

Don't Give Thanks: Be Thankful

Make Thankfulness & Gratitude a Defining Characteristic of Your Life
Tim Williams, Camp Hill Church of Christ, 2016-12-04

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.

6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

Thanksgiving is gone. We are done with being thankful for another year, right? Many are, but I sure hope we aren't!

Gratitude and thanksgiving are familiar ideas to the Christian, but I want to challenge you to go much further and develop a lifestyle of deep gratitude and constant thanksgiving to God in your heart, mind, and soul.

Thankfulness is foundational to the Christian life!

Philippians 4:4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Colossians 3:15-17

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And **be thankful**. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with **gratitude in your hearts**. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God** the Father through him.”

Notice how Being thankful and having gratitude is central to this passage!

Thankfulness is central to Worship – at the very core of our encouraging one another!

Psalm 100

“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

Psalm 69:30-31

“I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hooves.”

Thankful doesn’t mean forgetting our problems.

I am not saying forget or ignore the problems we face in life or the sin we must address in our own lives and the lives of others! Being positive, thankful, and full of praise doesn’t mean we ignore everything.

But a person that develops a deep mindset and heart of constant thankfulness and gratitude toward God is prepared to deal with the difficulties and problems of life,

Psalm 30:2-5

“Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

James 1:2

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Despite whatever happens we must look to developing a deeply thankful life. The world forgets thankfulness and ends up turning from God!

Romans 1:21

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

We are Christians and we all give thanks to God, right? Yes... but... What God wants is far more than just a prayer of thanks before a meal and a thank you at your evening prayers.

1 Thess 5:16-18

“Rejoice always, pray continually, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 5:20

“...**always** giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Psalm 138:1-2

“I will praise you, Lord, **with all my heart**; before the “gods” I will sing your praise. I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your unfailing love and your faithfulness...”

Psalm 30:11-12

“You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.”

Psalm 103:1-5

“Praise the Lord, **my soul**; **all my inmost being**, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, **my soul**, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

Do these verses describe your heart, mind, and soul? Your inmost being? Thankfulness and gratitude should be one of the defining attributes of the Christian. One of the things that makes us stand out from the world!

The Science of Gratitude & Thankfulness

And did you know there is even science to back up the value of gratitude and thankfulness!

How Gratitude Can Change Your Life

by Marelisa Fabrega

<http://www.thechangeblog.com/gratitude/>

Gratitude means thankfulness, counting your blessings, noticing simple pleasures, and acknowledging everything that you receive. It means learning to live your life as if everything were a miracle, and being aware on a continuous basis of how much you’ve been given. Gratitude shifts your focus from what your life lacks to the abundance that is already present. In addition, behavioral and psychological research has shown the surprising life improvements that can stem from the practice of gratitude. Giving thanks makes people happier and more resilient, it strengthens relationships, it improves health, and it reduces stress.

Research Shows Gratitude Heightens Quality of Life

Two psychologists, Michael McCollough of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, and Robert Emmons of the University of California at Davis, wrote an article about an experiment they conducted on gratitude and its impact on well-being. The study split several hundred people into three different groups and all of the participants were asked to keep daily diaries. The first group kept a diary of the events that occurred during the day without being told specifically to write about either good or bad things; the second group was told to record their unpleasant experiences; and the last group was instructed to make a daily list of things for which they were grateful. The results of the study indicated that daily gratitude exercises resulted in higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, optimism, and energy. In addition, those in the gratitude group experienced less depression and stress, were more likely to help others, exercised more regularly, and made greater progress toward achieving personal goals.

Dr. Emmons – who has been studying gratitude for almost ten years and is considered by many to be the world’s leading authority on gratitude – is author of the book, “Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier”. The information in this book is based on research involving thousands of people conducted by a number of different researchers around the world. One of the things these studies show is that practicing gratitude can increase happiness levels by around 25%. This is significant, among other things, because just as there’s a certain weight that feels natural to your body and which your body strives to maintain, your basic level of happiness is set at a predetermined point. If something bad happens to you during the day, your happiness can drop momentarily, but then it returns to its natural set-point. Likewise, if something positive happens to you, your level of happiness rises, and then it returns once again to your “happiness set-point”. A practice of gratitude raises your “happiness set-point” so you can remain at a higher level of happiness regardless of outside circumstances.

