



Thinking About Thanksgiving

By

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Introduction

We are just days away from celebrating another Thanksgiving Day. It's a time set aside every year in the United States to consider the many gifts God has given us and to share words of Thanksgiving with Him and our family and friends.

I received a business call from Australia a few years ago where the person calling wished me Happy Thanksgiving and said they wished their country had a similar holiday where everyone would be thankful for what they have. We do have a lot to be thankful for in the United States, but Christians can be thankful wherever they live. Being thankful as a child of God is a natural outgrowth of our new life in Jesus Christ. However, God knows and understands the many battles we have with our flesh and lovingly guides us toward this amazing Truth. It is important to be thankful.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)

The Journey

What should our response be to God's continual provision and protection? **Thanksgiving!** God has called His people to be thankful in all we do and say. It's at the heart of how we should respond to God in our lives "in everything."

Here's a brief journey of thanksgiving, beginning with Israel after God freed them from slavery in Egypt and continuing until the day we are all together in Heaven under the eternal care of our Heavenly Father.

Moses

'This *is* the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to the Lord: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of blended flour mixed with oil. Besides the cakes, as his offering he shall offer leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering." Leviticus 7:11-13

"And when you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, offer *it* of your own free will. On the same day it shall be eaten; you shall leave none of it until morning: I *am* the Lord." Leviticus 22:29-30

King David

“The Lord lives! Blessed *be* my Rock! Let God be exalted, The Rock of my salvation! *It is* God who avenges me, And subdues the peoples under me; He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me; You have delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, And sing praises to Your name. ‘*He is* the tower of salvation to His king, And shows mercy to His anointed, To David and his descendants forevermore.” 2 Samuel 22:47-51

“And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the Lord God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, *then* Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals; Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly *blew* the trumpets before the ark of the covenant of God.” 1 Chronicles 16:4-6

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever. And say, ‘Save us, O God of our salvation; Gather us together, and deliver us from the Gentiles, To give thanks to Your holy name, To triumph in Your praise.’ Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting! And all the people said, ‘Amen!’ and praised the Lord.” 1 Chronicles 16:34-36

“Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High.” Psalm 50:14

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord *is* the great God, And the great King above all gods.” Psalm 95:1-3

“Know that the Lord, He *is* God; *It is* He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves; *We are* His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name. For the Lord *is* good; His mercy *is* everlasting, And His truth *endures* to all generations.” Psalm 100:3-5

Ezra and Nehemiah

“When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: ‘For *He is* good, For His mercy *endures* forever toward Israel.’ Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.” Ezra 3:10-11

“Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, *with* cymbals and stringed instruments and harps.” Nehemiah 12:27

Jesus Christ

“So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples; and the disciples *gave* to the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.” Matthew 15:35-37

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’” Matthew 26:26-28

Apostle Paul

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” Romans 1:8

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Romans 7:24-25

“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be blameless* in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

“Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.” Ephesians 1:15-16

“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Ephesians 5:17-21

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Colossians 2:6-7

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.” Colossians 3:15

“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1
Thessalonians 5:16-18

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.” 2
Thessalonians 1:3

Heaven

“*The* four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.’ Revelation 4:8-11

The Opportunity

Have you ever gone through some tough financial times? Ever had a deep concern about someone in your family? Ever struggled with sin? Ever faced a medical emergency? Have you ever thought your world was going to collapse beneath the weight of your problems? Sure you have. We all have. That's part of life in this world. Nobody escapes trouble. But there's a difference between how Christians and non-Christians deal with the trouble: Christ is in us!

Being a child of God is more than a name. It's an **opportunity** to share our lives with the God of Life, Jesus Christ. He's our Lord and Savior, He's our God, He's our Counselor, He's our closest Friend. Jesus understands the problems of this world thoroughly. He has walked in our shoes far more than a mile. He's been there ... done that. He knows what it's like to be human and deal with human problems. He's the perfect Man and never sinned, but he still faced our problems.

