

Ann Voskamp: Give Thanks for Storms

We're laughing like these crazy loons out in the middle of a field of corn. The Farmer's got hold of the seat of his combine like he's being shot to the moon. It's harvest time, and a time of thanksgiving, and the corn keeps on coming.

"How in the world?" I can't take my eyes off the combine's yield monitor. Stunned wonder isn't an understatement. We had a drought this year. The sky had locked up hard about the middle of June.

The Farmer had said, "I've never seen any crop look so desperate on this farm. If God doesn't give rain by the weekend, there's not going to be any corn this year."

I'd felt in his words the surrender of one worn Farmer to the heat of the sun and a withering crop. Life is a furnace, and the faithful live by the testimony of Shadrach: "Even if he does not rescue us... " This world doesn't have anything that can burn down the faith of a heart on fire for God.

Come November, the digital screen of the combine monitor, calculating the number of bushels per acre this field of corn yields, flashes out these little black numbers that are huge, making no sense. The numbers are a bit stratospheric. Grace is most amazing of all, defying what makes sense.

"Get out of here!" I'm slack-jawed over the high monitor spikes, and the Farmer looks like he is right out of here and straight over the moon. I slap at his chest like the flapping loon that I am and he grins giddily.

"I know, I know!" And all over again, he's that laughing teenage boy that made me blush silly.

"Who would ever have thought?" I can't stop shaking my head.

"You know ..." He leans over the combine steering wheel, glances past me, past me to the wagon filling with corn. "I don't know what to think—so maybe I just thank?"

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever" (Ps 118:1).

The corn's running like flashes of glory into the wagon. What if we celebrated Thanksgiving the most because it's the least commercialized? What if the grace of God was only rightly answered by the gratitude of men? What had Karl Barth said?

"Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder [follows] lightning" —Karl Barth.

The corn's streaming in, and I can still see the lightning that came right after Sunday preaching way back in July. I remember the gusts of wind and the thickening black to the west. I remember the thunder that rumbled hope and how we stood on the front lawn and begged that rain to come.

And I remember how it went north. Twice. And how the Farmer had stood there, watching the rain come down only two miles away, and I'd whispered wild to him, "What if we get nothing? What if we lose the harvest?"

And he'd said it steady and certain, with the rain coming down right there, two fields over and so far away, "When you know your Father's loving—what can you fear losing?"

"Let those who fear the Lord say, 'His faithful love endures forever.' I called to the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me and put me in a spacious place. The Lord is for me; I will not be afraid" (Ps 118:4-6, HCSB).

The rain kept falling to the north, and he'd stood in this startling surrender. And then, just before supper, the sky had

darkened with hope and the black had opened up to give us our prayers, the way that the black so often does. We all danced on the lawn in that rain.

I turn to him now in the combine, "It was that storm." Gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightning. "The storm gave us this yield. The storm was grace."

There's no harvest without a storm.

Gratitude follows grace—as thunder follows lightning. And the storm is grace because whatever drives us to God, is a grace from God. It's all grace.

God gives grace, and ours is to give thanks. This is God's unconditional demand: that we live thankful.

The Farmer grabs my hand, pulls me to the seat behind the steering wheel, "Here, you feel the harvest." And I keep my eyes on the rows, my hands loose on the steering wheel, letting go, and I laugh embarrassed and nervous and the Farmer winks. "You're doing great—it's all great. He is."

"This came from the Lord; it is wondrous in our sight. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:23-24).

And I can feel it—there's corn. And there's us all here. And there's sky and food and family and a God in heaven and a love we don't deserve, and there's grace that comes as storms, and the only answer to God's unending grace is man's unending gratitude. When you live in a covenant of grace, you can't help but live out a covenant of gratitude. The Farmer leans into me and whispers it, "Thank you, Lord," and I murmur it too.

The way grace and gratitude echo to each other through everything . . .

"You are my God, and I will give you thanks. You are my God; I

will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever" (Ps 118:28-29).

Reflection Questions

What storms in your life have later produced a harvest?

When have you seen God's hand of provision in circumstances that seemed impossible?

What can you do to celebrate and remember the grace He has lavished upon you? {eo}

Excerpted from The CSB (in)Courage Devotional Bible, © 2018 Holman Bibles, Denise J. Hughes, Editor. incouragebible.com.

Ann Voskamp is wife of one good farmer, the home-educating mama to seven exuberant kids, and author of four New York Times' best-sellers. She is a contributor to the CSB (in)Courage Devotional Bible, where this article first appeared.