God is Good Forever

A superscript, four stanzas, and the difference between feeling grateful and giving thanks

SPEAKER	Steve Hawthorne
DATE	Sunday, November 22, 2026
PASSAGES	Psalm 100:1-5; 1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3; Jeremiah 33:10-11; Ezra 3:11; Exodus 8:1
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:48:12 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Psalm 100 has a line written above it in Hebrew calling it a song for thanksgiving, and the psalm ends where it has to end: the Lord is good, and his lovingkindness is everlasting. Steve's point was that giving thanks is not the same thing as feeling grateful. It is speech addressed to someone — a covenant-keeping God who is good, in a world full of gods who are not.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The superscript is part of the text. Psalm 100 announces itself as a song for thanksgiving before it says a word, which is why Steve's family has read it at their Thanksgiving table for about eight years.
- God never told Pharaoh simply to let his people go. It was always "let my people go that they may worship me." Worship, not relocation, was the point of the exodus.
- We serve gladly, not as slaves afraid of what the master might do. The joy and the gladness in the first two verses are not decoration; they are the instruction.
- "It is he who has made us, and not we ourselves." You are not summoned to remodel yourself into something presentable first. Come with the weaknesses and the strange habits.
- Being called sheep is not an insult. Sheep cannot sing, read or write; what they can do is follow, and belonging to a shepherd who keeps covenant is a better arrangement than being impressive.

- Most of the gods on offer in the world are not good. Tens of millions of people are presently running away from a deity they have to buy off. “The Lord is good” is not a rhyme — it is a claim with teeth.
- Feeling grateful and giving thanks are different acts. A table where everyone says what they are grateful for can go all the way around without anyone addressing God.
- Israel kept saying the same sentence at every rebuilding — the tent, the temple, the ruins, the foundation. The refrain outlasted the buildings.

▶ 0:48:12

Steve came up squinting through the stage lights, noticed that the verse printed in the morning’s bulletin was from Psalm 100, and said that was convenient, because Psalm 100 was what he had come to talk about. Five points, four stanzas, and one line written above the whole thing.

The line above the psalm

▶ 0:49:04

He started with the superscript, and was quick to say he was not doing it to impress anybody with Hebrew. *Super* means above, *script* means writing: a line written above the psalm in the Hebrew manuscripts, sometimes naming the author, sometimes giving the historical backdrop — *this psalm exists because this happened*. Psalm 100 has one. The pew Bible, on page 592, renders it “A Psalm for giving thanks.” Steve reads the New American Standard, which has “A Psalm for Thanksgiving,” and when his family was deciding years ago what to read at their feast, that settled it. “We’ve been reading Psalm 100 at our Thanksgiving festival” for about eight years, he said — not as a prescription for anyone else, but “it hasn’t hurt our gratitude at all.”

1. Singing with joy, in order to serve God

▶ 0:53:40

> “Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful singing.”
>
> PSALM 100:1–2 ↗ (NASB)

All three lines carry the same overtones — joy, gladness, singing — and all three are aimed at service. The verb in verse two, Steve pointed out, is the same one God kept sending through Moses to Pharaoh: let my people go, that they may serve me. "He didn't say just let my people go. No, never once." The point was never a better property and a decent house. The point was worship. And we serve him gladly, "not as slaves out of fear that he might do something bad."

▶ 0:55:53

"All the earth" is a large address. Steve noted, with evident enjoyment, that God is used to working at that scale — the Bible we hold is the prequel to how he gets himself worshiped and loved from every people, tribe, tongue and nation. And "come before him" means, literally, to come before his face. Which is where he pushed back hardest on the religious instinct: "Religion is a sculpted bit of performances that you perform and then you get credit." Those systems all call for you to remodel or recreate yourself first. "No, don't do it. You're loved, and you're summoned to serve him out of love. Come with all your crisscross ideas, strange habits. Come with your weaknesses."

Then the angels, which are not in the psalm at all and which he brought in anyway. God has myriads of them, and any one of them can sing better than the whole room. "And yet he wants to hear his little children say something pleasant and kind." *Jesus loves me, this I know* — flat, unimpressive, and he loves it, because what we know about him first is that he is a Father.

2. What we know about God, and about ourselves

▶ 0:59:13

> "Know that the Lord himself is God; it is he who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture."
>
> PSALM 100:3 ↗ (NASB)

Lord in small capitals stands for the name, Yahweh — and Steve was careful to say he cannot pronounce it correctly and that many Jewish friends are careful about speaking it at all. This is the creator, which is the reason he is worshiped.

