

We Give... Because We Are Thankful

Psalm 107:21-22

Background – Thank Offering

In ancient times, a *Thank Offering* was a type of fellowship offering, as prescribed in Leviticus 3 and Leviticus 7:11-15. Thank offerings were to be given in response to God's grace or deliverance and were to be given spontaneously and by free will. While Leviticus 23:19 prescribed a thank offering to be given during the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), they could be given at any other time of the year, as long as they were given with a thankful heart (Leviticus 19:5).

Thank offerings were classified as fellowship offerings, recognizing that the giver was at peace, or in fellowship, with God. These gifts were over and above the tithes, first fruits, and sin offerings that were also prescribed. As such, these gifts were always given in response to something that God had done, the result of a heart overflowing with gratitude.

Leviticus 3 indicates that several types of gifts were appropriate as fellowship offerings: oxen, sheep, or goats. It appears as though the type of gift was up to the giver, or dependent upon their resources. Regardless of the gift, it was to be without defect. Once the sacrifice was given and the priests had received a portion of the sacrifice, the remainder was a sanctuary feast to be shared by the giver and family or friends. The feast was a celebration of God's faithfulness and loving deeds.

This ancient thank offering has modern day echoes in many countries: Canada, United States, Germany, and Japan, just to name a few. Often in the fall, these days of thankfulness provide nationally recognized opportunities to reflect upon God's blessings, to give thanks, and to celebrate together. God has created us to be a thankful people. Traditionally in the Church of the Nazarene, an offering has been received each November to help support the global mission of the church – *making Christlike disciples in the nations*.

As a global church, we invite Nazarenes everywhere to consider God's blessings upon our lives, our churches, and our missionaries. By emphasizing the ancient tradition of a freewill thank offering, members and friends are given the opportunity to consider how God has blessed us, and how we might give a thank offering of our own, sharing those blessings with others around the world. ***We give... because we are thankful.***

Worship Service Suggestions

The focus of this service is to invite members of the congregation to consider the ways in which their lives have been transformed by God's grace. Whether this is done as a Sunday morning service, a Sunday night service, or a special Service of thanksgiving, the emphasis is on considering what God has done for us, and then inviting the worshiper to give a *Thank Offering* to God.

Suggested scripture readings, musical choices, creative options, and a sample sermon are provided for you as a starting point in your planning. As you choose from these elements, consider the ways in which God has blessed your life, your church, and the lives of those in your congregation. As you plan the service, consider ways to weave those stories into the worship service, highlighting personal and corporate reasons for giving thanks.

Suggested Scripture Lessons to be read during the service

Leviticus 7:11-15

Psalms 50:1-6, 23

Psalms 107:21-22 (Or consider the creative reading option of verses 1-32, 43)

Luke 17:11-19

James 1:16-18

Suggestions for Congregational Singing

Amazing Love – Billy J. Foote

And Can it Be? – Charles Wesley

Because I Have Been Given Much – Grace Noll Crowell

Come, Ye Thankful People, Come – Henry Alford

Count Your Blessings – Johnson Oatman, Jr.

Forever – Chris Tomlin

Freely, Freely – Carol Owens

Give Thanks – Henry Smith

Glory Be to God the Father – Horatius Bonar

Great Is Thy Faithfulness – Thomas O. Chisholm

I'm Forever Grateful – Mark Altrogge

I Give You My Heart – Reuben Morgan

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee – Henry van Dyke

Let All Things Now Living – Katherine K. Davis

Now Thank We All Our God – Martin Rinkart

Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow – Thomas Ken

We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise – Kirk Dearman

We Fall Down – Chris Tomlin

Creative Reading of Psalm 107:1-32, 43

Psalm 107 is a poetic retelling of God's deliverance in a variety of situations. Each stanza of the poem is a response to the opening invitation: "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story." In each stanza, the same pattern is presented: 1) the bad news, 2) God's deliverance, and 3) an invitation to praise.

Consider presenting Psalm 107:1-32, 43 as a scripture reading by two readers—one reader presenting the opening and the repeated invitations to thank God, and the other reader presenting each of the stories of God's deliverance. Alternatively, if you have five readers available, one reader could do all of the bold-faced verses, with the remaining readers each doing one of the italicized sections. All readers should read verse 43 together, as an invitation for the congregation to ponder the loving deeds of God.

**¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**

**² Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,**

**³ those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north and south.**

*⁴ Some wandered in desert wastelands,
finding no way to a city where they could settle.*

*⁵ They were hungry and thirsty,
and their lives ebbed away.*

*⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.*

*⁷ He led them by a straight way
to a city where they could settle.*

**⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind,**

**⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty
and fills the hungry with good things.**

*¹⁰ Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness,
prisoners suffering in iron chains,*

*¹¹ because they rebelled against God's commands
and despised the plans of the Most High.*

*¹² So he subjected them to bitter labor;
they stumbled, and there was no one to help.*

*¹³ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.*

*¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness,
and broke away their chains.*

**¹⁵ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind,**

**¹⁶ for he breaks down gates of bronze
and cuts through bars of iron.**

*¹⁷ Some became fools through their rebellious ways
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.*

*¹⁸ They loathed all food
and drew near the gates of death.*

*¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.*

*²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them;
he rescued them from the grave.*

**²¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.**

**²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings
and tell of his works with songs of joy.**

*²³ Some went out on the sea in ships;
they were merchants on the mighty waters.*

*²⁴ They saw the works of the LORD,
his wonderful deeds in the deep.*

*²⁵ For he spoke and stirred up a tempest
that lifted high the waves.*

*²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away.*

*²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunkards;
they were at their wits' end.*

*²⁸ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.*

*²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.*

*³⁰ They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.*

**³¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.**

**³² Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people
and praise him in the council of the elders.**

Together:

***⁴³ Let the one who is wise heed these things
and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.***

Interactive Options

Note: The following options are ideas for a creative or interactive element in the service. Many of these ideas could be used as a transitional point between the reading of Psalm 107 and the sermon. If you use one of these options, it could replace the opening illustration in the sermon.

1) Immediately following the creative reading of Psalm 107, have 1-3 individuals prepared to come share a brief (1-2 minute) testimony of a bad situation that God redeemed. At the conclusion of each testimony, lead the congregation in the response from verses 21-22:

**²¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.**

**²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings
and tell of his works with songs of joy.**

2) Distribute “I am thankful for...” stickers and markers prior to the service, inviting participants to fill out the sticker with what they are thankful for and wear it prominently. Just before the message, invite members of the congregation to mingle, learning the “I’m thankful...” stories from 2 or 3 other people.

3) “Pop-Up Testimonies” are short, one sentence statements of thanksgiving. (Congregants stand, share one sentence, and are seated.) Invite members of your congregation to stand and share one-sentence testimonies based on the words that are on their stickers, for instance: “I am thankful for a loving family”; “I am thankful for salvation”; “I am thankful for my health.” Encourage participants not to elaborate or tell a story, but simply to share as many of these one sentence testimonies as possible. After each testimony, lead the congregation in a response from Psalm 107:1

**¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**

4) In the weeks leading up to the service, create a “Thankfulness Tree” or a “Thank Offering Wall” in the fellowship hall or other public space. Distribute 3x5 cards during each Sunday School class and worship service, inviting people to list one thing that they are thankful for. These cards can be hung on the tree, or displayed on the wall. Consider using these cards to also create a slideshow or video presentation that can be played just before the message.

5) Invite the teenagers or children to perform a skit or wordless drama that illustrates the theme of thankfulness. A wordless drama is a mime that illustrates the meaning of the song that is being played. One possibility would be “Cardboard Testimonies,” in which actors write a one sentence example of a bad situation on one side and a one sentence testimony of God’s deliverance on the other side. Actors walk across the platform, show the first side, pause, and flip the cardboard over to reveal God’s deliverance. Choose a song that highlights the transformational power of God’s grace, such as: “A New Name in Glory,” “Amazing Grace,” or “Heaven Came Down.” Alternatively, consider Matthew West’s “Next Thing you Know” or Brandon Heath’s “I’m Not Who I Was.”

6) Distribute a “Count Your Blessings” sheet at the beginning of the service, and invite people to list their blessings during the prelude. Just before the message, sing “Count Your Blessings,” pausing between each verse for two or three members of the congregation to each share one blessing.

Sample Order of Service

Note: This sample is one way in which the suggested elements could be combined. Used as-is, you could expect this service to take between 60 to 75 minutes.

- **Prelude** – congregation invited to fill out and wear “I am thankful for...” stickers
- **Call to Worship:** Psalm 50:1-6, 23
- **Worship in Song**
 - Forever – Chris Tomlin
 - Amazing Love – Billy J. Foote
 - We Fall Down – Chris Tomlin
- **Invocation**
- **Scripture Lessons**
 - James 1:16-18
 - Luke 17:11-19
- **Hymn:** Let All Things Now Living
- **Dramatic Reading of Psalm 107**
- **Interactive Option**
- **Sermon**
- **Response/Prayer Chorus** – I Give You My Heart – Reuben Morgan
- **Prayer**
- **Thank Offering**
- **Doxology** – Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow
- **Benediction** – Colossians 3:15-17

Suggested Mission Stories

- <http://engagemagazine.com/content/church-guyana-gets-renovations-through-us-partners>
- <http://www.asiapacificnazarene.org/seeds-that-were-planted-starting-to-be-harvested/>
- <http://engagemagazine.com/content/video-melodie-uses-radio-reach-kids-madagascar>
- <http://engagemagazine.com/content/never-say-never-zhanetas-mission-bulgaria>

Sermon Outline

- Interactive option or personal illustration
- Psalm 107 overview
 - The bad news
 - Desperation / end of their rope
 - Unable to deliver themselves
 - God's deliverance
 - A response to their cry for help
 - A specific deliverance from a specific situation
 - Our response
 - Give thanks
 - Tell others
 - Sacrifice a Thank Offering
 - What is a Thank Offering?
 - Freewill
 - Response to God's grace
 - A community celebration
- A local story (individual, church, or community)
- A global story - <http://engagemagazine.com/content/church-guyana-gets-renovations-through-us-partners>
- Call to action – praise and thanksgiving

Sample Sermon Manuscript

Opening Illustration

Note: The following illustration can be replaced with a personal illustration from the life of the pastor or one of the interactive options. In writing a personal illustration, consider a situation in which you or someone you know received a blessing that could not be repaid, except through a heart overflowing with gratitude. The following illustration is based on a true story that took place in a Church of the Nazarene in North America.

The news was grim. The last report from the doctor's office indicated that one kidney had failed, and the other kidney was not healthy. The transplant recipient list was long...and the donor list was short. Steve knew that finding a donor was his best hope, and he prayed that he wouldn't have to rely on a tragic accident in order to receive the kidney he so desperately needed. So Steve contacted his pastor, who began to share the need each week during pastoral prayer time. The congregation began praying that a suitable kidney would be found.

As Jeff heard the prayer request from the pulpit, he began to hear another whisper as well. He didn't know Steve well, but knew that he was married and had children who were in high school and college. Over the course of time, the whisper seemed to be louder, a gentle nudging of God encouraging Jeff to simply be tested to see if he might be a match.

After prayer, conversation, and doctor visits, it was determined that Jeff's kidney was a match—and that Jeff was willing to share his kidney with Steve. At 4:30 in the morning on July 5th, family and friends gathered in the hospital chapel to ask God for deliverance and that the transplant would be successful. Nine years have passed, and since that day Steve has celebrated birthdays, Christmases, and was able to dance with both of his daughters at their weddings.

Has anyone ever given you a gift you cannot repay? Maybe you felt trapped in a dead end, and someone showed you the next steps. Maybe they paid a crushing financial debt that you could never pay. Or perhaps it was a new lease on life through kind words that got you through a difficult time. Maybe it was a career life raft, helping you get out of a sticky situation just in time. Maybe they saved your life through intervention, medical care, or even a transplant like Steve's.

And while you know that those gifts were given with no expectations attached, you know what it means to have a debt of gratitude, to live a life of thanksgiving, personally obligated to say thanks whenever you can.

Jeff didn't give his kidney so he could have a new friend. It wasn't so he could get thanks and recognition. It wasn't so he could get extra gifts every Christmas. At the same time, we can understand Steve's gracious generosity toward Jeff—with every passing birthday, every Christmas, every milestone in his children's lives—he offers an expression of gratitude for God's deliverance and for Jeff's sacrificial generosity. ***Why does Steve give? He gives... because he is thankful.***

Overview of Psalm 107

Psalm 107, the passage we just heard, is a poetic retelling of God's grace and deliverance. The psalm begins with an invitation to give thanks to God and then continues with four primary stanzas, each stanza following the same basic threefold pattern – the bad news, God's deliverance, our response.

We hear about those who wandered in desert wastelands, hungry and thirsty (vv. 4-5). We learn of those who sat in the darkness, prisoners because of their rebellion (vv. 10-11). The third stanza tells of those who were foolish and rebellious, drawing near the gates of death (vv. 17-18), and the last stanza is about those who found themselves in a tempest out on the sea (vv. 23-27).

These are stories about people who—often by their own decisions and rebellion—found themselves in need of rescue, unable to do anything to get out of their situation. These are desperate situations – homeless, hungry, in prison, dying, and lost at sea. While our situations may not have been as severe, we know how it feels to be trapped, unable to save ourselves.

After the bad news is presented, each stanza tells us that the people “cried to the LORD in their trouble” (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28). This is the central moment in each story of deliverance. These individuals were not simply saved by luck or by their own ingenuity or abilities, they were saved because they cried out to the Lord, and God delivered them. The repetition in each stanza tells us that the LORD “saved them from their distress” (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28).

The psalmist is specific about how that deliverance came about and what the deliverance looked like: a city where they could settle (v. 7), breaking of chains (v. 14), healing (v. 20), and the calming of the storm (v. 29). I'm reminded that God's deliverance in our lives takes on specific forms and that God's deliverance is perfectly suited to the distress in which we find ourselves.

At the end of each stanza, we find an exhortation to “give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind” (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). We learn that when we are delivered, we are to give thanks, to tell others about what God has done, to offer songs of joy, and to give thank offerings. Verse 22 says “Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.”

