking God cost you something.
- Corban turned an offering into a way of keeping your hands closed. What religious words do people hide behind today to avoid helping someone? Which ones have you used?

Application | What do I do?

- What is your inner cell right now? Name it plainly. What would it look like to pray and sing there, not as a way out, but because God is in there with you?
- Who is listening to you at midnight? Think of the people who see you on your worst days. What are they hearing?
- The jailer washed their wounds and set a table. Who around you has been hurt, and what could you do for them this week? Who could you feed at an hour that costs you something?

Cross References

Philippians 1:12 to 14 Paul tells the same church that his chains have actually advanced the gospel, through the whole imperial guard. Philippi had seen it happen before. They had watched a jail become a church in one night.

Philippians 4:5 to 7 Right after rejoice: let your reasonableness be known, the Lord is at hand, do not be anxious, pray with thanksgiving, and the peace of God will guard your heart. October's third session closed on these verses. They were written to the jailer's church.

Psalm 50:14 to 15 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon me in the day of trouble. Thanks first, then the call in trouble, in the same breath, and then the promise: I will deliver you. Session one met this psalm at verse 23.

Personal Reflection (solo journaling)

- Write about the worst night you have had. Where was God in that room? If you had sung, what song would it have been?
- Paul says I have learned to be content. Write down one thing you are still learning to be content in. What would it take to call it a lesson instead of a sentence?
- What in your life is being poured out right now: your time, your strength, your money, your health? Write it down as an offering, and tell God it is his.

Weekly Practice: Midnight Songs

This week, practice the sacrifice of praise in the places it costs most.

Day one. Read Acts 16:16 to 34 out loud. Circle every mention of time. Notice when the singing happened.

Day two. Set an alarm for the middle of the night, or pray at the darkest hour you are naturally awake. Pray, then sing one verse of a song you know. It does not have to be pretty.

Day three. Name your inner cell. Then write Philippians 4:4 under it and say it out loud: rejoice in the Lord always. In the Lord, not in the cell.

Day four. Read Hebrews 13:15 to 16. Offer the second half too: do good, and share something you would rather keep. Hebrews calls that a sacrifice.

Day five. Wash somebody's wounds. A meal, a hospital visit, an apology, a hard conversation you have been avoiding. Do one thing for someone who has been hurt, at an inconvenient hour if you can.

Day six. Read Luke 15:20 to 32. Throw a small party for someone who came back: to God, to church, to you. Celebrate. It is fitting.

Closing Prayer Prompt

As you close, pray about these three things.

- The cell. Name the darkest room you are in and thank God for one thing you can see from there.
- The listeners. Pray for the people who hear you at midnight, by name, that what they hear from you would make them ask what the jailer asked.
- The offering. Give God what is being poured out of you right now, and ask him for Paul's joy while it pours.



Session Four

Enough

THE FIVE THOUSAND | JOHN 6 AND DEUTERONOMY 8 | WEEK OF NOVEMBER 24

It is the only miracle of Jesus' ministry, apart from his own resurrection, that all four Gospels tell. Thousands of hungry people on a hillside by a lake, nowhere to buy food, and a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus gives thanks over that lunch in front of five thousand men, everyone eats until they are full, and there are twelve baskets left over. This is Thanksgiving week, and this session sets that hillside next to Moses' rule for a full table: eat, be full, and bless the LORD. It also asks the hardest question of the month. What happens to your thank you if the gift gets taken?

Opening Question (5 minutes)

Think of a Thanksgiving table, or any big meal, from your past. Who was there? Who is not there anymore? What was the prayer before the meal like, and did anybody mean it?

Scripture Reading

Read aloud: John 6:1 to 15, then Deuteronomy 8:7 to 18.

Reference passages: Mark 6:30 to 44 and Matthew 14:21 (the same day from two other angles), John 6:35 (the bread of life), Psalm 34:1 to 8 (taste and see), Psalm 136:1 to 3 (for he is good), John 1:14 to 17 (grace upon grace), Romans 6:23 and James 1:17 (the free gift), 1 Chronicles 29:10 to 16 (of your own), Luke 17:11 to 19 (the one who came back), Romans 1:21 (the root of ingratitude), 1 Timothy 4:4 to 5 (received with thanksgiving), Psalm 126 (sheaves).

The Story (read aloud, 10 to 15 minutes)

Start with how tired they were. Jesus had sent his twelve closest followers out two by two through the villages of Galilee, and they had just come back with a great deal to tell him. Around the same time came the news that John the Baptist, Jesus' relative, the man who had baptized him, had been beheaded in prison on the orders of King Herod, at Herod's own birthday banquet. Mark tells you what Jesus said to his friends.

> The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.
>
> Mark 6:30 to 31

They had no leisure even to eat. Hold onto that, because the day that follows is all about food, and it starts with people too busy and too grieved to have any.

So they get into a boat and cross part of the lake, the Sea of Galilee, toward somewhere quiet. And the crowd sees where they are headed and runs around the shore on foot and gets there first. When Jesus steps out of the boat, the desolate place is full.

> When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.
>
> Mark 6:34

This was supposed to be their rest, and the news about John was still fresh. Mark says he had compassion on them. The Greek word is built from the word for a person's insides; it is compassion felt in the gut. He looked at thousands of people who had taken over his quiet place, saw sheep with nobody to lead them, and taught them until the day was nearly gone.

John, by long tradition the disciple who wrote this Gospel, adds a detail none of the others do.

> Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.
>
> John 6:4

Passover, the feast that remembered the night God brought Israel out of Egypt. And every Jew on that hillside also knew what came after: forty years in the wilderness of bread from heaven, every morning, enough for the day. They are about to watch God feed his people in a desolate place again.

Sooner or later somebody has to ask about food. In John's telling, Jesus asks first.

> Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little."
>
> John 6:5 to 7

A denarius was about a day's wage for a laborer, so two hundred is most of a year's work, and Philip says even that would only buy everybody a bite. His math is correct. Mark says the disciples had a simple plan: send the crowd away to buy their own food. Jesus answers with a sentence that makes no sense on a hillside with no food in sight.

> But he answered them, "You give them something to eat."
>
> Mark 6:37

Then Andrew, Peter's brother, comes forward with the only food anyone can find.

> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?"
>
> John 6:8 to 9

Barley was cheaper than wheat, by most accounts the bread of the poor. Five barley loaves and two fish, probably dried or pickled, the kind of food a boy might carry. And Andrew says the honest thing: what are they for so many?

Most of us live inside that question. We are rarely holding nothing. We are holding a little: five loaves and a crowd, a paycheck and a pile of bills, a marriage that is not enough for what it is up against, strength for about half of what today is asking.

Jesus does not answer it. He tells everyone to sit down.

> **Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.**
>
> John 6:10

Mark adds that the grass was green, and that they sat in groups, by hundreds and by fifties, like a dinner party laid out across a hillside. Matthew adds that the five thousand was only the men, besides women and children. Nobody knows the full number. It was a town's worth of people, sitting on the green grass, waiting to be fed from one boy's lunch.

And then the sentence this whole month has been walking toward.

> **Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.**
>
> John 6:11

When he had given thanks. That is *eucharisteo*, session one's word, the one Paul used for giving thanks in all circumstances. Jesus did not wait for the twelve baskets. He gave thanks over the lunch. Before anything had multiplied, before a single person had eaten, while the math was still exactly what Philip said it was, he looked at what was in his hands and thanked his Father for it.

Mark tells the same moment with a different word. He says Jesus looked up to heaven and said a blessing, *eulogeo*, to speak well of. A Jewish man taking bread into his hands would bless God for it, and Jewish families still bless him as the one who brings bread out of the earth. Both words are true. He blessed God, and he thanked him. For five loaves.

And then John adds: as much as they wanted. Philip had hoped for a bite each. They got as much as they wanted.

> **And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.**
>
> John 6:12 to 13

Eaten their fill is one Greek word, *empiplemi*, to be filled up, satisfied, all the way. And leftover is *perisseuo*, to overflow, to be more than enough. Five thousand men and their families ate until they were full, and when they were done, there was more food on the hillside than when they started. Twelve baskets, perhaps one for each of the disciples who had wanted to send everyone away.

Mark describes those baskets with a word you will meet again later in this session. He says they took up twelve baskets full, and the Greek word for full there is *pleroma*, fullness. Keep it in mind.

And notice the last command. That nothing may be lost. The God who just fed a town out of five loaves does not waste the crumbs. Nothing he gives is throwaway.

Here is what the crowd did with it.

> When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.
>
> John 6:14 to 15

They wanted to make him king. A king who could feed an army for free was a king worth having. Jesus walked away from it. The next day the crowd tracked him down across the lake, and he told them plainly that they had come looking for him because they had eaten the loaves and been filled. Then he told them what the bread had been about.

> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."
>
> John 6:35

The loaves were a sign, a gift pointing at the Giver, and the Giver was standing in front of them. Most of the crowd wanted more loaves and did not want him. By the end of that chapter, many who had been following him turned back.

> **Jesus gave thanks for five loaves before anyone ate. Gratitude does not wait to see whether there will be enough. It looks at who is holding the bread.**

That crowd's mistake is far older than they were, and Moses saw it coming well over a thousand years earlier. Israel had spent forty years in the wilderness eating manna, bread that showed up on the ground every morning and rotted overnight if you tried to save it, except on the day before the Sabbath. They had never once had a full pantry. And now they were standing on the edge of the promised land, and Moses tells them what is about to happen.

> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.
>
> Deuteronomy 8:7 to 9

Wheat and barley, the same grain as the boy's loaves. Bread without scarcity. After forty years of one day's bread at a time, a land where you would never have to wonder. And then Moses gives them the instruction for what to do after dinner.

> And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.
>
> Deuteronomy 8:10

Three of this month's words are in that sentence. Be full is *sava*, to be satisfied, filled up. Bless is *barak*, session one's word, the blessing said to God. And good is *tov*, the word for what God saw in his creation again and again: and it was good. Eat. Be full. Then bless. Jewish tradition built its blessing after meals on this verse, and many families say it to this day. Most of us pray before the meal, when we are hungry. Moses tells Israel to pray after, when they are full, because that is when they would forget.

He says so in the next breath.

> Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,
>
> Deuteronomy 8:11 to 14

Hungry people pray. The danger Moses sees coming is a full stomach. When everything has multiplied, the heart is lifted up, and God slips out of mind. And then the sentence a full heart says to itself.

> Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.
>
> Deuteronomy 8:17 to 18

My hand got me this. That is what ingratitude sounds like from the inside. It does not curse God. It just forgets him, and takes the credit. Paul puts it near the root of everything that went wrong with the human race.

> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
>
> Romans 1:21

Give thanks there is *eucharisteo*, the word Jesus prayed over the loaves. Before the idols and everything else in that dark chapter, Paul names where it started: people who knew God would not honor him or thank him.

Jesus met that forgetting face to face once, on the road between Samaria and Galilee. Ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, as the law required, and shouted for mercy. He told them to go show themselves to the priests, which is what a person did when they had been healed, and as they went, they were healed. All ten.

> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.
>
> Luke 17:15 to 16

Giving him thanks, *eucharisteo* again. And he was a Samaritan, the outsider, from a people most Jews of that day would not even eat with.

> Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."
>
> Luke 17:17 to 19

Where are the nine? The text never calls them bad men. They were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do. They got what they wanted and kept walking. One turned around. And notice what Jesus says to him alone: your faith has made you well. All ten got their skin back. One got Jesus.

That is the difference between the nine and the one, and between the crowd and the leper. The crowd got bread and came back for more bread. The leper got his skin back and came back for the one who healed him.

