

# Thankfulness

## WHY THANKFUL

I spent 30 years in the corporate world, where we learned that given the nature of business, you can NOT praise your team enough. You can't tell them "too many times" how important they are, the good work they do and how pleased you are they are on your team. And when they do well, you can't "over-thank" them.

This doesn't mean you shy away from those "difficult" performance conversations, in fact contrary to that - we spent just as much time coaching our leaders to have those tough discussions when needed and without delay.

We learned over the years that it's just the nature of being "busy at the business of doing things" that tends to focus leaders to measure success on OUTCOMES and not on appreciating and thanking the PEOPLE that actually produce those outcomes. In other words, we forget WHO is doing the work

Teams led with a balance of accountability and tons of praise and "thank-you's" for work well done, produce more work and higher quality work. Leaders of these teams find themselves much closer to the day-to-day business processes as well - so results improve. Team Members enjoy their job more and stay longer as well. In short – it works for everyone involved.

Similar to the business analogy I just described, as human beings we often struggle to remain in a state of thankfulness because we ALSO measure it in the wrong areas. Too often, we measure our thankfulness against EARTHLY THINGS or OUR CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES. Using these as yardsticks, it can sometimes make it hard to be thankful

So if during this thanksgiving season, you (like me) would like to be more thankful, let's go to the bible to find our direction on "thankfulness"

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

It's good to start with Jesus when discussing any biblical topic. Thankfulness is no different and Jesus was (no surprise) a model of thankfulness.

**(Matthew 15:36–37)**

**Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had GIVEN THANKS, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.**

Jesus, the Son of God, was thankful to God his father by acknowledging WHERE His power and this provision originated

Later in his ministry, in Matthew 26, we find Jesus in a room, with his best friends on earth, sharing what he knows to be his last meal with them. As man AND God, we know that He knows that he is about to die a horrific death. What does he do? Let's read

**(Matthew 26:26)**

**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had GIVEN THANKS, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”**

**(Matthew 26:27)**

**Then he took a cup, and when he had GIVEN THANKS, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.**

That’s right ... He GIVES THANKS. He did so even though he knew the future. He knew how his life here on earth ended, YET under the most unimaginably bad CIRCUMSTANCES Jesus remained THANKFUL and in obedience to both God’s will and God’s plan of salvation

We’re all familiar with the name of the event portrayed in Matthew 26 – it’s called, of course, The Lords Supper, or Communion. You may not know how it’s forever tied to a spirit of thankfulness. You see it’s called by another name as well - The "Eucharist". We get that word from the original Greek "eucharistesas," which means "thanksgiving", “gratefulness” or praise for the works of God

Matthew Henry shares this about the Last Supper: “He (Jesus) gave thanks, to teach us, not only in every ordinance, but in every part of the ordinance, to have our eyes UP to God”. Henry is saying that Christians should be aware of WHAT they are doing, WHY they participate in communion and WHO this is about – giving thanks reminds us this is NOT a ritual where we go through the motions, but rather a way of praising and thanking God

Let’s read from Luke 22:19 to help tie this all together

**And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; DO THIS in REMEMBRANCE of me.**

My emphasis on the words DO THIS in REMEMBRANCE is because this was a command from Jesus to us. Jesus is saying “remember” what I did, who I did this for and as you do – GIVE THANKS, just as I did to my Father

## **WHAT TO BE THANKFUL**

WHAT SHOULD Christians be thankful for? What does our faith ask of us on “thankfulness”?

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “give thanks in ALL CIRCUMSTANCES; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”**

The simple answer is “everything”. The keywords here are “ALL CIRCUMSTANCES”. Let’s cover just a few - among many things, Christians are called to be thankful for:

- The sacrificial act on the cross by Jesus that forgave our sins
- God’s daily Grace and Mercy AND his Righteousness and Judgment
- The Holy Spirit’s guidance, conviction and correction
- God’s will in our lives (and even our unanswered prayers)
- Earthy blessings of family, food and shelter (no matter the current condition)
- Trials we experience living in a broken world (these strengthen our faith and draw us to God)

## WHEN TO BE THANKFUL

If we are aligned on the word “ALL” circumstances being accurate, then the “WHEN” is really easy – It’s just 3 words “**All the time**”

As Christians, we should be thankful in ALL circumstances, ALL the time BUT ... Do we live our lives like that OR do we only give thanks at meals or when a worrisome health test come back clean?

For a biblical standard of “all circumstances, all the time”. Let’s go to the book of Acts

First, let set the stage. Paul is a prisoner on a boat adrift in a storm. For weeks now, the boat has been pummeled by what Paul describes as hurricane force winds. It’s leaking like a sieve. By now they’ve thrown everything they can overboard to lighten the load INCLUDING the lifeboat! Now, wait for it ... Just ahead of what appeared to be a looming full-on DISASTER, Paul decides to take a moment to do what? “Give thanks”!

