

635 How Can I Be Thankful?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Gratitude is at the real heart of Christianity. For many, Thanksgiving is a time of turkey and football. Let's put the "thanks" back into Thanksgiving. Today we're asking the question, "How Can I Be Thankful?" Perhaps you remember the story of the ten lepers. Luke 17:11-18 says: While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten leprosy men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?"

One temptation of the maturing Christian is the danger of getting accustomed to his blessings. Like the traveler who has been everywhere and seen everything, the maturing Christian is in danger of taking his blessings for granted and getting so accustomed to them that they fail to excite him as they once did. Emerson said that if the stars came out only once a year, everybody would stay up all night to behold them. We have seen the stars so often that we don't bother to look at them anymore. We have grown accustomed to our blessings. The Israelites in the wilderness got accustomed to their blessings, and God had to chasten the people (Num. 11). God had fed the nation with heavenly manna each morning, and yet the people were getting tired of it. Num. 11:4-6 says, "Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, 'Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.'"

Another thing that kills a grateful heart is the idea that others have a better situation than we do. The Israelites remembered their diet in Egypt and longed to return to the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. They were saying, "The people in Egypt are so much better off than we are!" Look at all the wonderful foods they have to eat, and all we have is this same old manna, day in and day out. Obviously, they had forgotten the slavery they had endured in Egypt and the terrible bondage from which God had delivered them. Slavery is a high price to pay for a change in diet. It is so easy to find someone you think has it better than you have. There will always be someone richer, someone better fed, someone healthier, someone stronger, or someone who has what you don't have. If you spend your life wishing you had what someone else has, you'll never find any happiness. The writer of the book of Hebrews said in chapter 13, verse 5, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" The Israelites had food each day that they didn't have to grow; they had clothes and shoes that did not wear out; they had the protection and providence of God with them; but they still complained about all the things they didn't have. How sad. We do not wish to be like the nine, healed lepers who went about their business and forgot to say "thank you." Perhaps it is time to sit down and truly count our blessings. It is so easy to concentrate on our faults, losses, and negatives that we lose sight of what we possess. Paul said in 1 Tim 6:8, "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." What about you? Are you content with what you have? Paul taught in Colossians 3:15-17: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and

be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." All that we do ought to be done in thankfulness to God who has been so good to us and blessed us with all that we possess. In Eph. 5:20, Paul said, "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Gratitude should be a way of life for the Christian. In Christ, even the most difficult things can be a blessing to be thankful for.

You may not realize it, but complaining and grumbling are sinful. Paul said in 1 Cor. 10:9-11, "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come." Grumbling says to God, "God you didn't take care of me the way you are supposed to." Complaining about our lot in life might seem quite innocent in itself, but God takes it personally. And the way things go is that once you start complaining, you might make it a habit. It seems the more you complain about things the more things you will have to complain about. Complaining can become a way of thinking that sours our lives and offends God. Constant grumbling shows little faith in God and much disappointment. How could you ever lead anyone to God, if you spend your time complaining? Marty Radcliff said, "If you haven't all the things you want, be grateful for all you don't have that you don't want." Sometimes the things we think we have to have, grumble for, are the things that hurt us most. Could it be that not having "things" is really what is best for us?

Gratitude, thankfulness, has great value in our lives. First, thankfulness puts the focus on the goodness of God. James said in James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Whatever good thing you have, God gave it to you. Every flower, every sunset, every smile, every hug, every morsel of food, and every drop of water comes from the good Lord. Second, gratitude makes us warm and positive. Counting your blessings blesses you. It brings a smile to your face and contentment to your soul. Paul said in Phil. 1:3-5, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." Some of the happiest moments of our lives come from remembering what good things have happened to us. The church for the last forty years has been such a great blessing in my life. Like the Philippians, I rejoice every time I think of people whom I have known and loved. Third, thankfulness is our response of love to God's love given to us. The word "grace" in Greek is the same word as "thanks"; that is why people used to speak of saying "grace" at the dinner table. Grace is all that God does for us; being thankful is the motivation behind our faith, love, and service to God. John said in 1 John 4:19, "we love because he first loved us." His love teaches us how to love and to be loving people. I have found that ungrateful people are usually selfish. They don't have much room in their hearts for others. This story illustrates what I mean. A godly farmer was asked to dine with a well-known gentleman. While there, he asked a blessing at the table as he was accustomed to do at home. His host made fun, "That is old-fashioned; it is not customary nowadays for well-educated people to pray before they eat." The farmer answered that with him it was

customary, but that some of those on his farm never prayed over their food. "Ah, then," said the gentleman, "they are sensible and enlightened. Who are they?" The farmer answered, "My pigs."

