

Giving Thanks: A Spiritual Practice and Lifestyle

Thesis: Giving thanks is so much more than a holiday on our calendar. Giving thanks is meant to be a spiritual practice and a lifestyle for followers of the Lord Jesus.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Psalm 50:23; 107:1; 136:1-26

Today, I want to talk with you about ***Giving Thanks: A Spiritual Practice and Lifestyle***.

Here are some verses about giving thanks that I want us to process together.

First, I want to read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 in three different translations.

Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NIV).

Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live [lifestyle] (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 MSG).

Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NASB).

Now, let's look at Colossians 1:3-12 in The Message.

This week we get to celebrate Thanksgiving in the USA. It is different than in past years because of COVID. Still, this federal holiday is an opportunity to enjoy family, feasting, and football.

And, giving thanks is so much more than a holiday on our calendar. Giving thanks is meant to be a spiritual practice and a lifestyle.

Giving thanks is an important spiritual practice in which we acknowledge God as the giver of all good things in our lives. Giving thanks helps us to grow in awareness of what God is doing in us, through us, and around us. This discipline of giving thanks can involve other spiritual practices like reflection, worship, community, celebration, and prayer, to name a few.

Giving thanks goes beyond a spiritual practice. In the word of God, we are invited, even commanded, to choose a lifestyle of giving thanks. Thanksgiving is meant to become

second nature to us. In other words, we seek to become unconsciously competent in giving thanks. We want thanksgiving to become second nature, a part of our lifestyle.

Gratitude is expressed all through the Bible. Just look up the phrase “give thanks” and you discover that it is a major theme in Scripture.

Thanksgiving (תּוֹדָה, todah; εὐχαριστία, eucharistia) is the act of offering thanks or being thankful, usually to God. Thanksgiving is often connected to provision, deliverance, or God’s character. Thanksgiving is commonly associated in Scripture with meals and worship.

Guthrie notes that thanksgiving is a characteristic of the entire Christian life (Guthrie, *Theology as Thanksgiving*, 181–216). Christians are to thank God for creating and sustaining the world and for His ongoing redemption of it through Jesus. They are expected to pray to God privately (Matthew 5:6) and thank Him for what He has done (Luke 17:12–19). The Psalms display individual prayers of thanks (Psalm 69:30–36). The New Testament includes individual thanks for fellow believers (Philemon 1:4). Thanklessness is regarded as a rejection of God, which leads to further sin and eventual judgment (Romans 1:21).

Ultimately, Christians are to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:17). From this perspective, all of an individual’s life in Christ—whether in worship, at meals, or otherwise—becomes an opportunity to offer thanks.

Jesus lived a life of thanksgiving

The New Testament records Jesus offering thanksgiving to God on several occasions. For example, when reflecting upon the division between those who accepted Him and those who rejected Him, Jesus thanks God for hiding His plans from the wise and revealing them instead to little children (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21). Also, before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus thanks God for hearing Him (John 11:41–42). The most notable accounts of Jesus giving thanks are during His feeding miracles and at the Last Supper (McKnight, C. 2016.

Thanksgiving. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press).

Think about the impact and influence of giving thanks.

On the one hand, being around someone who is full of thanks and gratitude is contagious. Hearing someone give thanks can provoke others toward love and good deeds... like the good practice of giving thanks (Hebrews 10:24 NIV).

On the other hand, grumbling opens the door to judgment. Grumbling and complaining are **infectious**. (Read Number 13:26-33; 14:1-38.)

Does it surprise you that God made the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years because they grumbled?

God clearly is not pleased with grumbling. It doesn't make him happy to hear his children complain constantly. Does that sound like anyone you know?

Being grateful is a choice. It is not a feeling which is dependent on our circumstances. We can see that clearly in the lives of the Pilgrims. They believed that God was in control of their lives. The Pilgrims responded to the circumstances of their lives with a perspective that said, "God has allowed this for our good."

Grumbling and complaining open the door to judgment. Grumbling and complaining are infectious.