**(Acts 27:35)**

**[Paul] took some bread and GAVE THANKS to God in front of them all.**

To the crew around him, it’s a 911, we’re all gunna die, end-of-the-world moment ... but Paul has a different perspective. One focused on God. He assures the crew they will survive if they remain on board and suggests to everyone on the sinking boat that they GIVE THANKS to God before eating a meal that’s intended to gather their strength.

Instead of wailing or whining with cries of “Oh God where are you?” OR Why me God, why me? Paul simply gives thanks. Then the bible says:

- The crew and passengers were “ENCOURAGED”
- The crews lives are SAVED just as Paul said they would be
- AND, the Centurion SPARED Paul’s life

The lesson for us is clear. Paul had DREADFUL CIRCUMSTANCES, but he did not let those circumstances stand in the way of his thankfulness and Paul (and others) were blessed by it.

## MESSAGE TITLE

We read in **(Romans 5:12)** a sad, but tragically true verse

**Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned**

Paul wrote this because he knew better than anyone that before Christ’s resurrection, all of mankind was doomed to die. Lost in our sin, with no way of redemption. Because of sin, we could not approach our God and creator in a personal way. The world was without hope.

BUT, as a Jew, Paul was also acutely aware of the prophesies of a savior to come. Prophesies from Genesis 3:15 to Isaiah 11:1 that had spoke of Jesus centuries before his birth. Then, (and literally during Paul’s lifetime) the ministry, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything.

Paul reminds us in **(Romans 5:1-2)** just how much everything HAS been changed by Jesus **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.**

The Gospel was then and is now such STARTLING and STAGGERING good news that much of the world changed how we tracked time to coincide with Jesus's birth.

- Because, ONLY AFTER Jesus was there real hope.
- ONLY THEN was there a Gospel to share.
- ONLY then could we come near a holy and perfect God.

Jesus made that way for us and then God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to live IN us, and like Christ, we too will now live forever.

Paul's encounter with Jesus made him acutely aware of how far from God he was and it also made him wildly THANKFUL for Jesus's saving grace. He now sees a path to eternity. A home in heaven. A relationship with the living God. NO WONDER HE'S SO THANKFUL and NO wonder he wrote so many letters exhorting others to be the same way

BUT friends, what Paul had was not a secret, what he had was not unique to him

- You and I have the same thing Paul had. We have the same Jesus and the promise of eternal life too

That brings us to the title of today's message:

- God gave his son to redeem us from our sin
- If we place faith in him, we will live forever
- It IS the best gift ever given in history
- **Are we thankful ENOUGH in all circumstances, all the time?**

**(John 3:16)**

**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

Max Lucado calls John 3:16 "A twenty-five word parade of hope". Lucado's description is perfect for what is, in essence, the Gospel in a single sentence. As Christians, we've accepted this ETERNALLY VALUABLE gift. There's no other gift like it and you'll never get a better one. Doesn't an eternal gift demand an "all the time and in all circumstances" spirit of thankfulness?

- Do we thank God ENOUGH that he made a way to Heaven for us?
- Are we thankful ENOUGH for Jesus sacrificial act on the cross?
- Are we thankful ENOUGH for the Holy Spirit that lives in us?

Just as the business of leading people suffers from a lack of praise, so too does our walk with God suffer when lacking in thankfulness. All we have, all we do and all we are starts with God and none of it was possible before the sacrificial act by Jesus on the cross

So, if you want to be more thankful, to show a more thankful spirit, let's see how we can do just that.

## TESTIMONY

Well, we can't go far into this area without acknowledging the connection from the spirit of thankfulness to the action of prayer. Prayer is the action we take when our heart is "thankful". An infrequent, weak prayer life, will be one devoid of thankfulness and gratitude. You simply can't have one without the other.

Start by asking yourself a couple of simple questions:

- How many meals have I prayed over this week?
- How many times have I thanked God in prayer this week?

Is the reason why we don't give thanks in all circumstances and at all times simple forgetfulness? I don't think so. Let me share my testimony around giving thanks for a meal.

You see, I was in this same spot not too many months ago. My beautiful, god-fearing wife would silently and faithfully pray over every meal where as I would only do it occasionally. I asked the Lord to examine my heart as to why. He revealed to me it wasn't forgetfulness - it was the sin of Pride.

Here are my excuses and God's answers:

- I'm in a hurry! God says - Pride! (does your agenda trump Gods?)
- My food will be cold! God says - Pride! (Jesus suffered far more so you could be blessed)
- I just prayed over the last meal! God says - Pride! (good enough ... is that what I deserve?)

