

Turning Thanksgiving into Thanksgiving

1Thess 5:16-18 Rejoice
evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

18 In every thing give thanks: for
this is the will of God in Christ
Jesus concerning you.

On Thanksgiving, we are reminded that gratitude is not merely a polite social courtesy. It is not limited to a holiday with turkey, pie, and family gatherings. It is something deeper and richer that flows from the soul of one who understands what God has done.

Those who refuse to let a spirit of victimhood define their outlook are going to be generally thankful. As we grow in the Word of God, we gain a spiritual depth that enables us to grasp what it really means to say, "In every thing give thanks." Last week we examined that all things work together *for* the good and how the good of Romans 8:28 is not necessarily what *feels* good, but what *makes* us good. It is not defined by comfort or by the absence of pain, but by the accomplishment of God's purpose. From 1Thess 5:17 we saw that we should be praying at all times and in vs. 18 we saw that we should be thanking God for all circumstances. We should be thankful for things we don't understand or would never have chosen.

The mellow sweetness of
pumpkin pie off a prison spoon is
something you will never forget.

– Mitchell Burgess

In other words, even hardship can heighten gratitude when you realize what you once had... and what you still have. We *also* thank God for what we *don't* have.

For what I have received, may
the Lord make me truly thankful.
And more truly for what I have
not received.

– Storm Jameson

Be thankful we're not getting all
the government we're paying for.

– Will Rogers

Thanksgiving is far more than
courtesy. It is more than table manners. It
is the overflow of a redeemed heart. It is
often referred to now in many
Thanksgiving sermons as *Thanksgiving*.

1. The Difference Between Good Manners and True Gratitude

We all know the difference between
polite thankfulness and heartfelt
gratitude. There are times when someone
gives you a gift with a gift receipt tucked
inside. You can keep the gift without the
awkwardness of knowing how much they
spent on it, but in case you might not be
able to use the gift, you can still
exchange it. Good manners compel you
to smile and say, "Thank you," even if it
ends up in the closet. You are grateful for
the thought even if the gift wasn't exactly
what you needed.

There is the deeper sense of
thankfulness that is not about the gift—it
is about the giver.

There is an often used illustration
about a missionary in Africa who
received a beautiful seashell from one of
the village boys. The shell was rare and
only found many miles away on the
coast. When the missionary admired it
but commented, "You shouldn't have
gone so far to get this," the boy smiled
and said: "Long walk part of gift."

That simple phrase captures the heart
of true giving. The value of the gift was
not in the seashell—it was in the
sacrifice, effort, and love expressed by
the giver. This is just as Jesus who came
to walk among us and spent His whole
life on the way to make the ultimate
sacrifice on the cross for us.

Gratitude is not only the greatest
of virtues, but the parent of all
others.

– Cicero (ancient philosopher and
statesmen)

True gratitude is not just about what we have received. It is also a statement about our appreciation for who gave it. When we worship God at Thanksgiving, we are drawn upward—not just to His blessings, but to His heart.

2Cor 9:15 Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable gift.

We don't merely thank God for the eternal life He has given. We also thank Him for Who He *is*.

Psa 106:1 Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is* good: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

This explicitly anchors thanksgiving not in what God *gives*, but in Him Who is characterized by His goodness and mercy.

This forms the foundation of Thanksliving: not just a thankful day, but a thankful life. When you receive a great gift, something happens in your heart. You don't feel *forced* to respond which might be against your will. You feel *compelled* from within to respond.

1Cor 9:16 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for **necessity** is laid upon me; yea, **woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!**

Mat 10:8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: **freely ye have received, freely give.**

True thankfulness always produces movement. Gratitude creates responsibility. Blessing produces not just a social burden but a holy burden.

Some people avoid gratitude because they don't want obligation. They don't want to feel beholden to anyone. They don't want to admit they needed help. They think receiving help is a kind of weakness.

That might be wise if the mafia offers to "help" you, but it is foolish if pride

keeps you from receiving the love God wants to show you through others. Gratitude opens the heart, but pride closes it. When we refuse to receive, we miss an opportunity to love and be loved.

Think of marriage. I can never pay my wife back for her goodness. I am indebted to her even from before the day she said "Yes." That is not bondage. It is love. If someone pushes you out of the way of a speeding car and dies in your place, you may respond selfishly, "Well, who asked him to do that?" For them, this is what stops them from getting saved. They don't want to be obligated to God. They will let their boss expect things of them. They will let the government expect things of them. They will let neighbors expect things of them. But God? No, He can't expect anything. That is the heart of an ingrate.

Jesus Christ stepped in front of the wrath of God on your behalf so you could humbly say, "I owe him my life." When they say, "Thank You for dying for me," at that point, they live a life of sacred obligation not to *earn* salvation, but *because* of salvation.

Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

2. Living in Gratitude -

Without God, gratitude becomes irrelevant.

The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.

– Dante Gabriel Rossetti

An atheist may express appreciation for circumstances, but who do you thank when you attribute everything to luck? The universe is more than a mass of swirling chemicals that happen to just fall into line and produce life. When you see the wonders of creation, who do you thank? Even if you attribute life to just

fate...who arranged the fate? An atheist cannot bow his heart in thankfulness to the God who gave him life, breath, and all things. Without humility there is no deep gratitude. Without recognizing one's *true* need as a sinner, thanksgiving becomes hollow and superficial.

Without seeing one's sins, the cross means nothing. Only the believer can attain the depths of thanksgiving because only the believer understands the depths of mercy.

A prominent Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner where a woman who was not of the same Pharisaical life style came and anointed Jesus feet.

Luke 7:39-48 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath

anointed my feet with ointment.
47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little.
48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

3. Clothed in Gratitude -

Paul speaks of gratitude not as a *feeling* but as a *garment*. Being thankful is like getting all spiritually dressed up and then putting on thankfulness as a crown or tiara to complete your ensemble.

Col 3:12-15 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye.

14 And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

Thankfulness must be worn like clothing. It is not seasonal—it is daily apparel.

Gratitude is not only a virtue that pleases God—it is a gift that shapes the hearts of others. When we take the time to sincerely express appreciation, we breathe life into the weary, strengthen the faltering, and affirm the quiet, faithful acts that often go unnoticed. Words of gratitude are not mere pleasantries; they are spiritual reinforcements. They become a feedback mechanism that lets people know they are on the right track and pursue a wrong track. A simple "thank you" offered with sincerity can become a powerful reminder that their

efforts matter, that their labor is seen, and that their faithfulness is bearing fruit. In a cold and critical world, expressions of appreciation warm the soul and create an atmosphere where love can flourish.

Prov 16:21 The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

Pro 15:23 A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word *spoken* in due season, how good *is it!*

Words of appreciation are “in due season,” bringing joy and grace. People thrive where they are valued. A thankful heart naturally generates a climate of encouragement, and encouragement fuels responsibility. When someone knows that their kindness, diligence, or service is genuinely appreciated, it not only blesses them in the moment—it strengthens their resolve to continue doing what is right. Appreciation does not make people complacent; it motivates them. Gratitude is a divine catalyst that multiplies good works. It inspires continued obedience, greater effort, and a more willing spirit because people feel supported rather than taken for granted.

In the Old Testament world, a Jewish blessing was far more than a polite wish or sentimental expression. It carried prophetic authority, covenant significance, and parental encouragement all at once. What Jacob did with his sons and grandsons was not merely poetic—it was spiritually weighty, legally meaningful, and emotionally empowering. This is how the blessing of Jacob for his sons functioned in Gen 48

- Jewish parents gave blessings not because they fully trusted the child—but because they fully trusted God with the child’s life. A blessing was the parent saying: “God has a plan for you. “You belong to the Lord. I see His fingerprints on your future.” This gave the child

confidence, identity, and direction.

