



## **“Giving Thanks Always”**

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Thankfulness should be a reflexive reaction to receiving blessings from others--most importantly, God. Most of us don't appreciate people who receive a gift or gesture of kindness without being grateful. But did you know that gratitude is not merely a reaction that we should have to what we perceive as good things we receive, but that God expects us to be thankful in every circumstance in life? That puts things in a little different light, doesn't it? That's a hard expectation to live up to. Listen to the apostle Paul.

**Ephesians 5:20 “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;”**

Frankly, that is one of the “hard sayings” of the Bible. Not only give thanks to God, but *give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father*. It must've been a hard saying even for the man who penned the words. Do you live with the attitude of Paul? Are you thankful to God through every season and circumstance of life? And what does it say about us if we're not?

There are four attitudes about life that consequently make up four kinds of people. We encounter all four types of people on a daily basis, and mark it down: what kind of person they are will tell you how happy they are. You and I each fit into one of these groups, and whichever one that is will tell us a lot about our relationship to God and to others. It will tell us a lot about ourselves, too.

The first group are those people who are constantly complaining and grumbling. Don't you know people like that? A dark cloud just follows them everywhere they go. They can't look on the bright side of anything. The glass is always half empty. You could give them a million dollars, a clean bill of health, a nice home, a fine car. But I will guarantee you they will still find things to complain and murmur about. They are critical. Consequently, they are typically hard to get along with.

Then, there are people who don't really complain so much; they're just ungrateful. They take things for granted. They almost feel entitled to what they have. They rarely if ever stop to think about where their blessings come from, and they certainly don't give God any of the glory and praise for the bounty of

their lives. These people will often display the same attitude toward others, finding it very hard to say, *thank you*. They may be very prideful.

Then, there are those who DO thank God when something obviously good happens to them. Maybe when someone they love or they themselves escape death or a serious accident, or when something they think is really important works out or goes their way. Well, that IS better than the other two categories, for sure.

There is a fourth kind of attitude that is better than them all. That is to be thankful for all things all of the time. That's the kind of attitude that we are to have if we really have a right relationship with God. Did you know that one of the worst sins, according to the Bible, is the sin of ingratitude? As bad as murder, lying, adultery, perversion, stealing, idolatry, and all of those kinds of things are, did you know that the Bible teaches that it is the sin of ingratitude that leads to all of those other sins? That's right.

**Romans 1:20-21 "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."**

Paul says that that's what led the world away from God toward the very beginning. They were not thankful. What does he mean? He means that God created a world for man to dwell in and have dominion over. He gave man everything he needed to live and thrive. He filled the earth with food, water and beauty. He made man in His own image with the ability to love and appreciate beauty and goodness. But man didn't thank God for it. Because of his pride, his selfish lusts and sinful desires, man didn't want to submit to God. He didn't want to acknowledge God as the source of life and blessing because that would make him subservient and indebted to God. So, their ungrateful hearts rejected Him. Mark it down: when you meet someone who is ungrateful, you're dealing with a proud, self-indulgent, stubbornly independent person. Unthankful people are never happy. Instead they are filled with negativity, selfishness, self-pity and bitterness. That makes them the enemy of God.

Look at what the sin of ingratitude has done to people since the beginning of time. For example, Adam. He was a perfect specimen of the human race. God created him in His own image. Think about it. There were no genetic flaws, no difficulties or challenges to deal with. Sin brought all of that later. Adam, as he was created, was perfect. God prepared him a garden filled with wonderful trees to eat from. He could eat from the tree of life and live forever and he didn't have to work to provide and survive. God gave him a beautiful companion and gave them the marriage relationship to enjoy love, support and companionship. They only had ONE law to keep. God told them they could eat of every tree of the garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and if they were to eat of that one tree, they would forfeit all of that and die.

