

Thanksgiving

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Preacher: John Lowrie

[0 : 0 0] Turn with me please to Ephesians chapter 1, Ephesians chapter 1. Thank you very much John for leading our worship for Lindsay and speaking to the boys and girls and to the musicians and singers as always. I must confess I didn't know half of those songs so that was great. You really start off Advent really well in this place. Those were great songs filled with good theology. That's the good thing about Christmas songs, they really are. They're well thought through about the incarnation, about the person and work of Jesus Christ. They're just terrific. While you're looking that up, just a couple of things. We ran out of these wee booklets. I only got 13, you remember, the last time. I didn't expect them all to go but they went like hotcakes. I've ordered another six so if you want one I'll put another batch of six out there so if you can get. If you've already got one in your household, don't get another one. You don't need one each but leave it for somebody else.

It's a £2 suggested donation. Nobody's going to be chasing you for the money so I'll leave that out there so you can get another six of those. By the way, for those of you who don't know, enjoying your prayer life, that's what it's called. So this is in preparation for January, the first starting your new prayer life, ready to go, all things new and so that's exciting.

That's more exciting than Germany playing Scotland in the Euros so get ready for that one. The other thing is tonight we are looking at Philippians, as you know, in their regular studies. We're coming to two big verses. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice. Be anxious for nothing but in everything with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ. We're looking at the topic of anxiety and stress. Good topic leading up to Christmas but we all suffer with anxiety and stress to some level so this is the place to be tonight so I commend that to you. Big topics, you'll get practical help, you'll get spiritual help tonight so we're not just coming tonight to keep out the way of the buses, we're coming to improve our walk with the Lord and those are big, big verses and we'll look at them this evening. The other thing is, was prayed, Lucille and I are away on holiday, you don't need to feel sorry for us. Anyway, we are away on holiday, doing a runner on Monday, away for a week. I won't be here this Wednesday. The following

Wednesday, the 13th, will be a missionary prayer meeting but the 20th of December, I wonder if you can circle that ring fence that day. Alongside prayer, as we're looking at prayer to begin 2024, we will be looking at daily reading plans. So that'll be a very practical prayer meeting where we'll look at various plans or whatever, we'll chat about them, we'll talk about them, how if you, if there's a reading plan you find helpful, print it out, bring it there, we can, we have a wee display, you can come up to the table, you can tick it off if you want a copy of it or whatever, find where the source is. Please take that seriously, not just that meeting but your regular reading, your systematic reading of God's Word. That's where God will speak to you. So although we're spending four weeks in prayer, really we're remiss only doing one serious session on God speaking to us. How do we hear Him? So give some thought to that, bring your reading plans, share on that occasion. So that's the Wednesday before Christmas.

So that's the 20th of December. If you can remember that, that'll be great. And we'll be sharing a few other things as well. Dorothy sent me a couple of things to do with the names of God which will, I'll show you them as well and we can get some of them run off as well. All the resources we need will be tooled up to the eyeballs come January the 1st. There'll be no excuse. Let's read Ephesians chapter 1.

[4 : 0 0] Looking at the topic of thanksgiving as we come to tea in the Acts of Prayer. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spirit, blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Christ Jesus, or Jesus Christ, sorry, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we who were the first to put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory. We'll end our reading at the end of verse 14. Let's come before God. Let's ask for his help.

Our loving Father, we just still ourselves in your presence this morning. Father, we thank you for the service. We thank you for all that's gone before to this point. Father, we thank you for these songs, these hymns that we've been singing together, glorifying your name, glorifying your Son, praising you, Lord, for your grace and for the gospel, for sending us a Savior into the world, the Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world. Father, we rejoice that many, if not all of us, Lord, here know this this morning. We know it, Lord, because you have given us your Holy Spirit, and he has awakened our eyes to see, Lord, you, to see your sin, to see Jesus as our Savior. Lord, we love him.

We love you, Lord. We make much of these things. So, Father, bless us now. Help us, Lord, as we look at prayer, as we look at this aspect of prayer, Lord, of thanking you, Lord, for all your goodness to us.

So, Father, speak to us now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. This morning, we're considering continuing a series of studies in this wee acronym ACTS. Here's the reminder of where we're going, the acts of prayer.

