
THE HIDDEN POWER OF GIVING THANKS

Philippians 1:3-11

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. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Today we are going to look at the topic of giving thanks, specifically the hidden power of giving thanks. Really, we are continuing what we began last week, looking at this theme before we go to our Christmas theme next Sunday. Last week we looked at a simple truth, a very powerful truth that **thanksgiving multiplies the blessing of God**. It certainly multiplies our experience of God's blessing. You remember that we looked at that visual of God's mercy and faith in God, and how thanksgiving is a pivot point that allows us to experience more of both. When we experience God's mercy, as we respond with gratitude our faith increases. It's just like a seesaw. When mercy is increased, our faith rises. Likewise, when our faith increases and we partner that with gratitude, we experience more and more of the presence of God, more and more of the blessing of God, the mercy of God. I know that that could be misunderstood, that it sounds like we are generating God's mercy and faith. But **I think what happens in practice is that we stifle our experience of God with a lack of giving thanks.**

So today, I want to go a little deeper and talk about why this is true, why it is that the giving of thanks multiplies the blessing of God, then end with how to do it. That's right. We are going to talk about how to give thanks, and practically, how to get started. I am absolutely convinced that we need this because I raised six kids, six amazing kids, six phenomenal kids, and I made them all give thanks. My wife and I taught them from a very early age to always say thank you. We would give them food, they said thank you. Whatever happened, they had to say thank you.

My suspicion is that they always said thank you but were not always thankful. I think it was right to teach them to say thanks, but what we were really teaching them to do was to be polite. Gratitude flows from a condition of the heart. It needs to be expressed. But if we don't understand how thanksgiving works in the overall economy of God, then what we

find is that our giving of thanks is superficial. It's obligatory. You know, "I'm grateful for you and I thank God. I'm grateful for the weather. I thank God for this, for that." All of that is true enough, but it lacks teeth. It lacks spiritual grip.

So we are going to look at why it is that thanksgiving multiplies our experience of God, multiplies the blessing of God, then briefly how to do it. We will end with the passage we read today from Philippians 1, which provides a paradigm, a model for the giving of thanks. But before we do, I want to begin by answering this question of why. It's going to be a bit of a topical study from scripture on the importance of thanksgiving and how it works.

Why Thanksgiving Multiplies the Blessing of God

Here is our first point.

I. Thanksgiving makes you aware of God's presence.

Psalm 100:4: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!" God prescribes thanksgiving. He tells us that we are to come into the presence of the Lord. We are to come into worship, giving thanks for who he is and for what he has done, praising and blessing his name. And if God has prescribed this, then certainly it must work. We understand that God is around us all the time, but we also understand that we are not always consciously aware of his presence. He is here, but we are often more aware of our circumstances, more aware of what isn't happening, more aware of what God isn't doing. The giving of thanks makes us aware of God's presence.

II. Thanksgiving magnifies God.

Psalm 69:30: "I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving." When we stop and from the heart, with thoughtful reflection, give thanks to God, God begins to get bigger, not only in our awareness, but as he is at work around us.

I believe it's John Piper who has used this comparison to help us understand this biblical concept of magnifying the Lord. God is magnified not in the sense that we are making him larger than he is, not in the sense of how a microscope works, but in the way that a telescope works. A telescope takes a very large item that seems very small to us and brings it closer, makes us aware of its magnitude. That's what we do when we magnify the Lord. We become aware of his presence and we magnify God in general. We need a God-consciousness.

I find as a pastor that there is a certain disease that sometimes afflicts your leaders. Our pastors will typically come in and do postop on a Tuesday, which is our Monday. We will do an evaluation. We will talk about how we can do things better. I don't think it's unique to us. You may be in a business or you may be involved in a daily kind of work where you do

evaluation. But there were times in the long history of our church where I would come out of those evaluation meetings feeling like, “Wow, I need to quit what I’m doing.” That’s no one else’s fault.

