

1 Thess. 5:18

Thanksgiving: How to Grow in Gratitude

The Summit Church, *Summit Online + Podcast*

MPT: It's God's will for Christians to give thanks in all circumstances.

MPS: Thanksgiving is a command for all contexts that is part of our calling.

INTRODUCTION

Happy Thanksgiving, Summit Church. For those of you who may be listening to this on the podcast, we're set up a little different this weekend, as I'm here preaching this sermon to a room of about 10 people **in our studio**...so however this sermon is getting to you this weekend, I pray this message finds you **fat and happy and full of leftovers** from Thursday.

I may be alone in this, but does **anybody else think the leftovers taste better** than the *actual* meal? Something about **second dinner** on Thanksgiving that just hits different.

- (Hopefully that's how some of you **will feel** about not having Pastor J.D. this weekend--**I may be the leftovers**, but let me tell you that I have chosen the finest cut of Scripture from the fridge, I'm gonna heat it up and hopefully serve it just right for you. Scripture is PRIME grade beef regardless of who is preaching it, amen?)

Speaking of the holiday season, I feel like **more than ever** this year I've heard the debates over **when the start of the Christmas season should be**. Recently I heard Thanksgiving be called the **"John the Baptist" of holidays**--it's just a predecessor of the greater one that's coming. **Let's go ahead and separate the sheep from the wolves here:**

- Who thinks you should wait until **after Thanksgiving** to celebrate Christmas?
- Who thinks it's fair game **immediately after Halloween**?
 - (The correct answer is 'A'--wait until after Thanksgiving. If you're one that starts right after Halloween, man, what a slap in the face to Thanksgiving. Just an **afterthought of a holiday** jammed in the middle of "the holidays." What a pity.)

I've been thinking a lot lately about the idea of Thanksgiving. Not just the holiday, but **truly the idea of "thanks-giving;" Of "giving thanks"--of living a thankful, grateful life.**

I've been thinking about it, cuz we live in a culture constantly inundated with **outrage** and **anger** and **frustration** and **irritation**. The leading headline every day might as well be:

FEAR THIS!
BE UPSET ABOUT THAT!
WHY AREN'T YOU OUTRAGED ENOUGH OVER THIS!

*(Now, of course there are times we should be **upset and outraged** over injustices in our world. I'm not talking about those...I'm talking about the propensity to **wake up on a Tuesday morning** and already be bombarded by **fear-based media, marketing** that desires to make us feel ungrateful unless we own certain things, and our **hearts bend** toward **constant irritation** with everyone and everything that doesn't **live, think, drive, and do** exactly how we think they should.)*

If ever there were a place this **shouldn't be the case**--if ever there were a place that *should* be filled with **thankfulness** and **joy** and **gratitude** and **grace** and **mercy** and **patience** and **love**--it should be in the church of Jesus Christ, right?. . . **Key word: *should* (Can I get a witness?)**.

One of the saddest parts of the Church today, IMO, is that we are known far more for what **we are against** than what **we are for**.

- Instead of being a people of **perpetual gratitude**, we fall prey to **grumbling** just as quickly as the next person.
- Instead of **never ending thanks**, we are prone to **constant complaining** like the rest of the world.
 - To be clear, I'm not perched up in my ivory tower throwing stones here, I'm as guilty as anyone in this. Be honest, *how many professional grumblers do we have here?* Some of us complain like it's our job.

Spurgeon once said, "I do not think the church rejoices enough. We all grumble enough and groan enough: but very few of us rejoice enough."

When I think about the people I love being around the most, almost all of them have one character trait in common: they are people of **gratitude**. People of **joy**. People who, in their attitudes, actions, and words, seem to just **give thanks** constantly.

These are the people who have tapped into the secret of 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which is where we're gonna be today...

1 Thessalonians 5:18, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

I think it's time for the church to **repent** for our lack of **rejoicing**. And it's time to regain the lost value of **thankfulness** that should be a **distinguishing mark** of a Christian.

Here's the main idea I want you to take away from today in regards to thanksgiving: **Thanksgiving is a command for all contexts that is part of our calling.**

We have a command, a context, and a calling..