- A parental blessing in Israel had the flavor of prophecy because: God often revealed His will through the patriarchs. The father functioned as the spiritual head of the family. The blessing was spoken in conscious recognition of God's promises.
- A Biblical blessing wasn't flattery. It was a parent recognizing who the child was becoming, what strengths God had woven into them, and what future faithfulness God could bring forth. The blessing both saw their present and shaped their future.

This is why Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3 to "be ye thankful" stands alongside mercy, kindness, forgiveness, and charity. Thankfulness enhances every other grace. When we express our gratitude to someone for their service, their love, or their faithfulness, our words become a mirror that reflects the grace of God in them. It shows them that their actions are bearing spiritual fruit. It helps them see that their labor in the Lord is not in vain. In this way, gratitude becomes more than a feeling—it becomes a ministry we exercise toward others.

Furthermore, gratitude builds trust and unity. It binds hearts together because appreciation communicates that we do not exist unto ourselves. We depend upon one another. We need one another. When we remind a brother or sister in Christ how much their faithfulness means to us, we knit the body of Christ more tightly together. A grateful church is a loving church; a loving church is a strong church. Nothing strengthens the bonds of fellowship more than the mutual recognition of God's grace at work in one another.

Phil 1:3-5 I thank my God upon
every remembrance of you,
4 Always in every prayer of mine
for you all making request with
joy,
5 For your fellowship in the
gospel from the first day until
now;

1Cor 12:25-26 That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Gratitude has a sanctifying influence. When we cultivate the habit of noticing God's grace in others and expressing thanks for it, we train our own hearts to see the good, not the faults. We become less critical and more compassionate. We speak life instead of discouragement. And as we reinforce goodness in others, God uses our words to encourage them in their spiritual responsibilities and actions. Gratitude, then, is not passive—it is profoundly productive. It builds love, strengthens resolve, motivates service, and deepens the unity of God's people. In short, gratitude creates the environment where Christian growth thrives.

Pro 11:25 The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

Expressing appreciation and encouragement “waters” others—and God waters us in return.

Pro 12:25 Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

Gratitude “speaks life instead of discouragement.” A good word lifts the heart.

Pro 15:30 The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: *and* a good report maketh the bones fat.

Seeing the good in others brings joy and strength.

Pro 16:24 Pleasant words *are as* an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.

When Scripture commands: "In every thing give thanks," it is not asking for a moment—it is asking for a lifestyle.

A heart that lives in gratitude will:

- Pray more
- Complain less
- Love deeper
- Serve gladly
- Worship sincerely
- Forgive quickly
- And obey joyfully

Gratitude is more than a table prayer. More than a holiday. More than polite manners. It is the Christian life itself. Jesus deserves more than a polite "thank You." He deserves—and demands—our hearts. He gave us everything, even His life. We owe Him everything, even our life. Let us thank Him in everything—not because everything is good, but because *God* is good.

Yesterday I noticed a long line of people waiting outside a church to receive a Thanksgiving food distribution. And I couldn't help but think—why don't we ever see people lining up like that to enter the church on Sunday? Are we grateful for the gifts but forgetful of the Giver? God loads us daily with blessings—life, breath, strength, and opportunities to serve Him. True thankfulness should not stop at receiving; it should move us toward Him with a glad sense of responsibility, offering ourselves in worship and obedience.

1Thess 5:16-18

1. The Difference Between Good Manners and True Gratitude 2Cor 9:15, Psa 106:1, 1Cor 9:16, Mat 10:8, Rom 12:1
2. Living in Gratitude - Luke 7:39-48
3. Clothed in Gratitude - Col 3:12-15, Pro 16:21, 15:23, Phil 1:3-5, 1Cor 12:25-26, Pro 11:25, 12:25, 15:30, 16:24