[7 : 2 6] Adoration, beginning in prayer by adoring God, praising him, and adoration, we're not really thanking the Lord, we're just praising him for who he is in and of himself. And then confession, which we looked at last time. We looked at this, it's a good acronym for prayer because there's a, there's, it's biblical, it's balanced, it's not just all supplication, which we tend to weigh heavily on, Lord, help me, help me, help me. But we come, and first of all, we become aware of God. And when we become aware of God, we cannot help but become aware of ourself. When we elevate him, he becomes greater, we become less. It's a natural response to adoring God. And it's a great way not just to begin the year, but to begin every time of prayer. Jesus tells us how to pray, doesn't he? Our Father who art in heaven. We are to focus on him. Hallowed be your name.

To recognize him. And that is how we must, in many ways, begin our own devotions in 2024. Adoring him and confessing our sins before him. We, I won't labor those because I've mentioned them twice, but we, we praise the Father. We understand who he is, his plan of salvation, and so forth. We praise the Son. All praise to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. We, in that sense, distinguish between them, just in our mind. But we praise God, and we understand who that is, the Father, the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Last time, confession. We reminded ourselves that God is holy. When we come before him, we will become aware of his holiness. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. We have met, we have not loved him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We become aware of our sin, and we confess our sin. And, but we don't just confess our sin. We want to be cleansed. We looked at Psalm 51. Cleanse me. And also, we repent. We, we don't want to just be cleansing to go back and do it again. We want to turn from our sin. All these aspects are aspects of our confession. We know that we need the mercy and the grace of God in, in doing this, and we want to know this restoration, this, this walk back with God. Well, if you're confessing your sin, and the Lord is, his hand is heavy on you, and he's showing you that sin, he will also show you his son. And this will cause you to thank and to praise him for the forgiveness that you receive.

And that's what I want us to do this morning, is to look at thanksgiving. Thanksgiving in these four is, is one of the relatively easier parts. I mentioned before that confession is probably number four in our personal list. We would have number four, one right at the start, supplication, and then we would probably have thanksgiving afterwards. That's probably the order that we naturally do these things. Lord, help me, help me. I thank you for helping me yesterday. Help me again. That's basically what prayers. But we're looking at thanksgiving, and it follows naturally from adoration, confession, thanksgiving. And it's a characteristic of being a Christian to thank God.

It's a characteristic of non-Christians not to thank God. Romans 12:1, for although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him. People are not interested in coming to church this morning. We are here. We're a small group of people in Edinburgh and Westerhales, because most people don't, it's not in their heart to thank God, because they don't really know God. They don't see their need of God. They don't fully understand how great God is, what God has done for them, when we think of Christmas and so forth. They just don't get it. They are dead in trespasses and sins, but you are not numbered among them. By the grace of God, you see, you know, you understand, and therefore you give thanks. That's why you're here, isn't it? It's not just to sing, it's to really praise the Lord and to give thanks to him. You're a thankful people.

All God's people are thankful people. We do understand. We do acknowledge God. We give thanks to him. So I want to look at three things this morning in the time that we have before us. How do we go about thanking God? How, where do we just start? Do we always just thank the Lord for the day before? Lord, I thank you that I caught the bus. I thank you that the weather's great.

[12 : 11] I thank you. You've healed that sore back of mine and so forth. What is your thankfulness in prayer like? Is there room for improvement? I don't know about you, but in these whole four things, I need to constantly refresh them, constantly develop them and work on them. That's why I was encouraging you with a wee book to write verses down under adoration, under confession, and also as you read things and as you have a wee diary. Lord, I thank you for that. So first of all then, we must begin by thanking the Lord for spiritual blessings. In many ways, this is the first thing that we need to do because upon confession of sin, it's not going to thrill you so much if you do catch the bus on Monday morning, if you're aware of sin. That's not going to alleviate your trouble. You need a solution for your sin. That is the thing that separates you in God, and you need to know that that when you come to him after confessing your sin, that there is some kind of hope. So you turn, you thank the Lord for spiritual blessings, and that is why this aspect of thankfulness must come first. It makes sense, thanking the Lord for spiritual blessings. And this is what we have in the gospel.