Christ's answer to our troubles is, "Be anxious for nothing." Jesus knows how easy it is for the human heart and mind to worry. He knows how upset we can get. He knows how anxiety can destroy us over time. He knows how it clouds our thinking and feeling and causes us to lose focus about what's really important in life.

Jesus gives us four steps to deal with troubles that cause anxiety. This list starts with Philippians 4:4. That's the context for our study.

- Rejoice in the Lord always.
- Let your gentleness be known to all men.
- Be anxious for nothing.
- In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

I want to spend a few moments with you about the last part of Step 4: **“with thanksgiving.”** Why did God say that? Why do we need thanksgiving as part of our prayer requests?

Christians are human. We are sinners saved by God's Grace. What makes us different from others in the world is our special relationship to God. He is our Loving Heavenly Father. We are His children, members of the Body of His Son Jesus Christ. We are co-heirs with Christ. We have lots of potential, but we still live in bodies of clay. We fight with thoughts of discouragement and anxiety. The Apostle Paul wrote about wanting to do one thing but doing the opposite. He wrote about dragging the old man around with him like it was a corpse. This is true. We are “between” mortality and immortality. We are “between” being sinners in this world and being “like” Christ in heaven. We are in a transition period. That's tough because nothing is quite like it ought to be. We are alive in Christ, but we aren't free of the physical death that surrounds us. We are aware of the spiritual light God has given us, but we still live in a world of spiritual darkness. We have

every spiritual blessing, but we still struggle in this world.

God wants us to **THINK** differently. He knows our “thoughts” can do us in. We “think” the wrong things, “believe” the wrong things, “do” the wrong things. Being **anxious** is the wrong thing. It’s evidence we’re not “relying” on Christ in us. What’s God’s advice for dealing with that? Pray! Okay, we pray but we still worry. Now what? Pray differently. Pray “**with thanksgiving.**”

Worry and anxiety are **negative** ways of thinking. Giving thanks is a **positive** way of thinking. Being negative is one of the major things sin did to mankind. Being positive is what the Holy Spirit wants to do for us. Adults have spent decades thinking negatively. Changing our way of thinking won’t happen over night. You’ll have a little victory and then suffer a big defeat. You’ll have another victory and another defeat. What should happen is that we trust the Christ Who lives in us.

One of the positive things giving thanks does for us is cause our minds to “rehearse” the good things Christ has done for us. The process of remembering the positives in our lives builds a reservoir of positive thoughts that can balance out the number of negative thoughts we have in a day. Think about that for a minute. You and I hear scores of negative things every day. We hear them at work, at school, at home, around the neighborhood. We think our own negative thoughts dozens of times a day. We have a huge storehouse of negativity built up in our minds. We have to do

something to counter that. That's where praying with thanksgiving comes in. We have to have some balance. If we think about 200 negative things a day, for instance, we need scores of positive thoughts to counter that.

What happens when you thank God? You begin to feel better. You become calm. You become less anxious. You worry less. You place things in proper perspective. You realize you're pretty fortunate after all. You see things are better than you thought. You start the process of rejoicing. It begins with being thankful.

God takes our thankfulness and positive thinking and uses it to build a wall of peace around our minds. The more we thank God, the higher and thicker that wall gets. We stop thanking God for awhile and let the negative thoughts of worry and anxiety into our minds again and the wall of peace gets pretty thin. We must remember that we are "in" Christ and He is "in" us.

Do whatever it takes. Spend whatever time you need to be thankful each day to offset the worry and anxiety that can overtake you. Some days are tougher than others. What's at stake here is your well-being and your enjoyment of Christ in you. God's willing and able to guard your mind. He wants to give you a peace that transcends all understanding. Your part is to pray with thanksgiving.

You may want to begin by writing all of the things you are thankful for in life. The list should be long. Once you've written **everything** you can think of, think about it throughout your day. Get to the point that

praying with thanksgiving becomes natural. Thanksgiving will be in the front of your mind and on the tip of your tongue at all times. It will make a difference in how you think and how you speak to others. People around you will notice what a positive, thankful, gentle, joyful person you are. They will see that you are “in” Christ and He is “in” you.

