

THANK GOD FOR THE RED SEA

- A. Introduction: The Bible has much to say about the importance of keeping your focus on the Lord. God promises peace of mind to all those who keep their attention on Him. Heb 12:1-2; Isa 26:3
1. In this series of lessons we're discussing how to stay focused on the Lord and still function in real life. We all have responsibilities we must attend to and we all face challenges the need our attention. We've made these points thus far.
 - a. The first step in keeping your mind on the Lord is recognizing that there is more to reality than what you see and feel in the moment. II Cor 4:17-18
 1. The Bible, the written Word of God, reveals unseen realities to us that change our perspective. This new perspective then changes the way we view and deal with life.
 2. The Bible reveals that Almighty God is with you and for you, and nothing can come against you that is bigger than God. Everything you see is temporary and subject to change God's power either in this life or the life to come. He will get you through until He gets you out.
 - b. The second step in keeping your mind on the Lord is developing the habit of praising God in the face of life's hardships. Praise in its most basic form means to acknowledge God.
 1. When your thoughts and emotions are stirred up because of circumstances, you choose to recall and speak out of your mouth who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
 2. You get control of your mind and your mouth by choosing to rejoice or cheer and encourage yourself with the truth—who God is and what He does. James 1:2-3; II Cor 6:10; etc.
 2. Last week we added another element to our discussion—the importance of giving thanks and being thankful. To be thankful means to be grateful. Thanking God helps keep your focus on Him.
 - a. We don't thank God because we feel like it or because everything is wonderful in our lives. We thank Him because it is always appropriate to thank Him for who He is and what He does.
 1. I Thess 5:18—Thank [God] in everything—no matter what the circumstances may be, be thankful and give thanks; for this is the will of God for you [who are] in Christ Jesus (Amp).
 - b. You recognize that in every situation there is always something to be thankful for—the good that God has done, the good that He is doing, and the good that He will do.
 - a. It's easy to be thankful when things are going well and we feel grateful. The challenge is being thankful when things are not as we'd like them to be and we don't feel good.
 1. This is where you must know that God is so great that He is able to bring genuine good out of truly bad circumstances as He works out His plan for a family. Rom 8:28-30
 2. Therefore, we can thank God for the good that is from Him and for the good He can bring out of things not from Him—life's challenges, hardships, and painful events. We can be thankful before we see results because we know that God is at work and we will one day see results.
 - c. We want to continue our discussion this week by talking further about the power that comes from learning to thank and praise God in everything for everything—good and bad. Eph 5:20
- B. We've mentioned Paul the apostle frequently in our discussion of the importance of acknowledging God. Paul was an eyewitness of Jesus and wrote two-thirds of the New Testament documents (14 epistles).
1. In his writings Paul made numerous references to Old Testament passages. These Scriptures were the portion of the Bible completed in his day. Paul reported that these writings were written in part to instruct and encourage God's people. Rom 15:4
 - a. The Old Testament is a record of redemptive history, detailing how God preserved the line through which Jesus came into this world—the descendants of Abraham (Hebrews, Israelites, Jews), from their inception (1921 BC) down to four hundred years before Jesus was born.
 - b. I Cor 10:1-11—In his epistle to the Corinthians Paul referred to the generation that was delivered

from Egyptian slavery by God’s power under Moses’ leadership.

