

Thankfulness

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[0 : 00] It's really nice to see everybody this morning. God bless all of you. It's always a joy to be in the Lord's meeting hall with God's people.

Great creator, friend of ours.

God, we need so much to be more aware of your presence. We're here again. You are here again. Come, Lord.

Live among us. Live in our presence now in this moment. Speak to us through your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thanksgiving this week. You all know that. You've all been thinking about it. And, of course, a lot of the children are out sick today, by the way. That's where it seems like a lot of our kids are.

[1 : 14] But for the young folks that are here that are school age, you're very aware of it because you get some break time this week. And it's always good to get a little break from school. And the adults that are still working, that's a good thing.

You get a few days off from work. There you go. But all of us enjoy Thanksgiving. I don't know about you. It's actually my favorite holiday of the year. I like Thanksgiving more than any other holiday.

So many things to give thanks for. I was looking over a list that somebody put together this week and they said, be thankful for yard work. And I was like, what?

He said, you get to deal with dirt outside of the house for a change. He said, be thankful if you live with teenagers.

You have the opportunity to learn a second language. Be thankful for your bathtub. It might be the only place where you get some time to yourself.

[2 : 19] Be thankful for your neighbor's child that is annoying because he or she is not your kid.

Be thankful for the smoke alarm because it will let you know when the turkey's done. That list could go on and on and on.

By human nature, it's weird, isn't it? It's a part of our sinfulness. We tend not to be thankful. We tend to be ungrateful. I mean, really, that's our tendency.

And some people are just about impossible to please. The story is told of a dog went in a butcher's shop one day.

He was carrying a basket, you know, with the handle of a basket in his mouth. He goes in the butcher shop, jumps up with his paws on the counter, and sets the basket down.

[3 : 18] And the butcher looks over and looks in the basket, and there's some money in there. And he says, well, hey there, little boy, did you come to get some meat? And the dog goes, woof. The butcher thinks, kind of strange, huh?

You, what do you want? You want some liver? Bacon? Chicken? Steak? And the dog goes, woof. The butcher thinks, boy, this is really strange.

But she says, how much would you want there, little fellow, rover? You want a half a pound? A pound? Pound and a half?

Two pounds? Dog goes, woof. He says, okay. So he reaches around, and he looks in there. There's enough money to buy a couple pounds of steak. So he cuts off a couple pounds of steak, wraps it up into butcher paper, puts it in the basket, takes the money out, puts the change back in the basket.

And he says, well, there you go, boy. Have a good day. The dog just jumps up, grabs that basket in his mouth again, goes out the door, trotting down the street. The butcher says, I've got to follow this dog.

[4 : 34] This is amazing. So he's following, you know, about 20 feet or 30 feet behind the dog. The dog goes several blocks down the street until he comes to an apartment building. And he goes in, and he goes up three flights of stairs, carrying this basket.

The guy's following along behind him. He goes down about five doors, and he's scratching on the door and scratching on the door. And the door opens, and a man comes out, and he starts shouting at that dog and screaming and fussing.

And the butcher can't stand there. He jumps up and says, stop, stop. This is the most intelligent dog I've ever seen. And the guy says, you call that intelligent?

This is the third time this week he went off without his key. Some people are impossible to please. Well, Satan attacks the church often, especially through ingratitude.

[5 : 43] When we don't have a grateful heart, it opens the whole church up to attacks the more that we're not grateful for what we have. Again, just kind of a crazy story.

This was not a joke. It has a serious thought to it. But a new demon showed up for work. And the head devil there was showing him the storehouse where they had all the seeds of temptation. And they're walking through. And he says, well, now, there's the seeds of anger. There's the seeds of self-pity. There's the seeds of greed. There's the seeds of lust. There's the seeds of family problems.

I mean, just going through. And then they come to a massive area. I mean, just huge. And he says, what are those? Those are the seeds of discouragement.

And the young demon says, well, why are there so many of those? Those other sins seem more serious. And this demon says, well, it can be hard to get a seed of anger or something to grow.

[6 : 52] But you can get a seed of discouragement to grow almost anywhere. And the young demon says, where won't they grow? He says, well, it is really hard to get a seed of discouragement to grow in the heart of a thankful person.

And I've thought on that. And I thought, boy, is that ever true? As long as I'm giving thanks and thinking on the things where God has blessed me, it is real hard to get discouraged.

But when I get my mind in that other direction of not being appreciative and thankful, oh, man, it's easy to get discouraged. Well, I was meditating some on this and doing a little Bible study.

And I was wondering, well, Lord, why do we give thanks anyway? And you could come up with your own list.

But as I was studying through the Bible, just looking up and doing a search on the word thanks and thanksgiving and thankful. And I came up with some verses that spoke to my heart.

[8 : 04] And I want to share them with you. One reason that I'll begin with, and I think I've got about a dozen of these. We'll go through them quickly. Be thankful because it is the right thing to do.

How about read this scripture with me? It's Psalm 92.1. It is good to give thanks to the Lord. Let's read it again. It is good to give thanks to the Lord.

You see, it's just the right thing to do. It's a good thing to do. Let's look at another one. God has commanded us to give thanks.

Read with me Psalm 104. Be thankful to him and bless his name. You see, that's in the imperative. Be thankful.

Bless his name. It's not optional. As a follower of Christ, you are told and commanded to be thankful. Let's look at another. This is thankfulness.

[9 : 09] We give thanks because it is our response to the salvation we have received. Paul said this in Romans 7.25. Read it with me. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What has Jesus done for us? Wow. The only way you really thank God is through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are strangers. We are sinners.

We are bound for punishment except through Jesus Christ our Lord. So our response to our salvation is to be thankful. Let's look at another verse.

It can change your whole perspective towards your life. We tend to be so self-centered.

Thankfulness can help us to become more God-centered, more content.

Read with me Philippians 4.11. I have learned to be content in any situation. That's the situation that drives you nuts.

[10 : 12] If we will just learn to be thankful and give God thanks for the parts of it that are good. Oh, how blessed we would be.

Young Mark and Callie and Becky and I went to a marriage retreat. And I remember one of the things that the speaker, this guy Gary Chapman, wrote the five love languages.

One of the things he said, he was talking about, you need to focus on what is good about your spouse and compliment them on that. Encourage them for that.

And he said once after he'd given that talk, a lady came up to him and said, there is nothing I like about my husband. Nothing. How can I possibly point out what's good?

And he said, so I thought about it a minute and I asked her, does he take a shower? And she said, yeah.

[11:15] He says, oh, some people don't. So why don't you start with that? Tell him how much you appreciate that he takes a shower. The point being that thankfulness helps us to be content in our situation.

It helps us to focus on what's good instead of what's not. We live in an age of anxiety. Thankfulness will help to cure our anxiety. It's another reason to be thankful.

Read Philippians 4, 6 with me. Don't be anxious. Instead, ask God with thanksgiving. We need to create the habit that when we're praying, we're always giving thanks.

You ask God with thanksgiving. We're big on asking God. Even unbelievers will ask God when they're in a jam. God, help me now. But we forget to give thanks.

Even as we're asking, we forget to give thanks. Even for the thing that's an unanswered prayer so far. We could at least say to the Lord, God, I thank you that you're working on this problem.

[12:27] I thank you that you are. Even though I don't see the results yet, I have brought it to you, Lord. So I'm trusting you that you're at work. Let's look at another one.

It is the basis. We give thanks to God because it is the basis of our worship. Here's an amazing verse that I found in 1 Chronicles 23 and 30.

Read it with me. Morning and evening they stood before the Lord to sing songs of thanks. Becky, what if we actually began every day and ended every day with a song of thanks?

Wouldn't that be amazing? We ought to think about that. Wow. How often do you sing? I must say I met a lady.

I was in a nursing home and was there too. It was the Bayberry Center where Susan goes and teaches once a month. I go about three or four times a year and teach.

[13:36] We got introduced to that nursing home by Mike Parker's mama, Dee, was a resident there. Anyway, in that resident's home, or what's it called?

Assisted living home. I was talking to a lady there who was approaching 100 many years ago. And so I was talking to her about, you know, what kept her happy, what was good about life.