And, God has shown us a better way.

Intentionally embracing the spiritual practice of giving thanks is a skill that God uses to transform our lives and to open the door to blessings for us.

1. **Giving thanks nurtures in us an awareness of God and what he is doing around us** (John 3:3).
 - a. Jesus said that those who are born again can see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).
 - b. We are invited to live in awareness, to see what is unseen, to commune with him who is invisible, to know the one who is Spirit. We can live a life of awareness of God, of who is in us and what he is doing around us.
 - c. *Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and **consider** the great love of the Lord (Psalm 107:43).* **To consider** is an invitation to be aware.
 - d. In Psalm 107, the people needed direction, deliverance, healing, and provision. Awareness is cultivated in the context of what is repeated throughout the Psalm: *Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for people....*
2. **Giving thanks makes room in our lives for God** (Ephesians 3:16-21; Psalm 105:1-5).

- a. *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... (Ephesians 3:16-17 NIV). 20 Never doubt God's mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelievable dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you. 21 Now we offer up to God all the glorious praise that rises from every church in every generation through Jesus Christ—and all that will yet be manifest through time and eternity. Amen! (Ephesians 3:20-21 PT).*
- b. *Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. 2 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. 3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. 4 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. 5 Remember the wonders he has done... (Psalm 105:1-5).*
3. **Giving thanks changes our perspective (reframing)** (Philippians 4:4-9).
 - a. *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:4-9 NIV).*
4. **Giving thanks expresses faith in our God** (Psalm 107:1).
 - a. *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever (Psalm 107:1).*
 - b. Because we know and believe that God is good and full of lovingkindness, we give him thanks.
5. **Giving thanks is a weapon against resentment, bitterness, and deception.**
 - a. Without being thankful, we are unaware of God and what he is doing. We are prone to focus on what is broken, needy, or falls short of our expectations.
 - b. In a culture that focuses on its rights, on injustice, on brokenness, on who is to blame, on what is wrong, we have the chance to shine like a Lighthouse beacon, piercing the darkness and fog with the light of Christ. Our culture dwells on injustice, on being victims, and on not getting our way. With a wrong perception, we are easily deceived,

blinded to the goodness, grace, and mercy which God is showering down on us.

- c. *See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many (Hebrews 12:15).*
 - d. In the Psalms, many times the scripture begins with a lament, a cry, or a litany of issues. But the Psalmist, as he cries out to God, gains new perspective. He makes a list of what God has done and promised. There, he is lifted out of the pit, and he sees life from God's point of view.
 - e. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-8).*
 - f. *Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse (Philippians 4:6-8 MSG).*
6. **Giving thanks honors God** (Psalm 50:22-23).
- a. Conversely, ingratitude dishonors God and opens the door to judgment on our lives.
 - b. *Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, 15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me... 22 Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue: 23 He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:14-15, 22-23 NIV).*
7. **Giving thanks prepares the way for God to do more in our lives** (Psalm 50:23).
- a. *He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23 NIV).*
 - b. Like John the Baptist, we are called to be forerunners, those who prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.
 - c. When we give thanks, we become a door, a way for the King of Glory to step down and step in.
8. **Giving thanks gets us into a cycle or flow of blessing from God, through God, and to God** (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). Also, read this passage in The Message.

Practicing giving thanks.

I want to invite you to try on the spiritual practice of giving thanks.

1. Take time to remember and write down as many things for which you are thankful as you can. Then, take the time to pray, giving thanks to God and blessing the Lord.
2. Practice giving thanks at least once a day in writing, in prayer, and/or in conversation with others.
3. Reflect with yourself and/or others as you practice giving thanks. What you are learning? What challenge(s) you are facing? What transformation is taking place in your life as you practice giving thanks on a regular basis?

