

Evidence of a Grace-Filled Life

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Preacher: Pastor Andrew

[0:00] Thank you, worship team.

Thanks, Katie and Megan, for singing this morning. Wow, it is rich.

I don't want to stop. There will be more singing. But we have a full service today. Have this remembrance of communion and an opportunity to baptize some individuals as an expression of the work of God in their life.

And so it's really no surprise that we're experiencing this morning kind of the full measure of God's grace. Not only in the teaching of the word and the singing of songs, but also in the remembrance of the death of Christ and then the work of salvation in the newness of life that he gives through the resurrection of Christ as commemorated through our baptism.

So we get the full experience today. I'm excited. I wonder, as we come to this service, how was your Thanksgiving this week?

[1:34] And I know it was the holiday of Thanksgiving, but I wonder, really, how was your Thanksgiving? Thanksgiving. You ever have those traditions where you kind of have to work around the table before you get to take a bite of your Thanksgiving meal?

It's sitting there. It's tempting you. All of the goodies are on the table. But before you can eat them, you have to say something you're thankful for. Now, there are the normal things that always kind of come into our mind.

They kind of pop into our head. We're thankful for family. We're thankful for freedom. We're thankful for the Bible. We're thankful for salvation. And all of those things that kind of come to our head in the moment.

But how many of those things really are just circumstantial? How many of those things that we're thankful for when it comes to family, when it comes to, oh, God, thank you for helping me get through another semester.

Thank you for helping me perform well on that test. Thank you, Lord, for getting me from point A to point B in my travels so that I can enjoy Thanksgiving meal with the ones I love.

[2:47] How many of those things really are just fleeting? Very surface, very superficial. And how many times does our Thanksgiving really penetrate to the heart?

Get to the things that are enduring. Get to the things that we can really be thankful for regardless of the circumstances. I was just reminded of that this past week.

Before we made our trip to Cedarville, which now is short, we're grateful not to have to travel from Chicago down to enjoy Thanksgiving in Cedarville, but now from Columbus.

But before we made our trip, I noticed there was a screw in our tire. Like, oh, how are we going to make it? And so, of course, we prayed, Lord, please help us make it to Cedarville.

So we made it to Cedarville. Thank you, Lord. What a great God. He can hold the nail in the tire and keep it from deflating. Wow. And, of course, God faithfully got us back, too.

[3:53] And isn't it true that our thankfulness just goes to the surface? It doesn't penetrate to the heart. And challenged, I'm sure, as many of you have been, by the stories of thankfulness that come from the deep well of those who have experienced the overwhelming grace of God.

I think of Corrie Ten Boom, who, with her sister Betsy in World War II, were sent to a concentration camp because of their willingness to house Jews in their home and try to be a safe haven for them. But being discovered and being sent to a concentration camp, there were several opportunities to put joy and thanks to the test.

And if you've read the stories of Corrie Ten Boom, you would know that they're packed into these rooms with hundreds of ladies, packed in like sardines to these tiny little rooms and stacked four on top of each other in these bunk beds that there's not even room to sit up.

And the straw that's covering the bed is all rotten and it's not comfortable. It smells. It stinks. But even worse, it's full of fleas.

[5:21] And one morning, as Corrie Ten Boom was waking up, she forgot about the short bed, and bumped her head on the bunk ahead of her, and turned to her sister and said, Thanksgiving, what can we be thankful for?

And Betsy, being perhaps the more spiritual of the two, the more mature, said, Lord Jesus, help praying to God to help fill their hearts with an understanding of gratitude in the moment.

And then she remembered the passage that she had read just earlier, a passage that we're going to actually study this morning in 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 16 to 18.

Short passage with only about 16 Greek words and 22 English words in the ESV translation, but profound, impenetrating truth for us this morning as we think about the significance of Thanksgiving.

And through the course of the morning, what I want to bring to our attention is this morning, if you are a person who has experienced grace, you must be a person who is also experiencing and expressing Thanksgiving.

[6:45] Are you gripped this morning by grace? Has it permeated your life, and has it led you to expressions of Thanksgiving and joy?

It is my desire in this message to help lead us to, first of all, the components of a grace-filled life. What are the components of a grace-filled life?

That is our first point this morning. And as we look at the Scripture, I want us to be gripped with the fact that those who have experienced the grace of God will also be those who express the grace of God through these elements.

Joy, Thanksgiving, and prayer. Let me open our time this morning in prayer before we come into the Word. This morning we are challenged to be people of grace today.

God, please help us to overcome this morning with the significance of grace and its implications in our life. May we, like Corrie ten Boom, come to the place where we understand the significance of Thanksgiving.

[8:05] May it permeate our lives, not just give us a comprehension of what we're expected to do, but may it move us and drive us to the actual expression of Thanksgiving and praise and prayer today.

