

The Power of Gratitude: Being Thankful in All Circumstances

Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Psalms 37:25, Psalms 100:4; Ephesians 5:16-20; Colossians 3:15-17; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8

Introduction: The Associated Press one time carried this article: In the Hartford Kentucky "Times News" Dorothy Gentry says that she hates it when her football fan husband refers to the turkey leftovers as "replays." But then she heard the wife of a TV executive who said her husband calls the leftovers "reruns." But to top it all off, the local mortician's wife was not sympathetic to the other two wives, because her husband calls the leftovers "remains."

We have all come to accept that Thanksgiving Day is a food holiday. It is a family holiday. For many it is all this, plus a football holiday. But it was originally intended to be a **NATIONAL FAITH HOLY DAY**. A day when Americans take time to give thanks to God for the multiple blessings we enjoy.

The official Thanksgiving Day goes all the way back to 1789 when George Washington proclaimed November 26th as a day of Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Day continued to be celebrated on different days in different states until finally in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a White House proclamation calling on "the whole American people to observe a special day of Thanksgiving on the last Thursday of November of every year."

Thanksgiving Day is a distinctive holiday. It doesn't commemorate a battle or anyone's birthday. It is simply a day set aside to express our thanks to God.

Celebrating the American Holiday of Thanksgiving is not a Biblical command, but having a heart of gratitude IS.

I want us to consider today, The Power of Gratitude; Being Thankful in Every Circumstance.'

Turn with me to Romans, chapter 8

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [NIV] LETS PRAY

Researcher Robert Emmons in his book **Thanks**, writes, “Gratitude is literally one of the few things that can measurably change people’s lives.” His studies suggest that gratitude improves our health and relationships, making it one of the most effective ways to increase our well-being in life.

But there’s a problem with prescribing gratitude to everyone: Most of what we know about it comes from studying Americans—and, specifically, the mainly American college students from the campuses where researchers work.

Jonathan Tudge, a professor at UNC Greensboro, is perhaps the foremost expert on cultural differences in gratitude. Tudge and his colleagues published a series of studies examining how gratitude develops in children across seven different countries: the US, Brazil, Guatemala, Turkey, Russia, China, and South Korea. They found some similarities, as well as some differences.

First, they asked a group of children from seven to 14 years old, “What is your greatest wish?” and “What would you do for the person who granted you that wish?” Then, they grouped the kids’ answers into three categories:

- **Verbal gratitude:** Saying thank you in some way.
- **Concrete gratitude:** Reciprocating with something the child likes, such as offering the person some candy or a toy.

- **Connective gratitude:** Reciprocating with something the wish-granter would like, such as friendship or help.

Children were less likely to respond with concrete gratitude as they got older. Overall, children in China and South Korea tended to favor connective gratitude, while kids in the United States leaned toward concrete gratitude. Children in Guatemala—where it’s common to say “Thanks be to God” in everyday speech—were particularly partial to verbal gratitude.

So why don’t we all express gratitude in the same way? Cultural values, parenting practices, and education play a role. Americans tend to be very individualistic, while 85 percent of the world’s population lives in cultures that researchers deem as more collectivist. In such cultures, people put greater emphasis on harmony and honoring others. One study found that the more respect Chinese children show to parents, the more grateful they are.

One man asked his friend one day, ‘do you ever wake up grumpy?’ He said no, ‘I just let her sleep.’ [could be a woman asking her friend, too]

Illustration: A few years ago, there was an ad on TV that started like this: There was a woman sitting in a car. She’s minding her own business, and suddenly this man comes out of the blue, rips the door open, grabs her, and pulls her out of the car roughly. It looks like he’s attacking her, and we look on in horror. Then the camera pulls back, and we see that the car is actually on fire, but the woman didn’t know it. The man *wasn’t* assaulting the woman; he was rescuing her. The ad finishes by saying, “You need the bigger picture. Channel 10 News gives you the bigger picture.” The ad makes a good point. We need to have a bigger picture.

The words “thanks, thanksgiving, gratitude” appear in the Bible in over 130 verses. Here are just three examples in the NT. Paul says to the church in Thessalonica, **“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus”** (1 Thess. 5:16–18).

In Ephesians he says, **“Make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Eph. 5:19–20).

To the church at Colossae, he says, ***“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”*** (Col. 3:15–17).

In a **Christian framework**, ingratitude is not just a psychological problem or a cultural issue. It's not just an impoverishment of our experience. **It's a sin**. In Romans, Paul says, ***“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile.”*** They perceived themselves to be entitled, to be owed.