And she said, I never go a day without singing at least one hymn. She said, every day I pull my hymn book out in the morning sometime and I sing a hymn.

And I thought, wow. Have I done it? No. Should I? Yes. Praise the Lord. Let's look at another good reason for giving thanks.

People are being saved. Look how Paul said it in 2 Corinthians 4.15. Read it with me. As God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving.

[14:44] Steve Garrett, I think you let me know this week that you were blessed to lead a guy to accept Christ this week. Hallelujah. The angels are rejoicing. We all need to be rejoicing.

Praise the Lord. As more and more people are getting saved. Glenn Hawke shared with me this week that he saw a thing somewhere on a news thing, a Christian news thing, that somebody a few weeks ago had rented Dorton Arena in Raleigh and invited college students.

And they packed the place. And 600, NC State, Peace College, whatever, Meredith College, 600 got saved in Raleigh about three weeks ago.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. And then, interesting, Glenn, just yesterday, Becky and I were visiting with a family that were big NC State fans.

And the subject came up. And they said, oh, yeah, that really happened. Our son was there. And 600 got saved. Praise God.

[15:52] He's at work. And so we should give thanks. People are being saved. There's more coming into the kingdom of God. Another good reason to give thanks.

In order to have a more joyful life. Read with me Colossians 2.7. Let your lives overflow with joy and thankfulness for all he has done.

Let your life overflow with joy, with thankfulness. And then we need to give thanks. And then we need to give thanks because it will make our prayers more effective.

Read with me Colossians 4.2. Devote yourselves to prayer with a thankful heart. And again, that repeats what we saw in that earlier scripture.

As you're praying, be giving God thanks. It's an important part of your prayer life. Another reason to give thanks.

[16:55] I love this one. Number 10 in my list. God created food to eat.

Can I get an amen? Amen. Wow. I mean, I would say you're not a Baptist for sure. You're not a believer. Probably. You're probably not human.

If you're not excited about God created food to eat. And there's actually a scripture on that. 1 Timothy 4.3 and 4. Read it with me. God created foods to be eaten with thanks.

I was just thinking about that scripture. Just really meditating on it. So I'm saying, really Lord? I mean, obviously we always give thanks for food. But I mean, you intentionally made food for us to enjoy, to be thankful.

And I really got to think about it. And I thought, once a day at least, I've got to recharge my cell phone. It runs down. And I plug it in.

[18:02] And every day it gets the same old electricity. Every day. And that gives it the energy to go. And my car runs out of gas.

Well, it used to run out of gas a lot. And then they finally put those little lights in there that come on to let you know you've got 30 more miles. Before that, you would often find me on the side of the road with my car out of gas.

But anyway, it gets low on gas. And it needs more energy. So I go down to the gas station. And I put the same old flavored 87 octane in the tank.

My flashlight runs down. And I stick the same old alkaline flavored battery in there. But when you and I need more energy, look what God has done for us.

Oh, my goodness. Pizza. Bacon. Bacon. Bacon. Apple pie and ice cream.

[19:08] What's your favorite? Key lime pie. Hash browns. Hash browns. Candy says spaghetti. Spaghetti. The list could go.

In a Mexican restaurant, if they bring out those sizzling fajita plates. Yeah. Shh. Oh. Bread baking the aroma.

And y'all know I've talked about this one before. And for our anniversary, I dragged Becky up to the mall so I could get a Cinnabon. Whew.

Whew. Well, she got a little bit of it. To really, this is true. Now, this part's true of cheapskate, Matt. To really top it off, to make it a really special night, I said, let's just enjoy a quiet cup of coffee together. I said, okay. Okay. So, we left Crabtree and went to that little McDonald's there and got two senior citizen coffees for about 69 cents with a free refill.

[20:15] Tell you what. I told the young lady. The young lady came over. I said, would you mind making a fresh pot of decaf? And she said, well, okay.

Sure. I said, look, it's a special night. I said, you see that woman sitting over there. I really did this. You see that woman. She looks. Yeah. I said, today we've been married 47 years.

