

In 1736 Benjamin Franklin wrote in *Poor Richard's Almanac*, ‘God helps them that help themselves.’ He was by no means the first to offer this opinion. Aesop, the famous storyteller said it back in the 6th century B.C.

Aeschylus in the 5th Century B.C. said ‘God loves to help him who strives to help himself.’ Sophocles (5th Century) put his twist on it, ‘Heaven helps not the men who will not act.’

God doesn’t throw worms into a bird’s nest. Birds have to scratch for them. God doesn’t slip money into the wallet of someone who refuses to look for a job.

◆ That’s the truth, but it’s not the whole truth.

There’s something wonderful you should also know about God: God helps those who cannot help themselves. God helps people who have landed themselves in deep trouble, even if it’s all their own fault. God is so good!

◆ But some people don’t believe in a good God. Why? If God the power to stamp out evil and stop injustice, why hasn’t he done it?

Well, how many people would survive if God were to stamp out all evil today? They should ponder that!

The Apostles Peter and Paul both tell us that God is patient, waiting for people to repent and be saved, but in the day of wrath he will judge evil wherever it is found. (Romans 2:3-9; 2 Peter 3:9, 15)

Regardless of what some disgruntled folks may say, God is good. The evidence for God’s amazing goodness is irrefutable. It is the most wonderful truth about God ever revealed to us.

Our problem is that most often we take God’s goodness for granted.

The 107th Psalm is a high-octane celebration of God’s goodness.

It’s actually an historical Psalm about Judah’s Babylonian captivity, and the subsequent return of the exiles.

So this Psalm was probably written about the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, almost 600 years after the Psalms of David.

It’s a long Psalm of 43 verses, and we’ll look at most of it.

But to introduce it I’ll read just a few verses that reveal the theme, and offer an example of God’s goodness.

107:1 *Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!*

107:2 *Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble*

107:3 *and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.*

The writer offers some examples of God’s judgment of wickedness and his goodness to his people:

107:33 *He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground,*

107:34 *a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants.*

107:35 *He turns a desert into pools of water and parched ground into springs of water;*

107:36 *And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in;*

107:37 *they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield.*

• As we read this Psalm we’ll keep bumping into two refrains that emphasize how good God is.

First, “*Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress*” (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28).

Second, “*Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!*” (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31).

The centerpiece of the second refrain is that colossal Hebrew word, *ghesed*.

Here it’s translated, *steadfast love*, but it’s too immense to be captured in a single English word. It incorporates God’s *mercy, grace, lovingkindness, and unfailing love*.

It’s God’s *steadfast love* that stirs us to thank him for being so good to us.

So the Psalm ends with this invitation:

107:43 *Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord.*

At the start of this Thanksgiving week the examples of God’s goodness here in Psalm 107 help us to express our sincere thanksgiving to God.

I. GOD IS GOOD TO PEOPLE WHO FEEL HOPELESS. Psalm 107:4-9

What is proper etiquette when praying to God? Do you have to use lofty religious jargon you never hear anywhere except in church?

Not according to this Psalm. The desperate people who pray to God here have lost their way in life. They don't know which way to turn.

- This Psalm encourages us to pray something like this, "Oh God, please help me. I'm in big trouble. I've messed up again."

Jesus told a story about a proud religious man who went into the temple and bragged in his prayer about how much better he was than other people. Jesus said the man "prayed to himself." Another man was also praying. This man confessed that he had messed up and he begged God for mercy. Jesus said God heard and helped the humble sinner. But the arrogant dude got nothing from God. (Luke 18:10-14)

- See how this Psalm celebrates God's goodness to those who feel hopeless:

107:4 *Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in;*

107:5 *hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.*

107:6 *Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*

107:7 *He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.*

107:8 *Let them give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

107:9 *For he satisfies the longing soul and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*

The people of Judah were exiled from their homeland after the Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon in 587 BC.

Their plight was as pathetic as homeless people lost in a vast wasteland.

- Today lots of people identify with this. They've lost everything that made them feel safe.

They wish they could go back and do things over.

They don't see anything good in their future.

Life has become a shriveled, dry husk of existence.

Maybe some of you feel that's what's happened to you. Your hopes and dreams and goals are dashed.

You feel hopeless, wandering in a wasteland of life.

That's how most of the exiles from Judah must have felt.

- It's against this dark background that the psalmist sets the brilliant beauty of God's goodness.

When people who feel hopelessly lost cry out to the Lord in their trouble, he helps them (6). He delivers them from their distress.

God brings hurting people into a safe place where they belong. God gives people a fresh start.

- If that's what you need, let your soul cry out to God in your trouble right now.

Jesus Christ is the way to get to God. Put your trust in him. He said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.' (John 14:6)

God saves people who feel hopeless, and cry out to him in their trouble.

That's why we give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and for the wonderful *things he has done for people like us.*

II. GOD IS GOOD TO PEOPLE WHO ARE TRAPPED. Psalm 107:10-16

God is good to people who are as helpless as a kitten up a tree.

They're caught in a predicament, and they don't know how to get free.

107:10 *Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons,*

107:11 *for they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High.*

107:12 *So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help.*

107:13 *Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*

107:14 *He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart.*

107:15 *Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!*

107:16 *for he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.*

The people of Judah had been exiled in an alien land. The writer says it was like being in a prison.

- But they could only blame themselves. They had rebelled (11).

God had sent one prophet after another to warn them to turn from their evil ways, but they refused to listen.

More than a hundred years before this exile the Prophet Isaiah had predicted: '*Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling; their words and deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.*' (Isaiah 3:8, 9)

After many warnings and lesser acts of discipline, God sent them into captivity.

They became the victims of their own wickedness.