He said he wished there were more time for the sheep, because he has asked actual shepherds about them. Sheep have no particular strengths. They cannot sing — he gave a demonstration — and they cannot read or write. "So what good is a sheep?" The answer is not wool. The answer is that "we are his people" is covenant language, and a covenant is a connection God makes and then keeps.

▶ 1:01:26

Here the message widened out past Austin, and it was the part with the most weight in it. There are rival gods and goddesses all over the planet, and many of them are not good. “It’s known: this deity, you have to give it something, because they’re not good, and they’ll get you.” Idolatry always multiplies — one god for a child, one for the rent, one for the house, and always a priest who needs a little change to make it work. A good share of the world’s population is right now trying to get away from a bad god and find one who might help. Against that, “it’s a joy to serve our creator,” who makes us something beautiful and simple: a covenant people. Following is all a sheep can do, and “it’s actually wonderful to depend on him.”

3. Coming near to give thanks

▶ 1:04:22

> “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.”
>
> PSALM 100:4 ↗ (NASB)

Gates and courts mean we are invited into the throne room — not met on the porch, not held at the door pending appropriate dress. Steve has been in countries where houses are arranged exactly that way, with a clear limit on how far a guest gets. This is not that.

▶ 1:06:36

And then the distinction the whole message turns on. “Giving thanks is a relational reality,” he said. When you thank another person, you are recognizing that they went out of their way for you — which is a different act from being glad about how things have been going. He has sat at Thanksgiving tables where someone asks everyone to name what they are grateful for, and listened to the answers go around: the team won, the officer let it go with a warning. “So I’m very grateful.” Grateful to whom? “It never comes out, because they’re just grateful. They’re not giving thanks. There’s a difference.” He is not against being kind and nice at a table. That is simply not what the verse says. “This ritual of feelings about gratitude is not the practice of giving thanks.”

And then he made the room do it

▶ 1:07:56

“I’m not going to send you out of the room and say, well, apply this to your life. No. I’m going to call for it.” Groups of three or four — not five, and not two, because “two is weird” — families split up, names exchanged first. “Don’t pray with strangers. You’re supposed to learn their name.” Name the thing you

are thankful for, say it out loud to the others, and then actually say something to God. If praying aloud is too much, ask someone in your group to do it for you.

▶ 1:12:22

It ran long, as it should have. He kept calling the room forward — next person, keep going, one minute more — and when he hurried someone along he did it generously: "I know there's long stories. That's wonderful. That's why heaven takes so long." He closed it with a small correction worth keeping. "Do you know how to end a prayer? Don't say amen. That's not over and out. It means something."

4. For the Lord is good

▶ 1:13:28

> "For the Lord is good; his lovingkindness is everlasting and his faithfulness to all generations."
>
> PSALM 100:5 ↗ (NASB)

Steve nodded at the call-and-response everyone in the room already knows — God is good all the time — and said yes, it is true, and it is also not a rhyme. It is serious, because there really are gods known for not being good, and people really are hungry and fleeing them and drinking out of rivers you would not want described. And the goodness in verse five is specific: not that he likes us a great deal, but covenant love. "There's a covenant where he's going to love us, and he's promised, and he calls for us to love him, and we do our best, and we screw up, and we can keep trying. He wants to help you. He really does."

▶ 1:16:24

Then the tour, and it is the best argument in the message. David gives thanks at the dedication of the tent of worship he has finally got standing again in Jerusalem, and the sentence he uses is "give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his lovingkindness is everlasting." David wanted something more permanent than a tent; God liked the idea and gave the job to Solomon.

▶ 1:17:53

> "Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house… and all the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the house, bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement, and they worshiped and gave praise to the Lord, saying, 'Truly he is good, truly his lovingkindness is everlasting.'"
>
> 2 CHRONICLES 7:1–3 ↗ (NASB)

The priests could not get into the building. What came down, he said, is hard to describe and he tried anyway: the glory of God is "something like a fire, but it's brighter and lighter — and a rainbow. Beautiful." Then he caught himself — "don't get me going; I have a PhD in what the glory of God is" — and declined, twice, to start. Would you enjoy it? He answered his own question: "I don't think you could stand it, because it's so beautiful that you can't stand even looking at it." And the point he would not let go of: the people on the pavement "said the same thing." One sentence, now said twice, by two different generations.