There are so many things we all can be thankful for! First I think of physical blessings. These may vary from person to person: health, physical and mental, homes, food, clothing, freedoms and the Veterans who sacrificed to give them, job, ability to earn a living, and medical facilities. When I think of all these blessings, I am so thankful. I am reminded of David in Psalm 103:1-5. He said, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." God gives us food, sunshine, rain, rainbows, flowers, animals, air to breathe, and the glorious moon and stars at night. David said in Psalm 19:1, "The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." What a great God we have!

Second, I think of the spiritual blessings that belong to every Christian. Paul said in Eph. 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." In Christ, we have every spiritual blessing; we aren't lacking even one. The thing most folks are thankful for is the assurance that we are saved. Our sins are forgiven. David said in Psalm 103:8-12, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." I can't imagine any blessing so wonderful as knowing that God has removed our transgressions from us, made us his children, and has an inheritance for us in heaven.

Paul gives us another blessing: we are privileged to leave the rule of the devil and live for Jesus. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." We needed to be rescued or delivered from a sinful world filled with so much ugliness. We needed to be able to enter something better, and that kingdom is the church, the family of God. In Christ we are indeed in God's family, the church. Ephesians 2:19-21 says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord." As a member of God's family in the church kingdom, we are not strangers to God but his children. He loves us and holds each of us to be his own.

Because we are his own children, God hears our prayers. We need to hear the words of Jesus in Mark 11:22-24, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown

into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." God invites us to pray, to ask, to seek, and to knock. He loves us and wants to bless us by answering our prayers. God cares about our problems. Peter said in 1 Pet. 5:7, "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." God watches over us. In 1 Cor. 10:13 Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." God will help us through every struggle we face. Further We have the word of God to guide and strengthen us. Paul said in Acts 20:32 that the word "is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." In that Word, we have God's promises. When God makes a promise, He keeps it. We can always put our trust in God. And last, we have heaven as our eternal home. Paul reminds us in Phil. 3:20-21, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." One day we'll go and live with Him forever. What a great God we have!

After you have considered all the things God has done for you, perhaps you also need to consider your own life, your soul, and whether or not you are showing your thanks to God. We show our thanks to God by keeping Him in our hearts every day. We study His word, we pray, we worship with the church, we live moral lives, we tell others of Jesus, and we give of our talents and our money. Thanks giving is also "thanks living." We reveal our hearts by our lives. We show and demonstrate our love by loving others, just as He loved us. We demonstrate our faith by confessing it before others and living it. Jesus did not rescue us so that we could continue living worldly lives and ignoring the Father in heaven. He rescued us so that we could live holy lives and prove to all what the will of God can do in our lives. Shakespeare said, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child!" That must also be true of Christians! How God must grieve in heaven to have given us his best in His Son Jesus and then to watch us ignore Him and His will for our lives. I hope you aren't living like a thankless child. I hope you're living like a loving child who cares about the Father in heaven. I hope that you are truly his child. To become a child of God means that you must believe or trust in Jesus. You must be willing to trust enough in Him to do whatever He asks and to believe whatever He teaches. He will never lie or deceive you. With faith and love, you need to turn away from sin to live a righteous life. This is repentance, a change of heart that leads to a change of life. Because you believe Him, you should confess Him before others, that you believe Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. And with your faith, repentance and confession out of love, you must put on Christ in baptism. Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. At this point He will wash you clean from all sin and add you to His family, the church. There is no more wonderful thing you can do today than to become a child of God, to begin living your life filled with love and thankfulness. I hope you'll not put off becoming a Christian even one more day.

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Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org