

How to Be More Thankful Than You Already Are

Colossians 3:15-17

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. **And be thankful.** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs **with gratitude in your hearts to God.** And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

Scottish minister Alexander Whyte was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful. One Sunday morning the weather was so gloomy that one church member thought to himself, “Certainly the preacher won't think of anything for which to thank the Lord on such a wretched day like this.” Much to his surprise, however, Whyte began by praying, “We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this.”

That's one perspective on gratitude. Another is found in the statement I read once which read, “Thanksgiving is when millions of Americans get together to drink, talk, eat, and go home again. It's also known as the four G's: giggle, gabble, gobble, and git!”

Well, if you want your Thanksgiving this year to be more than that, let's talk about it. I'm definitely not saying that we are all ungrateful wretches—certainly we are all thankful at least a little bit. But if you want to be more thankful than you already are, here are some general guidelines to help you achieve that goal.

1 Understand that expressing gratitude to God is not an option
Gratitude begins the instant we realize how very much we do not deserve anything God gives us or has done for us.

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” (Psalm 100:4)

“Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:19b-20)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

In fact, the Bible teaches us that ingratitude is a major characteristic of those whose hearts have turned away from God. Listen to Romans 1:21—*“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”*

2 Slow down to count your blessings.

Slowing down to count our blessings is a deliberate action on our part. Giving thanks is not something we “accidentally” find ourselves doing!

A very good idea is to keep a “Gratitude Journal.” Write something in it every day as a record of the blessings God has heaped on your life. Look for the hidden treasure in every circumstance or situation. It is good discipline, and you may find yourself struggling at first. But then you will find it easier and easier to find things for which you can be thankful. Here is the testimony of one person who tried this:

For about a year I kept a “thankfulness journal,” in which I forced myself to keep a daily record of that for which I was thankful. At first, I was just thankful for food, shelter, and other obvious things, but by the end of the journal I found I did not have room or time each day to write down everything deserving of praise. Now, I live a lifestyle of thanksgiving. I am so grateful all the time, I could go on and on with offerings of praise to God – for the rain, for the heat, for the Tucson desert, for the glory of nature, for a penny I find on the sidewalk, for each and every opportunity, for every lesson learned, for every bill paid, for every one of my friends and loved ones, and even for the trials, temptations, and persecutions I face, because even they are instruments of growth and character in my life. I have truly learned to thank God in everything, and even when I cannot see any good in a situation, I can at least thank God because I know that He will somehow work it all out for my good according to His promise! (Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:11) It simply comes naturally to me now, and I am just a happy person in general.

(Eric Carr)

L.A. Tubbs expressed his experience of counting his blessings in a poem:

*I’ve been countin’ up my blessin’s, I’ve been summin’ up my woes,
But I ain’t got the conclusion some would naturally suppose:
Why, I quit a-countin’ troubles ‘fore I had a half a score,*

*While the more I count my blessin's, I keep a findin' more and more.
There's been things that wasn't exactly as I thought they'd ought to be,
An' I've often growled at Providence for not a-pettin' me!
But I hadn't stopped to reckon what the other side had been—
How much o' good an' blessin' had been thickly crowded in.
For there's been a rift o' sunshine after every shower o' tears,
An' I found a load o' laughter scattered all along the years.
If the thorns have pricked me sometimes, I've good reason to suppose
Love has hid 'em often from me, 'neath the rapture of th' rose!
So I'm goin' to still be thankful fer the sunshine an' the rain,
Fer the joy that's made me happy; fer the purgin' done by pain;
Fer the love o' little children; fer the friends that have been true;
Fer the guidin' hand that's led me every threatenin' danger through!*
--L. A. Tubbs

3 Regain a proper perspective on your life

Alexander MacLaren was a Scottish preacher of another generation. He had a very good understanding of how perspective makes a big difference in whether or not we are grateful. He wrote, *“Don't let the tears so fill your eyes that they can no longer see the goodness of the Lord. Do not let the thunderclouds, however heavy their lurid piles, shut out from you the blue that is in the sky. Do not let the empty cup be your first teacher of the blessings you had when it was full. Do not let a hard place here or there in the bed destroy all your rest. Seek as a plain duty to cultivate a buoyant, joyous sense of the crowded kindnesses of God in your life.”*

I like that phrase, “the crowded kindnesses of God in your life.” It says to me that God has jam-packed our lives and our world with a multitude of His kindnesses. Yet MacLaren points out that it would be all too easy for the tears and the thunderclouds and the empty cup to make us forget all the ways that God is intimately involved in our lives. Remember what he said? “Seek as a plain duty to **cultivate** a buoyant, joyous sense of the crowded kindnesses of God in your life.” That's called “perspective.”

I met a man a few years ago, just before Thanksgiving, whose home near Picayune, Mississippi, received several thousand dollars' worth of damage as a result of Hurricane Katrina. He said that part of the roof was ripped away, and the water came pouring in. He and his wife worked desperately to try to save their beautiful wood floor, but the rain came in faster than they could mop it up. Part of the roof was gone, the ceiling inside was ruined and hanging down, and their wood floor

was totally ruined as well. He said they spent a couple of days there being very depressed over the damage to their beautiful home.