Sir Robert Watson Watt was the Scottish physicist who is credited with developing radar. Once while driving in Canada he was arrested for speeding. He had been caught in a radar trap. He told the policeman, *'Had I known what you were going to do with it, I wouldn't have invented it.'* Afterwards he wrote this little poem:

*Pity Sir Robert Watson Watt,
Strange target of his radar plot.
And this with others I could mention,
A victim of his own invention.*

- The Israelites were not victims of Babylon's imperialistic appetite. They were paying the penalty of their own persistent rebellion against God.
- Sometimes God deals firmly with his people to bring them to their senses.

God lets some people get into trouble because that's what it takes to get them to ever think of him.

They don't come to their senses until their freedom is gone.

- That's why many men and women turn to God in prison.

The good news of God's love gets through to them only when they can't run anymore and there's no way out.

- It doesn't have to be a literal prison with steel bars.

Some people are trapped by the consequences of their irresponsible, devious actions.

They wish they could run, but they can't.

- God is so good, even to people caught in the consequences of their own rebellion.

When they cry out to him, he brings them out of their darkness and deepest gloom and breaks the chains that bind them (14)

- If that has happened to you, then you know how it feels to have your soul set free, to feel that you have a future.

Charles Wesley the 18th cent. co-founder of Methodism was a prolific hymn writer. One of his hymns, *'And Can It Be?'* celebrates the truth of this theme in Psalm 107. *Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast-bound in sin and nature's night. Thine eye diffused a quickening ray. I woke; the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed thee.*

- Are you trapped in a dungeon of despair?

I urge you to pray to the Lord God in your trouble.

God is so good. He gives a new start to people who are trapped in the consequences of problems they brought upon themselves.

III. GOD IS GOOD TO PEOPLE WHO ARE BROKEN. Psalm 107:17-22

God is so good to those whose spirits are crushed because of their own foolishness.

Now they're broken.

107:17 *Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;*

107:18 *they loathed any kind of food and they drew near to the gates of death.*

107:19 *Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*

107:20 *He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.*

107:21 *Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!*

107:22 *And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!*

This word *fool* in v. 17 doesn't mean a *'stupid idiot.'* It means *'immoral'* or *'morally perverse.'*

- Sometimes this *foolishness* appears where you'd least expect to find it.

Liz and I know a woman who was married to a fine Christian man and had a lovely family.

Then she did the unthinkable. She left her husband and took up with a man who had a reputation as a womanizer. We were stunned!

She refused to listen to godly counsel. She stayed with that rogue for several years.

Then we heard that she was broken. In her remorse she cried out to the Lord.

God is so good. God forgave her and gave her a fresh start with him. Her Christian husband also forgave her. They have been back together about seventeen years now in a strong marriage. She knows the joy of being restored. But some of the pain and the sorrow will be with her forever.

If you go against the grain of God's will, don't be surprised if you get slivers that hurt.

- God is so good to people broken by the pain of their own moral misbehavior.

When they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, he saves them from their distress.

- Sometimes we feel like saying to people who have messed up, *'You have made your bed, now you must lie in it.'*

Jesus Christ says, *"Take up your bed and walk!"*

- Yes, there may be painful consequences, but they cannot extinguish the joy that breaks out in thanksgiving to God, as they *tell of his deeds in songs of joy* (22).

God is good to those whose lives are in pieces. When they cry out to him, he takes the broken pieces and makes something beautiful out of their lives.

IV. GOD IS GOOD TO PEOPLE WHO ARE FEARFUL. Psalm 107:23-32

Now the Psalmist deals with people used to having everything under control. Then everything changes and they are overwhelmed by forces beyond their control.

107:23 *Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters;*

107:24 *They saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.*

107:25 *For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.*

107:26 *They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight;*

107:27 *they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end.*

107:28 *Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*

107:29 *He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.*

107:30 *Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.*

107:31 *Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!*

107:32 *Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.*

Evidently there were Jewish exiles who had become merchants during the seventy years of exile.

They were at the mercy of the steep ups and downs of international economics.

They saw how quickly their business could be shipwrecked.

- The Psalmist depicts them as merchants on the sea.

The Psalmist describes a scene that struck terror in the hearts of those who heard it as they imagined the dreadful storm.

- This is a picture of those who risked everything for material success.

Then God showed them how it could all be lost in an instant, and they were not the masters of their own destiny.

You may know people like that. They have mortgaged their lives for a chance at success.

Then something happens—a sharp chest pain, a spot on an X-ray, a car accident—and suddenly they find out how fallible and mortal they are.

There are people in hospital ICU's who the day before were "on top of the world."

For years they have pursued their own goals and ignored God. They've been too busy chasing their treasures.

- ◆ God is so good to those who are anxious because they can't control life anymore.

In their anxiety—or utter terror—if they cry out to him, he brings them out of their distress.

He quiets the storm and brings calm to their souls.

The Psalmist used these parables to illustrate the marvelous truth that God is good to people who call out to him in trouble—people who don't deserve God's goodness. That's true of all of us.

Does your soul need to cry out to God today?

- Do you feel as if you are a drifter in a spiritual desert and you wish you could go back to where you belong in your relationship with God?
- Are you trapped in a predicament that you got yourself into because you disobeyed God? Do you want to be set free?
- Has sin sapped most of your emotional and spiritual strength and left you broken inside?
- Have you devoted your energy to business pursuits and now you're afraid of what might happen to you if you were to lose everything?

The help we get from God is by faith in Jesus Christ. He is our Savior, who lifts us out of despair, and breaks the chains that bind us, and lifts up those who are broken, and gives peace to those who are anxious.

To cry out to God in your despair means to confess your sins and ask for God's forgiveness by trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior.