

GIVING THANKS
EPHESIANS 5:19-20; 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION:

As we near this day which has been set aside annually to offer thanks to God for all that He has blessed us with, we have to ask ourselves, **How thankful are we as a nation?**

As we survey our country today and see the many blessings that God has blessed us with—Do we express gratitude as we should or are we displaying ingratitude and unthankfulness?

It is clear to see that this great country of ours has slipped and continues to slip from what once made it great.

The history and writings of our founding fathers show that **they continually gave praise and they encouraged an attitude of thanksgiving** toward God in this country. However, we live in times in which many are offended at the name of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and secularism is being encouraged on almost every front, especially as it relates to our government!

Our Country reminds me of the situation that Paul describes in *Romans 1:21-22*—"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

John Wesley explained that passage this way, "*They neither thanked him for his benefits, nor glorified him for His divine perfection*" (John Wesley's Explanatory Notes).

That surely describes the majority of the people in our nation today! Francis Schaeffer said, "*The beginning of men's rebellion against God was, and is, the lack of a thankful heart.*"

Today I want us to consider the subject of "**Giving Thanks**". As the message goes forth today, I would ask each one of us to ask ourselves this question, "**How thankful am I?**"

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I believe that our degree of thanksgiving says a lot about our spiritual health. Note three things with me:

I. THANKSGIVING IS A DEFINITE ATTITUDE.

1 Thessalonians 1:2—"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers."

In nearly every Epistle, Paul's first words include some sort of thanksgiving and praise to God. Paul says, "*We give thanks...*" The words "**give thanks**," is the English translation of just one Greek word that means "**to be grateful and to express gratitude.**"

I read a story about a man who is a stress researcher by the name of Hans Seyle. He claimed that **two attitudes, more than any other, influence the quality of everyday life.** The most destructive emotion is **revenge.** But in contrast, **among all the emotions, there is one which more than any other, accounts for the absence or presence of stress in human relations: that is the feeling of gratitude.**

Thanksgiving is a definite attitude! It is a choice we make! We can either be thankful and express gratitude for the rich blessings of God, or else, we can gripe, murmur and complain about our circumstances! The choice is ours!

William Law said, "*The greatest saint in the world is not he who prays the most or fasts the most; it is not he who gives alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity or justice. It is he who is most thankful to God, and who has a heart always ready to praise Him.*"

Oliver B. Greene said this in his Ephesians Commentary, "*A Spirit-filled person is a thankful person...always for all things. A Spirit-filled person will be always thanking God for the Lord Jesus, and for the spiritual joy, peace, blessings, assurance and security that we have through the shed blood and the grace of God in the Lord Jesus.*"

Paul tells us in *1 Thessalonians 5:18*—"In everything give thanks: for

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this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Paul's thanksgiving was independent of his circumstances. He continued to thank God despite the many hardships he faced as detailed in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33.

Note also that Paul's thanksgiving was evidenced in his prayer life. 1 Thessalonians 1:2– *"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers."*

To Paul this was a spontaneous outflow of his love for Christ as well as his love for the saints of God!

As we recognize our debt to God for the gift of eternal life and for His providence in sustaining us day by day, we too should have such an attitude of gratitude!

Shall we thank God at this Thanksgiving? Think about some things with me:

- Why were we born at this particular time in the history of the world?
- Why were we born in a spotless delivery room in an American hospital instead of a steaming shelter in the dank jungle of the Amazon or a mud hut in Africa?
- Why did we have the privilege of going to school with capable instructors while millions around the world, without school books, sit or squat on a dirt floor listening to a missionary?
- How does it happen that our children are tucked into warm beds at night with clean sheets and ample cover while millions of children in the world will lie in cold, filthy rooms?
- Why can we sit down to a warm meal almost whenever we want to and eat too much when millions live all of their lives with the gnawing pangs of hunger?
- Do we deserve to share in such wealth? Why us and not others?
- Why were we born in a land we didn't build, in a prosperity that we didn't create and enjoy a freedom that we didn't establish?
- Why will we be Americans sitting comfortably in our own living room this Thanksgiving rather than suffering want in some other

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land?

Do we deserve what we have? By what right do we have it?

All that we possess—our health, our wealth, our possessions, or whatever we hold near and dear—it all comes from the hand of a loving God.

We don't deserve anything, but He freely bestows them on us by His grace! We have much to praise and thank God for! *Thanksgiving is a definite attitude. . .*

II. THANKSGIVING IS A DUTY ASCRIBED.

Ephesians 5:20—"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Because of the wonderful mercy and grace of God we have a duty to be thankful. Notice:

A. Giving Thanks Is A Command!

According to vs 20 of our text it is a Biblical command to be thankful. It is not optional! God was the very first to declare a Thanksgiving Proclamation!

Deuteronomy 8:10—"When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee."

Psalms 100:4—"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful to him, and bless his name."

1 Chronicles 16:8—"Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deed among the people."

Colossians 3:15—"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful" Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:2—"We give thanks to God always for all of you..."

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In 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul said, "*We are bound to thank God always for you...*" or we could read it this way: "*It is our duty to thank God always for you.*"

Giving thanks is a command and we should always be

thankful!

BE THANKFUL (Author Unknown)

Be thankful that you don't already have everything you desire.

If you did, what would there be to look forward to?

Be thankful when you don't know something, for it gives you the opportunity to learn.

