
“Even So, Be Thankful”
Various Scripture References
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(Philippians 4:6)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

It's been a tough seven months for all of us, hasn't it, and we're not out of the woods yet. We've all been through a lot. During these months I think the vast majority of us have struggled in our spiritual lives, and that's to be expected. This is, after all, an unprecedented event that has impacted the entire planet. I think we have to remember how unique this really is. So don't go beating yourself up if you've been struggling in your faith.

One of the things that we often times forget in our faith journeys is cultivating a habit of being thankful, and a habit it is. If you're of the complaining, grumbling type, you must realize that it's taken years of complaining and grumbling to have become the delightfully, cantankerous person you are today. And if you're the grateful, thankful type, that too, is a habit that has been formed over years and years. Whichever side you fall on, know that it is more than the result of a personality type you were born with. Sure, some by nature, may lean more toward one side or the other, but it is definitely the result of the choices we have made. And because they are choices, that also means that we can change from being grumblers and complainers to becoming grateful and thankful. And if you're already a grateful person, then you can be even more thankful. This is Thanksgiving weekend, so let's take stock of our lives. Let's become thankful people.

There are actually three different words in the Greek that are translated 'thanks' or 'thanksgiving.' One of those words only occurs one time, so we won't focus on that one. The word that occurs the second most (10 times) is the word that is normally translated as 'grace.' So, we might come across Paul exclaiming, "Thanks be to God!" The word that is often used there is 'grace.' "Grace be to God!" It makes sense that the word 'grace' is used because to be thankful or to give thanks is in response to an undeserved blessing or favour that we've received, but the word that is used most often for thanks or thanksgiving in the New Testament is most of the time used by the Apostle Paul. Of the 55 times this word is used, 36 of them are used by Paul. The word in the original language is where we get the word, "Eucharist." Most protestants don't use that word. We like to use the word, 'communion' or 'the Lord's Supper.' It's the original 'thanksgiving meal.' Not the one with turkey and ham, but the one with the bread and the wine. When Jesus sat down with his disciples, the evening before his death, he gave thanks to God for the food before them, and then he broke the bread and poured the wine. That's why it's called the Eucharist.

This word, *eucharist*, is actually the combination of two words. Some of you will catch it. The first word is 'eu', which means 'well' or 'good,' like in the word 'eulogy' which literally means 'to speak well of someone'; it's a word of blessing, which is what we do at a funeral. The second word is *charis*, which means grace. When you put those two words together it literally means 'well-grace' or 'good-grace. Thanksgiving, then, is the response for a good grace that we've received from God.

What I will be doing today is I'll be going through the Apostle Paul's use of this word 'thanks,' since he's the one that uses it the most. So, let's begin.

As you might have already guessed, **Thanksgiving is to be given to God.** In all but one instance, Paul directs his thanksgiving to God. Here are some verses:

(Ephesians 5:4) Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (implied: to God)

(Philippians 4:6) Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

(1Corinthians 1:4) I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

Why is thanksgiving directed to God? The answer is because, literally everything that we have comes from God. Everything! Paul summed it up like this in Acts 17:28, "For in him we live and move and have our being." He is the giver of our lives. We exist because God caused us to exist. He's the one that breathes into us the breath of life. He's the one that sustains us moment by moment. We all know that life on this planet cannot exist apart from the sun. The earth is perfectly distanced from the sun. If it were too close, we would burn up and if were too far, we would freeze. On our planet, all of life depends on the energy and light that comes from the sun. And to whom should we give thanks for our life-giving sun? The creator of the sun. Jesus said in Matthew 5:45, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Who does the sun belong to, according to Jesus? God! It's his sun.

Consider also these well-known words found in Jeremiah's prophecy:

(Jeremiah 9:23) This is what the LORD says:

 "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
 or the strong boast of their strength
 or the rich boast of their riches,
24 but let the one who boasts boast about this:
 that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
 justice and righteousness on earth,
 for in these I delight,"
 declares the LORD.

The reason we shouldn't boast in these things is because, at the end of the day, these things are gifts. A person could argue, "Well, I'm wise because I studied hard. I'm strong because I trained my tail off. And I'm rich because I worked hard and invested wisely." But who gave you the brain and the body? Who gave you the talents? Who gave you your life? Was it not from God? It's like the child who won't share his candy with mom and dad, which was purchased with their own money. We mustn't take the credit that ultimately belongs to God. Our thanksgiving must first and foremost be directed toward God.