WALKTHROUGH

1) COMMAND

"give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Command: Give Thanks

In an **increasingly secular age**, Thanksgiving is an **oddy**.

- It's one of the few traditional holidays that **hasn't been renamed** ("Winter break" or "happy holidays").
- There's no **offensive Starbucks cups** that go along with it.
- Most companies and organizations **take a break for a day** with the purpose of "giving thanks" (at least theoretically...until midnight when folks go insane over Black Friday shopping).
- Thanksgiving is kind of this **universally recognized** day set aside to "give thanks" that **hasn't been co-opted for a political agenda**.

However, the puzzling question in our culture is, *To whom are people expressing thanks?* G.K. Chesterton once said, "The worst moment for an atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank."

Sure, it's easy to sit here and knock an atheist for **inconsistencies in gratitude**, but I can't help but wonder if we too have missed the Bible's teaching on thanksgiving. See if we, as believers--knowing what Jesus has done for us--live thankless lives then **our 'inconsistency' is actually way more of a problem** than an atheist who refuses to give thanks...because you and I *know* to whom we are supposed to be giving thanks. So *not* giving thanks makes it even more egregious of a sin (Romans 1 addresses this!)

Clearly God knows something about our **propensity for ingratitude**, for he has to **remind** and **command** us in 1 Thess 5:18 to give thanks.

And God's not subtle about it either:

- Variations of the word "thank" are used almost 150x in the Bible. 38 of those times we're specifically told to "give thanks."

Now the **Greek word** for 'thanks' is *eucharisteō*. That word might sound familiar to some of you if you grew up in church: communion, Lord's Supper, **Eucharist. . . eucharisteō**. It's the word that Jesus used when he was administering the Lord's Supper with the disciples and he broke the bread and "gave thanks." When we take the Lord's Supper we're literally "giving thanks" in remembrance of what Jesus has done for us.

In **Hebrew**, there are at least **seven words for praise and thanks**.¹ This is fascinating. Listen to these:

1. *Todah*: a thanksgiving choir
2. *Barak*: to kneel in thanksgiving
3. *Tehillah* (not tequila...): to sing a song of thanksgiving
4. *Halal* (where we get hallelujah): to give thanks by boasting and praising God
5. *Yadah*: to give thanks with expressive gratitude. (IOW, to extend hands in praise...not a pentecostal thing; a Bible thing)
6. *Zamar*: to give thanks with a musical instrument
7. *Shabach*: to give thanks in a loud tone (shout to the Lord)

4 out of 7 of these words are found in one single Psalm--**Psalm 100:4**,

*"Enter his gates with **todah** (thanksgiving choir), and into his courts with **tehillah** (singing praises). **Yadah** (Extend your hands) to him, **barak** (kneel in thanksgiving) before his name."*

¹ Robert Morris, [His Thanksgiving](#)

Thanksgiving is supposed to be **so central** to who we are as followers of Jesus that it causes us to **sing** his praise, **shout** his praise, **lift our hands** in praise, **kneel** in praise.

- Some of you wonder why others have their **hands in the air** and **sing freely** and **loudly** and are **praying** and **weeping** in church--and you think it's weird--it's because they understand *who it is* their giving thanks to.
- Gratitude is what causes worship to come forth. **You'll never be a worshiper if you're not grateful.**
- (FWIW, I'm not saying that if you *don't* worship like this that you don't love God. Don't let me lose you here. The point I'm trying to make is that our thanksgiving, at some point, is going to flow from **inside our hearts** and begin to **affect our actions**. That's gonna look differently for everyone...even depending on personality type.)

This type of thanksgiving is **repeated** and **expected** and **commanded** over and over in the Bible. Look at **Psalm 92**...

***¹It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;***

See when we talk about this idea of "giving thanks" it is inextricably linked with **who God is**--we give thanks to THE LORD...sing praises to HIS NAME. The more we learn about God, the more we should **praise** and **glorify** him.

And *this is where* the Christian's Thanksgiving diverges from the world's...cuz this is NOT the way the Thanksgiving holiday is set up in our culture.