There are times when you are analyzing every detail. “How do we do this better? How can we be better at this?” We are so aware of where we need to improve, and certainly there is a place for that, but I wonder sometimes if the proportions are completely off. Perhaps we need to take the focus that we give to evaluation, including evaluating our spouses, evaluating one another, our family members, our friends, our work, our performance -- and we need to swap that with the attention we give to giving thanks. We evaluate like this and give thanks like this, and we need to give thanks like this and evaluate like this. This is a bit of an overused image, but a lot of times we so inspect the fruit that we damage it. God is at work, but we are not very aware of his presence and what he is doing. We are more aware of how we could do better. Let’s do both, but let’s give thanks. Moving on...

III. **Thanksgiving renews the inner person.**

Psalm 28:7: “The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.” There is this picture of inner strength, of a trust in God, the knowledge of God’s faithfulness and the protection and the security that is ours in the Lord, flowing from a heart that is full of gratitude.

Thanksgiving is the primary activity of an exulting heart. A grateful heart and strength share a reciprocity. They strengthen one another. “The joy of the Lord is my strength.” Worry, anxiety, fear, unbelief all flee as the song of God’s greatness and the greatness of God is magnified through the giving of thanks. Thanksgiving renews the inner person. It makes us aware of his presence, magnifies God, and renews the inner person.

IV. **Thanksgiving lifts up everyone around you.**

This should be rather obvious for us. Don’t you like to be around grateful people? Psalm 34:1-3: “I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!” Psalm 34 is a psalm of thanksgiving. It is a psalm that David wrote after God delivered him from great danger. He found himself in the presence of a foreign king and in a very vulnerable situation, where he was sure that his life might be taken. In order for his life to be spared, he had to act like he was crazy. Literally, with spittle running down his face, he acted like a madman so that he would find deliverance. And when he gets free, he’s happy. He exults in the Lord. The entire psalm is a psalm of exaltation to God and God’s deliverance in his life. As he praises the Lord, there is this recurring theme where he calls the broken, the crushed in spirit, the humble to come rejoice with him. He has experienced this state that’s about as low as you get -- this state of self-imposed humiliation in order to just survive, and he is exulting in God and lifting up everyone around him.

We have just gone through a Know and Grow track. Know and Grow is our launching pad for discipleship. There are four areas of discipleship here at Riverside: Gather, Connect, Serve, Grow. We offer Know and Grow six times a year, beginning in January, every other month. If you are new to Riverside and you don't know how we encourage discipleship here, I encourage you to come to Know and Grow in January and you will know more. It will be right after the service on Sunday morning for four Sundays. When we finish that, those individuals who go through that who want to become part of Riverside – we have a practice where they meet with an elder or a pastor. We just want to get to know that person. We want to know how to care for them.

It's very interesting. Our elders come early on Sunday morning. They have been doing that for several weeks now, and here is something I have observed when the elders come into the prayer time before the service: They are happy. They are giving thanks. Think about this. They are coming early, and what could be the tone of that meeting is, "How many more of these do we have to do? How many times do I have to come early?" But there is this eagerness.

Today one of the elders was saying, "Thank God. This just feels so right to have this opportunity to meet with people and to care for them. They have been sharing testimonies of individuals who have said, "You know, I have been in the church for years and years and I have never had this opportunity where an elder and a pastor sought me out to see about the condition of my own soul." This is a great church. If you didn't know that, if you are new here, looking for a church, in spite of the pastor, this is a great place. My point is this. As I was hearing that again this morning, it just elevated the spiritual atmosphere. Thanksgiving lifts up everyone around you.

My wife tells me when I come home from work and I tell her I had a great day, I got so much done, she says, "You know, I love to hear that." Isn't that simple? Just the focus on the positive, where we are saying, "God is at work! This is working." It's a lot better than, "How did you sleep?" "Not good. You snored." Right? I've never heard that. You understand, it's a simple point, but it's powerful. Thanksgiving lifts up everyone around you.