John opens his whole Gospel by saying it.

> **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.**
>
> John 1:14, 16

From his fullness. *Pleroma*. The same word Mark used for the baskets. The leftovers on the hillside were a picture of him. The baskets ran over because he never runs low. Grace upon grace, the Greek says grace in place of grace, one gift landing on top of the last one before you have finished with it. That is the word for Thanksgiving Day.

And Paul puts the whole thing in one sentence that every Christian should know by heart.

> **For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
>
> Romans 6:23

Wages are earned. Death is what we earned. The gift is *charisma*, something given freely, from the verb to give as a favor. You cannot earn a gift, and you cannot pay one back. You can only receive it and say thank you. That is why a Christian's whole life is shaped like a thank you. James says every good gift comes from above. Paul, at the end of a long chapter about generosity, runs out of words: thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.

And now the hardest question. What if the gift is taken?

Every Thanksgiving table has an empty chair at it eventually. The job ends. The health goes. The child moves away, or worse. And if your gratitude was built on the gift, when the gift goes, the gratitude goes with it. Job said the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD, and October showed you what that sentence cost him. Hannah lent her son to the LORD and sang, because her song was about God and not about the boy.

There is a psalm that, by most readings, comes from people who had lost everything and been given some of it back. Israel had been carried off to Babylon, the temple burned, the city ruined, and decades later some of them came home.

> When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.
>
> Psalm 126:1 to 3

Shouts of joy is *rinnah*, a ringing cry, the sound people make when they cannot hold it in. But the psalm does not end in the celebration. It turns and asks God to do it again, as if the homecoming were not finished and some of them were still weeping.

> Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.
>
> Psalm 126:4 to 6

Sow in tears. Picture a farmer in a hungry year with a handful of grain. He could eat it. Instead he walks out into the field crying and throws it into the dirt, because that is the only way there will ever be more. The psalm never promises he will stop crying on the way out. It promises he will come home with his arms full. Thanksgiving in the Bible does not pretend the tears are not there. It sows anyway, and it trusts the harvest to the one who owns the field.

That is what Jesus did with the five loaves. He held a little, he gave thanks, and he gave it away. The baskets came after.

> **Thanks built on the gift lasts as long as the gift. Thanks built on the Giver outlasts everything you lose.**

Word Study Spotlight

טוֹב tov *(tove)*

Strong's H2896

Meaning Good. Pleasant, beautiful, right, well. Used as an adjective and as a noun.

Appears more than 550 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Psalm 34:8

Genesis 1 says it seven times over creation: and God saw that it was good. It is the most common word for good in the Old Testament and it covers everything from good food to good people to a good God. Psalm 34 says you find out by tasting, the way you find out bread is good. Psalm 136 makes it the reason for every thank you: give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. Paul says everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

שָׂבַע sava *(sah-VAH)*

Strong's H7646

Meaning To be satisfied, to be full, to have enough or more than enough.

Appears nearly 100 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Deuteronomy 8:10

The blessing after a meal grows out of this verse. Moses gives the order: eat, be full, then bless. And then he warns that full is the most dangerous place to stand, because a full heart lifts itself up and forgets. The word can tip into too much: Proverbs prays for neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full and deny you. On the hillside in John 6, five thousand people were full in exactly this sense, and the meal had begun with Jesus giving thanks.

πλήρωμα pleroma *(PLAY-roh-mah)*

Strong's G4138

Meaning Fullness. What fills something up, or the state of being completely full.

Appears 17 or 18 times in the New Testament

Key verse For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. John 1:16

Mark uses it for the baskets: twelve baskets full. John uses it for Jesus: from his fullness we have all received. Paul uses it for the deity that dwells in Christ: in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. The word that measured the leftovers is the word for who Jesus is. Grace upon grace means one gift arriving on top of the last, so that you never get to the bottom of the basket. This is Thanksgiving Day's word.

χάρισμα **charisma** *(KHAR-is-mah)*

Strong's G5486

Meaning A free gift, something given as a favor. Also a gift God gives for serving others.

Appears 17 times in the New Testament

Key verse **For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Romans 6:23

It comes from the verb charizomai, to give freely, and belongs to the same family as charis, grace. Paul sets it against wages in one sentence: wages are what you earn, a gift is what you cannot. Our English word charisma started here, but in the Bible it is never about personality. It is what God hands you that you did not work for, beginning with eternal life. Paul also uses it for the gifts God gives each believer to serve the church, and those are not earned either.

עֹשֶׁר **osher** *(OH-sher)*

Strong's H6239

Meaning Riches, wealth.

Appears 37 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse **Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.** 1 Chronicles 29:12

David's last great prayer, over the gold and silver he and his people had just given for a temple his son would build. Riches come from you, he says, and two verses later he says what giving them back really is: of your own have we given you, literally, from your hand we have given to you. Moses warned that wealth makes a heart say my hand got me this. David says the opposite out loud. It was always your hand.

רִנָּה **rinnah** *(rin-NAH)*

Strong's H7440

Meaning A ringing cry. A shout of joy, singing; occasionally a cry of pleading.

Appears 33 times in the Hebrew Bible

Key verse **Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!** Psalm 126:5

Usually a shout of joy, sometimes a desperate cry for help, and it is worth knowing it can be both. Psalm 126 uses it three times, for exiles who came home laughing and for farmers who planted crying. Jehoshaphat's singers in October went out with it. The psalm promises it to the one who sows in tears, not instead of the tears. The shout comes at harvest, and the harvest belongs to God.

περισσεύω **perisseuo** *(peh-ris-SYOO-oh)*

Strong's G4052

Meaning To abound, to overflow, to be more than enough. Of food, to be left over.

Appears 39 times in the New Testament

Key verse And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." John 6:12

The leftovers are this word: what was more than enough. Paul uses it for grace abounding for many, and for thanksgiving overflowing to the glory of God, and he says in Philippians, I know how to abound, the same word, right next to I know how to be brought low. Jesus made more bread than the crowd could eat, and then made sure none of it was wasted.