What is a *thank offering*? You can read about thank offerings in Leviticus chapters 3 and 17, but I'll tell you a little bit about them now. Thank offerings were voluntary offerings given in response to something God had done. They were to be given with a grateful heart as an indication that the giver was at peace with God, and that God had delivered or blessed the giver.

Thank offerings were often a sacrifice of livestock – oxen, sheep, or goats – and were an animal without blemish or defect. It was not an obligatory offering like the offerings of first fruits, tithes, or sin offerings. Instead, the thank offering was to be given spontaneously in response to some specific act of God's grace. After the offering was given, it became a sacred feast that the giver could share with family and friends in the sanctuary. Not only was the thank offering a way to praise God, but it was also a way

to share with others, and to celebrate as a community. **Why do we give? We give... because we are thankful.**

A Local Story (individual, community, or church)

Note: In this section you could highlight a local story – an individual who has experienced miraculous deliverance this year, a testimony of a life that was changed through your church ministry, or a way in which God breathed new life into the congregation. Consider a story that starts with words like this: “Here at First Church, we have many reasons to celebrate this year!” The best stories are those that follow the trajectory of the stanzas in Psalm 107: a bad situation, God’s deliverance, a response of praise and thanksgiving.

*If appropriate, consider concluding the story with these words: **Why do we give? We give... because we are thankful.***

A Global Story

Note: The point of the sermon is brought home through the following story of generosity, which highlights a couple who gave to others because of their gratitude for God’s deliverance in their own life. You can read more about the Balkarans here: <http://engagemagazine.com/content/church-guyana-gets-renovations-through-us-partners>

[Click here for a list of suggested mission stories and videos that can be used at this point in the message.](#)

Shawn Balkaran experienced God’s grace and deliverance in his own life. His grandparents, who were Hindu, found Christ through the work of missionaries who came to his home country of Guyana from the United States. Shawn remembers his own childhood encounter with Christ, at the local Church of the Nazarene that met in the open area under a house on stilts. He remembers the church moving to a tent, and he remembers working with other church members, forming concrete blocks that would be used in the construction of their first church building.

Shawn and his family immigrated to the United States in 1977. At 17 years old, he was immediately aware of the economic disparity between Guyana and the United States—and quickly realized the worldly luxuries and benefits that the missionaries must have left behind in order to bring Jesus to the people of Guyana.

Shawn puts it this way, “When I came to [the U.S.] and saw the luxuries the missionaries left to come to Guyana and live with us and walk in the unpaved streets and get the mosquito bites, I wondered what made them do something like that. I realized it was the love of God in their hearts. It lit a fire in myself to want to give back. God has truly blessed us.”

So when Shawn and his wife Leacha returned to Guyana a few years ago, they discovered their opportunity to give a thank offering of their own. The church that Shawn remembered building had fallen into disrepair. There were cracks in the walls. The ceiling was rotting. The single bathroom was no longer fit for use. When they looked around and saw the beautiful Hindu temples and Islamic mosques, they were overcome with tears.

God spoke to both Shawn and Leacha, inspiring them to begin a fundraising campaign to repair and renovate the church in Bush Lot, Guyana. Together with their pastor and their local church in Kissimmee, Florida, the Balkarans helped raise \$10,000 over a period of six months. Renovations are underway, and the reputation of the church in this heavily Hindu community is being restored.

Why did the Balkarans feel led to do this? The Balkarans gave out of gratitude for all that God has done for them. Having seen the devotion of the missionaries who brought him to Christ, Shawn wanted to give back, an expression of gratitude for all that God had done for him and his family. Why did they give? ***They gave... because they were thankful.***

Call to Action

Today, we want to give you an opportunity to participate in a thank offering. Like the thank offerings from the Hebrew scriptures, this is not an offering to be given under obligation, but an offering of praise and thanksgiving in response to all that God has done for you.

What are you thankful for today? Would you take a moment to think back over 2014 and consider the ways that God has moved in your life this year?

Is there an addiction that you've been delivered from? Have you made miraculous progress getting out of financial debt? Maybe God answered a specific prayer for deliverance or healing or reconnected you with a loved one. Or you might even think back to who you were before you responded to God's gracious invitation. Maybe you felt like you were wandering in a desert wasteland. Maybe you were drifting on the sea without purpose or direction. Maybe you felt spiritually homeless and hungry and finally found yourself at home with God. Perhaps you were imprisoned in chains of your own making, but you cried out to God and found grace and deliverance.

With hearts full of gratitude we will bring whatever God has called us to give. And like the thank offerings of the Old Testament, we will share our offerings with our brothers and sisters around the world, giving an expression of gratitude toward the global mission of the church – *making Christlike disciples in the nations.*

Whatever you give tonight, may your gift flow out of the blessings that God has given you... indeed, ***we give... because we are thankful.***