▶ 1:20:06

Centuries later Babylon wanted the wealth of the land, destroyed that temple, and carried off anyone who could breathe and do some work, to be slaves in Babylon. Jeremiah had warned them, and had also promised that after seventy years God would restore the land and give them all kinds of beautiful things:

> "Yet again there will be heard in this place, of which you say, 'It is a waste, without man and without beast' — that is, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate — the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, 'Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his lovingkindness is everlasting'; and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the Lord. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first, says the Lord."
>
> JEREMIAH 33:10–11 ↗ (NASB)

"That's pretty happy singing," he said of the bridegroom and the bride. And notice what is standing inside the promise of restoration: not just rebuilt streets but people carrying a thank offering into the house, saying the sentence.

▶ 1:21:25

Jeremiah was standing where the temple had been. Everything he said would happen, happened; and after the seventy years, God brought some of his people back — Haggai had to remind them what they were there for. Ezra keeps the record of the morning they relaid the foundation — priests in their

apparel with trumpets, Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, following written instructions left by King David, who "had been dead a long time." They found what he had written, and they sang it.

> "They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, 'For he is good, for his lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.' And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."
>
> EZRA 3:11 ↗ (NASB)

Tent, temple, ruins, foundation. Four occasions, four centuries, one sentence — and there are more of them in the Psalms than he had time to find. "It goes on and on and on. It won't fail." That is what the refrain is for: "God's saying, 'I'm never going to fail you.'"

5. Shouted with a great shout

▶ 1:24:38

Steve had flagged this at the start, and now he collected on it. Ezra says the people shouted. Are we allowed to do that? The room answered him before he could — *absolutely, yes* — and he agreed on the only grounds that matter: "Scripture says shout. Do it." He admitted that his own instinct is to shout better when he is small and unnoticed, corrected himself out loud — "actually, I shout better when I'm standing up and I'm trying to yell" — and split the room by the seating colors: the middle section purple, the north and south sides gold. Middle section up first, mumbling it, then lifting the volume: *God is good.*

▶ 1:25:35

Then he stopped them, because half a sentence was not enough. "We need more, because it's not just he's good. He's got love going. He's not stopping. He keeps loving us no matter what." So the sides stood and took the second half — *he loves forever* — and the two halves went back and forth until the room put them together into the title of the message: **God is good forever.**

▶ 1:26:32

"I know this is all out of order," he said, handing it to the band, "but now we're going to sing some." The room sang that God is good and his love endures today, and forever — and mid-song the instruction from the prayer exercise came back around: "Lift up your voice and just sing your own song to him. Tell him he's good." Not a feeling about gratitude. Words, addressed to somebody.

▶ 1:33:18

The songs that followed did the psalm's own work in order: thank you Jesus for finding me like a good shepherd — the sheep of verse three, located — and then the line that is the whole message in one breath, *what else could I do but lift up my voice and say thank you*; then that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and his mercies are new every morning; then forever God is faithful, forever God is strong, forever God is with us, Emmanuel. Then he asked for the shout one more time, and the room gave the sentence back whole — "God is good" / "his love endures forever" — and ended it the way he had taught them an hour earlier, with an amen that was not over and out. Tent, temple, ruins, foundation, and a Sunday morning in Austin: same sentence, still not failing. Lette asked everyone to stay afterward to decorate for Advent, and the prayer team stayed available at the front for anyone who wanted someone to say it with them.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Psalm 100:1–2
- Exodus 8:1
- Revelation 7:9
- Psalm 100:3
- Psalm 100:4
- Psalm 100:5
- 1 Chronicles 16:34
- 2 Chronicles 7:1–3
- Jeremiah 33:10–11
- Ezra 3:11
- Lamentations 3:22–23

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. God told Pharaoh to let the people go so that they could worship him. Where in your life have you treated the deliverance as the point and quietly left the worship out?
2. Steve said we are summoned without having to remodel ourselves first — come with the crisscross ideas and the weaknesses. What do you keep trying to fix before you come?
3. Being called a sheep means your best action is simply following. Where does that feel like relief right now, and where does it still feel like a demotion?
4. Say out loud the difference between “I’m grateful” and “thank you, God, for this.” Which one do you actually practice, and what does the other one cost you?
5. The same sentence — he is good, his lovingkindness is everlasting — got said over a tent, a temple, a ruin and a foundation. Which of those four are you standing on this week, and what would it change to say it there?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Steve Hawthorne was asked to bring Hope Chapel’s Thanksgiving Sunday message and chose Psalm 100 — the psalm his own family has read at their Thanksgiving table for about eight years. He preaches from the New American Standard Bible, works the Hebrew superscriptions while insisting he is not trying to impress anyone with them, and speaks firsthand of countries where people live under gods they have to buy off. He mentions doctoral study on the glory of God, then declines to get started on it.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZItTHDSwEk&t=2892s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.