

with Bathsheba. For around a year, from the death of Uriah until sometime after the baby was born, there was a barrier between God and David. The arrival of Nathan the prophet caused David to confess his sin and to offer to God the beautiful prayer expressed in this psalm. His sin against God is acknowledged, and the plea is made for God to blot out all his iniquity. With his recognition of his sin came the words of the prophet: "The LORD also hath put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13).

A contrite heart

Before praying, it would benefit all of us to read the Master's parable of the two men who went up into the temple to pray (Lk. 18:9-14). Despite his appearance of respectability, the one was condemned, whereas the other recognised his sinful state and was justified. This is what the psalmist is telling us also. God desires truth in the inward parts (Ps. 51:6), a truth that recognises what we are and our total dependence on the grace of God. He looks for this contrite heart.

The word 'contrite' links back to those thoughts we expressed at the beginning of this article on

the symbol of incense. In forming the incense the instruction was that they were to "beat . . . it very small" (Ex. 30:36). The word translated 'contrite' carries the meaning 'to beat small'. The humility necessary for our prayers to be effective is symbolised in the preparation of the incense before it was burned on the altar or in the censer: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). We have to beat down the pride and self-reliance we naturally possess; we have to beat down the self-importance that easily takes hold; we have to beat down the self-deception that can delude us.

In the place of these we must allow our understanding of sacrifice, deliverance, service and purity to be compounded together so that our prayers can rise acceptably before God. With the psalmist we should say: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me . . . wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice" (vv. 2-8).

Praise and thanksgiving

David Burges

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High: to shew forth Thy lovingkindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night" (Ps. 92:1,2).

AS CHILDREN of the living God by grace, we share the enormous privilege of being able to commune in prayer with the Creator Himself, through the mediation of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. An objective analysis of the *contents* of our prayers, however, might well conclude that a high proportion of them are concerned with requests to God to satisfy our needs and desires, rather than to render worship and thanksgiving to Him. The inspired psalmist quoted above declares that it is a *good thing* to give thanks and praise to the Almighty. Yet it has to be said that many, perhaps the majority, of the public prayers given on behalf of our ecclesial congregations pay scant attention to this aspect of prayer, concentrating rather on requests for blessing and guidance.

The Bible, as we might expect, gives considerable emphasis to worship, praise and giving of

thanks, and employs a wide range of original words to convey them (see [Table 1](#)). This stress upon praise is surely due to a recognition that the God Who has called us is a God of salvation, that He has reprieved all those who call upon His Name from the death penalty due to sinners, and that this should call forth from them constant confessions of sincere praise and heartfelt thanksgiving.

Being thankful

Saints, then, above all people, should be thankful. Thankfulness as a state of mind should pervade all of their attitudes and actions, and should be freely expressed in their prayers to their heavenly Father. But all of us will be aware of deficiencies in this regard, for often we find ourselves expressing dissatisfaction about some aspect of our circumstances, wishing we were someone

Table 1 A selection of Bible words for praise and thanksgiving	
Original	Translation
Old Testament	
<i>barak</i>	bless, blessed, kneel down, be praised
<i>yadah</i>	praise, give thanks, confess
<i>hadar</i>	honour, glory, majesty
<i>halal</i>	praise, sing praise
<i>tehillah</i>	praise
<i>todah</i>	thanksgiving, thank offering, praise, sacrifice of praise
<i>shabach</i>	praise
<i>shachah</i>	worship, bow (self)
<i>zamar</i>	sing, sing praises, give praise
New Testament	
<i>aineō/ainesis</i>	praise
<i>doxa</i>	glory, honour, praise
<i>epaineō/epainos</i>	praise, laud
<i>eucharisteō/ia</i>	give thanks, thanksgiving, thankfulness
<i>eulogeō/ia</i>	bles, praise, blessing
<i>exomologeō</i>	thank
<i>humneō</i>	sing an hymn, sing praises
<i>proskuneō</i>	worship
<i>timaō/timē</i>	honour

else or somewhere else, or had more possessions or fewer problems. The list of our potential complaints is endless.

But so were the complaints of the children of Israel on the wilderness journey. At least five times in the record we read that the congregation of Israel ‘murmured’ against Moses; but the nature of their complaints indicates that in fact they were ultimately murmuring against God Himself. Consequently, after the episode of the spies’ evil report of the land of promise, God Himself asks: “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur *against Me*? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur *against Me*” (Num. 14:27).

However, when we consider some of their grumbles, principally the lack of food and water in the wilderness, we might admit a degree of sympathy, and confess that we could well have felt the same under those conditions. Here was a serious testing of faith which many a present-day disciple might have struggled with. Yet the Apostle Paul’s warning to true believers is stark: “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Cor. 10:10). On the contrary, we are exhorted to endure under all such trials on our wilderness

journey in order to be pleasing to our heavenly Father: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke” (Phil. 2:14,15).

It hardly needs saying that murmuring and grumbling are the enemies of thankfulness. When we find fault with the circumstances in which our daily lot is cast we are in effect doubting the wisdom and providence of the Father, Who overrules the lives of all of His children. It clearly requires considerable insight and faith to recognise that, even in the painful or unpleasant situations we sometimes find ourselves in, He knows best for us, and that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). We have the apostle’s assurance that painful experiences in life are part of the discipline that the Father ordains for all who are His true children:

“My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth . . . Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit

of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:5, 6,11).

There are few examples in Scripture more striking and encouraging than that of Job. Here was an outstandingly faithful servant of God, who was tested, far beyond the experience of most believers, by the catastrophic loss in one day of all of his wealth and possessions, and above all of his children. So strong was Job's trust in God, however, that he was able to respond by worshipping his Maker: "the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:20,21). The subsequent further disaster of a crippling disease did nothing to diminish his strength and determination to honour God, even though his extreme suffering moved him to curse the day of his birth. And this faithfulness and endurance was in the end rewarded by the Almighty in the restoration of Job's health and substance (42:12,13).

The same extraordinary spirit of endurance was seen in the examples of Paul and Silas at Philippi, who, having been beaten with many stripes and secured in the inner prison, nevertheless "prayed, and sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:23-25), when they might have sat mute and resentful in the darkness. They were following the example of their Master, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). We are clearly intended to view our lives in Christ with this same perspective, to be thankful even in the trials of life, understanding that, taking the long view, they are all for our ultimate benefit, however much we would rather avoid them. True disciples are to pursue thankfulness in all of the circumstances of their lives.

"The sacrifice of thanksgiving"

Saying 'thank you' for blessings received is something that most parents teach their children from a young age. The child who simply takes what is given it without expressing thanks is generally considered to be spoilt or rude. Yet so often we forget to thank our heavenly Father for blessings received from Him! As Christadelphians we habitually and properly offer thanks for our food, but there are so many other daily benefits which we readily take for granted. For instance, probably most of us will pray for safekeeping when setting out on a journey, but how many of us will correspondingly remember to offer grateful

thanks when we arrive safely at our destination? And not least of the blessings sent from above are the free access to God's Word and the knowledge of the Truth itself, which we enjoy and yet which can all too easily be taken for granted.

Scripture refers frequently to praise and thanksgiving as types of *sacrifice*. Here are some examples:

"And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he shall offer unto the LORD. If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the *sacrifice of thanksgiving* unleavened cakes mingled with oil . . . [and] leavened bread with the *sacrifice of thanksgiving* of his peace offerings" (Lev. 7:11-13);

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God . . . I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills . . . Offer unto God *thanksgiving*; and pay thy vows unto the most High" (Ps. 50:7-14);

"Then [fools] cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and He saveth them out of their distresses. He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the *sacrifices of thanksgiving*, and declare His works with rejoicing" (107:19-22);

"O LORD, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to Thee the *sacrifice of thanksgiving*, and will call upon the name of the LORD" (116:16,17);

"Accept, I beseech thee, the *freewill offerings of my mouth*, O LORD, and teach me Thy judgments" (119:108);

"Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast . . . the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for His mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the *sacrifice of praise* into the house of the LORD" (Jer. 33:10,11);

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate . . . By him therefore let us offer the *sacrifice of praise* to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate

forget not: for with such *sacrifices* God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:12-16).

Here is a consistent teaching through both Testaments that to offer praise and thanksgiving to God is a form of sacrifice. Normally we think of sacrifice as the giving up of something valuable, a form of self-denial, as in the sacrifice of animals required by the Law of Moses. In truth, however, we can give nothing material to God that is not already His (Psalm 50:10, quoted above), but praise and thanksgiving *are* ours to give freely in response to His goodness to us.

Furthermore, these sacrifices are far more pleasing to Him than the offering of animals, for they are made acceptable by the perfect sacrifice of His beloved Son. As the apostle puts it in the verses from Hebrews quoted above: "By *him* therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise" (v. 15). And to the sacrifice of praise he adds two more types of sacrifice: doing good and communicating (Greek, *koinōnia*, 'fellowship', 'sharing'; v. 16). These, we are told, are pleasing to God and therefore constitute actions which we as His children should constantly seek opportunity to perform in order to be acceptable to our Father.

The language of praise

The fact that the Bible contains a wide variety of terms for worship and praise (only a selection is given in [Table 1](#)) shows how important it is that true believers should lift up their voices in thanksgiving to their Maker. Yet it seems to be a common experience that most of us find it difficult to express praise to God with any degree of fluency, at least in public prayers. Most brethren have their own collection of stock phrases that they use when called upon to pray, but it has to be said that not many of these fall into the category of 'praise'.

Since, however, the Scriptures contain a whole compendium of expressions of praise in the book of Psalms as well as in many other places, any effort to commit some of these to memory would be rewarding and enriching, both for public and for personal prayer. [Table 2](#) overleaf has a selection of memorable phrases from the Psalms, which, with suitable adjustment of the pronouns used, could readily be incorporated into our prayers to express the praise that is due to our heavenly Father.

Praise in the New Testament

The Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles were, of course, fully conversant with the language of

praise so eloquently set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Lord's Prayer, for instance, given as a pattern to his disciples, draws on the language of praise in David's prayer of thanksgiving recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, while teaching them to exercise the additional privilege of addressing the great God of heaven as 'Father'. So, too, the Apostle Paul uses the language of the Psalms (see [Table 2](#)) to express praise in his letters: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3); and similarly: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Indeed, amongst the many passages advocating the practice of prayer in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, there are powerful exhortations to include praise and thanks unto God:

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17);

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18).

With such encouragements we should surely not neglect the necessity to thank our God daily for His goodness to us, as thankful children. Indeed, if we have a genuine awareness of that goodness in all the blessings of our lives, and above all for the knowledge of the true gospel in Jesus Christ, our hearts and voices should overflow with thanksgiving and praise to our heavenly Father and to the Saviour who died for us. We would do well to emulate the spirit of Christ in the psalmist, which declares: "*Seven times a day* do I praise Thee because of Thy righteous judgments" (119:164).

However, our privilege and duty to praise our God now, in this time of probation, is but a prelude to the joy of sharing in His praise in the Kingdom of God. For then we shall be privileged to join with the whole host of heaven in the endless expression of worship and praise:

"And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour

Table 2 A collection of verses from the Psalms for praise and worship

"O LORD our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! Who hast set Thy glory above the heavens" (8:1)

"I will praise Thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all Thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy name, O Thou most High" (9:1,2)

"I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in Whom I will trust" (18:1,2)

"Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day" (25:5)

"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (27:1)

"Give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (29:1,2)

"He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (33:5)

"Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgments are a great deep" (36:5,6)

"Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting" (41:13)

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (46:1)

"Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation" (68:19)

"Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory" (72:18,19)

"I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old" (77:11)

"Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee" (86:5)

"Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (86:15)

"Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations . . . from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God" (90:1,2)

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High: to shew forth Thy lovingkindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night" (92:1,2)

"For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations" (100:5)

"Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with honour and majesty" (104:1)

"O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches" (104:24)

"Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (107:8)

"Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and Thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations" (135:13)

"I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless Thee; and I will praise Thy name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable" (145:1-3)

"Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise Him for His mighty acts: praise Him according to His excellent greatness" (150:1,2)

to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:5-7);

"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such

as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (5:13).

Public prayer

Nigel Bernard

In his first letter to Timothy the Apostle Paul stated the following reason for writing to Timothy: ". . . that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church [ecclesia] of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (3:15). One aspect of behaviour of which Paul spoke was prayer: "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (2:8). In this article we will consider prayers spoken in the ecclesia. The principles that underlie public prayers in many ways apply to prayers in general, and thus what follows may overlap with other articles in this issue; but it is hoped that the emphasis on public prayer in the article will ensure that points specific to this type of prayer will be drawn from these principles.

IN SCRIPTURE prayer is likened to incense. As the psalmist wrote: "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (141:2; cf. Rev. 8:3,4). In the Kingdom incense will once more be offered: "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts" (Mal. 1:11).

Incense will be offered "in every place", not just one place. This matches with the phrase "every where" in 1 Timothy 2:8. Paul exhorts us to pray "every where" just as the incense of prayer will be offered "in every place" in the Kingdom. In Isaiah 24 the prophet wrote of a time when the land of Israel would be desolate, but when there would be "fires", or "lights", scattered across the seas giving glory to God:

"When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD [Yahweh], they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the LORD [Yahweh] in the fires, even the name of the LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel in the isles of the sea" (vv. 13-15).

Ecclesias today, although not "in every place", nevertheless are in many places throughout the world. God is glorified in the ecclesial "fires" as they shine "as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). As they shine, ecclesias, wherever they are, should offer prayer, they should "cry aloud from the sea", a foretaste of when incense will be offered in every place in the Kingdom.

The ecclesial house of prayer

When Paul wrote of the ecclesial "house of God . . . the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) the Spirit was echoing the mention of the pillar set up as the "house of God" at Bethel (Gen. 28:17-22). The phrase "house of God" also, of course, brings to mind the temple, and its predecessor, the tabernacle. Isaiah spoke of the house of God as a "house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7). Although this speaks of the temple in the Kingdom, nevertheless, just as Christ indicated that the temple in the first century should have been a "house of prayer" (Mt. 21:13), so the ecclesial house should be a "house of prayer". If Christ came to our ecclesia would he find it a "house of prayer", or would he conclude that we had made it into something else? The brother who offers a public prayer on behalf of the ecclesia has an important role in ensuring that the ecclesia is indeed a "house of prayer".

In order to help teach the Israelites, and ourselves, the role of prayer in the house of God, a