ἐμπίπλημι **empiplemi** *(em-PIP-lay-mee)*

Strong's G1705

Meaning To fill up, to fill completely. To satisfy.

Appears 5 times in the New Testament

Key verse And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments." John 6:12

Eaten their fill is this one word: they were filled. Mary uses it in her song, the one that echoes Hannah: he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. Jesus uses it in a warning: woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. The difference between those two is whether the fullness has made you forget who filled it.

Discussion Questions (20 to 25 minutes)

Observation | What does the text say?

- In Mark 6:30 to 34, what state are Jesus and the disciples in before the crowd arrives? What does Jesus feel when he sees them, and what does he do?
- In John 6:5 to 13, list the events in order. When does Jesus give thanks? What is in his hands at that moment?
- In Deuteronomy 8:10 to 14, what three things are Israel told to do at a meal, and what is the danger Moses names?

Interpretation | What does it mean?

- Why would Jesus give thanks before the bread multiplied instead of after? What is he thanking his Father for?
- The crowd wanted to make Jesus king because he fed them, and he walked away. What were they getting wrong about the gift and the giver?
- Moses warns that being full is more dangerous than being hungry. Do you believe that? Where have you seen it in your own life?
- Psalm 126 holds tears and joy in the same song. What does it look like to thank God while you are still weeping? Is that honest, or is it pretending?

Application | What do I do?

- What are your five loaves right now, the little you are holding that is not enough for what you face? Say it out loud. Then say one specific thank you for it, before anything changes.
- What has God given you that you have started to think your own hand got you? Name it, and give God the credit in front of someone this week.
- This is Thanksgiving week. Who is the empty chair at your table this year? How can you give thanks for God in a way that is honest about that loss?

Cross References

Psalm 136:1 to 3 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever, and every one of its twenty six verses carries the same refrain. A whole congregation answering every line. Thanks in the Bible is usually said together.

1 Timothy 4:4 to 5 Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. Grace before a meal is how a gift gets received for what it is: from God, and good.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. Not some of them. Every one, including the ones you thought you earned.

Personal Reflection (solo journaling)

- Make a list of twenty good things in your life right now. Then go back and next to each one, write who it came from before it came to you.
- Where are the nine? Write about something God did for you that you never went back to thank him for. Go back now, on paper.
- Write about a gift that was taken from you. Then write one sentence of thanks to God that does not depend on getting it back.

Weekly Practice: Bless After

This is Thanksgiving week. Practice Moses' order: eat, be full, then bless.

Day one. Before one meal, hold the food in your hands for a moment and thank God for it specifically, the way Jesus did with the loaves.

Day two. After one meal, when you are full, stop and bless God for it out loud. Deuteronomy 8:10. Notice how much harder it is after than before.

Day three. Read Deuteronomy 8:17 to 18. Write down one thing you have been quietly taking credit for. Then tell God, out loud, whose hand it came from.

Day four. Thanksgiving Day. Before the meal, read John 1:16 out loud to whoever is at your table. Grace upon grace. Then ask everyone to name one gift and who gave it.

Day five. Be the one who turned back. Thank somebody, in person or in writing, who did something for you that you never properly thanked them for.

Day six. Gather the leftovers. Take something from your full fridge, or an hour from your full calendar, to someone who does not have enough. Nothing he gives is meant to be wasted.

Closing Prayer Prompt

As you close, pray about these three things.

- The five loaves. Thank God for the little you are holding, before you know whether it will be enough.
- The full heart. Confess where you have forgotten him because things were going well, and bless him for the good land.
- The empty chair. Name the loss you are carrying into this Thanksgiving, and thank God for himself, the fullness that is still there when the gift is gone.



Session Five

Grace Upon Grace

INTEGRATION | THE WHOLE MONTH | THANKSGIVING AND AFTER

Four sessions, four stories, four tables. A mother at a feast where she would not eat. A king handing out bread in the street. A jailer setting food in front of two bleeding men at midnight. A hillside of five thousand eating until they were full. This session steps back and asks what the four have in common. The answer is in what each of them let go of, and in a prayer David prayed at the end of his life, over gold that had never really been his.

Opening Question (5 minutes)

Across all four sessions, what actually landed? Not what you think should have mattered most. The line, the word, or the question that stuck to you and came back to you later in the week. Start there and let everyone answer before anything else.

The Thread (read aloud, 10 to 15 minutes)

Here is the month, one week at a time. Listen for the thing that runs under all four, because none of the stories stops to point at it.

Session one put you at a feast. Hannah, with a double portion on her plate and no children to share it, mocked every year at the holy meal. She poured out her soul at the doorway of the sanctuary so quietly a priest thought she was drunk, and made a *neder*, a vow: if you give me a son, I will give him back. She named him for *sha'al*, asking. Then she walked him up the hill and lent him to the LORD, and sang a song that never mentions him once. *Samach*, I rejoice in your salvation. *Barak*, blessed every year by the priest who had misjudged her. And behind it, the *todah*, the thank offering you eat with people, which God says is the sacrifice that honors him, and *yadah*, to give thanks, perhaps first a hand held out, and *eucharisteo*, the good grace of giving thanks in all circumstances.

Session two put you in the street. David brought the ark up on a cart with a band playing, and Uzzah reached out to steady it and died. The king was angry, then afraid, and for three months God blessed someone else's house while he kept his distance. Then he went back and read the instructions, and the second time, six steps in, he stopped to worship, and then he *karar*, whirled, with all his might in plain linen. His wife watched from a window and despised him. He told her he would *sachaq*, play, before the LORD and be more undignified still. Then he built a choir whose only job was thanks. *Halal*, praise, the root of hallelujah. *Mizmor*, a psalm. *Zamar*, music on purpose. *Psallo* and *ode*, the strings and songs moved into the heart of every Christian. *Aineo*, the praise on the road into Jerusalem that the stones would have shouted if the people had not.