May we leave this place, not only comprehending the significance of grace, but may we leave this place having experienced grace and those who desire to be conduits of grace to the world around us.

May all that happens today bring glory to our Savior. In Jesus' name, amen. So this morning I want to begin with the components of a grace-filled life.

And we're going to memorize the passage, okay? It's very short. I think you can do it. And I'm going to do it in sections so it'll be even easier, okay?

All right? So this section to the far, to my far left, okay? You have rejoice always. Can you say it? Rejoice always.

[9:18] Fantastic. Great. Okay? This section, pray without ceasing. Ready? Pray without ceasing. Okay? This section, in everything give thanks.

Okay? Ready? In everything give thanks. And we'll make it easy. For this is the will of God. For this is the will of God. Now you can add in Christ Jesus concerning you if you want, but let us focus on in this is the will of God.

Okay? Ready? Here we go. This side over here. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks.

For this is the will of God. Why does Paul so often put these commands together?

Why so often do we see joy and thanks and expressions of prayer so connected to one another as we do this morning?

[10:20] Well, it's because these are actually the components of grace. And I want to show you a graphic this morning. This is a graphic of grace.

So grace is the, sorry, go ahead, go back to that one. Grace is the well from which joy, thanks, forgiveness, and prayer spring forth. Grace is the well from which joy, thanks, forgiveness, and prayer spring forth.

Now this next graphic will help you see the connection between grace and these other components. You see, grace is in the middle because grace is the root, the foundation of all of these other things. Grace is the Greek word for charis. You see over in your top left, rejoice, which is Cairō.

You can kind of see charis in there, grace, in rejoice. You can see kara, which is joy. You can see in the bottom left, forgive, which is charizomai, and give thanks, which is eucharisteo.

[11:32] Well, charis and grace fit into each of these because grace forms the foundation for all of these other expressions.

So that you cannot give thanks unless you've experienced and you know God's grace. You cannot be a person of joy.

You cannot be a person of thanksgiving. You cannot be a person who forgives unless you're a person who's experienced the grace of God.

And on the flip side, if you are an individual who has enjoyed the benefits of God's grace in your life, then the resulting condition of your heart will be the posture of exemplifying that grace in tangible ways.

So that if you are a recipient of grace, you cannot be other than a forgiving individual.

[12:44] If you are a recipient of grace, you can't help but be an individual who gives thanks. I'm going to just point you to a couple of passages that help to reinforce this truth.

I want you to see Paul's description in Romans chapter 1 verse 21. Paul is just describing the potency of the gospel by saying, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

That's in 1:16. And then he goes on to describe the group of individuals who are seeing the evidence of God in creation. It is clear, it's obvious, his attributes, he says, are clearly manifested. But they reject him anyway. And here is how Paul describes their heart. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.

But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. That's a very strange description, wouldn't you say?

[13:56] I would think they didn't know God, so they didn't believe God. But Paul doesn't put it that way. He says, they didn't know God, and thus were not thankful.

It's because they didn't know grace. And because they didn't know grace, they could not be people of thanks.

However, Paul's description in Colossians chapter 2 helps us to see the connection a little clearer for those who have experienced grace. Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Why? Because people who have been transformed by grace, people who have experienced God's grace and are walking in faith are going to be people who evidence the grace of God in their life, which will show up in abounding thanksgiving.

Not just in token thanksgiving. Not just in glimmers or hints of thanksgiving here and there, but abounding, this life that is just overabounding in thanksgiving because of the work of God in their life.

[15:28] So if we struggle with joy this morning, if you struggle with thanksgiving this morning, perhaps it's because you have lost a connection and you're not abiding in the grace of God for you.

I'm reminded of this passage in Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 13 that puts it this way. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

This year we've been talking about the significance of this abiding relationship with God. We've been talking about being filled up with the living water of Christ, with allowing his word to fill your heart and soul and to lead you to ever deeper, ever richer experiences with him.

Being washed and changed by the Lord himself. So often I think this verse is true of us in that we commit two evils.

Not only do we reject the good things of God, but we instead try to fill up our lives with everything else but the only thing that can satisfy. We build for ourselves the cistern of notoriety or promotion at work.

[17:02] We build up for ourselves the cistern of leisure that helps to ease and to pacify our frustration and struggles with the struggles of this life.

We seek to escape instead of laying our burdens down at the feet of Christ and experiencing the waters that can heal our lives.

We push him away and the broken cisterns of our life continue to leave us feeling empty, feeling devoid of the true satisfaction that can be found in Christ himself.

The fountain of living waters is given to us through Jesus Christ. Run to the water because grace is the well from which joy and thanks spring forth.