We're going to celebrate with two cups of senior citizen decaf coffee. She kind of backed up a little bit.

You know, went sneaking over to the kitchen. You know, keep in mind. Anyway, it was fun. And that is absolutely a true story. Just like that. Well, but I'm a big spender.

I spare no expense at McDonald's on that little lady right there. Well, well, God didn't have to. You know, he could have just issued us one tree that spit out one little cube of no tasting.

[21:21] You know, tastes like grits with nothing on it. You know. Some of y'all, oh, I love grits with nothing on it. But that's because you're a southerner. You're nuts or something, right?

Now, like grits, you put a good butter on it and cheese and whatever. All right. Salt. Exactly. See? Shrimp. Shrimp. See? Garlic. Look at all that stuff God put out.

See, I'm saying, he didn't have to make life so wonderful. But thank God when you sit down to eat this week, you can give thanks because God created thousands of flavors and fragrances and aromas just for your pleasure.

And we have good time with other people, don't we? Don't we? No. Wow. And I don't have a scripture in here about giving thanks for other people to share with. Wow.

But it makes a meal a whole lot better. Wow. Okay. Well, let's look at another. I've only got two of these to go. We give thanks because we are followers of Jesus.

[22 : 25] And that was his example. Read with me in John 6, 11. Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks to God. If Jesus wanted to give thanks to God and he actually created the wheat, he was the creator.

And he was giving thanks to God the father. Well, I don't know about you, but I haven't raised my food lately. And I didn't build the highway I drove here on.

And I didn't make the medicines that I needed and took the last time I was sick. And that just goes on and on and on. I didn't build my house. I didn't create the gasoline that I put into the car I didn't build.

It just goes on and on and on. If Jesus gave thanks for even what he did create, shouldn't we give thanks for all things? Wow. We came into this world with nothing.

Well, the last one I'll share. We give thanks because the Lord deserves it. Read with me.

Revelations 5, 12.

[23 : 37] Worthy is the lamb to receive thanksgiving. Is he worthy? Is he worthy of your praise? Did he hang on the cross for your sins?

Did he shed his blood so that you would have eternal life? Did he die in your place? Did he create you on purpose with a plan? Did he adopt you into the family of God when you didn't deserve it? Is he worthy? Is he worthy? And yet so often we don't give thanks. I got to end by telling you a phone call I had this week.

I have a friend. I've mentioned him before, maybe in a sermon, certainly to some of you. Young man. He's, well, he's my son's age. 40. How old are you, Steve? 45.

I think he's about 43 or something like that. His name's Tim. When he was only about 21, he was drunk.

[24 : 41] He got in a fight. He murdered two men. I've known this guy. I knew his parents before he was born. And I knew him from a baby.

Well, he went to court. And he happened to murder them at an NC State tailgate party before a football game.

And it was such a public thing. The judge really threw the book at him. He ended up with a life without parole. Now, in North Carolina, life without parole means without parole.

You are never going to get out of prison. So, about five or six years ago, we kind of got reconnected. And I've been going to visit him some. And he and I send each other.

He's got, he's permitted one way that he can send an email. He doesn't have access to the internet. But he and I will send emails to each other. And he can make a collect phone call to me.

[25 : 43] And over the years of visiting him, I found out that after he was in prison, he had gotten really on the wrong track. Really on the wrong track.

But one of the first jobs they gave him in prison was to be in charge of the library in the prison. And he's a pretty smart kid. And so he started reading books.

And he read every book in their library. I think he said it was about 1,500 books or so. He read every one of them, cover to cover. He read everything about science fiction and novels and all kinds of mechanics and engineering and just regular science and medical stuff and entertainment stuff.

And he read stuff about philosophy, about all kinds of religions, everything about Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam and whatever. And somewhere in all of that, he came to really believe that Jesus Christ is the answer.

And he truly is the Son of God. He also read the Bible cover to cover, sitting in the library. I didn't sit there all day with nothing to do. He would read books. And after he became a Christian and he began to practice that, he realized, okay, I'm in prison the rest of my life.

[27 : 01] God, what do you want me to do? And it came to him, his ministry, his mission in life was to help the other inmates any way he could.