So we bring before the Lord thanks for aspects of the gospel and what God has done for us. Look at verse 3. Paul begins this letter by saying, praise be to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, it means more than happy, but let's stick with happiness, who has really filled us with joy in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He's thanking the Lord for these heavenly, these spiritual blessings, and that is what we must do as well. And Paul now, in this chapter, or these verses that are read, begins to think through what these are. If you know that in Paul's day, Greek wasn't written with punctuation marks and spaces and so forth, it didn't have these accents and breathing marks, colons, semicolons, they were all added later on. I remember at Bible college being told that the first two chapters were basically one sentence, and it's almost as if Paul doesn't come up for air. He just says one thing, which leads on to another thing, and another thing, and another thing, and you almost feel it's saying to him, Paul, breathe, just breathe. You're just going to do yourself a mischief here.

As he's recalling, he just can't help it, but praise the Lord for what these spiritual blessings are, with every spiritual blessing. And he moves from one to the next. He praises the Lord for it, thanks the Lord for this, for that, for that, and that reminds him of something else. And so he goes on. So if you were wondering, this is a great template, if you're wanting to start your wee book on under thanksgiving, what can I do?

I'll write these points down, maybe even today, that this will remind you of things to thank the Lord for. So let's look at these verses. Remind ourselves that Ephesians, all of Paul's letters, were designed to be just simply read out to a church. We look at these and we think, well, they're really for theological colleges. They're really for folk to delve in. When we hear them, they just all wash over us.

We are supposed to read and understand what's being said here. They're for the ordinary Christian. These are deep spiritual truths that we read them, and the congregation is supposed to go, wow, that's a great letter. Thank you very much, Paul, for saying. We're supposed to grasp them.

[15 : 59] But sometimes we don't focus on them enough. We focus on what's good for me at my daily level, and don't think enough about these spiritual blessings. So let's run through these very quickly. All I can do is mention what these spiritual blessings are, because I have another two points after this. What do we thank the Lord for under these spiritual blessings? Paul mentions nine things. I'm only going to mention them. Election, first of all, choosing. Verse 4, he begins these every spiritual blessings, for, because, whatever, because he chose us in him before the creation of the world. He mentions it again in this short passage in verses 11 and 12. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined, according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. Verse 12, in order that we who are the first to put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory. Paul loved this fact that he was chosen by God. This is a big biblical theme in the Old Testament and in the New, that God chooses. He chose a nation, Israel. He chooses individuals.

He is a God who chooses. He chose you. He chose me. Jesus said, you did not choose me, but I chose you.

Paul loved this truth, that in the plan of God, that God chose you. That should humble you. I remember when I became a Christian. All I knew I was a sinner. Jesus saved me. That was all I knew.

That was enough that sent me rejoicing into work on the Tuesday morning. I was saved on a Monday night. But after a while, you suddenly realize there's a plan, and that God chose you. I just, that blew my switches. It still does, that God chose me. And I just think that that's quite amazing. That should thrill you. Lord, I thank you for choosing me. Others, Lord, don't get it, but you chose me. Do you thank the Lord for him choosing you? Secondly, knowledge. He made, verse 9, he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure. Once again, he's the prime mover. He draws up the plan. He chooses according to his will. He makes known to you the mystery of his will, the mystery of the gospel, a mystery that was hidden for long ages, but has now been revealed. You know, you see what others don't see. There are theological professors who aren't saved, who don't have the

Holy Spirit, who don't see, they don't get it the way you get it. And I'm always amazed that even when the Lord saves somebody who's maybe not academically gifted or whatever, but they get it. They just see it.

[19 : 02] One of the last persons that I was, the privilege, I don't get the chance to lead many folk to the Lord, but I remember in one church, my mother had just had enough. She couldn't really cope. And then just as I sat and spoke to her, it was funny, as I sat and spoke, she sat in the chair, and at the very moment, a light shone through the window. It was the most amazing thing.

And then, and she just seemed to grasp everything that I said. And I thought, you're winding me up. It's never as easy as this. You mean Jesus did? Isn't that great? And I thought, you're winding me up. The whole time I was there, I thought, she's just winding us up.