- The way we practice thanksgiving as a culture, it's generally a kind of "glass half full" thanksgiving--we **focus on the positive** and **look for silver linings**.

- But what prompts believers to thanksgiving isn't "looking for the positive" in situations...it's **knowing who walks with us in ALL of our situations.**

CS Lewis talked about how being thankful is **woven into a life of worshipping God.** He notes that our tendency is to give God thanks for what he has done for us--the blessings he has bestowed upon us, namely the gift of salvation through Jesus. Which is awesome. We should definitely do that--literally count our blessings.

But when we really get down to the root of what our thankfulness should spring from for the believer, **it's not just from what God has given us, we should be thankful simply for who God is.** Being thankful is one thing, Lewis says, but **knowing *who we're thanking*** leads us into a life saturated with both **thanksgiving** and, listen to this, thanks-living...Living a life of **worship, gratitude, thanks, and fellowship** with the One true God.

You know, we talk a lot about having an "attitude of gratitude." But I think **thanksgiving is far less about an attitude and far more about an action**—'thanksgiving' is one thing; 'thanks*living*' is a whole different 'nother thing.

- Having an "attitude of gratitude" is great...but it's only great inasmuch as it's followed up with "habits of gratitude."

Brene Brown (who has become a leading author, thinker and TED talker) talks about this in her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*. She talks about how she can have a "**yoga attitude**"--she's got the **yoga attitude**, she owns the **yoga pants**, she's got the **yoga mat**, the **yoga water bottle**...you can *ask her* to stand on her head and strike a **yoga pose**. But with all of those yoga things, she's still never done yoga. She hasn't put her **yoga attitude** into **yoga action**. So would you say she's a yogi? No!

See, **gratitude w/o practice** may be a little bit like **faith w/o works**--it's not alive. *If someone claims to be thankful for Jesus in their lives, but constantly **complains**, is **irritated**, and seems **ungrateful** for everything and everyone...what's gonna be your conclusion about that person?...or, even worse, this God they claim?*

So, yes, *do you have a grateful heart?* That's a great question and something to assess. . . but also *is that **heart** matched with **habits**?*
Keller: "It's one thing to be grateful. It's another to give thanks. Gratitude is what you feel. Thanksgiving is what you do."

Practically what does this look like?

- Well, if you feel **emotionally distant from your spouse**, start doing some things you did when dating: express gratitude. Write notes. Buy them flowers. Text them throughout the day. Do things you did at first. Get out of your joggers, take a shower, get dressed, and take them out on a date.
- Once a week, send an **email to a co-worker** encouraging them.
 - *I saw. I appreciate.*
- Once a month, **send a note to your pastor thanking them** for the way they serve the church (I wouldn't be mad if there were a Starbucks gift card in there).
- Every night, take 5 minutes to replay the day, and ask, "**Where did God meet my needs today?**"
- As part of your morning quiet time, **write down one way God has been faithful to you.**
- Make this one of your **small talk questions with other people:** *"What's made you grateful recently? Where have you seen God working in your life?"*

Practicing gratitude...practicing having a thankful heart.. this is why **Psalm 107:2**, "**Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!**" Not just "think so." SAY SO. It's a command!

- (I'd appreciate if someone did that during my sermon if you think it's good--SAY SO.)

See, Church, we always have a reason to give thanks--**God has never stopped being good; we've just stopped being grateful!** God has never stopped being good, so we should never stop giving thanks! I agree with **Pastor Charles Dates** when he **begs of his church**:

- *May we never be a people who come to church and sit on our hands, indifferent to who God is.*
- *May we never come to church and look at the worship team and say, "Pfft, they better be glad we showed up today."*
- *May we never come to church out of obligation and think we're worthy to be here, in God's presence.*
- *May, when our feet cross the threshold of the sanctuary, may we **feel the desire to worship** long before any blessings have fallen into our lap, but may we worship God and give him thanks simply and solely because of who he is!*

First, **thanksgiving is a command**. But it's a command that's set **in all contexts**.

- So first we have a **command**, and now we have a context for that **command**...

2) CONTEXT

"give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Our **command** is to give thanks.