We have so much to be thankful for, **but** we are coerced multiple times a day to be discontented and unthankful. Every magazine cover, advertisement, and commercial is basically telling you, ***“What you have, what you drive, how you look, where you live is not enough.”***

And on top of that, most people have a ***“when and then”*** attitude. **When** something happens in your life, **then** you are going to be happy and grateful. When I graduate school, when I get married, when I have kids, when the kids graduate, when the house is paid for, when I get the perfect job, when I retire...When-and-then. You fill in the blank.

A man and his wife on a strict diet, sat down at the table for a meatless meal, all steamed and green and good for you. He looked at what was before him and said, 'You say the blessing. If I thank the Lord for this, He'll know I'm lying!'

Being thankful is a choice. If we are not thankful **BEFORE** good things happen to us, chances are that we will not be thankful **AFTER** good things happen.

The more we think we are entitled to, the less we will be grateful for. The bigger our sense of entitlement...the smaller our sense of gratitude.

Robert Roberts once said there is a uniquely Christian framework for gratitude.

Gratitude is a byproduct of a way of seeing things, of a certain worldview, and it always involves three factors. These factors come from the old Latin word bene, which means "good." Gratitude always involves three benes.

First, gratitude involves a benefit. Psalm 103 says, "**1Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. 2Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— 3who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, 4who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, 5who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**" [NIV]

The **second** factor of gratitude is a **benefactor**. Benevolence means "to will the good." Benefactor—means "one who does good." To be grateful, you must believe not just that benefits are coming your way, but that they come from somebody. James says: "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." This is an expression of God's goodness.

There must be a benefit, and a benefactor, and then...

Thirdly, there must be a beneficiary: one who receives the good. That's you and me. You are the beneficiary of the benefits of a good benefactor (God) who has your best interests at heart.

Illustration: Every devout Jewish person was devoted to two daily forms of prayer. One was called the Shema, from the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.**"

The other form of prayer was called the 18 benedictions. In Hebrew, a benediction was any prayer that began with the word bless. To bless is to speak good to somebody else.

In the morning when they woke up, they would pray; "Blessed are you, God." In the middle of the day, they would pause and pray; "Blessed are you, Lord, At night before they went to bed, they would pray; "Blessed are you, God." They were training for gratitude.

So, what is Gratitude? Gratitude is simply thankfulness, but it's not just remembering to say "thank you" when someone passes you the gravy on Thanksgiving. Gratitude is a heart posture, a perspective, and a daily decision to focus on the blessings rather than the botherings.

Sometimes we are like the little boy who comes home from a birthday party. His mom met him at the door, and asked, "How was it?" He showed her all his candy and gifts. She said, "Wow! Did you say, 'thank you?'"

"Well," he said, "I was going to, but when I was in line to leave, the girl ahead of me said, 'Thank you' to the woman, and she told her, 'Oh, don't mention it.' So, I didn't."

Getting a Biblical Mindset about Gratitude:

I. It is God's Will for you to be Thankful.

It is God's plan for you to be thankful in every circumstance. We are expected to have gratitude, and to be thankful people. It is God's will to be thankful because everything we are and everything we have is from God. This is a key point that we can so easily forget. Everything we are and everything we have is from God. Listen to how Paul speaks about the authority of God over all things.

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, He himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us. 28'For in Him we live and move and have our being.'

(Acts 17:24-28 NIV)

God is a God of more than enough. What I mean by that is that He is a God of abundance and generosity. God doesn't just provide us what we need. He doesn't give us the bare minimum requirements so that we can scrape by. **God gives us**

what we need, and then some.

Just think about food for a minute. We need food to survive. We need protein, carbs, sugar and water. God provides those things. But notice that God COULD have met those needs with one item for each category. We could be living a life in which every day we only had fish, brussel sprouts, apples and water, or like the Israelites in the desert; manna every day...breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Instead, in each category God created and provides a variety of tastes, textures, flavors, and combinations. Think of the varieties within each of those choices. Take apples for instance: How many varieties do you think there are?

- 2,500 varieties of apples are grown in the United States.
- 7,500 varieties of apples are grown throughout the world.
- Apple varieties range in size from a little larger than a cherry to as large as a grapefruit.
- Apples are a member of the rose family.
- Apples come in all shades of reds, greens, and yellows.
- The crabapple is the only apple native to North America.
- The pilgrims planted the first United States apple trees in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- 100 varieties of apples are grown commercially in the US.
- The average size of a United States orchard is 50 acres.
- Apple trees take four to five years to produce their first fruit.
- Most apples are still picked by hand in the fall.
- Apple blossom is the state flower of Michigan.
- The science of apple growing is called pomology.

Now I understand we may not have ACCESS to all the choices all the time, but my point is that God is a God of abundance and generosity.

ILLUSTRATION: The comedy film Cool Runnings is about the first Jamaican bobsled team to go to the Olympics. John Candy plays a former American gold medalist who becomes the coach of the Jamaican team. The players grow to like him and affectionately call him the "Sled-god."

During the story, the coach's dark history comes out. In an Olympics following his

gold medal performance; he broke the rules by weighting the U.S. sled, bringing disgrace on himself and his team. One of the Jamaican bobsledders could not understand why anyone who had already won a gold medal would cheat. He asked Candy to explain. He said, ***"I had to win, and I learned something. If you are not happy without a gold medal, you won't be happy with one."***

It is God's will for us to be thankful.

Biblical Mindset: Gratitude doesn't come when you get more stuff. Gratitude comes when you see all the benefits that come from a wonderful benefactor, of which you are the grace-given beneficiary.

II. Be Thankful when God GIVES and when He TAKES AWAY.

Our problems can come from God's blessings Now I know this sounds backward and wrong. But let me illustrate this point and then I will show it to you in the scriptures.

- If I have family problems, it is because God has blessed me with a family.
- If I have work problems, it is because God has blessed me with a job.
- If I suffer loss, it is because God blessed me with something, and now it's gone.

Story: In her book **Tramp for the Lord**, Corrie ten Boom tells the story of an old woman she met in Russia during the Communist persecution of Christians during the Cold War: The old woman was lying on a small sofa propped up by pillows. Her body was bent and twisted almost beyond recognition by the dread disease of multiple sclerosis. Her aged husband spent all his time caring for her since she was unable to move off the sofa ...

The only part of her body she could control was her right hand. And with the index finger of that hand she had for many years glorified God by typing on an old typewriter beside her. Day and night, she would type; by translating Christian books into Russian. Always using just that one finger— peck ... peck ... peck—she typed out portions of the Bible, and the books of Billy Graham ... and Corrie ten Boom ... and others.

"Not only does she translate books," her husband said, "but she prays for these

people every day while she types. Sometimes it takes a long time for her finger to hit the key, or for her to get the paper in the machine, but all the time she's praying for those whose books she's working on."

[Corrie ten Boom writes]: I looked at her wasted form on the sofa, and prayed, "Oh Lord, why don't you heal her?" Her husband, sensing my anguish of soul, gave the answer. "God has a purpose in her sickness. Every other Christian in the city is watched by the secret police. But because she has been sick for so long, no one ever checks on us; they do not think we are a threat. They leave us alone and she is the only person in the entire city who can type quietly undetected by the police." Who would have thought that multiple sclerosis could be a gift from God?

Has it ever occurred to you that the very thing you most want removed from your life might be the very thing God uses in the greatest way for His glory?

Now let me show you this in the scriptures. Job lost all his possessions, and all his children were killed. Listen to what Job said, and what he did after that:

"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."22In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. [Job 1:20-22, NIV]

Job worshiped. How could he do that? Listen to what he said. Job said that he started with nothing and he would end with nothing. Everything we have has been given to us by God. Job sees that his problems have come because of God's blessings. God gave him wealth but now it is gone. That is okay because I started with nothing and everything is a blessing from God. God gave Job ten children and now they are dead. That is okay because I started with nothing and those children were a blessing from God.

Job has a biblical perspective. I can be thankful in all circumstances, because I am not looking at what I lost but what I was able to enjoy. Job shows how to think about what we're going through when we're not thankful.

We used to sing a song that says:

*Where Your streams of abundance flow, blessed be Your name
Blessed be Your name when I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness, blessed be Your name
Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your glorious name*

*Blessed be Your name when the sun is shining down on me
When the world's "all that it should be", blessed be Your name
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering, blessed be Your name
You give and take away, You give and take away
My heart will choose to say, Lord, blessed be Your name*

Biblical Mindset: I can be grateful in ALL circumstances, because I believe with all your heart that God is good.

III. A lack of Gratitude is Self-destructive.

The apostle Paul said it to the Roman Christians. ***"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. 21For 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."*** [Romans 1:20-21 NIV]

Paul says that the result of our lack of thanksgiving is that we will become futile and worthless in our thinking. Ungrateful hearts lead to wrong thinking. Ingratitude leads to worthless thinking and darkened, and foolish hearts.

Who would think that thanksgiving would be so important? Paul says that if we are not thankful and we do not look at difficulty the way Job did, then we are ruining our lives to the point of self-destruction.

I do not have time to finish Romans 1. But if you look down to the end of chapter 1, you will see a lack of thanksgiving leads to every evil and destructive behavior in

the world (Romans 1:28-31).

We wonder how people become foolish, faithless, ruthless, heartless, and full of evil and maliciousness. Paul says the starting point is a lack of thanksgiving to God. Ingratitude is self-destructive.

Biblical Mindset – I'm not just thankful for the blessings I have received or the blessings I am enjoying right now, but will have faith to be thankful in all things.

At the beginning of my sermon, I read Romans 8:31-39, let me close by showing you three benefits that you can be personally thankful for every day:

A. You can be Thankful Every Day that God is FOR You.

'What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?' [Romans 8:31, NIV]

Grammatically this verse would better be translated with the word "since" rather than 'if.' "Since God is for us, who can be against us?"

This is a rhetorical question that gives a definite answer.

- ◇ To the question "Who?" - The answer is nobody can be against us.
- ◇ To the question "What?" - Nothing can be against us.
- ◇ To the question "When?" - Never can anything be against us.
- ◇ To the question - "Where?" - Nowhere can anything be against us.

When you read the Bible, you will find one of the greatest lessons taught is this: God plus one equals a majority.

Joseph learned that lesson in prison.

Job learned that lesson in trouble.

Joshua learned that lesson at Jericho.

Jonah learned that lesson in the belly of a whale.

David learned that lesson against Goliath.

Daniel learned that lesson in the lion's den.

Elijah learned that lesson on Mt. Carmel.

Moses learned that lesson at the Red Sea.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego learned that lesson in the fiery furnace. Paul and Peter learned that lesson in prison.

One of the greatest promises to every follower of Jesus Christ is Isaiah 54:17.

"No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their vindication is from Me," declares the LORD.

How can we be so confident about this? Listen to verse 32.

'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?'

If God gave His Son to us before we were saved, what will He not give to us after we are saved? If God gave His Son to us while we were sinners, what will He not now give to us now that we are His sons and saughters?

By the very fact that we know that God did indeed give His Son for us then in our greatest times of need, do you not think God will also give everything and anything else that we need? When you accept Jesus Christ, you get everything that God has. ***God stands for us...***

B. You can be Thankful Every Day that God is WITH You

Listen to verse 33; ***"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies."***

The phrase "bring a charge" is represented by one word in the Greek; a legal term which means, "to formally accuse." So, the question is - who would bring a charge against one of God's children that they are not worthy of God's love, or worthy of eternal life in heaven?

We know from the Word of God that the one who would do it and does do it, is Satan. In Revelation 12:10 he is called "'The Accuser of our brothers and sisters - the one who accused them before our God day and night.'" (Rev 12:10)

When hell's district attorney brings a case against us in court he has us dead-to-right. But what he doesn't understand is that the case has already been settled, because the judge is also our defense attorney.

'Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.' [vs. 34]

He calls witness after witness. He has exhibits A - Z. He has pictures, photographs, tape recordings, signed confessions and the defense never calls a witness.

Our defense attorney, Jesus Christ, doesn't say a word. He just holds up a nail-pierced hand, shows it to the judge and the gavel comes down, and the verdict is rendered, **'Not guilty.'** Jesus died for your sin, and His resurrection is the proof that God accepted that debt as payment for our sins.

That is why even when I fall short of the glory of God, I can still be thankful because I know that God stands with me.

C. You can be Thankful Every Day that God is BY You

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:35-39, NIV]

Do you notice how these verses begin with no condemnation and end with no separation? Check out the mathematics of salvation?

God came to sinners and added grace to our lives. He then subtracted sin; and multiplied forgiveness so there can be no division of our life from His life.

That is why the Apostle goes on to say in verse 37; ***"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."*** (Romans 8:37, NASB)

In his bestseller, The Tipping Point, Malcolm Gladwell defines the tipping point as *"the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point."* It is the moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior passes the point of no return and gains acceptance.

In the realm of physics, a tipping point is when an object is displaced from a stable state of equilibrium into a new state.

In economics, it's the point at which an emerging technology becomes the standard of industry.

And in sports, it's the moment when momentum shifts.

Spiritually speaking, the tipping point is when you believe, without any reservation, that God is for you. It's the revelation that leads to a life of gratitude, because you know that God doesn't just love you, He likes you. He loved you enough to die for you, and He likes you enough to spend eternity with you.

We need to have this biblical mindset of gratitude. This means that we can find the path of thanksgiving even through the pain and the hurt and the loss. Thanksgiving in all circumstances is possible since we are told to do this. But it's only possible in and through Christ, especially as we know that Jesus is for us, with us, and stands by us.