In addition, Dr. Emmons’ research shows that those who practice gratitude tend to be more creative, bounce back more quickly from adversity, have a stronger immune system, and have stronger social relationships than those who don’t practice gratitude. He further points out that “To say we feel grateful is not to say that everything in our lives is necessarily great. It just means we are aware of our blessings.”

See me if you are interested in reading the rest of this article. And there are several other articles, other studies, and web pages about what has been discovered about gratitude and thankfulness.

I really enjoy when honest science discovers and shows that what God said is true!

Thanksgiving & Gratitude The Next Step

What is the next step for each of us? A lifestyle of total heart and soul thanksgiving is not easy. It takes thought, planning, study, and prayer. It takes perspective. It takes avoiding the negative! You can't be a thankful person at your very heart and whine at the same time! You can't be grateful - have a grateful heart - and complain at the same time!

So how do we change our lives and become a grateful, thankful people? No matter our heart now, how can we be even more thankful in our lives, hearts, and minds before, and to, God?

Here are some suggestions gleaned from articles, sermons, God's word, and life:

Notice and Appreciate Each Day's Gifts

Consciously change your focus. You don't need to focus on problems, they will certainly yell loud and win your attention. You do need to focus on all the good things in life because they won't grab your attention. From the article I referenced earlier the author also says:

"People tend to take for granted the good that is already present in their lives. There's a gratitude exercise that instructs that you should imagine losing some of the things that you take for granted, such as your home, your ability to see or hear, your ability to walk, or anything that currently gives you comfort. Then imagine getting each of these things back, one by one, and consider how grateful you would be for each and every one."

Keep a Gratitude/Prayer Journal

Keep a Gratitude & thankfulness prayer journal. Each day write down in it 5 things for which you are grateful and wish to give thanks. Organize your thoughts and spend time in each area you can think of by writing down the things in that area to be thankful for:

- Your body: We are "fearfully and wonderfully made" In spite of any aging or health issues list all that is wonderful about the body God gave you.
- Write down as many reasons as you can that make you grateful for your spouse, children, parents, family, friends, the body of Christ, etc.
- Read God's Word and contemplate salvation, eternity, and God's love. Make this a part of your day constantly throughout the day.
- What is good about your job, home, car, neighbor, stars, challenges, struggles, etc., etc., etc.!

As you write and then re-read what you have written, make it a constant informal prayer to God.

Stop Complaining, Whining, and Being Negative!

“Last year (This was several years ago) millions of people took the challenge proposed by Will Bowen, a Kansas City minister, to go 21 days without complaining, criticizing, or gossiping. To help condition the participants to stop complaining, they each wore a purple No-Complaint wristband. Several authors in the self-improvement genre have suggested that people do something similar to help condition themselves to be constantly aware of the things in life that they’re grateful for.”

Don’t Complain for 1 full week (or 3 as the article says) Set a goal to not complain for 1 week. Focus on shutting down your negativity. Stop complaining & whining about your age, your problems, your health, your failings, your lack, your anything and everything! Whenever a complaint comes to mind replace it with a prayer of thanksgiving. If a negative needs to be dealt with, first address what you can be thankful for in or around the situation (including being able to address the negative) and then address it positively.

Do a wristband, do a charm bracelet, write down something, put a Bible verse in your pocket. Do whatever will help you to focus on being grateful and stop whining.

Use Visual Cues

Develop and use various reminders including post-it notes, scripture cards, or anything else you can think of that will visually remind you to be thankful.

Develop Instant Thankfulness

You can turn everything in your life into a mental or visual reminder to be thankful if you practice. You can develop the skill of just saying thank you directly to God informally at any moment for anything as you are driving, walking, working, etc. God hears you! Every sunset, every kiss, every hug, every wonderful flavor – all can be cues to remind you to say a quick thank you to God.