And she became a Christian. And then I left her full of the joys. And then she said she wanted to go out and tell everybody. She phoned me on the Saturday morning. I need to tell folk what's happened.

She goes, I'm in the mirror. She goes, I just want to run into the street and tell everybody I'm a Christian. Is that normal? I said, well, it's not normal. I said, but go ahead and do it. If you want to do that, that's exactly what to do. And that's because the Lord has revealed to her the mystery of his will.

You begin to understand. That should thrill us. It should really thrill us. Thirdly, forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.

[20 : 14] You've just confessed your sins. Lord, forgive me. And you come to a passage like this, and you talk about the spiritual blessings and the knowledge, and you know that Jesus died. You know, that your sins are forgiven. He forgives your sin. Fourthly, redemption. In him we have redemption.

You've been bought back through his blood. It's as if you've been, the devil has put you in a pawn shop or whatever, and you're sitting on the shelf. Your life is going nowhere. And he buys you back with his own blood. It says you're as precious as that. You're sitting on the shelf. Your life is going nowhere. You're heading towards a lost eternity. He comes. He chooses you. He buys you. He redeems you with his blood. Peter mentions the same thing. We were redeemed not with perishable things such as silver and gold, as good as they are, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish. So you were chosen.

You were bought. But it's not just a plan. It is personal. Number five, adoption. You were adopted. Verse four, in love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through his son, according to his pleasure and will. Peter says the same thing. You're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, holy nation, God's special possession, who calls you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Never let the devil make you feel as if you are useless, worthless. You are worth something. You, it's not just a plan. God is not just an architect. He's your father. In love he did this, not just in wisdom, but in love he predestined you to sonship. He chose you because he loves you.

He loves you. He has adopted you into his family. Number six, the Holy Spirit. He has given us his Holy Spirit. Verse 13, you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Here Paul's telling us you heard the truth, you heard the message, when you believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. You're given the Holy Spirit. He resides within you. Do you thank the Lord for these things? Number seven, as a result, you have an inheritance. You're part of the family of God. You have an inheritance in heaven. You have a hope. You're given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of that inheritance.

[22 : 53] Verse 18, the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. Jesus said in John 14, didn't he? Don't let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God.

Believe in me. My father's house are in many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you I'm going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. That's a great truth. Even as we sit here in a cold December morning, the Lord is preparing a place for you. He will come back and take us to be with him.

That is worth thanking him for, is it not? An inheritance. And we don't deserve this. What do we get? We are sinners who deserve nothing except the wrath of God. We are saved. He chooses us. He reveals the mystery of his will. We are given the forgiveness, the Holy Spirit. We have an inheritance. From being here, we really are. I mean, the transformation is quite something. From being a sinner, held observing sinner, who rebelled against God, not just out of weakness, but actively turned our back on him, we get love and grace and mercy and an inheritance. And this is all by grace. Verse 6, to the praise of his glorious grace. Verse 7, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Paul's struggling. John Newton would later call it amazing grace. In his glorious riches, the riches of his grace. Paul was just blown away by the fact that we deserve none of this.

And this is what we have. And all of this is in Christ. So 8 was grace. And all these blessings are in Christ. If you just scan these words from verse 3 through to 14, with the exception of verse 8, one verse, every single verse mentions in Christ, in Jesus. How many times do we do? Look at verse 3, every spiritual blessing in Christ. Every spiritual blessing in Christ. Verse 4, chose us in Christ.

[25 : 09] 5, through Jesus Christ. 6, in the one he loves. 7, in him, through his blood. Missing verse 8. 9, he purposed in Christ. Verse 10, all things in heaven under Christ. 11, in him we were also chosen.

12, put our hope in Christ. And you were also included in Christ. How many times in our thankfulness do we thank, mention the name Jesus? He should trip off our tongue at every single opportunity. I'm forgiven. In Jesus. I'm adopted. In Jesus. Praise, get into, we must try and get into the habit of praising the Lord for him. With, you know, 2 Corinthians 1, no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. And so through him, the amen is spoken by us to the glory of God.

And Paul cannot mention anything for thanking God without mentioning Jesus. We thank you, I have this in Jesus, this in Jesus, this in Jesus. And not only that, Paul wants to know more of Jesus. Look at verse 7. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. He's saying, I know what Jesus has done.