The Day

Welcome to Thanksgiving Day! As I consider the meaning of this special day, my thoughts turn to the Amazing Grace of our loving God. What He has done for me, for all of us, is beyond words of gratitude. He has given so much of Himself and His creation to us. He gave us air to breathe, water to drink and food to eat. He also gave us family, friends, and brothers and sisters in the Faith.

Yes, one of the great things He has done for all of us ... is you! You are a blessing to me and every member of the Body of Christ.

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” Romans 1:8

“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.” 1 Corinthians 1:4

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” Philippians 1:3

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” Colossians 1:3

“... remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” 1 Thessalonians 1:3

“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy

with which we rejoice for your sake before our God?” 1
Thessalonians 3:9

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.” 2
Thessalonians 1:3

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” 2 Thessalonians 2:13

“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.” 2 Timothy 1:3

“I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers.”
Philemon 1:4

The Apostle Paul thanked God for the Christian brothers and sisters in his life. He began many of his letters with that spirit of thankfulness. Paul's words were rich and encouraging to those who received his letters. Paul felt thankful deep in his soul and understood the importance of sharing his thanks with those who were special in his life.

We need more of that in the Body of Christ: being thankful for our brothers and sisters and telling them, often. Life's rough enough as it

is. Most people don't feel appreciated for who they are and what they do in families and communities. Unfortunately, most Christians don't feel appreciated in their local churches. Why is that? Is it because Christians really aren't thankful for other believers? Maybe with some, but many Christians are thankful. So why don't they share their thankfulness? Is it because we get very busy with our own concerns and take others for granted or just forget to say thanks? I think that's a big part of it.

A friend of mine calls it being “**other-centered**,” rather than “self-centered.” Being “other-centered” works in marriages, parenting and with fellow believers. It's understanding the work and efforts of others and **regularly** sharing your thankfulness to them. It also helps the entire Body of Christ to share your thankfulness to individuals openly to the whole church. Look at what Paul did.

“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. Greet Mary, who labored much for us. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were

in Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the *household* of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” Romans 16:1-13

Paul understood the Lord’s Work and how to get it done. Paul passed the philosophy along to us through his writings. Here are three basics of doing God’s Work that we should publish in bold letters in every place where Christians meet throughout the world.

- The Lord’s Work belongs to God. He’s the Manager. We’re His staff. The Lord’s Work gets done when God’s the Boss and we do what He says.
- The Lord uses a lot of people in His work. The Work gets done when everyone does their job well. Nobody’s a star. Everyone has a job to do and every job is important.
- The Lord’s Work gets done best in an environment of love and encouragement. A big part of the encouragement comes in the form of being thankful and sharing our thanks with others.

I thank my God for every one of you reading this. I encourage you to sit down this week and make a “Thanks” list for other Christians in your life. Write their names on a piece of paper and what they’ve done that causes you to be thankful for them (just like Paul did in Romans 16). Do one of a couple of things the next time you’re at church. Read your list aloud during a sharing time or (if public speaking makes you nervous) make copies of your list and hand out to the people you want to thank. Give your pastor a copy, too (since his name should be on any Christian’s list).

Think about what would happen this Sunday if thousands of Christians stood up in churches around the world and shared their thanks for others in the Body of Christ! That one action could begin a revival of heart and soul across the land. But don’t stop there. Remember Paul. He shared his thanks for other believers over and over again; year after year. Being thankful is not something you do one time. Keep sharing your thankfulness with your husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, grandson, granddaughter, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, cousin, pastor, elders, deacons, praise team members, Bible teachers, class members, nursery workers, children’s workers, youth workers, friends ... everybody! People work for the Lord and they know the Lord is thankful for what they do, but they also want to know that you are thankful, too. Share the joy!

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Colossians 2:6-7

Happy Thanksgiving!

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