Well, what happened? Was Adam grateful? In reality, no, because he rebelled against the Creator who gave him all of that. Despite that, God was merciful and He began to unfold His work to redeem man. In the course of time, He raised up a nation of chosen people. He fed them with manna from heaven and quail. He fought their battles for them, clothed them and led them. He made a covenant with them to give them a land flowing with milk and honey. Of all the nations of the earth, He chose them and made that wonderful promise to them. To make them a great people and the heirs of His promises. He made that agreement with the Israelites on the condition of their faithfulness to Him. What a privileged

position they occupied to be the chosen people of God and to be the nation who would produce the Messiah who would save the world from its sin and finally redeem fallen humanity!

But were they thankful? No. Rather, their history recorded throughout the Old Testament shows how that over and over again, they reneged on their covenant with God. While they soaked up the blessings of God, they grumbled, complained, worshipped idols, and lived in sin and immorality. They weren't thankful; they were arrogant. Sadly, that is the history of most of humanity. The sad reality is that it seems that the more we acquire, the more we are given and the more comfortable we become, the less grateful we are. That is ironic but very true.

Thankfulness and gratitude ought to lead men to worship and serve the Lord. Paul asked this question of the church in Rome:

**Romans 2:4 “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”**

Above all others, Christians should know how to be grateful. Not merely to be grateful when some temporal blessing comes along or when things going our way, but to be always grateful, living in view of not only the *physical* blessings God has given us, but even greater and more importantly, the *spiritual* blessings that we have in Christ Jesus. Therefore, to live with the continual attitude of gratitude. One day a year, we set aside time to enjoy home, family and friends and to return thanks to God for our blessings. That has been a tradition of our country for longer than we have been a country. Going back four hundred years, people living in America have paused to thank God for the bounty of this land and the tremendous opportunities this new world has offered us. That's all very well and good. We should. But the highest plane of living, the highest level of faith and spirituality, the key to contentment and joy is to learn to do as Paul said in our text: *to give thanks always*.

Johnson Oatman Jr.'s old song says:

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,  
 When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
 Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
 And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.  
 Are you ever burdened with a load of care?  
 Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?  
 Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,  
 And you will keep singing as the days go by.  
 When you look at others with their lands of gold,  
 Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;  
 Count your many blessings—money cannot buy  
 Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.  
 So, amid the conflict whether great or small,  
 Do not be discouraged, God is over all;  
 Count your many blessings, angels will attend,  
 Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.  
 Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
 Count your blessings, see what God has done!

That theme is biblical.

**Psalms 118:1 “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.”**

**Psalms 103:2 “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:”**

**Psalms 100:4-5 “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”**

That is how we are to enter the presence of God—with an attitude of thankfulness. Look again at Paul’s command to the Ephesian church and to us.

**Ephesians 5:20 “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;”**

What are we to be thankful for? He says, all things. That includes more than we could ever name.

**Psalms 68:19 “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.”**

Every day, a new load of benefits, as the psalmist refers to it, comes our way. Have you ever noticed that little word *Selah* in the Bible? It appears more than seventy times in the **Psalms**, and something like three times in **Habakkuk**. Scholars have a hard time deciding exactly what it means, but some think that it means to *think about it*. In fact, the Amplified Bible renders it, “*Pause and calmly think about that.*” So, think about what he says in that verse. Every single day, the God of heaven loads us down with benefit or blessing.

Did you know that not only can you never count the blessings of a lifetime, but you can’t even count the blessings of a single day! I challenge you to try.

**Lamentations 3:22-23 “It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”**

Even the physical, material universe is held together every second of every day by the will and the word of God.

**Colossians 1:16-17 “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”**

**Hebrews 1:3 “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;”**

The forces that propel and sustain the universe are constant and dependable. You might say, *But those are immutable, natural laws that explain all of that*. Yes, but where did those laws come from? The very air you breathe and every other necessary element to sustaining life minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, year by year is the blessing of God. The seasons that change, seed time and harvest—we may take them for granted, but they are all decreed, set up like clockwork by the architect of the ages and we can depend on them year by year, season by season. *His mercies are new every morning.*

There is an old story about a little boy who came home from the grocery store with a loaf of bread. His father thought he would teach him a lesson, so he asked, "Son, where did you get that bread?"

