

Testimony service (Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45)

There is something truly transformative about giving thanks unto the Lord, calling upon God's name, and making God's deeds known among the people.

by [Ray Speller](#)

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Some of the most indelible memories of my childhood took place on Friday evenings during what my little church community, and many others like it, called testimony service.

At the onset of the weekly service there was a time of singing, reciting psalms of praise, and telling of one's personal testimony of God's greatness in recent days. There was an expectation that there would be fresh testimonies of God's miracles every week, and these were punctuated with rousing congregational songs led by members of the congregation, who would raise the opening lines of the songs extemporaneously while the gathered worshippers joined in.

I'm not sure if what was most impactful as a child was the rousing singing, the powerful personal testimonies, or the scripture recitations. I do, however, know that it is the songs and scriptures that have stuck in my memory for life.

Together we sang “I’m So Glad Jesus Lifted Me,” “There’s a Storm Out on the Ocean,” “There is Power in the Blood,” and “That is Why I’m Happy Tonight.” These and other songs punctuated the testimonies and utterances of thanks to God. We sang with uplifted voices, and we testified with confidence in the God who stood near to us throughout even the most traumatic of experiences.

It was all, always, punctuated with Old Testament scripture, especially the psalms of ascent and psalms of praise. As we sang and swayed to the syncopated beat in that small sanctuary, the drums, guitar, and tambourines helped to establish an ecstatic experience of the One whose praises we were lifting. In that atmosphere there was always a feeling of connection—to God but also to the generations that had praised and testified of God before us. This was especially strong when the whole crowd would recite swaths of scripture together from memory.

There is something truly transformative—faith-building and community-building—about giving thanks unto the Lord, calling upon God’s name, and making God’s deeds known among the people, as the psalmist exhorts in this week’s psalm. Singing unto God and talking of God’s wondrous works fully reforms and reframes our way of thinking and existing in the world. As we praise, we recognize our membership within the mystical body of Christ, transcending all time and space. Long live testimony service.