

Engaging the Spiritual Practice of Giving Thanks

Thesis: We are a people who engage the spiritual practice of giving thanks to God because of God's command and because of the transforming benefits in our lives.

Text: Psalm 107:1; Philippians 4:6-8

The Bible is full of spiritual practices that help us to honor the Lord, recognize his presence, and respond to him appropriately.

Scripture emphasizes the importance of giving thanks to God for who he is, for all he has done, for his gifts, and for his works. When we give thanks to God, we express our dependence upon him and our gratitude to him.

The practice of giving thanks

Here are some of the benefits that we experience as we engage the spiritual practice of giving thanks:

1. Giving thanks raises our awareness of God who is with us.
2. Giving thanks acknowledges God is at work in our lives.
3. Giving thanks recognizes that God is faithful and good.
4. Giving thanks defeats discouragement, undermines depression, and disempowers anxiety.
5. Giving thanks fuels our joy, changes our perspective, and glorifies God.

Why do we give thanks to God?

1. **We give thanks to God because he is good and his love endures forever** (Psalm 107:1).
 - a. *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever* (Psalm 107:1).
 - b. We gave thanks to the Lord because of who he is. God is good.
 - c. We gave thanks to the Lord because of how he loves. God is love and his love lasts forever.
2. **We give thanks to God because thanksgiving is the password for entering the throne room of God** (Psalm 100:4-5).

- a. *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations (Psalm 100:4-5).*
3. **We give thanks to God because thanksgiving honors the Lord and opens the way for him to do more in our lives (Psalm 50:23).**
 - a. *“He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23).*
 - b. *Ingratitude is a way of neglecting or forgetting God, and it opens the door for judgment (Psalm 50:22).*
4. **We give thanks to God because Jesus modeled a life of gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving.**
 - a. *Feeding the 5,000 (Matthew 4:19-21).*
 - i. *And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children (Matthew 14:19–21).*
 - b. *Feeding the 4,000 (Mark 8:6-10).*
 - i. *He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so (Mark 8:6).*
 - c. *After the 72 disciples return from their mission trip (Luke 10:21).*
 - i. *In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will (Luke 10:21).*
 - d. *At the Tomb of Lazarus (John 11:38-44).*
 - i. *Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they*

may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go” (John 11:38–44).

5. **We give thanks to God because of our union and oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ** (Colossians 2:6-7, 9-10).
 - a. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness (Colossians 2:6–7).
6. **We give thanks to God because thanksgiving expresses gratitude for what we receive from God our good creator** (1 Timothy 4:4-5).
 - a. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:4-5).
 - b. By the way, we pray over our food and gifts which we receive as a way to give thanks to God for what we receive and to consecrate what we receive by our declarations and prayer.
7. **We give thanks to God in every circumstance because the Lord commands our thanksgiving** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
 - a. Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).
 - b. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever (Psalm 118:1).
 - c. We are commanded to pray with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2).
 - i. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6)
 - ii. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful (Colossians 4:2).

Here is a key passage about the importance and power of thanksgiving (Philippians 4:4-9).

Rejoice [celebrate joyfully] in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts [emotions, choices, well spring of life] and your minds [thoughts and beliefs] in Christ

Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me [model for others]—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:4-9).

Why shouldn't the followers of King Jesus celebrate exuberantly [celebrate joyfully = to rejoice]? It's only right; and celebrating Jesus as Lord encourages and strengthens loyalty and obedience to him. At the same time, it's interesting that he at once says that the public image of the Christian church should be of a gentle, gracious community (verse 5). Exuberance must not turn into mere extrovert enthusiasm which squashes sensitive souls and offends those who are by nature quiet and reserved.

The three main things that will come into line if the celebration is both joyful and gentle are the prayer which overcomes anxiety (verses 6–7); the patterns of thought which celebrate God's goodness throughout creation (verse 8); and the style of life which embodies the gospel (verse 9).