Listen to this testimony from [My Family's Gratitude Plan](#), by [FamilyLife.com](#):

Recently I read a book titled *One Thousand Gifts*, by Ann Voskamp. A mother of six, Ann found herself transformed by a challenge to list 1,000 things for which she's thankful. So I pulled out a spiral notebook and got started writing my own list. Here's what I didn't anticipate: Combing the day for things I'm thankful for is replacing my old way of seeing the world. It turns my eyes from all the things that aren't going my way—or even from the discouragement of legitimate problems—and onto the gifts God keeps piling up, just dumping them in stacks and stacks into my life. In essence, it helps me choose joy. Refusing to complain is a good discipline for my mouth. But to transform my heart, God actually replaced my complaining by helping me see His goodness and worship Him for it ([My Family's Gratitude Plan](#), by [FamilyLife](#)). (For more helpful resources on marriage and family, please visit [FamilyLife.com](#).)

Summary: Giving thanks is so much more than a holiday on our calendar. Giving thanks is meant to be a spiritual practice and a lifestyle for followers of the Lord Jesus.

Ministry time:

Addendum: [How to Be Thankful in All Things](#)

By Billy Graham. November 21, 2017

Are you thankful no matter what? Perhaps you have lost your job recently, as the economy has continued to struggle. Or you may have lost your health, or a loved one. Such circumstances can be tremendously difficult. But even so, we all have much to be thankful for. Look with me at the story of a man who had every right to be bitter—but wasn't.

The next footsteps in the corridor, he knew, might be those of the guards taking him away to his execution. His only bed was the hard, cold stone floor of the dank, cramped prison cell. Not an hour passed when he was free from the constant irritation of the chains and the pain of the iron manacles cutting into his wrists and legs.

Separated from friends, unjustly accused, brutally treated—if ever a person had a right to complain, it was this man, languishing almost forgotten in a harsh Roman prison. But instead of complaints, his lips rang with words of praise and thanksgiving!

The man was the Apostle Paul—a man who had learned the meaning of true thanksgiving, even in the midst of great adversity. Earlier, when he had been imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote, “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:19-20, NIV).

Think of it: Always giving thanks for everything—no matter the circumstances! Thanksgiving for the Apostle Paul was not a once-a-year celebration, but a daily reality that changed his life and made him a joyful person in every situation.

Thanksgiving—the giving of thanks—to God for all His blessings should be one of the most distinctive marks of the believer in Jesus Christ. We must not allow a spirit of ingratitude to harden our heart and chill our relationship with God and with others.

Nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. And nothing will do more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness.

In the ancient world, leprosy was a terrible disease. It hopelessly disfigured those who had it, and it permanently cut them off from normal society. Without exception, every leper yearned for one thing: To be healed.

One day 10 lepers approached Jesus outside a village, loudly pleading with Him to heal them. In an instant He restored them all to perfect health—but only one came back and thanked Him. All the rest left without a word of thanks, their minds preoccupied only with themselves, gripped with a spirit of ingratitude.

Today, too, ingratitude and thanklessness are far too common. Children forget to thank their parents for all that they do. Common courtesy is scorned. We take for granted the ways that others help us. Above all, we fail to thank God for His blessings.

Ingratitude is a sin, just as surely as is lying or stealing or immorality or any other sin condemned by the Bible. One of the Bible's indictments against rebellious humanity is that "although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (Romans 1:21, NIV). An ungrateful heart is a heart that is cold toward God and indifferent to His mercy and love. It is a heart that has forgotten how dependent we are on God for everything.

From one end of the Bible to the other, we are commanded to be thankful. In fact, thankfulness is the natural outflowing of a heart that is attuned to God. The psalmist declared, "Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving" (Psalm 147:7, NIV). Paul wrote, "Be thankful" (Colossians 3:15, NIV). A spirit of thanksgiving is always the mark of a joyous Christian.

Why should we be thankful? Because God has blessed us, and we should be thankful for each blessing.

Thank God for the Material Blessings That He Gives You

We seem never to be satisfied with what we have—rich or poor, healthy or sick. But what a difference it makes when we realize that everything we have has been given to us by God! King David prayed, "Wealth and honor come from you ... We give you thanks, and praise your glorious name ... Everything comes from you" (1 Chronicles 29:12-14, NIV).