Now, I've been to see him, you know, like I said, quite a few times. And I have found out from him that, you know, we conservatives, whatever, we tend to say, oh, they got it made in prison.

They just sit there and watch TV all day and take it easy and it ain't like prison. And, well, you ought to talk to somebody in prison. Because, you know, he says, the food is absolutely terrible, but you can eat it.

The clothes are not comfortable and they don't fit well. And he said, especially shoes. If you have to wear the shoes they issue. He said, now, fortunately for me, my mama will ship me a pair of shoes about once a year.

He said, but boy, those prison shoes, they'll wear your feet out. And he said, the medical care here is terrible. You get sick, you can have a fever, coughing, whatever, aches, pains.

[28 : 07] So you sign up for sick bay and it might be a week before they'll call for you. And they'll call your name over the intercom. And if you don't go, they move your name back to the bottom of the list and you have to wait another week.

And when you maybe, maybe you were outside, you didn't hear your name come over the intercom. You didn't know it was time to go. And he just goes on telling me that the heat there, in the winter, it's way too hot.

And in the summer, the air conditioner doesn't work. So all year, you're always too hot to where you have to live. You have no privacy. You, some of the guards are cruel.

Just this week, like I said, I had a phone call with him this week. He had, one of the prisoners there, an inmate, is an outstanding artist. It's amazing how many artists are in prison, actually.

And it's a big prison. There are about a thousand people there. And he had purchased from a guy an original painting this guy had done that he was going to ship to his mama, I think, for Christmas present.

[29 : 16] And they had a shakedown, which means everybody out in the yard and they go through your cell and they look at everything. You know, they're looking for drugs and stuff. It's reasonable to have a shakedown.

But when he came back to his room, everything was turned upside down. And that painting was gone. So some guards can be cruel. He says some inmates are mentally ill and dangerous. And they might jump on you and start choking you to death for no reason. And so he lives with all of these things. And yet now he's been in prison 22 years.

Since the time he was about 20 or 21 years old. He's been in prison 22 years. And he says, God has used this for good in my life. I've gotten an education.

I've learned how to help others. He's the editor of the newspaper there at the school. I mean, at the prison. He does so many good things.

[30 : 14] He actually has enrolled in seminary and gotten a degree through correspondence. And he works. He serves as a free chaplain in the prison he's in.

And so after all this stuff, about two years ago, he started raising money to send a petition to the governor. The only way he'll ever get out early is it'll be an act of God that the governor can let him out early.

But there's no other way. So he raised \$10,000 and bought a paid lawyer to do a petition for him to get earlier release instead of life.

And so he also spent a couple years gathering all the documents to show all the things he had done that were good while he was in prison.

And it was a box full of stuff. And he called me this week because the governor had reviewed all that and had declined his request.

[31 : 18] And so he called and we talked a little. And I said, you know, I'm just so sorry. He said, well, I'm thankful that this week I'm going to be leading some Bible studies.

And the subject will be Thanksgiving. And I'll be able to tell all these other guys who know I'm there for life without parole. And I'll be able to say, guys, I didn't get released.

And I'm still here for life. But I'm thankful to God that if he wants me to stay here and know you and help you and be one of your brothers here, I'll be happier here than I would be on the outside.

If he can be thankful to God for that, what excuse do you and I have for not being thankful for what we've got?

Let's pray. Lord, thank you. I guess that's enough said, Lord. Thank you.

[32 : 28] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And I'm going to do a quick encouragement. Come back tonight. Six o'clock. We'll do the announcements in a minute. But six o'clock refreshments.

Worship starts at 630. And you will have an opportunity. You don't have to. We'll give an opportunity to everybody that comes. And we're going to have people from the whole community. We've invited about eight other churches to join us.

Some of them will be here. And we're going to give an opportunity for anybody. Stand up and share why you're thankful. What are you thankful for? It'll be so good to have that opportunity to share that.

Won't have a sermon. We'll sing some. And we'll share our Thanksgiving thoughts. So come on back tonight. Okay. And now let's sing. Sing with me.

Play. Thank you.