So how do we tap in to this well? How do we find the source? Well, I want you to understand that God is the source of grace and joy.

[18:12] God is the source of grace and joy and thanks. If you turn with me, if you're in 1 Thessalonians, turn with me back a page to chapter 1.

You'll see the apostle Paul was just absolutely caught up in this truth. We find in verse 1, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of Thessalonica, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

Here he kind of reverses the order that we see in many of the other passages. Passages would say, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, which you find in all of those places that are there in front of you.

But here, the apostle Paul reverses the order and wants them to know that because they are in Jesus Christ, they are afforded grace and peace.

If you turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, you'll see that example in verse 2. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[19:27] God is the source of grace. If you want grace in your life, if you want to experience the favor of God for you, you must go to God.

He is the only source of grace. Peter puts it this way. He says in 1 Peter, see if I can find this.

Maybe not. 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 10 says, The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

He is the God of all grace. He is the source of all grace. It cannot be found outside of him. So if you want to be a person who understands joy, a person who experiences joy, a person who is characterized by thanksgiving, it begins as you are an individual who is looking to grace from God. Experiencing and drinking in the grace of God. And then letting it change your life and moving you to a place of thanks and joy in the world around you.

[21:01] God's favored desires to come and to fill your life. And those who are children of God are recipients of God's grace.

But also recipients of God's joy. We find that in 1 John chapter 1 verses 3 and 4. God is not only the source of grace, but as we would expect, he's also the source of joy.

And that joy will come to those who have experienced his grace. So how do we get the grace of God? How do we get to enjoy the grace of God for ourselves?

Well, I want you to know that Jesus is the means by which we receive grace and joy and thanks.

And of course, the verse that comes to mind is in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8.

Which says, For by grace you've been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

[22:29] For by grace are you saved through faith. Grace alone is the conduit for the gift of God in our life. Through faith in Christ.

Faith in his death. Faith in his resurrection. Faith in his work on the cross to accomplish for us forgiveness of sin. Are you a recipient this morning of grace?

Grace that comes from God through the person of Jesus Christ. The grace that wants to change your life and make you a person of joy and thanksgiving.

It comes through the person of Christ. And of course, you would expect that the events surrounding Jesus' coming would be dominated by joy and grace.

Would you not? We're moving into the Christmas season. We're coming into this Christmas narrative that we enjoy so often. So you would expect that if Jesus came to give us grace, then his story and the events surrounding his story would be punctuated by joy.

[23:39] And as you would expect, indeed it is. First in Matthew. In Matthew chapter 2 verse 10, speaking of the wise men, it says, When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

And then as the angel is speaking to Zachariah, giving him the announcement of John the Baptist's soon birth, he says in Luke 1.14, And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Moving down now after Mary has received word of her pregnancy and has gone to meet with Elizabeth, Elizabeth says to Mary, For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

And Mary, in this wonderful expression of praise to God, is lifting up the person of Christ and her soon Redeemer.

And says in Luke chapter 1 verses 46 and 47, And Mary says, My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

[24:58] And then Zachariah and his wife, in experiencing the pregnancy of John the Baptist, and neighbors beginning to hear about what's happening, it says in Luke 1.58, And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord showed great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

Then, of course, the familiar story of the angels who showed up to the shepherds, and they say to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all the people.

Jesus came to bring grace. And as the angels witnessed and announced, that coming of grace would be accompanied by great joy.

Automatic joy, because of the work of grace in a heart, in a life, leading us to the experience and the expression of joy and thanksgiving.

Jesus is the means of grace and joy. Have you experienced God's grace today? Is your life characterized by joy and thanksgiving?

[26:22] Now, that is the components of a grace-filled life. Now, I want to move to the continuity of a grace-filled life. You might say the constancy of a grace-filled life.

Because as we look at these commands, let's say these verses again, okay? So, to the far left, my left, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God.

Now, what should grip our attention, what should be at the forefront of our minds, is the constancy or the continuity of those words and the commands that we're given. Not only are they given in the present tense, it's a present imperative, a command for us for the here and now and in enduring into the future, but this continuing, perpetual call for us to be people who are characterized by these things.

One might ask the question, is this really realistic?

Is this a fair expectation? Is this something that is just a fluke for 1 Thessalonians or is this something that permeates the whole of Scripture?

[27:46] Do we find this in other places? And the answer, of course, is that Scripture is filled up with the command to be people who are rejoicing in the Lord.

Philippians chapter 4, verse 4 says, Rejoice in the Lord always again, I say, rejoice. We find in Ephesians chapter 5, this call to give thanks and rejoice.

It says, Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice there in that verse, the component of thanksgiving is preceded by the work of the Spirit in your life. The companion passage in Colossians chapter 3 helps us to see the accompanying work of the Word of God in Colossians chapter 3, verses 16 and 17.

It says, But let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

[29:02] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. How does thanksgiving happen from those two passages?

How do we access thanksgiving? How do we get a hold of it in our lives? How do we make it a reality, not just for the Thanksgiving holiday, the Thursdays that we experience once a year, but how does it become this perpetual activity, in season and out of season, this preaching of our life, this gospel witness that is happening for us, that shines forth the Word of God and proclaims the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light?

How does it happen? It happens through partnership with the Holy Spirit and through partnership in the Word of God speaking into our life.

So that, as Paul exhorts us in Galatians chapter 5, he says, walk in the Spirit, and you're not going to fulfill the lust of the flesh.

He says, later on, he says, but the fruit of the Spirit is love. And what's the next one? Joy, which is our Word this morning. It happens through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

[30:33] And as the Spirit is activated and indwelling you, as the Word of God is drawing you closer to the experiences and the knowledge of who God is, He leads you naturally to be people who are giving thanks in every situation.

You become people who are permeated by grace as you exist and dwell in the cauldron of grace. I like what Charles Spurgeon says. He says, rejoice in the Lord always. In the first place, this is a very delightful thing.

What a gracious God we serve who makes delight to be a duty and who commands us to rejoice. Should we not at once be obedient to such a command as this?

It is intended that we should be happy. That is the meaning of this precept, that we should be cheerful. And more than that, that we should be thankful. More than that, that we should rejoice.

[31:47] You know, this prefix, re, at the beginning of rejoice, signifies the reduplication of a thing, the taking it over and over again.

We are to joy, and then we are to rejoice. And as in Philippians chapter 4, rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say rejoice.

In season and out of season, our lives are to be punctuated and permeated with joy because of the work of the spirit of grace in your life, the work of Christ in salvation leading us to joy.

C.S. Lewis put it this way. He says, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. like ignorant children who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

[33:13] We're content to build our mud pies in the slums instead of the experience of joy that can be had for us at the ocean of God's love and grace.

We are half-hearted creatures. Our desires are not too strong but too weak. We fill up our lives with broken cisterns.

The water of our life pours out rather than pouring forth the rich living waters that God has to offer. God calls us to this unceasing activity of joy and thankfulness that happens through the context of prayer as we see so often in Paul's epistles.

We turn back to 1 Thessalonians 1. Where does thanksgiving and prayer come together? Well, we see here an example in 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 2. We give thanks to God always for you constantly mentioning you in our prayers.

Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness and hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Why is Paul happy?

[34:36] He's happy because of grace. The grace that he sees in these people and it's leading him to joy. It's leading him to thanksgiving. And it's leading him to prayer.

Prayer and thanks to God for his work in the hearts and lives of individuals. Finally, we come to the communion of a grace-filled life.

The communion of a grace-filled life. The word forgiving thanks is the word eucharisteo. And for those of you who may have participated in other churches more reformed in nature or maybe a Catholic or Lutheran background, the formality of the communion service, you would have probably heard the word eucharist.

Where does that word come from? It's actually the Greek word for give thanks, which has as a component in it the grace that God has given. Grace because, or thanks because of grace.

[35:43] We find all throughout the Gospels this expression of Christ's thanks for his upcoming death and resurrection. How is it that Jesus, the night before he is crucified, has his disciples with him and takes of the bread and takes of the cup and actually gives thanks for the very instruments that will bring persecution and death for him but also redemption for the world.

Matthew chapter 26, it says, now as they were eating, Jesus took the bread and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat, this is my body.

And he took the cup and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, drink all of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. as we come to the table and as we remember grace, it should lead us to Eucharisto. It should lead us to give thanks just like Jesus for the work that he did for us, he accomplished for us on the cross in forgiving sins and leading us to heaven, placing on us the righteousness of Christ that only comes through faith in Jesus as the only means of salvation.

So this morning, if you're struggling with joy, if you're struggling a bit this morning with thanksgiving, it's not a problem with your attitude.

[37:40] It is a problem with your character. It is a problem as you have missed, lost sight of the wonder of grace.

Something we all need to be reminded of. And I find this time together that we're going to experience where Jesus says, take eat, do this in remembrance of me.

There's the same prefix, re. Jesus does that for us because he knows we need to be called back to joy and called back to grace because we so often lose sight of the grace of God in our lives.

We need some recalibration. We need some help because our character is so tainted. We struggle with needing God to correct us on a regular basis.

So as we've been called to rejoice, well, maybe we need to begin with this call to remember. To remember the work that God has done for us so that we can be called to grace and he can remind us again of the significance of what that work will accomplish.

[38:53] It will accomplish the transforming process of leading us to joy in thanks. as you as