Some years ago I visited a man who was wealthy and successful. He was the envy of all his friends and business associates. But as we talked, he broke down in tears, confessing that he was miserable inside. Wealth had not been able to fill the empty place in his heart.

A few hours later I visited another man only a short distance away. His cottage was humble, and he had almost nothing in the way of this world's possessions. And yet his face was radiant as he told me about the work he was doing for Christ and how Christ had filled his life with meaning and purpose. I am convinced that the second man was

really the rich man. Although he didn't have much, he had learned to be thankful for everything that God had given him. Paul declared, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12, NIV). A spirit of thankfulness makes all the difference.

Are you constantly preoccupied with what you do not have? Or have you learned to thank God for what you do have?

Thank God for the People in Your Life

It is so easy to take people for granted, or even to complain and become angry because they do not meet our every wish. But we need to give thanks for those around us—our spouses, our children, our relatives, our friends and others who help us in some way.

I once received a letter from a woman who began by telling me how fortunate she was to have a kind, considerate husband. She then used four pages to list all his faults! How many marriages and other relationships grow cold and eventually are shattered because of the sin of ingratitude?

Do you let others know that you appreciate them and are thankful for them? The Christians in Corinth were far from perfect, but Paul began his first letter to them by saying, "I always thank God for you" (1 Corinthians 1:4, NIV). When a group of believers (whom Paul had never met) came out to greet him as he approached Rome, we read that "at the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged" (Acts 28:15, NIV). Thank God for those who touch your life.

Thank God in the Midst of Trials and Even Persecution

We draw back from difficulties, yet not one of us is exempt from some kind of trouble. In many parts of the world it is dangerous even to be a Christian because of persecution.

And yet in the midst of those trials we can thank God, because we know that He has promised to be with us and that He will help us. We know that He can use times of suffering to draw us closer to Himself: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2-3, NIV).

When the prophet Daniel learned that evil men were plotting against him to destroy him, "he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Daniel 6:10, NIV). The Bible commands, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NIV). Paul declared,

“You will even be able to thank God in the midst of pain and distress because you are privileged to share the lot of those who are living in the light” (Colossians 1:12, Phillips).

I don't know what trials you may be facing right now, but God does, and He loves you and is with you by His Holy Spirit. Cultivate a spirit of thankfulness even in the midst of trials and heartaches.

“God has given us the greatest Gift of all—His Son, who died on the cross and rose again so that we can know Him personally and spend eternity with Him in heaven.”

Thank God Especially for His Salvation in Jesus Christ

God has given us the greatest Gift of all—His Son, who died on the cross and rose again so that we can know Him personally and spend eternity with Him in heaven: “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15, NIV).

The Bible tells us that we are separated from God because we have sinned. But God loves us—He loves you, He loves me—and He wants us to be part of His family forever. He loves us so much that He sent His only Son into the world to die as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. All we need to do is reach out in faith and accept Christ as our Savior and Lord: “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” (John 3:16, NIV).

Have you opened your heart to Jesus Christ? If not, turn to Him with a simple prayer of repentance and faith, and thank Him for what He has done for you. And if you do know Christ, how long has it been since you thanked God for your salvation? We should not let a day go by without thanking God for His mercy and His grace to us in Jesus Christ.

Thank God for His Continued Presence and Power in Your Life

When we come to Christ, it is not the end but the beginning of a whole new life! He is with us, and He wants to help us follow Him and His Word.

In ourselves we do not have the strength that we need to live the way God wants us to live. But when we turn to Him, we discover that “it is God who works in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13, NIV). Jesus promised His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18, 20, NIV).

In many countries a special day is set aside each year for thanksgiving. But for the Christian every day can be a day of thanksgiving, as we are “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20, NIV).

Do you know the joy of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ? If you'll turn to God, He can take away your bitterness and give you the spirit of true thankfulness.