Listen, Pride should never have gotten in the way of my prayers of thanksgiving. I've dropped my prideful excuses and am now EAGER to take the time to praise and thank God.

We're called to be different than the world, to acknowledge the blessing and WHO gives it to us. Meals are just a small example. Do this in all areas of your life and watch what happens. Watch how you grow closer to God. Watch your spirit of thankfulness increase and your prideful nature decrease.

You see, a praying spirit of thankfulness, diverts our attention away from ourselves, moves our thoughts off current circumstances and focuses our minds on God who created all we're thankful for.

## PAUL'S CONVERSION

The Apostle Paul was quite a man before he encountered Jesus. He was a Jewish Pharisee born in the affluent city of Tarsus. He was also a Roman citizen and though we don't know many more details, he likely had a decent home, high standing in the synagogue and the respect of all who knew him. By the measure of that time, he sure had a lot to be thankful for, but you know what? He never wrote about it, at least not in the context of being thankful. Instead ... he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and THAT life changing experience is what he wrote about. Now let's look at all the wonderful things that happened to Paul AFTER his conversion:

- He was ridiculed and beaten many times
- He was shipwrecked and nearly drowned
- He was shackled and jailed more than once

YET ... consider this. Paul, of all people, goes on to author 8 of the top 10 books in the bible that refer the MOST to being “thankful”. Though his circumstances were terrible, Paul was looking at something entirely different:

Though blinded at one time – NOW he could really see and know the truth  
Though beaten again and again – He counted his stand for Christ as TRUE righteousness  
Though jailed over and over – He was still able to WITNESS for the mercy and saving grace in Christ

In his own words, Paul tells us (**Collosians 2:6-7**)

**So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with THANKFULNESS.**

## CLOSING COMMENTS

We’ll close by coming back to the season we find ourselves in now – Thanksgiving. It’s a season where we should be focused on “thankfulness” but I’m afraid that in our secular world that too many turkey dinners in this year will start without a prayer. For the ones that do, it may be the only meal that is prayed over for the entire year.

As Christians, we are called to do the opposite. To be thankful for ALL, in EVERYTHING and under ANY circumstance.

So, yes, this Thanksgiving season, let’s be thankful for:

- Our lives and the opportunity to place our faith in Jesus
- Our loving families for we know that others don’t always have one
- Our food and clothing that is not easily available in all parts of the world
- Our comfortable homes where we see others sleeping on benches outside
- Our country (though troubled), because it remains a last hope for freedom in a very dark world

BUT, let’s not forget **WHO** all of these blessings come from:

- GOD is the author and origin of your life.
  - Celebrate being alive, but **be thankful for the one who gave that life to you**
- GOD gave you your family – your parents, spouse and children
  - Yes, love them, but **be thankful to the one that created them for you**
- GOD gave you the skills and gifts to earn a living in order to buy food and shelter
  - Appreciate them, but **be thankful to the one that made it possible**
- GOD ordained that you were to be born into a country that allows the kinds of freedom to produce these blessings
  - Enjoy that freedom, but **be thankful for the one that put you here**

I challenge all of us to simply BE more thankful. Feeling thankful can rise and fall based on circumstances, but BEING thankful forces us to act, to pray and to focus on things of God’s Kingdom rather than our household. For a good example of how to BE more thankful Christians, look to the Apostle Paul.

***Paul didn’t base his thankfulness to God on his circumstances, he based it on blessings given in a life that SERVED GOD, not a life that served only himself.***

If serving God can produce such amazing “THANKFULNESS” then we might ask ...

- Who can I share the gospel of Jesus with today?
- How can I demonstrate Godly leadership/stewardship to my family today?
- Where can I freely provide my God given gifts to those in need?

When we serve God to produce blessings as Paul did, God will bless our service. Our natural reaction is to then praise and thank Him for His faithfulness.

**Are we thankful enough?** The question is OURS to answer, but I’m going to start by BEING MORE thankful than when I woke up this morning. BEING more thankful calls us to take action – to express our praise in prayer. By focusing our gratitude on things of God we will build a SPIRIT OF THANKFULNESS that’s strong - **all-the-time, and in-all-circumstances**

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord, I pray that we don’t wait for this Thanksgiving to be thankful. I pray that every family listening starts the very next meal with a prayer of thanksgiving. Lord, we want to give You thanks NO MATTER our current health condition, financial status or family dynamics. Lord we are thankful for your Mercy and Grace when we didn’t deserve it. We are thankful for being an adopted son or daughter of God. We are thankful that Jesus made a way for us to spend eternity with You - a Holy and perfect God. We thank You for the greatest gift ever given through your Son Jesus

- Amen