Session three put you in the stocks. Paul and Silas freed a slave girl from a spirit and lost everything for it: clothes, skin, dignity, and their feet locked in wood. At midnight they were praying and singing, *hymneo*, and the prisoners were listening. The earthquake opened every door and nobody ran. The jailer with the sword in his hand ended the night washing their wounds and feeding them at his table, *agalliao*, exulting with his whole house. About ten years later Paul wrote back from another prison: *chara*, joy, and *chairo*, rejoice in the Lord always. He called his life *spendo*, wine poured out on the altar. Behind it stood the *qorban*, the offering that brings you near, and the *olah*, the one that went up entirely, and the *thysia*, the sacrifice of praise that is now the fruit of lips. And a father in a story Jesus told, who said it was fitting to *euphraino*, to celebrate, because the lost was found.

Session four put you on a hillside. A crowd, a boy's lunch, five loaves and two fish, and Jesus giving thanks for them before there was enough. Everyone *empiplemi*, ate their fill, and twelve baskets were *perisseuo*, left over. Moses had told Israel the order long before: eat, *sava*, be full, and then bless the LORD for the *tov*, the good land, and beware, because full hearts forget. Nine lepers forgot. One came back. And John said it plainly: from his *pleroma*, his fullness, we have all received, grace upon grace. Eternal life is *charisma*, a free gift, and every good gift comes from above. Even *osher*, riches, come from his hand. And those who sow in tears will reap with *rinnah*, the ringing shout of joy.

Now here is the thread.

Go back and look at what each person let go of.

Hannah let go of her son. The one she had asked for, for years. She nursed him for two or three years and then she walked him up a hill and left him with an old man who had once called her a drunk.

David let go of his dignity. He dressed like the Levites who carried the ark and danced in a linen garment until his own wife despised him. Before that he had let go of something harder: the idea that he could carry God wherever he wanted, on his own terms.

Paul and Silas had everything taken. Their clothes, their skin, their freedom. And at midnight they let go of the one thing nobody could take, their right to complain about it, and sang instead.

And a boy's five barley loaves ended up in Jesus' hands. John does not tell us how. But they were his, and they were all anyone could find.

In every story, somebody opened their hands, and God was not finished. Hannah's boy became the man who anointed Israel's first kings, and God gave her five more children she never bargained for. David made himself small, and the choir he started was still singing more than a century later, in front of an army. Paul and Silas were stripped in the marketplace, and before dawn a jailer's whole household was rejoicing. The boy's five loaves fed a crowd. None of it was a return on an investment. Paul would one day give his life and get nothing back for it on this earth.

Somebody always wants to turn that into a formula: give to God and he pays you back with more. That is a wage. It is the opposite of thanks. Not one person in these four stories gave in order to get. Hannah vowed the boy before she had him and sang before she knew about the five. Paul and Silas did not know the earthquake was coming. The boy did not know about the baskets. They opened their hands because of who they were giving to, not because of what they would get.

And here is the sentence that explains why.

Near the end of his life, David gathered the leaders of Israel and asked them to give toward the temple his son Solomon would build. He gave first, out of his own treasure, gold and silver in amounts hard to picture. The leaders gave. The people gave. And they gave so freely that the text says they rejoiced, and David rejoiced greatly. Then the old king stood before the whole assembly, beside offerings the text counts in thousands of talents of gold, and prayed.

> Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever."
>
> 1 Chronicles 29:10

And then he says where all of it came from.

> Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.
>
> 1 Chronicles 29:12 to 13

And then the sentence the whole month turns on.

> But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.
>
> 1 Chronicles 29:14

Of your own have we given you. In Hebrew it is three words, and it says: from your hand we have given to you.

That is what gratitude is in the Bible. You cannot pay back a God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and he never asked you to. Gratitude is taking what came out of his hand and putting it back into his hand, with your name on it, because you know whose it was. Hannah lent the boy back. David laid his dignity down before the ark. Paul poured out his life on the altar. The boy's loaves went into Jesus' hands. And every time, the hand they put it into was the hand it came from, and that hand is never empty.

That is why thanks is a sacrifice and not a payment. A payment says we are even now. A sacrifice of thanks says we will never be even, and I am glad.

> **Of your own have we given you. Gratitude puts back into God's hand what came out of it, and finds that hand still full.**

There is one more thing under all four stories, and it is where this session gets its name.

Look at where each story goes. A mother at the yearly sacrifice meal, bringing a little robe. A king handing bread and meat and raisins to every person in the crowd. A jailer at a table in the middle of the night. Twelve baskets on a hillside. Gratitude in the Bible keeps ending up at a table.

And the Bible's last book shows where all of it is headed. It shows a throne, and around it angels past counting, and then every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, all of them saying one thing.

> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"
>
> Revelation 5:11 to 12

Wealth is on that list, and blessing. Everything David said came from God's hand is handed back to the Lamb who was slain. And then the circle widens to everything.

> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"
>
> Revelation 5:13

Of your own have we given you, sung by the whole creation. That is where this month ends up. Every thank you you say this Thanksgiving, at a table with an empty chair or a full one, is rehearsal for that one.

And notice who is at the center of it. The Lamb who was slain. The one who, on the night he was betrayed, took bread and gave thanks, *eucharisteo*, and broke it, and said this is my body, given for you. He gave thanks over the bread that meant his own death. He let go of everything, his life poured out like wine, and from his fullness every one of us has received. Grace upon grace.

Here is the whole month in one sentence. He gave himself first, so thanks is giving yourself back to him.