These are the things I've just reminded you of. And they're all in Christ, but there is so much more in Jesus. I don't know about you. I mean, what a great thing in 2024. Lord, if you could answer one prayer, Lord, show me more of Jesus. Help me to love Jesus more. I wonder if you could put your one, you'll be given requests to your loved ones to say, get me a pair of socks, get me hankies, get me this, that and the other. If the Lord says to you, what gift would you like me to give you? You've already got salvation, adoption, you've got all these things. What practical thing can I do for you?

That would be a great thing. Show me more of Jesus that I cannot help but talk about him, that I can't help but love him more. That would be my prayer request. That is an amazing thing. I think if I see more of him, I will thank him. Lastly, number nine under this heading, power, and his comparable great power for us who believes. He describes that power as resurrection power in verse 20. He wants to know more about Jesus. He wants to know more of his power in 2024.

[27 : 43] 24. The power that raised him from the dead. Lord, I want to know that power. And also sovereign power. Verse 20 onwards. Seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet. That is all you need. You need Jesus, the all-powerful savior who loved you, who has all power and authority. So, thanking the Lord for spiritual blessings. Election, God choosing us. You know his will, the mystery, forgiveness, redemption, adoption, the Holy Spirit, inheritance, grace, and power. Does that make sense? These are just some of the things that I've picked out from here. Secondly, then once we thank the Lord for these spiritual blessings and more as the Lord reveals them to you, that we thank the Lord for temporal blessings.

James says, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights. Every good. God is a God who's not only blessed us spiritually, but he blesses you with temporal things, the things that you need day by day. Theologians speak of common grace and special grace. Common grace is the grace that God shows to all his creation. This includes sunshine and rain, food and shelter, restraints from evil, and innovations and various things. God creates this world. He doesn't just leave it. He blesses the world that he has created. And he shows common grace to this world that he has created. But he also shows special grace. Special grace is for those that the Lord has called to himself and entered into a covenant with, to never leave you nor forsake you, to perfect you, to bring you to glory. He deals with you in as well as common grace, but in special grace.

You are the apple of his eye. Is that not worth thanking him for and rejoicing him? So let me remind you of things under common grace. Life itself, the very air you're breathing this morning, the very air the people in Edinburgh are breathing this morning, is a gift of God. And Acts 17, that great sermon in Athens. He is not served by human hands as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. Paul says, he's the one that gives you even the breath that you have. Isaiah 42, but it says, this is what the Lord, the God, the Lord says, the creator of the heavens who stretched him out, who spread out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on it. So every body that breathes is down to the goodness of God.

So he gives life. He gives rain and sunshine. It wasn't very long we had our harvest service. He causes the sun, Matthew, Jesus says, Matthew 5 45, he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. There are things that are common to us all.

Christian and non-Christian alike. He provides rain for the earth. He sends water on the countryside, Job says. He also gives us food. And we are to thank the Lord for food and ask the Lord for food.

[31 : 33] We'll mention this when we come to supplication. Give us today our daily bread. We're in the habit of giving thanks. Jesus, he took the five loaves and the two fish. He looked up to heaven and gave thanks. If you're a Christian, you give thanks. Let's just pray and we give thanks for the food.

We acknowledge that God has been good to us. He gives us food. He also restrains evil. He deposes kings and raises up others, Daniel says. He does this. His hand is upon him. Although the earth and man is wicked in many ways, it would be a lot worse, should he remove his hand, should he give up on this planet entirely. And so he does restrain evil to a certain extent. He is sovereign over all the nations. He gives to this world innovation and advancement. Exodus 35. He has filled them with all skilled to do all kinds of workers, engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple, scarlet yarn, and fine linen and weavers. All of them skilled workers and designers. There was, there's always a, there's a man single, is it Bezalel, I think it is, who was singled out as when building the tabernacle.

He gave him all the, I used to envy that guy, I must confess. By the time I read it, I thought, that's a great job. Imagine being filled with that skill to be able to work in the temple. And it wasn't just, just in metal work. It was everything. He had a whole skill set. And, and he does this.

And he, today, he gives doctors and engineers and teachers and scientists and artists and musicians, he gives us skills that we need. This is the common grace of God. He is good to us. Why does he do this?