Anxiety was a way of life for many in the ancient pagan world. With so many gods and goddesses, all of them potentially out to get you for some offence you mightn't even know about, you never knew whether something bad was waiting for you just round the corner. With the God who had now revealed himself in Jesus, there was no guarantee (as we've seen) against suffering, but there was the certainty that this God was ultimately in control and that he would always hear and answer prayers on any topic whatever. People sometimes say today that one shouldn't bother God about trivial requests (fine weather for the church picnic; a parking space in a busy street); but, though of course our intercessions should normally focus on serious and major matters, we note that Paul says we should ask God about every area of life. If it matters to you, it matters to God. Prayer like that will mean that God's peace—not a Stoic lack of concern, but a deep peace in the middle of life's problems and storms—will keep guard around your heart and mind, like a squadron of soldiers looking after a treasure chest.

The command in verse 8, to think about all the wonderful and lovely things listed here, runs directly opposite to the habits of mind instilled by the modern media. Read the newspapers [or other media]: their stock-in-trade is anything that is untrue, unholy, unjust, impure, ugly, of ill repute, vicious and blameworthy. Is that a true representation of God's good and beautiful world? How are you going to celebrate the goodness of the creator if you feed your mind only on the places in the world which humans have made ugly? How are

you going to take steps to fill your mind instead with all the things that God has given us to be legitimately pleased with, and to enjoy and celebrate?

Finally, reflect for a moment on Paul's command in verse 9. It is one of the most demanding ethical commands anywhere in the Bible—not so much for those who receive it, though no doubt it's that as well, but for the person who gives it. Which of us could say, after staying in a town for a few weeks, that the way to be a good Christian was to do exactly what we ourselves had done? (NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 131–132.)

Here are some ways to engage in the spiritual practice of expressing gratitude to God.

(See also: Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [The Other Half of Church](#) (p. 217-218). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

1. **Make a list of things for which you are thankful and tell God, "Thank you."**
 - a. The old hymn says, "Count your many blessings, name the one by one."
 - b. It could say, "Count your many blessings, name them ton by ton."
 - c. I am grateful that I was taught at an early age to write thanksgivings in my spiritual journey and to say them to God.
2. **Make journal entries of gratitude moments and reflect on those golden memories.**
 - a. Write down a memory for which you are grateful to the Lord.
 - b. Write down what you felt and experienced of the Lord in that moment.
 - c. In a quiet place, go back to that memory and relive it.
 - i. What did you feel in your body? Peace? Lightness? Other?
 - ii. What might God be communicating to you through the memory and the peace you feel?
 - d. **As you reflect on those golden memories (moments of gratitude), it will fuel your joy in the Lord.**
3. **Practice interactive gratitude:** practice giving thanks and listening to the Lord.
 - a. Express gratitude from me to God for something good in my life or my day.
 - i. Write it down in a simple way.
 - ii. *Dear God, I am thankful for...*
 - b. Imagine God's response to my gratitude and write it down.
 - i. What might He be thinking, feeling, or saying back to me, especially about who I am to Him?
 - ii. Write that down.
4. **Practice sharing your gratitude experiences with others.**

- a. In addition to practicing gratitude each day, take the time to practice sharing your experiences with others.
- b. When we share our experiences of gratitude with others, we are ramping up joy together.
- c. *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! 2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so... (Psalm 107:1-2).*

Summary:

The Bible is full of spiritual practices that help us to honor the Lord, recognize his presence, and respond to him appropriately.

Scripture emphasizes the importance of giving thanks to God for who he is, for all he has done, for his gifts, and for his works. When we give thanks to God, we express our dependence upon him and our gratitude to him.

Here are some of the benefits that we experience as we engage in the spiritual practice of thanksgiving:

1. Giving thanks raises our awareness of God who is with us.
2. Giving thanks acknowledges God is at work in our lives.
3. And, giving thanks recognizes that God is faithful and good.

Challenge:

During this holiday season, intentionally take time to practice different ways of giving thanks to God.

Ministry Time: