

GOD OUR PROVIDER

Psalm 65

Key Truth:

Staying mindful and grateful to God our Provider.

My mother's side of the family are farmers. They farm in the tiny town of Brimfield, Illinois. My mother's cousin farms over a thousand acres of primarily corn. Several years ago we took a family vacation to Brimfield. As I mentioned, Brimfield is tiny; it's population is about 900 souls. It is a few streets of houses and businesses cut out of a green sea of corn and soybean stretching for miles in every direction. It was mid-July. About the time we left the corn began to tassel. That didn't mean much to us, but as our relatives explained, if they didn't get about an inch and a half or two inches of rain in the two weeks after the corn tassels, they lose the crop. They are completely dependent upon the rains for a successful harvest. After plowing, seeding and weeding, there is nothing else they can do; it either rains or it doesn't. It's harvest or heartbreak.

Unlike midwest farmers, we don't feel that dependence upon the rain as acutely. Even in drought, technology, shipping and refrigeration blunt our gut-level feeling of dependence upon God. It's true; we are dependent. But we may not feel it. We aren't standing in a thousand acres of corn praying for rain.

On this score modern farmers share more in common with the Israelites of old than do we. Israel was a nation of farmers and ranchers always a dry year or two away from starvation. Their life blood were the rains and the snowmelt from Mt. Hermon that fed the Jordan River. The faithful looked to God to bring the rains as He promised in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:12).

Psalm 65 is a hymn of praise to God for bringing the rains. It was written by King David and it was probably sung as part of the celebration of the *Feast of Firstfruits*.

PSALM 65 AND THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS (Leviticus 23:9-14)

The Law of Moses stipulated that three times a year the Israelites gather in Jerusalem and celebrate the seven feasts of the Lord (Lev. 23). The feasts were grouped – Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Firstfruits were celebrated in April. The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) was celebrated late June. In the fall the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths were celebrated late September, early October.

The Feast of Firstfruits celebrated the barley harvest.

The Feast of Firstfruits worship service is described in Leviticus 23:9-14.

⁹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, ¹¹ and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD...."

As the High Priest lifted the barley sheaf and waved it before the Lord like a triumphant athlete, the congregation roared its praise and led by the Temple choir and orchestra joined their voices in singing Psalm 65.

PSALM 65

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID. A SONG.

¹ Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion,
and to you shall vows be performed.

² O you who hear prayer,
to you shall all flesh come.

³ When iniquities prevail against me,
you atone for our transgressions.

- ⁴ Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,
to dwell in your courts!
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
the holiness of your temple!
- ⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness,
O God of our salvation,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas;
- ⁶ the one who by his strength established the mountains,
being girded with might;
- ⁷ who stills the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples,
- ⁸ so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.
You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.
- ⁹ You visit the earth and water it;
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide their grain,
for so you have prepared it.
- ¹⁰ You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
- ¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.
- ¹² The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
- ¹³ the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

For farmer and rancher every word, every note vibrated with joy and relief and gratitude for the One Who brought the rains.

The feasts were also the time the Israelites would bring their animal sacrifices to the Temple. Some brought sin offerings to atone for transgressions of the Law. Others brought burnt offerings to thank God for answered prayer.

In verses 1-4 David praises God for both answered prayer and atonement for sin.

GOD FORGIVES AND DRAWS US NEAR (65:1-4)

- ¹ Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion,
and to you shall vows be performed.
- ² O you who hear prayer,
to you shall all flesh come.
- ³ When iniquities prevail against me,
you atone for our transgressions.
- ⁴ Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,
to dwell in your courts!
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,

the holiness of your temple!

David praises God for His spiritual provisions of answered prayer, forgiveness and fellowship. Coming to Jerusalem and to the Temple was a time for the Israelites to experience these spiritual blessings anew. It was the time when they honored and thanked God for answered prayer by bringing their thank offerings. Some people would include with their prayer request a vow to bring God a thank offering. A portion of the thank offering was offered on the Altar and a portion given to the worshipper to eat with his family and friends. It was during this communal meal in the Temple courts that the one who had taken the vow would glorify God by sharing with those present how God had answered his prayer.

The Feasts were also the time that the Israelites brought their sin offerings. Those Israelites guilty of breaking God's Law brought their sin offerings and received the assurance that their sins were covered by the blood of the sacrifice. Their fellowship with God was restored; they left with clean and free hearts.

The purpose of God's requirement that all Israel come up to Jerusalem and the Temple for the Feasts was so that they might be physically and spiritually near to God. The Feasts were a family reunion. In the Temple courts they felt God's presence and love. I believe God's presence and love was palpable and that's why David declares in verse 4, "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house...".

Does not God continue to provide for our spiritual needs?

He answers our prayers.

He forgives all our sin through the shed blood of Jesus and He restores us to fellowship when we confess our sin.

His Spirit lives in us; He is always with us and we with Him.

Let us stay mindful and grateful of God's spiritual provisions.

In verses 5-8 the Psalm praises God as the All Powerful One who answers prayer.

GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS (65:5-8)

⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness,

O God of our salvation,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas;

⁶ the one who by his strength established the mountains,

being girded with might;

⁷ who stills the roaring of the seas,

the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples,

⁸ so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.

You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.

Is anything too hard for the One who *established the mountains* and *stills the roaring of the seas*? With these words, the Israelites were encouraged to continue to look to God to provide their every need.

We can bring our every need to God in prayer including our need for rain. He is all powerful. He loves us. He is for us. He is making us more like Christ. He is able. Let us bring everything to Him in prayer. Even if we didn't see Him make the mountains, we and all the inhabitants of the earth see His power every morning and every evening with the rising and setting of the sun. He who made sun, moon and stars is surely powerful enough to answer our prayers.

For what would the farmers and ranchers of Israel pray?

Rain.

It would be hard to overstate the relief and joy and gratitude they felt when God sent the rains. Verses 9-13 praise God for the rains.

GOD SENDS THE RAIN (65:9-13)

- ⁹ You visit the earth and water it;
 you greatly enrich it;
 the river of God is full of water;
 you provide their grain,
 for so you have prepared it.
- ¹⁰ You water its furrows abundantly,
 settling its ridges,
 softening it with showers,
 and blessing its growth.
- ¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty;
 your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.
- ¹² The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
 the hills gird themselves with joy,
- ¹³ the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
 the valleys deck themselves with grain,
 they shout and sing together for joy.

For just a moment put yourself in the shoes of an Israeli farmer. The rains have come, the fields watered from the Jordan River. Pastures are thick with grass. Cattle and sheep graze in the fields. The barley harvest has begun; there's so much barley it's following off the wagons littering the roadside. You know you're going to be OK. You can feed your family. There'll be bread on the table and hay in the barn. And you look up into heaven and pray, "O, God, thank you, thank you, thank you."

God has been good; He sent the rains. He answered your prayers. Now, a week later, as you stand in the Temple courts your heart swells as you sing Psalm 65. Every fiber of your being cries out, "Thank you God for the rains."

HOW CAN WE STAY MINDFUL AND GRATEFUL THAT GOD IS OUR PROVIDER?

I think we feel this at Thanksgiving when we sing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness". But I do think it is hard for us to stay mindful and grateful that God is our provider. We depend upon various safety nets and work arounds to protect us from the effect of drought. We pay a bit more for food, but none of us went hungry. We don't directly depend upon the rain so we're at risk of being deceived and placing our faith in ourselves and our ability to provide for ourselves.

With our level of prosperity, how do we stay mindful and grateful that God is our provider?

Whatever the answer, it requires thought. It requires mentally walking things back. The baked potatoe we're slathering in butter and sour cream; where did it come from? Who created the genes, designed the proteins and animates the nanomachines of each cell such that a potatoe is formed? Who designed it such that soil, water and sun would stimulate that seed to germinate and nourish the seedling to maturity. Who provides the rain....

This may seem childish, but it's not; we need to be mindful of these realities if we are to be grateful to God.

The Israelites had the Feast of Firstfruits, we have Thanksgiving.

Psalm 65 challenges us to take our national holiday of Thanksgiving seriously as did the Israelites the Feast of Firstfruits. Perhaps we can be more intentional and thoughtful at our Thanksgiving celebrations to declare the blessings of God and in song and prayer give thanks for the specific ways God provides for both our spiritual and our physical lives.

Praying before meals – habit or heartfelt?

Do you pray before meals?

Do you pray a memorized prayer?

Those of us from a Catholic background may have grown up praying...

*Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive,
through Thy bounty through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.*

My parents taught me to pray...

God is great, God is good. Let us thank Him for our food.

Here's a cute child's prayer...

"ABCDEFGH Thank you, God, for feeding me."

Some less pious prayers that make me laugh...

Good food, good meat, good Lord, let's eat.

Lord, bless this bunch as they munch their lunch.

Lazarus rose, Moses led, Noah built, Jesus fed. Amen.

On a daily basis, could not our giving thanks at meals be a very meaningful way for us stay mindful and grateful that God provides? I must admit at times it is routine for me, but the times I really engage my mind and think about it, I am humbled again to realize that the meal in front of me ultimately is provided by my heavenly Father. That realization leads to sincere gratitude.

Our pay stubs – a physical symbol of God's provision.

God directed the Israelites to use the physical sheaf of barley as part of their worship. Instead of a barley sheaf, could our pay stubs serve a similar purpose? Could our pay stubs serve as a tangible reminder that God is our provider? Bring it to the table on the evening you receive it and along with your prayer for the meal thank God for the job God has given you to provide for you and your family. Might this practice also inspire us to think about how we're stewarding God's resources? Are we meeting our obligations? Are we honoring God by giving to Him faithfully? Are we generous to others as an expression of our faith in His provision? Our pay stubs could be a very helpful way for us to stay mindful and grateful for God's provision.

God is our Provider.

Ingratitude is not an option for a true child of God.

How will you stay mindful and grateful to God your provider?