The Words of This Month

The Woman Who Gave Him Back | Session One

neder, a vow, a promise you pay. **todah**, thanksgiving, the offering you eat with people. **yadah**, to give thanks, maybe a hand held out. **barak**, to bless, near the word for knee. **samach**, to rejoice, pointed at God's salvation. **eucharisteo**, good grace, thanks in all circumstances. **sha'al**, to ask, and to lend back.

The King Who Danced | Session Two

halal, praise, the root of hallelujah. **mizmor**, a psalm, a song set to music. **zamar**, to make music on purpose. **psallo**, the string moved into the heart. **ode**, a song, from the church kitchen to the throne room. **aineo**, praise the stones would shout. **karar**, to whirl, a word used for one day only. **sachaq**, to play before the LORD.

Singing at Midnight | Session Three

thysia, sacrifice, now the fruit of lips. **chara**, joy, grace felt from the inside. **spendo**, to be poured out like wine. **olah**, the offering that goes up entirely. **qorban**, the offering that brings you near. **euphraino**, to celebrate at a table. **hymneo**, to sing hymns at midnight. **agalliao**, to exult, a word built from leaping. **chairo**, to rejoice, in the Lord.

Enough | Session Four

tov, good, what God saw in creation. **sava**, to be full, the most dangerous place to stand. **pleroma**, fullness, the baskets and the Son. **charisma**, the free gift. **osher**, riches, from your hand. **rinnah**, the shout at harvest. **perisseuo**, more than enough. **empiplemi**, filled.

Integration Questions (20 to 25 minutes)

- Four tables: a feast, a street, a jail, a hillside. Which one is where you are right now? Which one would you least want to be at, and why?
- In every story somebody let go of something. Which would be hardest for you to let go of: a child, your dignity, your right to complain, or your lunch? Why that one?
- The month warned against turning this into a formula: give to get. Why is that the opposite of thanks? Where have you seen that mistake, in a church or in yourself?
- Of your own have we given you. If that is true, what changes about the way you give your money, your time, your attention? What changes about the way you hold on to what you keep?
- October's verbs were stand and pray. November's are give thanks and give back. Put them together. What does a life built on those four look like on an ordinary Tuesday?
- Jesus gave thanks for the bread that meant his death. What does it do to your own hardest thank you to know he said one first?

Month Long Reflection

- What is the one thing you are carrying out of these five sessions? Not the most impressive thing. The one that changed something in how you pray, think, or act.
- Go back to the paper from session one, where you wrote the prayer you have prayed longest. Read it again. Has anything changed, in the prayer or in you? What would you write underneath it now?
- Which word from this month has most changed the way you read Scripture? If somebody asked you to explain it in thirty seconds, what would you say?
- How has your picture of gratitude changed? And how has your picture of God changed: the one who looks on the humble, breaks out against a careless hand, shakes prisons, feeds crowds, and gives his own Son as the free gift? What kind of God is that?

Going Deeper

Reflections on the Psalms, C. S. Lewis Short, honest, and written by a man who once found the Bible's demand for praise troubling. His chapter on praising is the clearest answer you will find to session two's question, why God wants to be praised.

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment, Jeremiah Burroughs A Puritan pastor's book-length meditation on Paul's sentence, I have learned to be content. Old, slow, and worth it. Read it if session three's inner cell is where you live right now.

Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme, David W. Pao For the reader who wants to go deep. A careful study of how much of Paul's letters is built on giving thanks, and why it sits so close to the center of his faith.

Next Month: Words of Promise

November asked what a thank you costs. The answer was that it gives back to God what came from his hand, and finds his hand full. December asks what that hand has promised.

Because every story this month leaned forward. Hannah sang about God's anointed king before there was one. David's choir sang about steadfast love that endures forever. Paul wrote that he was already being poured out, and that a crown was laid up for him. And a crowd on a hillside wanted to make a king of the man who fed them, and did not yet know who he was.

Words of Promise begins on Tuesday, December 1, with an old man named Abraham, who was told to go outside and count the stars, and believed a promise he would not live to see finished.

The gift was never the point. The giver is.

November, Day by Day

One word a day, Tuesday through Sunday, in the week it belongs to. Mondays are dark on purpose.

This page is the bridge between the guide in your hands and the daily videos. Every word below gets its own short teaching video the morning of, plus a second short that puts you inside the story, a longer story video on Wednesdays, and a podcast episode on Sundays. Everything lands permanently and free in the library at library.faithlabz.com, usually the same night it airs, so if you are reading this early in the month the later entries are still on their way. You can use this page with no screen at all. Read the word, read the verse, carry the sentence.

Week One | Hannah | The Woman Who Gave Him Back

Day	Word	Verse	What it leaves you with
Tue 3	neder	1 Samuel 1:11	She asked for a son to give away, and paid her vow.
Wed 4	todah	Psalm 50:23	The sacrifice God wants is thanks, said out loud.
Thu 5	yadah	Psalm 100:4	Enter his gates with thanks. Tell him the truth.
Fri 6	barak	1 Samuel 2:20	The priest who misjudged her blessed her every year.
Sat 7	samach	1 Samuel 2:1	Her joy was in his salvation. It survived the hill.
Sun 8	eucharisteo	1 Thessalonians 5:18	Give thanks in all circumstances, not for them.

Monday, November 9. Dark. Nothing posts. Rest is part of the plan.

Week Two | David | The King Who Danced

Day	Word	Verse	What it leaves you with
Tue 10	halal	Psalm 150:1	Let everything that has breath brag about God.
Wed 11	mizmor	Psalm 24, title	The king who danced also wrote the music.
Thu 12	zamar	Psalm 98:4	Make music to God on purpose, with your hands.
Fri 13	psallo	Ephesians 5:19	The string is in your heart. The instrument is you.
Sat 14	ode	Colossians 3:16	The song in your kitchen is the song of heaven.
Sun 15	aineo	Luke 19:37	If you keep quiet, the stones will say it for you.

Monday, November 16. Dark.

