

OH, MAGNIFY THE LORD!

THOUGHTS ON PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

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I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving (Psalm 69:30).

What a curious expression, “magnifying” the Lord is. “To magnify”—both the English word and the Hebrew word it represents—means “to make large or larger.” So the psalmist was saying, “I will make the Lord larger with thanksgiving.” Can we make the Lord larger by praising Him? Well, no, not literally. However, we can make the Lord larger in our own eyes. This happens when we notice and reflect on what He has done for us, and especially when we put these thoughts into words and actions.

The principle behind all worship is that we can receive the Lord more fully when we seek Him in a considered, actual way—whether it’s reading the Word at bedtime, bending our knees in prayer, raising our voice in song on a Sunday morning, or offering words of thanks in response to a realization we’ve had while driving in the car. The Lord wants our worship, but not because it makes Him feel bigger or satisfies some kind of Divine ego. He wants it for our sakes. The more we appreciate the magnitude of His love and power, the more we can be sensitive to them, be influenced by them, and be filled with them. So, enlarging Him through acts of worship enlarges us! That’s a deeper implication of the psalmist’s words: “I will magnify Him with thanksgiving.”

The feeling of thankfulness, especially, is an enlarging feeling. When we notice something good and appreciate it, our minds are opened. Our gaze is turned outside of ourselves. Our senses are opened wider. Food tastes better when we’ve received it with sincere thanks. Music sounds sweeter. And people appear friendlier when we say “Thank you” to them. We have a warmer feeling for them. These things follow as the effects of an opened mind. More broadly, humble and sincere affections of worship open our minds. These affections are the heart of worship. To quote the psalmist more fully:

I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.
This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bull,
Which has horns and hooves (Psalm 69:30-31).

The external acts of worship (our “sacrifices of an ox or bull”) are hollow without the spirit of thanksgiving or humility or need. At the same time, the softening, freeing affections at the heart of worship are especially touched and kindled by external acts of worship. That is why we need them.

As the holidays approach, let us be grateful for the opportunities they provide for us to “magnify the Lord.” There’s not one of us who would not find ourselves “enlarged” by turning our lips, tongues, and vocal chords to praising our wonderful Maker and Provider, Redeemer and Savior!

I will bless the Lord at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make its boast in the Lord;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.
Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
And let us exalt His name together! (Psalm 34:1-3).