V. Thanksgiving transports grace.

This brings us to our passage here in Philippians. In a moment we will look at exactly how to give thanks, but just look at the first portion of the passage that we read previously. Paul begins most of his letters by giving thanks. Here he writes, "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. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Notice the time markers as Paul gives thanks. He tells them, "I am giving thanks for you to God." He talks about his remembrance of them. Then he talks about their current partnership. "Right now we are partnering in the gospel. From

Special Messages – The Hidden Power of Giving Thanks

Philippians 1:3-11 | Sunday, November 26, 2017 | By Brian Brookins



the first day until now and future, I am confident that God is going to complete what he has begun in you.” This is a powerful model of what a grateful heart looks like. “When I look back, I don’t have a record of wrongs I am holding against you. I am motivated to thank God in my every remembrance of you. We are presently partnering together in the gospel and I am absolutely confident that God is going to complete what he started in you.”

I think as Paul wrote this he is remembering...I love Acts 16 where we read about Paul’s experience in Philippi. When he goes to Philippi there is no synagogue, so he finds this place of prayer by the river. There, the first convert from Europe is brought to the Lord, the first Christian – a woman named Lydia. Evidently she was a fairly well resourced woman, because her home became the focal point of the church. She hosted the church as the church was born in Philippi.

As Paul would go back and forth to this place of prayer, there was a demonized girl that would follow them who would prophesy: “These people are really prophets of God.” It’s rather comical, but as Paul and Silas are going to this place of prayer, Paul gets irritated. He gets annoyed by this person who is shouting out these things, so he delivers her of this demon. It’s a great model for parenting, by the way. I’m sorry. Please don’t send me emails. He delivers her.

Friends, if you can see Philippians 1 for what it is, it *explodes* with thanksgiving. Paul does this, then there is this vivid portrayal of wickedness. There are these owners who are exploiting this girl for profit to tell the fortunes of other people. They get angry and they incite everyone into this mob response. Paul and Silas get arrested for setting this woman free. There they are, in shackles, in the inner prison, and they do what you always do in these circumstances. They began to praise God and to sing to God.

There they are, praising God at midnight! I go to bed at 8:30, so I’m not praising God at midnight, much less when I’ve been flogged with wooden rods. And there they are. They’ve been beaten. They are in prison, and they are singing to God. If you know the story of what happens from Acts 16, there is an earthquake. Their shackles come off. The doors open. The jailer is about to kill himself. And they say, “No, no, no, we haven’t escaped.” His life would be taken if the prisoners had escaped. They say, “No, no, no, we are right here.” And he and his whole family get converted. Do you see the power of a grateful heart?

Then in the morning, he’s like, “Okay, they say you can go free.” They say, “Nope. Not so quick. We want an apology.” I want a lot more than an apology if I’m Paul, right? So here he is. “I thank God in my every remembrance of you.” If you read what Paul experienced in Philippi, there was plenty of opportunity for grumbling. There was plenty of opportunity for, “God, what is going on here? I’m getting beaten with rods because I set some girl free of a demon! Where are you?” Yet Paul, so full of the Holy Spirit, is seeing the opportunity in the Lord and is giving thanks. And God is just working, working, working.

You know where Paul is as he is writing this letter? He is in jail again. He is in prison, full of thanksgiving. Philippians is a letter of joy. This is a spoiler alert, but as we finish out Philippians 1 and Paul is finishing his thanksgiving time, he says, “Listen, I know your concern for me that I’m here in jail, but I want you to know that my imprisonment is leading to the spread of the gospel. The whole Roman guard is hearing the gospel and many are coming to faith. God is using this in a fantastic way. And not only that, I understand I have some enemies.” Paul was famous for understatement. “But God is using even my enemies for the gospel to get out there more and more. You may be concerned that I might be killed – don’t be. I’m going to be set free. God has more work for me to do. God will set me free. You pray. I’m praying. We are doing this together. But just in case he doesn’t, I get to go to heaven.” You cannot get this guy down! Full of gratitude.

Last week we started looking at ten lepers. Ten are healed. Nine don’t come back to say thank you and one does. **What jumps out at us is the inappropriateness of ingratitude.** When we look at our lives, those of us who have experienced the forgiveness that’s found in Jesus and his mercy and his grace -- we know that it’s inappropriate for us not to live the life that Paul models. But we stumble. We fail. We often are more conscious and give vocalization to what isn’t right more than we are thanking God. Sometimes that just characterizes our lives.