Our **context** is to give thanks in all circumstances.

Notice this says to give thanks in all circumstances...not *for* all circumstances. Very important distinction. We are NOT called to be thankful *for* every circumstance and situation in our lives.

- This is one of those lessons that can **best be communicated by older Saints**...cuz they've been around long enough to know that **the Christian life isn't one permanent mountaintop**. Walk with God long enough and you're gonna go through

some things that, on one hand you would never wish upon anyone, but on the other hand you are incredibly grateful for because you **got to know God on a deeper level** than you ever imagined. You learn to be thankful in the hard times; even though you're not thankful for the hard time.

Listen:

- God is not commanding you to be thankful for the **job you just got laid off from**.
- He's not commanding you to be thankful for **the empty seat at your Thanksgiving table because of the loved one you just lost**.
- He's not commanding you to be thankful for the **betrayal that just occurred**.
- You shouldn't be thankful for the **seasonal affectiveness disorder that brings about depression** this time of year.

We're not commanded to be thankful *for* all circumstances, but we are called to be thankful *in* all circumstances. IOW, we are to **"give thanks in the midst of everything."** Not *for* everything.

You're probably like, *"Ahhh, I hear you, Pastor. But you just don't know my situation. No person in their right mind would give thanks if they were in my circumstances."*

- Gosh, if this is you, listen: You're right. What I DON'T want you to hear right now is some, *"Just change your perspective and your praise will follow!"* message. While that may be a *competent* strategy for you to some degree; it's not a comforting one.
- Whatever you're going through, I may not know your specific pain--I may know *some* of it--but I'm sure your brothers and sisters in Christ do. And I want to remind you that you are shoulder to shoulder with other believers who *have* walked through **loss, financial hardship, and depression**.

But even more important and valuable than that, I want you to know--if you hear nothing else today--is that **Jesus himself knows what it's like to hurt.**

- Jesus knows what it's like to be **betrayed.**
- Jesus knows what it's like to be **misunderstood.**
- Jesus knows what it's like to be **slandered, and lied about, and hunted down and broken, hungry, and abused.**
- He knows what it's like to **lose a loved one and weep.**
- Church, we do not serve a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our **weaknesses, wounds, and weariness.**

And while you may **hope** and **pray** he takes you *out of* your situation, what you can know for sure is that **he is with you in your situation.** That he **sympathizes** with you. That he'll **never leave you and he'll never forsake you.** And it's because of *that* knowledge, you can still give thanks--because his presence is with you, even in the "presence of thine enemies and circumstances."

As an author friend of mine recently wrote: *What unites the high times and the hard times? What allows us to offer them both to God with a sincere, "Thank you"? **God's presence.** I don't know what 2021 held for you. Nor do I know what 2022 holds for any of us. But one thing I do know: **God was there. And God will be there.** He walks ahead of us and invites us to follow him in the pathway to peace. And the rougher the road, the more he promises to hold our hands along the way.²*

Whatever context you find yourself in, you can still give thanks because the goodness of God is there.

One of our female leaders here at TSC--Kelsey--has been facing some very serious health issues for the last 18 months. This week she said something SO PROFOUND in the midst of her pain: **"Peace and joy are fruits of the Spirit, not fruits of my circumstances."**

- Oh, Church, would we, like Kelsey, realize we can access **peace** and **joy** and **thankfulness** and **gratitude** EVEN IF our

circumstances never change because we know that God is always with us.

- This is exactly what Paul meant in **Philippians 4:13** when he said, **"I can do all things through Christ!"** We use that in **sports** and **tests** and **job interviews** and **parenting**...but don't forget the context--Paul was in prison writing about joy! He said, "I know how to be:
 - Brought low, abound.
 - Having plenty, being hungry.
 - Rich, poor.
 - I can do all things..."

We are commanded to **give thanks**, in all **contexts**, and that's because it's crucial to our **calling.**

3) CALLING

"give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

We all want to know God's will for our lives, right? So what does that mean--"for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"?

First, this applies not just to our verse here--v18--but it backs up to v16. And what it says is that God's will is for us to **"rejoice always, pray w/o ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances."**

- It's God's will that we should **rejoice, pray, and give thanks** always.