But then a couple of days went by and they were able to get out of the house and drive around just a little. He said they only drove about a half-mile before they turned around and came home. But now, he said, they were happy. Their whole attitude had changed. All it took was for them to see that many people had lost everything. A ruined wood floor and a damaged roof suddenly didn't seem so bad anymore. That's called perspective.

I met another man and his wife just a few days later. They live near Pascagoula, Mississippi. This gentleman began to tell me of the car he lost—a 1967 Mustang convertible he had restored, using a lot of time and money. After the storm, he found it about a mile away, and the damage from the wind and the salt water was so great it was totaled by the insurance company. He had a wistful look in his eye as he remembered that car. But then his eyes refocused as he looked at me and said, “I loved that car, but my neighbor’s homes just across the street were completely submerged under water, while mine wasn’t touched. The car suddenly doesn’t mean as much anymore.”

What had happened to these people? Their perspectives had changed, just as it did for thousands and thousands of people as a result of the hurricane. And to both of these men I said something which came from my heart. At the conclusions of their stories, I told them, “Thanksgiving will mean something different this year, won’t it?” And both men, several days apart, who had never met each other, instantly smiled and said, “It sure will.”

For some of us, Thanksgiving has taken on a new meaning this year. This past year has seen some major changes in some of our lives, as many years have in the past. Life sure has a way of taking turns we don’t expect, doesn’t it? And yet, when we look back on the previous months, we have to stop and realize that God has indeed been faithful through it all.

John Greenleaf Whittier, the Quaker poet of the 19th century, was talking about perspective when he wrote:

*I see the wrong that round me lies,
I feel the guilt within;
I hear, with groan and travail-cries,
The world confess its sin.
Yet, in the maddening maze of things,*

*And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings:
I know that God is good!*

4 Remember where your blessings come from.

One Thanksgiving season a family was seated around their table, looking at the annual holiday bird. From the oldest to the youngest, they were to express their praise. When they came to the 5-year-old in the family, he began by looking at the turkey and expressing his thanks to the turkey, saying although he had not tasted it he knew it would be good. After that rather novel expression of thanksgiving, he began with a more predictable line of credits, thanking his mother for cooking the turkey and his father for buying the turkey. But then he went beyond that. He joined together a whole group of people most others wouldn't have thought about.

He said, "I thank you for the checker at the grocery store who checked out the turkey. I thank you for the grocery store people who put it on the shelf. I thank you for the farmer who made it fat. I thank you for the man who made the feed. I thank you for those who brought the turkey to the store."

This little fellow traced the turkey all the way from its origin to his plate. And then at the end he solemnly said "Did I leave anybody out?" His 2-year-old brother, perhaps hungry and eager to get to the business at hand, said, "God." Solemnly and without being flustered at all, the 5-year-old said, "I was about to get to him."

Well, isn't that the question about which we ought to think at Thanksgiving time? Are we really going to get to him this Thanksgiving?

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To do that, we need to remember the source of our blessings. Do they come from us? The government? We know that neither of those is true. We know, deep in our spirits, that all things come from God. Deep in our spirits, we agree wholeheartedly with the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*"

When Moses was saying goodbye to the Hebrew people, and getting them ready for new leadership, he took them through the Law of God once again. At one point he told them,

*When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹²Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸**But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.**” (Deuteronomy 8:10-18)*

And of course, let us remember the words of James in his letter: “*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows*” (James 1:17) Or the words of Psalm 103:2-5—“*Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*”

5 Develop a “thankful eye.”

Well, you’ve heard of a thankful heart, but what is a “thankful eye”? Has your preacher finally gone over the edge? Perhaps, but you’ll need more evidence than that! Simply put, developing a “thankful eye” means that you have the ability to see things God is doing in your life. You can see the hand of God in the circumstances of your life, even if they are unpleasant or not the things you would have chosen. It is the ability to see something and recognize it as being a blessing from God when other people either do not see it at all, or see it as something else.

Look at it this way. God is a good God, and it is part of His very nature to bless His people. It’s just part of who He is. We can do nothing to deserve those blessings, and yet God many times lavishes them upon us in measureless amounts. His blessings surround us, yet most of the time we are not aware of them. One of the surprises of heaven will be the discovery of the blessings God heaped upon our lives when we did not recognize them as such, nor give Him glory for them.

Learning to live a life filled with gratitude means that we train our eyes to look for the blessings of God which are all around us. It means that we deliberately take some time to hunt for them. It means that sometimes we might have to think for a while before we come up with something which qualifies as a blessing, or it might be staring us right in the face when we get up in the morning.

A thankful eye sees things others never notice. A thankful eye sees past the present, and sees deep into the future. A thankful eye is tuned to watch for the workings of God in our present life.

We all would say that yes, we are thankful this time of year as we are reminded of our duty to be thankful for all the things God has given us and all the people which have blessed our lives. And we all agree that gratitude is something we should experience year 'round. Yet how many of us have figured out how to do that? Would you like to learn how to be more thankful than you already are?

Here's how:

- 1. Understand that expressing gratitude to God is not an option**
- 2. Slow down to count your blessings.**
- 3. Regain a proper perspective on your life**
- 4. Remember where your blessings come from.**
- 5. Develop a “thankful eye.”**

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father** through him. (Colossians 3:17)*