Week Three | Paul and Silas | Singing at Midnight

Day	Word	Verse	What it leaves you with
Tue 17	thysia	Hebrews 13:15	Through Jesus, your praise is the sacrifice.
Wed 18	chara	Philippians 1:4	Joy is grace felt from the inside, even in chains.
Thu 19	spendo	Philippians 2:17	A life poured out like wine is not a life wasted.
Fri 20	olah	Leviticus 1:3	The offering that went up whole. Nothing kept back.
Sat 21	qorban	Leviticus 1:2	An offering is a way to come near to God.
Sun 22	euphraino	Luke 15:24	When the lost are found, it is fitting to celebrate.

Monday, November 23. Dark.

Week Four | The Five Thousand | Enough

Day	Word	Verse	What it leaves you with
Tue 24	tov	Psalm 34:8	Taste and see. You find out God is good by tasting.
Wed 25	sava	Deuteronomy 8:10	Eat, be full, then bless. Full is where you forget.
Thu 26	pleroma	John 1:16	Thanksgiving: from his fullness, grace upon grace.
Fri 27	charisma	Romans 6:23	Wages are earned. A gift is received, with thanks.
Sat 28	osher	1 Chronicles 29:12	Riches are his. Of your own have we given you.
Sun 29	rinnah	Psalm 126:5	Sown in tears, reaped with shouts of joy.

Monday, November 30. Dark.

December's theme, Words of Promise, opens on Tuesday, December 1, with Abraham.

A note on the first days of the month: Sunday, November 1 finishes the Elisha story from the October guide, Words of Battle. A story week does not stop at a calendar boundary, which is why Words of Gratitude opens on Tuesday, November 3.

Appendix: The Complete Word Glossary

Every Hebrew and Greek word taught across the five sessions, in alphabetical order.

Use this as a quick reference during personal study, in a group when somebody asks what a word was again, or whenever one of these turns up in your own reading. Occurrence counts are given as the sources report them. Where two standard sources disagree, you get the range or an "about," not a false precision.

ἀγαλλιάω **agalliao** *(ah-gahl-lee-AH-oh)*

Greek | G21 | 11 occurrences | Session 3

To exult, to be overjoyed, close to leaping for joy. The jailer and his household at midnight. *Key verse: Acts 16:34*

αἰνέω **aineo** *(eye-NEH-oh)*

Greek | G134 | 8 to 9 occurrences | Session 2

To praise God. The crowd on the road into Jerusalem, and the stones that would have joined them. *Key verse: Luke 19:37*

בָּרַךְ **barak** *(bah-RAHK)*

Hebrew | H1288 | about 330 occurrences | Session 1

To bless: God blessing people, and people blessing God. Strong's adds a rare sense, to kneel. *Key verse: 1 Samuel 2:20*

χαίρω **chairo** *(KHAI-roh)*

Greek | G5463 | 74 occurrences | Session 3

To rejoice, to be glad; also the everyday greeting. Keep on rejoicing, in the Lord. *Key verse: Philippians 4:4*

χαρά **chara** *(khah-RAH)*

Greek | G5479 | 59 occurrences | Session 3

Joy, gladness. Five times in Philippians, a letter written in chains. *Key verse: Philippians 1:4*

χάρισμα **charisma** *(KHAR-is-mah)*

Greek | G5486 | 17 occurrences | Session 4

A free gift, given as a favor. The opposite of wages. *Key verse: Romans 6:23*

ἐμπίπλημι **empiplemi** *(em-PIP-lay-mee)*

Greek | G1705 | 5 occurrences | Session 4

To fill up, to satisfy. The five thousand ate their fill; Mary sang that God fills the hungry. *Key verse: John 6:12*

εὐχαριστέω **eucharisteo** *(yoo-khar-is-TEH-oh)*

Greek | G2168 | 38 to 39 occurrences | Session 1

To give thanks. Good plus grace. Jesus over five loaves; the one leper who came back. *Key verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:18*

εὐφραίνω **euphraino** *(yoo-FRY-noh)*

Greek | G2165 | 14 occurrences | Session 3

To be glad, to celebrate, especially at a feast. Four times in the story of the son who came home. *Key verse: Luke 15:24*

הָלַל **halal** *(hah-LAHL)*

Hebrew | H1984 | 165 occurrences | Session 2

To praise, to boast, to shine. The root of hallelujah. Thirteen times in Psalm 150. *Key verse: Psalm 150:1*

ὑμνέω **hymneo** *(hoom-NEH-oh)*

Greek | G5214 | 4 occurrences | Session 3

To sing a hymn. The upper room, the inner cell, and Christ singing in the congregation. *Key verse: Acts 16:25*

כָּרַר **karar** *(kah-RAHR)*

Hebrew | H3769 | 2 occurrences | Session 2

To whirl, to dance spinning. Used only for David before the ark. *Key verse: 2 Samuel 6:14*

מִזְמוֹר **mizmor** *(miz-MORE)*

Hebrew | H4210 | 57 occurrences | Session 2

A psalm, a song set to music. Found only in psalm titles. *Key verse: Psalm 24, title*

נֶדֶר **neder** *(NEH-der)*

Hebrew | H5088 | 60 occurrences | Session 1

A vow, a promise made to God. Hannah vowed a vow and paid it. *Key verse: 1 Samuel 1:11*

ᾠδή **ode** *(oh-DAY)*

Greek | G5603 | 7 occurrences | Session 2

A song. Paul's spiritual songs; every other use is a song sung in heaven. *Key verse: Colossians 3:16*

עֹלָה **olah** *(oh-LAH)*

Hebrew | H5930 | 289 occurrences | Session 3

The burnt offering, wholly given. From alah, to go up. *Key verse: Leviticus 1:3*

עֹשֶׁר **osher** *(OH-sher)*

Hebrew | H6239 | 37 occurrences | Session 4

Riches, wealth. Both riches and honor come from you. *Key verse: 1 Chronicles 29:12*