Second, we need to realize that ***this applies to whom?*** Let's do a little grammar work here: **"for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"**...that little phrase ***"in Christ Jesus" modifies what? It modifies "for you."***

- Meaning, for those of you in Christ Jesus, for those of you who call yourselves Christians, **this is God's will FOR YOU.**
- Being thankful always is not God's will for the world, for the world can't be **joyful** and **thankful** always because **they don't**

² Pappalardo, *Thanksgiving After Another Tough Year*

know the source of all joy and gratitude...they don't know Jesus...they don't know about salvation.

- Being thankful always is God's will for you, Christian!

Now, you're like, "This is gonna be hard for me--I'm not naturally a happy-go-lucky, super-positive, optimistic person. I wanna be thankful, but how am I supposed to do that?"

Good news: it's not just God's will for you to will it; it's God's will to work it in your life. vPhilippians 2:13, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

- He wills it and he works it.
- If you are in Christ, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, then what is going to characterize your life is gratitude and thanksgiving...it's gonna be as normal and natural as breathing to you because the Spirit of God is willing and working inside of you and the result of that work is thanksgiving.

Alistair Begg says the call of the Christian life is to become what you already are in Christ. Colossians 2:6 says, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,"

- The tense here is not simply the past tense...it's a tense that conveys there has been a complete action in the past (you received Christ) that has continuing results and conditions (walk in him; rejoice in him; give thanks to him).
- Gratitude and thanksgiving is simply living out what we've already become in Christ.

So I have to state the obvious implication here: Maybe, for some of you, the reason you're not thankful is because you don't have the Spirit of God living inside of you. You've been playing the religion game, but you've never actually personally received Jesus as your Savior. Perhaps your ingratitude is a result of not actually being "in Christ Jesus."

You're trying to walk out a command and live out a calling that's impossible for you cuz there's no Spirit inside of you.

- You're trying to live the Christian life by your own power, instead of the power of the Holy Spirit. You're being called to do something you don't have the power to do!
- You're trying to drive a car w/o an engine.

Without the Spirit inside of you, you're just gonna hear this sermon as a religious burden and another call to do something that you are not equipped to carry. It's the epitome of seeing God as rules-based instead of relationship-based.

But I'm here to tell you, God sent Jesus to will and to work in your life. If you repent of your sin and ingratitude...if you acknowledge God for who he is and what he has done for you on the Cross at Calvary, he will...

- ...first and foremost, save you from your sin.
- ...then will "will and work in you" to carry out this command and calling on your life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION (VAMP)

For those of us in Christ, we never lack reason or occasion for praise and thanksgiving:

- We've been given an eternal gift in Jesus Christ.
- We should be thankful for our salvation.
- We should be thankful that sin and death have been defeated.
- We should be thankful for the power of prayer and that we have the ear of the almighty Creator.
- We should be thankful for our bibles.
- We should be thankful that God's mercies are new every single morning.
- We should be thankful that God never changes--that he is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore and that he can be trusted.

- We should be thankful that **God did not condemn us when we first sinned**, but instead **sent his Son to die in our place**, so that if we receive him we would live forever with God.

Church, God never stops being good so may we never stop giving thanks. Therefore, we **praise** him. We **worship** him. We **give thanks** to him.

We should respond like the **African church father, Augustine**, said...saying **“A Christian should be an Alleluia from head to foot.”**

Whether you’ve ever recognized it or not, all of our life stories are wrapped up in Thanksgiving³:

1. We were **created for thanksgiving**, to live in God’s presence forever.
2. Because of sin, we have all **fallen from thanksgiving**.
3. But, praise God, we were **redeemed by Jesus’ thanksgiving offering** in his own body.
4. And now, because of that sacrifice, we are **freed for thanksgiving**--having been **“strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”**⁴
 - a. So now we **“give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”**

PRAY

CS Lewis: “May our list of ‘Thank-you’s’ always be greater than our list of ‘please’s’.”

³ Mathis, [The True Story of Thanksgiving](#)

⁴ Colossians 1:11-14