He said, "I got it from the grocery store."

The boy's father said, "Well, where did the store get it from?"

The son said, "He got it from the baker."

"Well, where did the baker get it?"

"He made it out of flour."

"Where did he get the flour?"

The boy said, "He got it from the mill."

His father said, "Where did the miller get the grain to make the flour?"

"He got it from the farmer."

"Where did the farmer get it?"

The son replied, "Well, he got it from God."

"So, son, where did you get that bread?"

He said, "I guess I got it from God."

**James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."**

All of the dependable and constant things of life that make life possible and make life what it is exist and consist by the word of God. Do you thank God for the food you eat every day? We waste more than we consume. We've even become a gluttonous society until we are the most obese culture in the world! The poorest people in this country have more to eat than many people in far off lands around the globe. Most of us have more clothes hanging in our closets than we can wear in a month or even a year. We have clean water to drink and homes to live in that look like mansions to billions of people in other countries around the world. Don't grumble and complain about the home that you have and how the neighbor's house is nicer or how great it would be to live on the other side of town. Don't covet what somebody else has. The Bible calls that sin. One of the reasons I believe it is a sin is because it is a mark of ingratitude for what we DO have.

We have air conditioning to keep us comfortably cool in our homes in the summer, heat to keep us warm in the winter, cars to carry us wherever we want to go. Count your blessings and name them one by one. I say you can't do it, but we are to try.

The Bible teaches that every single prayer we pray should be framed in thanksgiving and gratitude.

**Philippians 4:6 "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."**

Paul says that when you ask for something, you do so with thanksgiving. Why should God give you something else if you don't thank Him for what He's already given you? In fact, do you ever pray without asking for any favor from God? Do you ever just bow your head and pray, thanking God for the everyday blessings of life? Or do you take it all for granted? Do you only thank God for some "big blessing" that comes along, but take for granted what He gives us every day that we live, without which we could not live? Do you thank Him for life itself?

When Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra in **Acts 14**, the idolaters there all began to worship them, like gods of some kind. Paul rebuked their idolatry:

**Acts 14:15-17 “And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”**

We should thank God always. It’s really more than what we say when we pray, as important as that is. It’s more than a matter of being so grateful for the abundance of blessings in our lives—most of all, spiritual, but temporal as well. Our hearts should be full of praise. The goodness of God should lead us to repentance, consecration, service, worship and dedication. The humility that comes with a grateful heart makes us realize our dependence, our inferiority, our subservience unto God.

Notice what else Paul said in our text: *Giving thanks always for all things...* Yes, spiritual blessings AND temporal blessings. But here is the real test of gratitude. If Paul had said to *sometimes* be thankful, that wouldn’t be so hard to do, but he said *always and for all things give thanks*. Do you live with that kind of attitude toward God? Does that not only describe the prayers you pray, but the life you live as well?

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”**

Some translations render that as *whatever happens* or *in all circumstances, give thanks*. Oh, how we fall so short of Pauls’ admonition and his own example. You may be thinking, *There you are telling ME to be grateful, but you don’t know the problems I have!* No, I probably don’t. But you know, I didn’t write those words. Paul did. I didn’t write the book of **Ephesians** where we took our text from. Paul wrote that. Do you know where he was when he wrote it? He was in prison. Do you know what happened to him in Ephesus, where these people were to whom he wrote this letter? He’d been lied about, abused, mistreated and thrown out of the city. Read what it says about his visit there in the book of **Acts**. Paul suffered. Oh, the things Paul suffered! But he suffered with a thankful heart.

We are even to thank God in the trials and difficulties of life. Yes, that’s hard. But it’s the key to happiness, contentment and a godly life. You simply have no idea in the trials and difficulties of your life, as hard as that may be to bear, what God may be sparing you from. You may have no idea what grand purpose and scheme God has for your life in allowing you to suffer that trial, tragedy or problem. *In all things, giving thanks always.*

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