Focus on Christ and God

Part of this change of focus is to focus on Christ not just when you worship but in every aspect of your life.

As we read before:

Colossians 3:17

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God** the Father through him.

Share It With Others

A very important aspect of our Christian walk is that we should be sharing our thanksgiving and gratefulness.

Isaiah 12:4-6

In that day you will say: "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

Psalm 9:1-2

"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High."

Psalm 105:1-3

"Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice."

Telling others is praising God, good for us, and good for the hearers!

Look To The Good Examples Around You

Dru Annivatarte has finished her race and gone to receive her crown. But while she was with us and fighting cancer, she amazed and humbled me with her spirit of thankfulness to God and her attitude. Even in the midst of her suffering she was an example to us all. I can't wait to see her again.

When Jennifer began her battle with cancer what I remember were her words of faith, her words of thanksgiving to God and appreciation for the Body of Christ.

Many others have in their own way also exhibited gratitude in the midst of difficulties.

Jenean Radzenko – I cannot remember ever hearing her complain about being deaf! Instead she signs and writes and posts on Facebook what is good and blessed about what she has in her life and in the deaf community! On Facebook she shares many posts, articles, and items from the deaf community. This community rejoices in their shared experience, their strength, their love. They express themselves in such a positive uplifting manner it almost makes one think we who are hearing are the ones that are missing out on something!

That is how we should be about everything!

Challenge Each Other

Challenge and encourage one another to be positive and don't allow each other to be negative, unthankful, and ungrateful. As a group let us challenge each other. We are the Body of Christ, let us excel in praise, gratitude, and thankfulness!

When I whine or complain I give you permission to tell me, remind me, that I shouldn't be that way. And you can mention something I should be thankful for,

Start A Gratitude Group and/or have a Gratitude Partner

There is strength in numbers! Meet together with others for the sole purpose (s-o-l-e) or should I say soul (s-o-u-l) purpose of reducing negativity and developing thankfulness to God.

Many Other Things You Can Do

There are many other things you can do: Change your "inner voice", make a public commitment, have a gratitude/prayer partner, express gratitude to others, etc. I have an article if you are interested called, 22 Gratitude Exercises That Will Change Your Life. You can also look up the many lessons, sermons, and articles available online about developing gratitude as a lifestyle.

My goal today is to call each and every one of you – no matter where you are in your walk with Christ – to become even more thankful, grateful, and overflowing with praise to God.

We don't want a $\frac{3}{4}$ full cup or even full to the brim, we want to be overflowing!

Colossians 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.

The foundation of all is God and our savior Jesus Christ. All else pales next to the everlasting love of God and the fact that He has granted all of us eternal life!!

Why is this extra emphasis on thanksgiving and gratitude important? Because not only will it change your life, it will change the congregation and help us as a body of Christ shine our light brighter for all those looking for something. We have won an eternity of love and joy, shouldn't we act like it!?

Let us encourage one another to make this congregation a beacon of hope, thankfulness, gratitude, and praise to God for all those around us for this will draw in the hurting and the seeking.

Every whine and complaint blows out a candle and every expression of praise and thanksgiving to God lights a fire to be seen in the dark!

I want to close with a powerful verse and an Irish blessing. It is interesting that some of the most uplifting words of faith, Christian attitude, and love can be found in the many Irish blessings and poems. I will leave you with Ephesians 3:16-21 and a favorite Irish blessing:

Ephesians 3:16-21

“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. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

An Irish Blessing

“Count your blessings instead of your crosses;
Count your gains instead of your losses.
Count your joys instead of your woes;
Count your friends instead of your foes.
Count your smiles instead of your tears;
Count your courage instead of your fears.
Count your full years instead of your lean;
Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.
Count your health instead of your wealth;
Love your neighbor as much as yourself.”

If you haven’t put on Christ, if you have any needs, if you have issues you need help with that keep you from a thankful lifestyle, please come to the back as we sing and the elders will help you.