Because the world he creates, he is, is sustaining. We, in Colossians, in him all things hold together. Margaret shared with us, John's gospel this morning, that he created all things. And the God who creates is the same God who sustains this world. Why does he do this? He does this because he's a good God.

[33 : 52] He gives good things. He sustains the world that he's created. But he also does this so that people will repent. Do you show content for the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? Romans 2, 4.

Sad to say, many people, even today, are blessed by God. Although they do not thank him or acknowledge him, God has been good. And if they do not repent, one day they will stand before him.

And they will be ashamed of the goodness of God. They never thanked him nor acknowledged him, but were foolish in their darkened minds. Our God is good. He is good. He gives us common grace.

But then there's special grace. Those, that special grace for those whom God has chosen, who's entered into a covenant with us. Psalm 103 talks about the earthly blessings that God gives us.

Praise the Lord, my soul. Forget not all his benefits. Who forgives all your sins, which is spiritual work, and heals all your diseases, which is a temporal thing. Who redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with love and compassion, satisfies your desires with good things. God is good to us. He's been good to you throughout 2023. You maybe look at the new things that you've got, and it's good. I think if we do need to take time to count on many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you. See if you're just feeling sorry for yourself and having a pity party, do that. Just go through. Thank you for my kids. Thank you. And be specific. And they've done well, and they've got a job. I thank you for my health. That's not 100%. It could be a lot worse. I thank you for this. I thank you for that. Thank you for these small things. Thank the Lord, not only for the spiritual things, but take time to thank him for the temporal blessings, the things that we need for here and now. He gives us prayer, doesn't he, as a temporal blessing, where faith will be turned to sight and glory. But just now, he wants to have fellowship with us. He gives us prayer. Think of answers to prayer. Do you ever, I always find it strange when some folks say, yeah, pray for me, could you, and do, do, do, and they never tell you how the

[36 : 23] Lord has answered prayer? It makes us wonder if we're really grateful for when the Lord answers. We almost see answers to prayer as a relief rather than a source of, a sense of joy. But thanking the Lord, coming back, remember that Jesus said, well, there are not 10 healed. It's only this one person that's come back. God's people can be guilty of this. Lord, help me, help me, help me, give me this, give me that, and the Lord blesses you. And then we just go, thanks for that, and we're straight on to something else. Here's another shopping list that I have for you, Lord. To praise the Lord, thank him for answered prayer. He also leads us and guides us. Psalm 139, all the days are ordained for me. Think of your growing up. Think of your childhood. Think of your family. Think of your education. Think of your health. Think of your wealth. Think of how the Lord has led and guided you, who says to you every day, do not worry what you will eat or what you will drink. That is for God's people. The Lord loves you. He won't abandon you. And we need to remember this. Deuteronomy 31.8, the Lord himself goes before you and will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. You know that. If I brought you up, you could give a testimony to that.

The fact that you're here, you've maybe been a Christian, kept for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years. He's never abandoned you. Thank him for that. Think of all these blessings. He has been good to us.

Think of comfort under special grace. 2 Corinthians 1, praise be to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Think of the times when he's just come alongside you when you've been feeling down. Lord, in this body and the world and everything's just impinging on me, I just feel dreadful and the Lord comforts you. Think of the many times that he does this. So thank him for temporal blessings. And you can add to that list. Thirdly, and with this, I'll close. Thanksgiving for difficult blessings. I was trying to find a better phrase.

But these are the times in our life when we have found it hard to trust him, found it difficult. It's very easy in the first two in many ways. Lord, I thank you for all these adoption and things like that. And I thank you, Lord, for the food and for the clothing and for the answers to prayers.

But as you go through life, there are many difficulties. Do you thank the Lord for them? Tonight we're looking at the verse, rejoice always. Again, I say rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord.

[39 : 13] If you're a Christian, you know that God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. Let me remind you of the words. God moves in a mysterious ways his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. I'll just read to you certain words in it. He treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will. Ye fearful saints, French courage take the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head. Have you dreaded? Are you dreading a cloud in your life this week? Are you finding it hard to thank the Lord for that cloud?