Be thankful for the difficult times. During those times you grow.

Be thankful for your limitations, because they give you opportunities for improvement.

Be thankful for each new challenge, because it will build your strength and character.

Be thankful for your mistakes. They will teach you valuable lessons.

Be thankful when you're tired and weary, because it means you've made a difference.

It's easy to be thankful for the good things, but a life of rich fulfillment comes to those who are also thankful for the setbacks.

Gratitude can turn a negative into a positive. Find a way to be thankful for your troubles, and they can become your blessings.

Giving Thanks Is A Command!

B. Giving Thanks Is A Commitment!

The person who is truly thankful for the blessings of God will be a person who is committed to praising and thanking God for all the Lord does for him at all times.

There's a difference between interest and commitment.

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When you are **interested in** doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you're **committed to** something, you accept no excuses, only results.

Paul said in *Ephesians 5:20*-"*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" That takes commitment!

The problem is that so many today are **committed to griping and complaining instead of praising and thanking** God for the rich blessings He bestows!

Charles Dickens said that we are somewhat mixed up here in America. He told an audience that instead of having one Thanksgiving Day each year we should have 364. "Use that one day just for complaining and griping," he said. "Use the other 364 days to thank God each day for the many blessings He has showered upon you." That brings us to the final point.

Not only is Thanksgiving a *DEFINITE ATTITUDE...A DUTY ASCRIBED...*

III. THANKSGIVING IS A DAILY ACTIVITY.

Ephesians 5:20a-"*Giving thanks always for all things...*"

A. THE TIME OF GIVING THANKS.

Notice vs 20 says, "*Giving thanks ALWAYS...*"

We are to live our lives in a spirit of thanksgiving. When something does go wrong we should praise the Lord because He does all things for our good and for His glory.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 tell us, "*In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*"

When bad things do happen in our lives, we can still be thankful to God for Who He is, and for the good He can bring through the distress.

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God can turn any trial into a blessing.

Satan loves to sow the seeds of discouragement in the hearts of people! Those seeds can be made to grow almost anywhere! But they cannot take root in the heart of a grateful person!

THE TIME OF GIVING THANKS.

B. THE SCOPE OF GIVING THANKS.

Ephesians 5:20 once again says, "*Giving thanks always FOR ALL THINGS...*"

"Gratitude is what always spoils life when it is left out."

A thankful spirit enables one to praise God even when circumstances are difficult.

Alexander Whyte, the Scottish preacher, always began his prayers with an expression of gratitude. One cold, miserable day his people wondered what he would say. He prayed, "*We thank Thee, O Lord, that it is not always like this.*"

1. The Assessment Of Our Blessings.

How blessed are we? Whatever we have, we have because God, in His grace and generosity, has given it to us! When we begin to realize this, there comes into our lives a joyful gratitude for what we do have, and we are freed from resentment and anxiety over what we don't have.

While on a short-term missions trip, Pastor Jack Hinton was leading worship at a leper colony on the island of Tobago. A woman who had been facing away from the pulpit turned around. "It was the most hideous face I had ever seen," Hinton said. "The woman's nose and ears were entirely gone. She lifted a fingerless hand in the air and asked, 'Can we sing Count Your Many Blessings?'"

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Overcome with emotion, Hinton left the service. He was followed by a team member who said, "I guess you'll never be able to sing that song again." "Yes I will," he replied, "but I'll never sing it the same way."

OH How blessed WE are! And how ungrateful so many times we are!

THE SCOPE OF OUR BLESSINGS...

The Assessment Of Our Blessings...

2. The Amazement Of Our Blessings.

We are to count our blessings, and as the song goes, "*Name them one by one.*" When we begin to count our blessings we are going to be truly amazed at just how blessed we really are!

The Psalmist said in *Psalm 68:19*-"*Blessed be the LORD, who **daily** loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.*"

Daily we should take assessment of our blessings and then we will truly be amazed of just how blessed of God we really are!

Someone has written a poem based on James 1:2- "Count it all joy."

*Count your blessings instead of your crosses;
Count your gains instead of your losses.
Count your joys instead of your woes;
Count your friends instead of your foes.
Count your smiles instead of your tears;
Count your courage instead of your fears.
Count your full years instead of your lean;
Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.
Count your health instead of your wealth;
Count on God instead of yourself.*

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We should see a silver lining in every dark cloud!
When we are tempted to complain about the bed being uncomfortable,
just thank God that we've got a bed of some kind!
When we don't like a particular food, thank God that we've got some
food to eat at all!
When our kids get on our nerves, thank God we have kids to get on our
nerves!
When trials and heartaches invade our lives we can thank God for HIS
grace and strength! (2 Corinthians 12:9)
When we lose a loved one who is saved we can thank God for the hope
and assurance we have of seeing them in Heaven!

CONCLUSION:

Let each of us resolve today, from this day forward, to apply the principle of
"Giving thanks always for all things..."

William Ward said, *"God gave you the gift of 86,400 seconds today. Have
you used one to say, 'thank You'?"*

Friends, may we all, at all times, *"Give Thanks"* for the wonderful blessings
we enjoy from God! Not just during this Thanksgiving season, but each and
every day of our lives.

The greatest thing to give thanks for in our lives should be our salvation in
Christ Jesus. The greatest way to give thanks is to first of all receive it!

After you receive it, then embrace it and treat it as the special gift that it is!