1. Paul stated that what is recorded about them was written for succeeding generations, especially those who live prior to Jesus’ second coming.
2. I Cor 10:11—All of these events happened to them (the Israelites) as examples for us. They were written down to warn us, who live at the time when this age is drawing to a close (NLT).
 - A. In I Cor 10:6-10 Paul detailed several specific wicked things these people did once they were delivered from Egypt. Their actions brought serious consequences into their lives (topics for another day). Note two of them—they murmured and tempted God (v9-10).
 - B. Murmur means to grumble (*Strong’s Concordance*). To grumble means to mutter in discontent (*Webster’s Dictionary*). To tempt means to test (*Strong’s Concordance*).
2. Ex 15:22-24—The historical record tells us that three days after God parted the waters of the Red Sea enabling Israel to escape from the Egyptian army, the Israelites reached a water source that was undrinkable. They immediately began to murmur (grumble) or express discontent.
 - a. The Hebrew word translated murmur means to complain. Complaining is an expression of discontent. Discontent means a lack of contentment or a yearning for improvement or perfection.
 1. There’s nothing wrong with desiring improvement or even perfection. The problem is, we live in a fallen world filled with trouble. Nothing is perfect and things sometimes don’t get better.
 2. The problem is that the Israelite people could have, should have recalled how God helped them with an even bigger water problem just three days earlier. He parted the Red Sea for them.
 - b. Ex 16—Six weeks later, Israel reached the wilderness of Sin (named for a nearby Egyptian city, Ezek 30:15-16), and murmured against (complained to) Moses and Aaron that they were hungry.
 1. Not only have they forgotten God’s past help, they’ve forgotten His promise to bring them back to Canaan (Ex 3:7-8). What they see and feel is affecting their ability to reason. If God allows them to starve to death on the way home, then He can’t keep His promise to them.
 - A. Additionally, they aren’t appreciative (grateful) for what they have. They are not on the brink of starvation. They came out of Egypt with flocks, herds, and unleavened bread (Ex 12:37-39). But, they’re so focused on what is wrong, they’re oblivious to what was right.
 - B. And, as often happens when men and women don’t get their thoughts and emotions under control by acknowledging (praising and thanking) God, the people began to make untrue statements about God and His motive for delivering them from Egypt. We wish God would have killed us in Egypt. At least the food was good in Egypt. Ex 16:3
 - C. Keep in mind that they could see the Lord. He was visibly present with them as a pillar (column of fire and cloud) throughout their entire journey. Ex 13:21-22
 2. Despite their shortcomings, God was patient with the Israelites and promised them food: In the evening you will have meat to eat and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God (Ex 16:12, NLT).
 - A. Quail (a delicacy eaten in Egypt) came into their camp in huge numbers several times during their journey. It could be preserved through drying and also provided eggs.
 - B. Manna (the Hebrew word means “what is this”, Ex 16:15) will appear all around their camp every day (but the Sabbath), providing sustenance for the next 40 years (Ex 16:35).
 - c. Ex 17:1-6—When Israel left the Sin Desert, they moved from place to place on their way to Mt. Sinai. Near Sinai, they came to a site called Rephidim, looking for water. When there was no water, the people began to complain. The Lord told Moses to strike a rock, and water gushed out.
 1. The Hebrew word that is translated complain in each of the incidents cited literally means to stop or to obstinate, especially in words. These people made no effort to be grateful to God.
 2. Their behavior is referred to as tempting or testing the Lord: The people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, is the Lord going to take care of us or not (Ex 17:7, NLT)?

3. It's easy to look at these people and see how outrageous their behavior was in view of all that God had already done for them, not to mention the fact that He was right there with them. But, remember why Paul wrote about these people in his epistle (I Cor 10:1-11)—to keep us from making the same mistakes.
 - a. What Israel did is completely appropriate if you assess your situation based solely on what you see and feel in the moment. We react the same way when we see and feel unpleasant, fearful, or agitating circumstances—we don't like it and we express our discontent (we complain).
 1. Ungratefulness is a characteristic of fallen human flesh (Rom 1:21; II Tim 3:2). We don't have to put forth any effort to begin to talk about what is wrong in our circumstances. Such a reaction not only seems appropriate, it feels right to express our discontent (complain).
 2. Most people (including the Israelites) would describe themselves as grateful people. Like them, most of us are grateful when things go well and we get what we want.
 - b. If asked, this generation of Israelites might have described themselves as grateful people: You should have seen and heard our praise service right after we passed through the Red Sea. Ex 15:1-21
 1. Thanking and praising God was easy then because of what they saw and how they felt. But when their circumstances and feelings changed, their gratefulness turned to unthankfulness.
 2. I'm not saying that we are supposed to pretend that we are happy about our circumstances. I'm saying that His praise is supposed to be in our mouth continually. Ps 34:1
 3. Remember, Paul wrote about being thankful as opposed to being thankless (Col 3:15), thanking God no matter the circumstance (I Thess 5:18), and thanking Him for everything (Eph 5:20).
 - A. This is why it is so important to know that God is able to bring genuine good out of truly bad situations (Rom 8:28). We can thank God for the good that is from Him and for the good He can bring out of life's challenges, hardships, and painful events.
 - B. Do you realize that Israel could have responded to the Red Sea with praise to God before it was parted? They could have thanked God for the Red Sea—not for its impassability and the added danger it posed—but for the good that God could bring out of it.
 - C. The Red Sea—in the hands of Almighty God—actually became the means of their deliverance from danger and the end of their problem with the Egyptian army.
4. Remember that Paul wrote about this generation to help us. Before we say more about thanking God in everything for everything, we need to make a few comments about how God works in a fallen world.
 - a. Ex 16:7-9—While Israel was camped in the wilderness of Sin, Moses pointed out that even though their complaints were directed at him and his brother Aaron, they were actually complaining against God. He was the One who led them to that place and was leading them back to Canaan.
 - b. This brings up a question we need to answer. If God is leading them—and He's a good God—then why did He lead them to waterless places with little or no food?
 1. Remember why the Israelites were there. God supernaturally delivered them from bondage in Egypt and is leading them back to Canaan, their ancestral home. But there's no easy way to get to Canaan. Why? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth.
 2. There were two routes to Canaan: the Way of the Philistines, a travel route that passes through lands controlled by a fierce, warlike tribe or a through the wilderness, a mountainous dry region, with peaks rising to 7,400 feet and less than 8 inches of rainfall per year. Ex 13:17-18
 3. Warlike tribes and wilderness regions (with all the associated challenges) are present in the earth because of Adam's sin. As the head of the human race and earth's first steward, Adam's sin radically affected the race and the planet. A curse of corruption and death permeated both. That's why there are waterless desert regions and people bent on destruction of others.
 - c. However, the Lord led Israel on the best route for them. He knew that they were not yet ready to fight the Philistine tribes. This route gave them opportunities to strengthen their trust in God for help and provision faith. And, it was a way rid of a main enemy (Egypt) at the Red Sea who could

easily attack them once they settled in Canaan.

5. Consider something written by James, the Lord’s brother. He wrote that if you can control your tongue, you “can also control yourself in every other way” (James 3:2, NLT).

a. In James 3:5-9 he wrote that the tongue, even though small, can do great damage and seems impossible to control. With the tongue we praise God and curse men made in the image of God.

1. James 3:10—And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely my brothers and sisters, this is not right (NLT).

2. James 3:11-12—A fountain can’t supply bitter and sweet water, or yield salt and fresh water, at the same time. The sweet and fresh water is tainted by the bitter and salt water.

b. The point is to get control of your mouth because a word of ungratefulness pollutes your word of praise. A tongue that speaks two opposite messages (blessing and cursing) is not under control.

1. You get control of your mouth by expressing praise and thanksgiving to God. The habit of expressing gratefulness helps you get control of your tongue. Controlling your mouth then helps you control your mind and emotions.

2. What if—in the moment, in the face of the aggravation, in the face of the disaster—you responded with praise and thanksgiving? Thank you Lord for this trouble—not for the bad, the hurt, the pain; not because it is from God, not because He is behind it, orchestrated it or approves of it—but because it is always appropriate to praise and thank God.

6. We’ve made the point in previous lessons that Paul practiced what he preached. He wrote the verses about being thankful and thanking God for everything (Col 3:15; Eph 5:20) while imprisoned in Rome.

a. He also wrote the letter to the Philippians at that time. You may recall that he first met those people when he went to the Greek city of Philippi to proclaim Jesus. A community of believers was established there. But Paul and his missionary partner, Silas, were arrested and jailed for casting a devil out of a slave girl. Acts 16:16-25

1. The men were beaten, placed in stocks, and thrown into the deepest part of the prison at Philippi. Yet at midnight they prayed and sang praises to God.

2. We aren’t told what they said and sang, but we get some ideas from things Paul wrote in his epistles. He told the Hebrew Christians to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving in the face of persecution (Heb 13:15). He told the Philippians in a later letter not to worry but to pray to God with thanksgiving (Phil 4:6).

3. What could they thank God for in that circumstance? Paul and Silas could have thanked Him because He is good and His loving kindness lasts forever. They could have thanked the Lord for the privilege of serving Him and setting a captive girl free. They could have thanked Him for the good that He will bring out of the circumstance.

b. Remember what happened? The men were delivered from jail when there was a great earthquake. God got them through until He got them out. And, tremendous good came out of the incident.

c. The jailer and his entire family became believers in Jesus (Acts 16:27-34). Had they not been in jail, they would not have encountered the jailer and his family. There’s no telling how many others saw and heard what happened that night and became believers in Jesus as a result.

C. Conclusion: You can thank God for your Red Sea. I posed this question earlier. What if—in the moment, in the face of the aggravation, in the face of the disaster—you responded with praise and thanksgiving?

1. Thank you Lord for this trouble—not for the bad, the hurt, the pain; not because it’s from God, not because He is behind it—but because it is always appropriate to praise and thank God.

2. Not only would you glorify God in your circumstance (Ps 50:23), you’d get control of your tongue before you began to complain. And, you’d get your focus back on the way things really are—God with you and for you, working to bring good out of bad in your situation. Much more next week!