

Writing Thank-You Notes is a lost art. I have heard stories about how mothers from the Fifties and Sixties forced their children to write thank-you notes for every birthday and Christmas gift they received. It became such a dreaded chore that the lesson to instill gratitude back-fired, and now it has become a social grace that is dying with the times.

Thank-you note and letter writing may be out of fashion, but our call to gratitude shouldn't be. I'm sure the children didn't struggle with being thankful. They probably struggled with what to say after, "Thank you." Apparently, many people struggle with what to say, as a google search on "How to Write a Thank You Note" revealed 365 million results. The first link included "9 Steps: With Pictures!"

It is hard to write a personal, heartfelt thank-you note if we don't know the gift-giver personally, and if the gift wasn't something we really needed. The psalmist in today's scripture doesn't have that problem. The psalmist knows whom to thank and why gratitude spills from the heart.

We learn that from the very beginning in verses 1-3: "*I will exalt you, Lord, for you rescued me. You refused to let my enemies triumph over me. O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you restored my health. You brought me up from the grave, O Lord. You kept me from falling into the pit of death*" (NLT). The psalmist has been healed from an illness, has been made whole, and all the credit goes to God.

The psalmist has obviously made it through the struggle, and reflects on the whole cycle of life. Before the illness, the

psalmist forgets to trust in God and depends on one's own sense of security. We know this, right? When we've accomplished something great and when everything is going well, we praise ourselves: "Go me! Go me! I'm awesome! Oh yeah!" Or, we break our arm for patting ourselves on the back.

But, when the tough times come, and they always do, we are humbled. We realize there is nothing we can do to cure ourselves. No matter how much we try to comfort or help our loved ones from their affliction, we can't heal them. The psalmist is humbled when an illness of some sort comes, leaving no other choice but to cry out for God's help and mercy.

The Hebrew scripture paired with this Psalm is 2 Kings 5, which tells the story of Naaman, a great military commander from Syria. He is a mighty warrior, yet he suffers from leprosy, a contagious skin disease. Naaman may be able to give the king of Aram many victories, but he cannot conquer this terrible disease.

One of his wife's servants, a young Israeli girl, tells Naaman that he should go to Israel to see the prophet Elisha to be healed. Syria and Israel are mortal enemies, even to this day. Naaman gets permission from the king and sets out for his journey to Israel. Naaman arrives at Elisha's door with all his horses and chariots. Elisha sends out a messenger to tell Naaman to "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then, your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy" (2 Kings 5:10).

Sounds simple enough, but Naaman's ego gets in the way. He thinks he knows better than anyone else on how to be

healed. First of all, he expects special treatment because he is a big, important army commander. After puffing up in anger, he says, “I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!” (v.11a). His ego was bruised that he didn’t receive the fanfare he was expecting.

He also expected to receive a magical cure: “I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me!” (v.11b). He didn’t think he’d have to do anything to be healed.

Finally, what he was asked to do, didn’t make sense to him: “Aren’t the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel?” (v.11-12). If anyone has seen the trickling and muddy Jordan River compared to these abundant bodies of water, one might understand Naaman’s point. But, Naaman is Syrian, and he just can’t imagine that anything Israeli would have healing powers. Certainly, his own land is better than his enemy’s land. So, often our pride and prejudice stand in the way of our healing.

Naaman’s friends counsel him. They tell him that these instructions really aren’t difficult, that he would do more difficult things to be healed. He needs to lower his expectations and humble himself, if he wants to be healed. Naaman does and is healed, just like the psalmist, and they both give thanks to God.

Many of us can relate to this if we’ve been healed. If our loved ones get to boast “cancer free.” If our child ‘beat the odds.’ But, how do we continue to praise God if we haven’t been healed. If we are still trying to claw ourselves out of our graves, out of the ‘pits of death’ that always seem to trip us up.

No matter what we try to do to avoid them. How can we be thankful when our loved ones die, when children suffer, when our healing doesn’t look like what we expected?

The psalmist tells us how: “Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning (v.5b). Hang on. Humble yourself and ask for help during this time of darkness. God loves us and is with us in the night time. The night may be one really long night, weeks or months of waiting for test results, years of debilitating treatment, or a season of grief or misaligned expectations. However long the night is, it will not last forever. Morning will come. There will be a new start, one filled with grateful hearts that we made it through the night. It’s the cycle of life: from well-being, to death, to new life. And, we can be grateful that God is with us every step of the way.

Have you ever written a Thank-You Note to God? Psalm 30 is one such note and tells us that in all circumstances and seasons of life, the psalmist “will give thanks to [God] forever!” (v. 12). That’s a pretty inspiring thank-you note. What would your thank-you note to God say? I encourage you to write one this week.