What else can we learn about thanksgiving from Paul? Related to the previous point, **it is a sign of the evil in our hearts if we choose not to give thanks to God.** It is a sign of the unsaved heart. It is the sign of a sinful heart.

If you remember, the letter to the Romans is Paul's dissertation on the Gospel. Before he gets into the all the intricacies of the gospel itself, he spends a couple chapters talking about sin, and the just wrath and punishment of God, that will be released upon all who reject his gospel. Paul then goes into a detailed description of these people.

(Romans 1:18) The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ 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.

(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.

Every human knows that there is a god, but our problem is that we didn't acknowledge God, we didn't give proper respect to him. We didn't glorify him, and we didn't give thanks to him. You might wonder why this is such an offense, why is this so bad that it's considered a grave evil? Can you imagine doing countless favours for another person, and that person doesn't once say, 'thank you'? Can you imagine if your son or daughter was like that? Can you imagine, after having done all the things that a parent does, from the birth of their child and all the way into their child's adult life, and the child doesn't say thank you, not even once? No one would say, that's okay. Or what's wrong with that? Universally, we know that something is seriously wrong with that child; and universally, we know that it's right for the parents to feel offended by that. So, if that's true in human relationships, how much truer is that with God, who gives us everything.

Let's continue. **We are to give thanks to God for people.** This is something we see over and over again in Paul's letters. In practically every letter, we can see Paul giving thanks to God for people. For what in particular? First for their salvation.

(Colossians 1:12) and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

(1Thessalonians 2:13) And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

(2Thessalonians 2:13) But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

We thank God for the saving work he has done in people. So, when we hear that someone we know trusted in Christ, we give thanks to God. When we hear of many turning to Jesus out on the mission field, we give thanks to God. Friends, let's not yawn over this. If even the angels in heaven rejoice over one prodigal who returns home, then we should never make light of every heart that God turns to himself. We should give thanks.

At the same time Paul teaches us that we are to give thanks to God for the work God is doing in the lives of believers.

(Romans 1:8) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

(2Thessalonians 1:3) We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

(Ephesians 1:15) For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

(Colossians 1:3) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people.

Whether it's a person's salvation or their spiritual growth, we give thanks to God, because it is God who saves. We don't save ourselves. We can't save ourselves. At the same time, though we play a part in our own growth and sanctification, ultimately, our growth is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. That's why it would sound really strange to say to someone who became a Christian. "Thank you for becoming a Christian. Thank you for trusting in Jesus." That sounds strange doesn't it? But it sounds normal and right to say to the person, "I thank God for saving you. I thank God for giving you the faith to trust in Him. I thank God for giving you a new heart to repent of your sins. I thank God for the work he's doing in you."

Friends, many of us, including myself, can have the tendency to complain about people, more than giving thanks to God for them. Sadly, many of us can be too self-absorbed to notice God working in others. It's like the narcissistic person who can never truly enjoy their friend's Instagram posts. Because he is more concerned about why his posts are not as beautiful and not as attractive or not as exciting. It's really sad. By the way, you know Instagram is fake right? It is not a true display of a person's life. I just want to make sure you know that.

So, look around you; look specifically at the people around you, that God has placed in your life, and give thanks to God for them. If you're a child, say to God, "Thank you God, for my parents" and also say 'thank you' to them. If you're a parent give thanks to God for your child. And if you're a spouse, give thanks to God for your spouse. And if you're single, give thanks to God for your incredible friends, and the work God is doing in them.

So, Paul gives thanks to God for their salvation, for their growth, but Paul also gives thanks for the people who have partnered with him in ministry.

(Romans 16:4) They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

(Philippians 1:3) I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now

Can you imagine doing God's work all by yourself? It would be so difficult and draining. It's remarkable just how many ministry partners Paul had. When we read the end of Romans and Colossians; they're basically just lists of people he's thankful for, his ministry partners. If you're a ministry leader, then you know how difficult ministry is. And you know how much better and effective it is when you are serving alongside ministry partners. Paul never forgets these people. He's always giving thanks for them. Let's do the same.

Church, I don't know if you noticed, but we didn't have servant appreciation this year. Remember? That's when I give a sermon about serving and then our leaders serve you ice cream. Well, blame it on COVID. So, let me take a moment to say 'thank you' to all the incredible servants we have in our church.

During COVID, we had an incredible team that came out every week to help with media and sound and worship. Early on, they came out every Saturday to help us record our services and they're still helping every Sunday. Thank you, guys.

And then when the church building opened up again, we had a team of brave ushers who helped us get in and out of the building in a calm and safe manner. And trust me, though you couldn't see the lower half of their faces, they were smiling as they were doing it.

Even though the launch of Life Groups was delayed, and even though online Life Groups are nothing compared to meeting in person, our leaders are doing their very best to help facilitate unity and support and community and prayer, during this difficult season. Thank you, LG leaders

Just this past month in September, so many of you, across all life stages, pitched in, to help cook meals for a family in need. I know they are so grateful for all of you.

Discipleship leaders, mentors, thank you for leading your classes and meetings.

Our deacons and elders did so much to keep church going. They were so instrumental to help essential ministries to go on despite the lockdown. Thank you.

And our pastors are amazing, aren't they? Since COVID, they've been on the phone non-stop to check up on all of you. They're leading online Bible and book studies, conducting weddings, leading Sunday services. Thank you, pastors.

Let's take a minute to thank God for them. Go ahead now and pray.

Let's always remember to give thanks to God for people, for their salvation, for their sanctification, and for their ministry.

Here's another thing about thanksgiving. **All Christians should desire that even more thanksgiving would be given to God.** Now that sounds a bit strange doesn't it? Well, listen to these verses, where Paul wants certain activities to result in thanksgiving to God.

(2Corinthians 4:15) All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

In the context surrounding this verse, Paul mentions the suffering he and his companions are enduring for the sake of the gospel. We know about those sufferings. Hunger, thirst, persecution, imprisonment and so many other things, but he doesn't mind, because through his efforts and through his sufferings, the gospel will spread and the grace of God will reach more and more people; and that will result in those who are saved giving thanks to. And those who are already Christians will also overflow with thanksgiving to God, to his glory.

Here's another verse:

(2Corinthians 9:11) You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

(2Corinthians 9:12) This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

The context surrounding these two verses is about the generous giving of God's people. Paul is saying that as a result of their generosity, people will give thanks to God. Which people? First there are those that are the recipients of their generosity. They will say, "God thank you for the generosity of the members of the church at Corinth." But others too will give thanks. The givers will say, "Thank you for the opportunity to give to help others." And then others who hear about their generosity will also give thanks. That's what an overflow of thanks to the glory of God looks like.

It should be our desire to have all people on earth give thanks to God. That's the same as wanting all people on earth to know God, to be saved by his Son Jesus Christ, for to be Christian is to be thankful.

Next, **Thanksgiving is part of the growing and maturing spiritual lives of all Christians.** Listen to these verses.

(Ephesians 5:4) Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

The sinful speech we used to practice must be replaced with thanksgiving. This is now a part of our Christian practice.

(Colossians 4:2) Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

(Philippians 4:6) Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Lest we get too caught up with our problems, our anxiety, and our needs, we should season all these prayers with a heavy dose of thanksgiving.

(Colossians 2:6) So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

One of the foundational building blocks of our discipleship, of our growth as Christians is thanksgiving. Thankful Christians are growing Christians, and not just here or there, not occasionally, but we should be overflowing with thankfulness. This is how we grow in our faith.

Friends, let's work on the habit of thankfulness. If you are not a Christian, or if you're not sure you're a Christian, you might want to take the thanksgiving test. Do you recognize God as the source of all you are and all you have? Do you recognize that it's a terrible offense to God that you haven't given him thanks? Do you know that he sent his son Jesus to die for your sin of unthankfulness? If you repent of your sins and trust in Jesus, I promise you, your heart will change. It will change into a heart that you will find difficult to recognize. It'll be that different. God, instead of you, will become the center of your orbit. You will become thankful to God during the good times and when blessings are coming your way. That's a miracle in and of itself, but the greater miracle is that you will find yourself thanking God, even during the bad times, during suffering, and tragedy. Trust in Jesus, so that your heart and our hearts will overflow with thanksgiving because of you!

For us Christians, let's guard our hearts from the sin of grumbling and complaining. Even during tough times, let's not make excuses and fail to give thanks to God. We Christians, of all people on the planet, should be the most thankful. Everything we have comes from God, our lives, our breath and God has by his good grace, by his eucharist, has saved us, he has washed all our sins away, by the death and resurrection of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God has placed so many people in our lives, people in whom God is working. He's saving them, he's growing them, he's using them for his Gospel purposes. May God help us to be thankful.

Let's pray.