

## 736 What Does It Mean to be Thankful?

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### God's Answers to Life's Questions

This week our nation will set aside a day to give thanks to God for all our blessings. God has truly blessed this country and given us so much for which to be thankful. Let's never let it be said that we were ungrateful or forgetful for what God has done. Today we're asking the question, "What Does It Mean to Be Thankful?" William Law in his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* said, "Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is more eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it is he who is always thankful to God who wills everything that God wills, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it." In the old Anglo-Saxon, thankfulness means "thankfulness." Thinking of all God's goodness draws forth gratitude. Today we want to explore what it means to be thankful.

David said in Psalm 100:4, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name." A thankful heart is a cheerful heart and one ready to give praise to God. It counts its blessings and knows how good God has been to every one of us. In Psalm 103:1-5, David further urges us, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle."

The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 13:15, "Through Him [Jesus] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." Thanksgiving is not just a holiday for once a year; it should be a way of life. Every day think of the good God has done. James said in James 1:17, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." The food you eat, the water you drink, the clothes you wear, and the house you live in—all of them come from His loving hand. He does indeed crown us with lovingkindness and compassion. Some people grumble and complain about every little thing, not realizing all that God does for us each day.

Someone has rightly said when you have your health, you have much to be thankful for. God certainly blessed us with wonderful bodies. David said in Psalm 139:13-15, "For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;" Each of us is skillfully, fearfully, and wonderfully made. It is a great blessing to be able to see and hear and taste and smell and touch. God gave us minds to understand, hearts to love, and souls so that we could relate to Him. We are blessed indeed.

Paul said in Colossians 3:15-17, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." God gives us so many spiritual blessings. He gives us peace, He gives us His Word to teach and admonish us, He gives us a song to build us up, and He gives us a purpose in life. The goodness of God makes us better people. His love makes us want to love all the more.

It is not always easy to be thankful. Life is not always fair; things don't always go smoothly. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." The test of a Christian is not if he will give thanks when things are easy, but will he give thanks and praise God when life is harsh? Christians rejoice always for Christ and His cross, even when the world hates them. They don't quit praying, because life is rough. They pray even more. They give thanks "in" everything and in every circumstance. They know everything is not good or pleasant; but they also know Romans 8:28. It says: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Not everything is good, but God can cause it to work for good. So we give thanks in everything.

Perhaps you remember the Alabama native Helen Keller, who was both blind and deaf. Helen Keller said, "Use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind. If I had three days to see, this is what I would want to see. On the first day I would want to see the people whose kindness and companionship have made my life worth living. I would call in my friends and look for a long time into their faces. I would also look into the face of a new baby. I would like to see the many books which have been read to me. The next day I would get up early to see the dawn. I would visit a museum to learn of man's upward progress in the making of things. I would go to an art museum to probe the human souls by studying paintings and sculpture. The third morning I would again greet the dawn, eager to discover new beauties in nature. I would spend this last day in the haunts of persons, where they work. I would stand at a busy street corner, trying to understand something of the daily lives of persons by looking into their faces and reading what is written there. On the last evening I would go to a theater and see a hilariously funny play, so as to appreciate the overtones of humor in the human spirit. Yes, by God's light in Christ, seeing what matters and beholding the extraordinary in the commonplace.

Let us also capture the desire to appreciate all we can. We must learn to be thankful. What hurts me is how many people never learn to thank God for what we have. Paul said in Romans 1:18-23, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." The first step away from God is to forget all the good things He has done for you.

God honored Job, because even in great anguish, he did not forget God or leave Him. Job suffered a fate worse than anything I can imagine. What did Job lose? Job 1:2-3 says: "Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east." Except for a few servants Job lost them all. Even his wife told him to curse God and die, but Job did not react that way. Job 1:20-22 says: Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD

gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.” Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. We need this kind of faith and love for God. Because of his patience, God restored to Job all he lost and more.

Here are five things for which we all can be thankful. First, I am grateful that we are not where we were. Paul said in Romans 6:16-18, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” We all used to be enslaved to sin and lost, but now by God’s grace we have obeyed the gospel and are servants of righteousness. We are not where or what we were. Now we are God’s children. God’s grace and love for us is so broad and wonderful. We thank God for the blood of Christ that cleanses and transforms us.

Second, I am grateful that we today have a Father in heaven. I lost my earthly father many years ago. It was probably the hardest thing I ever faced, but I learned that I have a Father in heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33, “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” God the Father has been taking of me my whole life. He has watched over me and blessed me greatly. He has provided my needs. He hears my prayers. I am so thankful to have a Father who will always be with me.

Third, I am grateful that my name is written in heaven. You’ll remember that Jesus sent out seventy disciples to preach the gospel of the kingdom in Luke 10. He gave them power to heal and to cast out demons. Luke 10:17-20 says: The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

Thankfulness leaves no room for discouragement. I once read a legend of a man who found the barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart, and on finding the seeds of discouragement more numerous than others, he learned that those seeds could be made to grow almost anywhere. When Satan was questioned, he reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which he could never get them to thrive. “And where is that?” asked the man. Satan replied sadly, “In the heart of a grateful man.” My friend it matters whether or not you learn to be grateful.

Fourth, I am grateful that we have victory over death. In Christ we can have confidence even in the face of death. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put

on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We have hope because of Jesus. Thanks be to God.

Fifth, I am grateful that we have an inheritance. Jesus promised to build a dwelling place for us in His Father’s house. That dwelling place is ours forever; it is our inheritance. Peter said in 1 Peter 1:3-5, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Heaven is a marvelous gift God has in store for us. We can never lose it; it can’t burn, be flooded, or blow away. It won’t get old or decay. The best thing about heaven, however, is that we will spend eternity with God and with Christ. Don’t you want to go to heaven?

Leslie Flynn tells this story: In Vermont a farmer was sitting on the porch with his wife. He was beginning to realize how much she meant to him. It was about time—for they had lived together forty-two years, and she had been such a help, a very willing worker. One day as they sat together, he said, “Wife, you’ve been such a wonderful woman that there are times I can hardly keep from telling you.” I wonder if God has not been so good to us there are times we can hardly keep from telling Him. Really, it’s a bit cruel not to say “thank you.” I look forward more than anything to going to heaven and seeing Jesus. The first thing I want to do is to look into His eyes and say to Him “Thank you for dying for me. Thank you for shedding your blood to cleanse me from all my terrible sins, so that I could live with you.” I hope we never become like the nine lepers Jesus healed. You’ll remember in Luke 17 they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” How often people today want and want and want from God, but never think to give their praise, their thanks, or their hearts to Him. Have you? Are you? Have you decided to follow Jesus and serve the One who loves you? God’s goodness ought to lead us to change our lives and be obedient to His will. If I love God and am thankful to Him for His grace, I will gladly do whatever He asks me to do. The grace and love of God makes us want to believe or trust in Him, to repent of all our sins, to confess His name, and to be baptized into Christ. In baptism we die with Him, are buried with Him, and are raised with Him to walk in newness of life. Nothing could be more meaningful. God wants you, your heart, your life, and your soul. Won’t you serve Him and follow Him always. Thankfulness begins when people keep the Lord Jesus in their hearts everyday and serve Him.

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