περισσεύω **perisseuo** *(peh-ris-SYOO-oh)*

Greek | G4052 | 39 occurrences | Session 4

To abound, to overflow, to be left over. The twelve baskets. *Key verse: John 6:12*

πλήρωμα **pleroma** *(PLAY-roh-mah)*

Greek | G4138 | 17 or 18 occurrences | Session 4

Fullness. The baskets full, and the Son from whose fullness we receive. *Key verse: John 1:16*

ψάλλω **psallo** *(PSAHL-loh)*

Greek | G5567 | 5 occurrences | Session 2

To sing, to make melody; first, to pluck a string. The source of psalm. *Key verse: Ephesians 5:19*

קָרְבָּן **qorban** *(kor-BAHN)*

Hebrew | H7133 | 82 occurrences | Session 3

An offering, what is brought near. In the Gospels, Corban. *Key verse: Leviticus 1:2*

רִנָּה **rinnah** *(rin-NAH)*

Hebrew | H7440 | 33 occurrences | Session 4

A ringing cry, a shout of joy. The harvest shout of those who sowed in tears. *Key verse: Psalm 126:5*

שָׂחַק **sachaq** *(sah-KHAHK)*

Hebrew | H7832 | 36 occurrences | Session 2

To laugh, to play, to celebrate; in another mood, to mock. I will celebrate before the LORD. *Key verse: 2 Samuel 6:5*

שָׂמַח **samach** *(sah-MAKH)*

Hebrew | H8055 | about 150 occurrences | Session 1

To rejoice, to be glad. I rejoice in your salvation. *Key verse: 1 Samuel 2:1*

שָׂבַע **sava** *(sah-VAH)*

Hebrew | H7646 | nearly 100 occurrences | Session 4

To be satisfied, to be full. Eat, be full, and bless. *Key verse: Deuteronomy 8:10*

שָׁאַל **sha'al** *(shah-AHL)*

Hebrew | H7592 | about 175 occurrences | Session 1

To ask; in one form, to grant on request, to lend. The thread of 1 Samuel 1. *Key verse: 1 Samuel 1:27 to 28*

σπένδω **spendo** *(SPEN-doh)*

Greek | G4689 | 2 occurrences | Session 3

To be poured out as a drink offering. Only Paul uses it, only of himself. *Key verse: Philippians 2:17*

θυσία **thysia** *(thoo-SEE-ah)*

Greek | G2378 | about 28 to 29 occurrences | Session 3

A sacrifice. Now the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips. *Key verse: Hebrews 13:15*

תּוֹדָה **todah** *(toh-DAH)*

Hebrew | H8426 | 32 occurrences | Session 1

Thanksgiving; the thank offering; a thanksgiving choir. The sacrifice that honors God. *Key verse: Psalm 50:23*

טוֹב **tov** *(tove)*

Hebrew | H2896 | more than 550 occurrences | Session 4

Good. What God saw in creation; the reason for every thank you. *Key verse: Psalm 34:8*

יָדָה **yadah** *(yah-DAH)*

Hebrew | H3034 | 114 occurrences | Session 1

To give thanks, to praise, to confess. Its command form, hodu, opens Psalm 136. *Key verse: Psalm 100:4*

זָמַר **zamar** *(zah-MAR)*

Hebrew | H2167 | about 45 occurrences | Session 2

To sing praise, to make music. Not the zamar that prunes. *Key verse: Psalm 98:4*

Notes

About FaithLabz

The goal is simple and it is not modest: to make the depth of Scripture reachable by anybody, without watering it down and without assuming you already know the stories.

The Bible is not a book of religious slogans. It is a library of ancient documents written in real languages by real people, and the further you go into those languages, the more alive the text gets. That is the whole idea behind the daily word. One Hebrew or Greek word, sitting exactly where the Bible puts it, in the story it belongs to.

And the stories get told. All the way, from the beginning, every time. If you have sat in church for thirty years and could not say why Hannah left her son at Shiloh, or why a king danced in the street, that is not your failure. It is a gap in how the stories usually get taught. Nothing here will assume you already know.

Where to Find Everything

The free library. Every word study ever made, searchable, at library.faithlabz.com. No login, no email required, nothing for sale on the other side of it.

YouTube. Two shorts a day Tuesday through Sunday, a longer story video on Wednesdays, and the podcast on Sundays. Mondays are dark.

The monthly Bible studies. A new one like this every month, free, at faithlabz.com.

Everything else. faithlabz.com, and @FaithLabz on the usual places.

How This Stays Free

This study cost you nothing and it is going to stay that way. So did the library, and the videos, and every study before this one.

There are a few things for sale at faithlabz.com. A 365 day devotional called The Whole Story in a Year. Devotional coffee mugs you scan in the morning. AR Bible cards that bring the people in these stories up off the table. The Prayer Candle. Some shirts and hoodies. Whatever gets bought is what keeps everything else free for the people who cannot pay for it.

If something here helped you and you want to stand with the work, that is one way. The other is simpler. For anyone who wants to help FaithLabz grow, so the next study reaches someone who needs it, you can give directly at faithlabz.com/donate.

And if you cannot give anything, take all of it anyway. In a month about gifts, that is the only arrangement that makes sense.

Share This Study

If a session in here landed on somebody in your group, or on you at eleven at night when you could not sleep, send it to one person. Not a broadcast. One person you actually thought of while you were reading. That is how this work grows, and it is how most of the people reading this found it in the first place. And if you would like to help it grow further, you can do that at faithlabz.com/donate.

One Last Thing

You are not going to finish this month having paid God back. That was never the plan. Hannah did not pay for Samuel. David did not earn the ark. Paul and Silas did not buy the earthquake. Five barley loaves did not feed a crowd on their own. What each of them held was already God's, and nothing they put back into his hand was ever lost.

Of your own have we given you. Say thank you, and mean it.

Onward, and God bless you.

FaithLabz