It helps us to go beyond the guilt of the offense (I need to be more grateful) and understand how gratitude is part of God’s economy -- how it fuels us in moving forward in speaking in faith, speaking of the glory of God, bringing God close, at least in terms of our experience and our awareness. Thanksgiving transports grace.

How to Give Thanks

Let’s look at these verses here in Philippians 1. Let me give you a quick how-to.

1. Express thanks to God.

You say, “Well, Brian, this isn’t very deep. It seems rather obvious.” But it’s not obvious. You know, we go around like some of you do on Thanksgiving, and we have a time of giving thanks. We express that. Sometimes we will be intentional as a family. Sometimes as a leadership team at Riverside we will express thanks. But what we want to make sure that we are doing is not just saying, “I’m grateful for you.” We want to tell the Lord that we are acknowledging that this blessing has come from God and that our thanksgiving is God-focused.

2. Based on one of two foundations.

This is really helpful because it gives us a basis from which thanksgiving proceeds. One is creation and the other is grace. When I say creation, I mean that God is reflected everywhere in his creation. There are people in your life who maybe don’t know the grace of God. Paul is thanking God for their partnership in grace, their partnership in the gospel.

Hopefully not everyone you know has experienced that. There are people that still need God's grace. So what is the foundation? If they are not trusting in Christ, what's the foundation for giving thanks? It's creation. They are made in the image of God and that they are reflecting the glory of God. Even in the situations where humanity is very broken, there is still evidence of God's work and beauty in their lives, reflecting the glory of God, for which we give thanks.

The second foundation is what Paul models here in Philippians 1, and that is God's grace. In verse 5 he speaks of their partnership in the gospel. Then in verse 7 that they are "partakers with me of grace." Partnership and partakers – it's the Greek word "koinonia." It speaks of fellowship and intimate working together in the grace of God, which characterizes who we are as Christians. We have experienced God's grace. We have experienced his forgiveness. God is working in our lives and Paul is using that as a foundation for which to give thanks. Creation/Grace. Express thanks to God based on one of two foundations.

Just before we leave this point, I might call your attention to Romans 1. We won't go there right now, but when Paul begins to teach us about sin and our brokenness with God and the brokenness of our relationship with God, he says that **the heart of sin is a failure to honor, to worship God, and to give thanks to him. The lack of gratitude is at the very heart of sin.** As we experience God's grace and he forgives us and we begin to experience God's healing, gratefulness then begins more and more to characterize our lives, because we are being restored back to the humanity God wants us to be. Express thanks to God based on one of two foundations.

3. With thought and meditation.

Paul says, "I thank God in all my remembrance of you." If we say out of guilt, "I need to be more thankful," then we go and express it, it's generally superficial. But if we sit down in an attitude of prayer and we say, "Lord, let me think about the gift of this person, how they reflect your image (creation), and how I see your grace at work in their lives, and I begin to think about it, meditate on it, reflect on it, then verbalize it to God, what happens now is that our thanksgiving begins to be substantive. It gets some momentum. It gets some meat. Then, when we express it, it's really encouraging.

Once in a while after a message, people will come up and say, "Hey, that was a great sermon. That was good. Thank you." Sometimes as a pastor you are looking...is that just an obligatory, perfunctory, "Attaboy?" Then some people say, "You know, you spoke about this, and God is doing this in my life." Immediately their thanksgiving expressed to the Lord shows a thoughtfulness, a reflection. You know what that does in that moment, in that relationship with whoever you are speaking to? It elevates, it lifts. It brings an awareness that God is at work. It magnifies God's presence in our lives.

4. From the heart.

Paul says, “It’s right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart.” This was not out of obligation. This was sincere and heartfelt. Paul loves them with the affection of Jesus Christ.

5. Encompassing past, present, and future.

We looked at this already, but it’s the whole idea of my remembrance of you, present now in partnership, and with confidence that God is going to complete what he started in you. I am thankful that God’s grace covers our past, covers your past. It’s marked by forgiveness. It’s present right now. I am in faith for this. Listen, this is such a good model for relationship, for work, for family, for friendship. We can say, “God’s grace covers our past. It’s a joy for me be with you right now and to work together, and I’m confident that God is going to help us in the future.”

6. Tell the person.

You are giving thanks to God. You are doing it from the heart. Thoughtful reflection. Past, present, and future. Creation/Grace. Then, you can say, “Hey, I am thanking God for you and here’s why.” Please don’t skip parts one through five. Don’t shortcut giving thanks, but do include part 6, where we actually then express to the person, “I’m grateful for you, and here’s why.”

7. With expressions of love.

“For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus,” Paul says in verse 8. We will sort of end with this, which means, “not yet.” When Paul finishes, he is just rolling gratitude upon gratitude, expression upon expression. He is expressing his gratefulness as it’s kind of in the soil of affection and love. There is no duplicity. There is no underhanded motive, like, “I’m telling you this, but if you don’t get sorted out...” Right?

Then, in verses 9 through 11, as he is just pouring out gratitude and love and affection, he sees this higher place he wants them to be. He talks about them in love, full of discernment and excellence and purity. This is really what love does. **It’s totally inadequate to see love as stopping at acceptance. Love begins at acceptance, but it always wants God’s best for the person.**

So without undoing his gratitude, he presents this vision of them being complete in Christ. This is hard to do. It comes from the Spirit of God. It comes from grace. It comes from faith. He does it with this confidence that Christ is going to take you there. He does it with love, which is wonderful.

He says, “It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” That is beautiful, isn’t it?

You think, “Oh yeah, but they must have been great people.” Go read Corinthians. Paul starts off in a similar fashion, a little different. The Corinthians were having some problems. They were getting drunk at the Lord’s Supper. We have had some issues as a church, but that’s not been one of them, I’m happy to say. They were suing one another. There was gross immorality and the church was all divided up, following different leaders. And he says, “I thank God for you. I see this genuine work of the Spirit of God.” Come on! They are a mess! Corinth was his problem child, and yet there was a confidence in God’s grace at work in their lives.

I am going to end with this. Here are a couple of action points for you. **Knowledge of God’s grace leads us here to repentance and obedience.** Our title today is “The Hidden Power of Giving Thanks.” Sometimes the greatest blessings in life are really obvious, and because they are so obvious, we dismiss them. They are familiar to us and we just don’t give them the weight or the importance that we should. My hope is that God will use this message to awaken something in you, to see the power of gratitude.

Now, ask yourself this question: **Do I need to repent of ingratitude?** I phrase it that way, because that’s the most helpful way. There is clear biblical instruction on what to do when the answer to that question is yes. Maybe you could talk about this at lunch. Say, “Hey, do you need to repent of ingratitude?” Ask one another. That was supposed to be a little bit funny, but evidently not so much.

Why? Because there is an immediate cure when we repent. Jesus Christ has paid the penalty of your sin. You don’t go earn redemption. You don’t go earn that forgiveness. “Lord, I repent of this. I repent of not being grateful. I’m not going to carry from this moment the guilt and shame of that, because Jesus carried it to the cross. **I receive forgiveness by faith in Christ. And I believe that God really wants to bring a cure, a manifestation of abounding gratefulness in my heart, because of his grace.** That’s what Jesus died to do in me.” I am confident of this, that God will complete the work that Christ has begun in your life. It will be completed. Here are my two action points: **Repentance and Grace. Own it and believe God’s grace, then go and do.** Amen?

Let’s pray. Father, would you give us your grace as we depart today to not live in the inappropriateness of ingratitude, but to experience the power of gratefulness? Lord, we take a moment right now just to say we need your grace here. We do not want this Polyanna, superficial kind of gratitude. **We want genuine, authentic thankfulness to characterize our lives.** Lord, we can talk about it, but the reality for me is if I’m in prison at midnight for doing the right thing, I will be tempted to dark emotions. I need you, Lord God. I need your grace. I receive your forgiveness. I trust in your perfect will and plan and faithfulness in my life, by your grace, O God. And I thank you in Jesus’ name. Amen. God bless you.

Special Messages – The Hidden Power of Giving Thanks

Philippians 1:3-11 | Sunday, November 26, 2017 | By Brian Brookins