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. Do you ever see God smiling? Do you see him smiling at you? The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. It's a fact of life that God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our ways. Times when they don't make sense. Painful times. George Matheson. You've heard, how many have heard of George Matheson? Yeah, a few of you have heard of George Matheson. He was a Scottish minister, born in Glasgow in the 1800s into the early 1900s. He was educated in Glasgow Academy and the University of Glasgow. He graduated first class in classics, logic and philosophy and at the age of 19 he went totally blind, George Matheson. And he resolved still to enter into Christian ministry and he studied theology and in 1879 at the University of Edinburgh, conferred on him an honorary degree in the Doctor of Divinity. Imagine going blind at 19. And he was commenting on 2 Corinthians 12. He said, this is the verse he comments on. He says, because, Paul says these words, because of these surpassing great revelations, therefore in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan. And he says this, George Matheson says this, I am in the habit of seeing

God's gifts in the abundance of the things of which my life possesses. In other words, I usually look at God's gifts and all the good things that God has given me. But he says this, but there is a complete reversal of my thought. The abundance is the danger. In other words, he saw these things as a danger and it diminishes the gifts. And he says that Paul was exalted above measure and so forth, and God gives him a thorn in his side. And the reason I know this story, because I had to Google this, because there's a great quote by George Matheson. And I googled it, and this is how I found the context of this. This is the quote, My God, I have never thanked thee for my thorn. This is a quote, I have thanked thee a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorn. That was etched in my brain. Etch that in your brain. I have thanked the Lord a thousand times. In these first two points, you might have a thousand times to thank the Lord.

But have you ever thanked him for your thorn? And that's what he says, I've been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross, but I have never thought of my cross as itself being present glory. So he says, teach me the glory of my cross. Teach me the value of my thorn. Show me that I have climbed to thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made my rainbow. Reveal to me that my strength was the product of that hour when I wrestled until the break of day. Then shall I know that my thorn was blessed by thee. Then shall I know that my cross was a gift from me. Then I will be able to say, Psalm 119 71, it was good for me to be afflicted. How many of us can say that? He is the one who wrote, O love that will not let me go. That's George Matheson. He wrote that. O love that will not let me go.

I rest my weary soul in thee. I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow. May richer, fuller be. Verse 3, O joy that seekest me through pain. I cannot close my heart to thee. I trace the rainbow through the rain. I feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be.

[44 : 17] Do you ever, do you know what it means to thank the Lord? We need to know what it means to thank the Lord for our thorn. Maybe life is thorny for you just now, and you can add an amen to the first two, but you're struggling on the third point. May the Lord lead us and guide us and teach us. His ways are not our ways. As a father, he disciplines us as children, doesn't he? And it proves to us that his hand is, he still loves us. He does this to show us that we really are his children. Thanking the Lord for these things is good. Spiritual blessings, temporal blessings, difficult blessings. Let's stand and we're going to sing, My Heart is Filled with Thankfulness. May it not just be our mouths, but as you, the Lord knows the gratitude of your heart. It's a work that we all need to be involved in. And we'll stand and we'll sing this together.

My heart is filled with thankfulness to the poor for my pain.

Who will plumb the depth of my disgrace and give me life again. Who will crush my curse of sinfulness and call me with his light. And jones his law of righteousness with power upon my heart.

Let's close in prayer. Our loving Heavenly Father, Lord, it's been good to be here this morning to sing praise to your name, but to be reminded, Lord, of your goodness to us as your children. Father, we thank you for all these spiritual blessings, Lord, that Paul reminds us of. We pray that we would know more of Jesus as your people, as we read your word, as we encounter you afresh, as we understand the gospel more and more. We thank you, Father, for these temporal blessings, for your common grace to a sinful world and your goodness to them. We thank you for your special grace. We thank you that you love us. You deal with us in a very real and a very intimate way. You lead us and guide us. You never leave us nor forsake us. You provide for us in so many ways. And we thank you, Father, for those times when it's been difficult, Lord, when we've been confused, when we've felt bruised and we've wondered what's happening. Lord, help us to know what it means to thank you for those thorns, knowing that you are sovereign and you're working in our life and that your ways are not our ways. So, Father, send us home rejoicing. Make us a thankful people in these days. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Thank you, folks.