

According to an old legend God once sent two angels out from heaven, each with a basket, to bring back the prayers of those on earth. One was an Angel of Thanksgiving. This angel started with a large basket. The other was the Angel of Petitions or requests and carried a small basket.

When they returned, each was in trouble. The Angel of Petitions came back with an over flowing basket and had filled a sack as well. The Angel of Thanksgiving had only three offerings in his large basket.

It is sad that this legend reflects some truth. Most of us do pray, and in our prayers we usually upload our burdens, fears, wants, and requests to God and rightly so. The problem is that only here and there do we express a word of thanks for answered prayer and the blessings received.

Sometimes we treat God no better than some children treat Santa Claus. I am told that each year before Christmas the Post Office receives thousands of letters from children, addressed to Santa Claus. In the months that follow Christmas, there are no letters of thanks.

The Bible tells us Jesus cleansed ten lepers. All were greatly blessed, but only one returned to thank the Great Physician, Jesus. What did Jesus say to the one? He said, "Where are the nine?"

Today while you are driving it is not uncommon for someone to signal their intent to merge into your lane—you yield to their desire and they do not offer a gesture of thanks. Sometimes this happens when I open the door for a woman—they never say a mumbling word.

But it is sadder that even on "Thanksgiving Day" there will be hundreds of thousands of families all across the nation that will cook a scrumptious meal and then tear into it like a hungry dog into his bowl of food--without even thanking our God who provided it.

In 2 Timothy 3:2 the Apostle Paul says that "in the last days people would be "unthankful." With this in mind, let's look into some possible reasons why people fail to give thanks.

I. Why do people fail to give thanks?

A. People fail to give thanks because of a lack of faith or belief in God.

It was in elementary school that I first learned about the history of Thanksgiving Day. I was taught that those who settled in the New Land, America, celebrated the first Thanksgiving Day. They, along with the Indians had a great feast to thank and praise God who gave them passage across the ocean and who also gave them a bountiful harvest.

A song we used to sing in *public school* was "We Gather Together (to ask the Lord's blessings.) Another was "*Come Ye Thankful People Come.*"

*Come, ye thankful people, come; Raise the song of harvest home.
All is safely gathered in; Ere the winter storms begin.
God, our maker, doth provide; For our wants to be supplied.
Come to God's own temple, come; Raise the song of harvest home.*

Today, many of our kids in school are being taught that Thanksgiving Day is a commemoration of the time when the Pilgrims had a dinner to thank the Native Americans for helping them out with some corn.

Did you know that when you give thanks, you give thanks to *someone*? When you give thanks, whether to a person or to God, you have to humble yourself and express appreciation for something that someone did for you.

It is hard for some to do this. Pride keeps many from acknowledging their need and pride keeps many from offering thanks when that need is met.

Without recognition of God, thanksgiving becomes just a shallow happiness in what we have.

Today many rejoice for what they have; but how many express genuine thanksgiving? The ten lepers were healed were all happy that they had been healed of leprosy yet only one gave thanks.

Millions of kids that will open up presents this Christmas--most will express excitement and happiness saying things like, "Wow!," "Awesome!," "Look what I got!," "Where are the batteries?" but few will say "Thank-you" to their parents, much less our Father in heaven.

Colonial merchant Timothy Dexter said, "*An ungrateful person is like a hog under a tree eating acorns but never looking up to see where they come from.*"

Many fail to give God thanks because they do not believe that He is the source of all the good things they have and experience. Is this you? Are you failing to give thanks because you really don't have an active faith and belief in God.

B. People fail to give thanks because they don't see their own unworthiness for the things they receive.

If you are employed, how many of you thank your employer for your pay check? Is it necessary to say "Thanks" to your job for the pay you labored to receive? Are they doing you a favor when they hand you your pay check? After all, you've done the work required of you. You've earned your pay.

Scripture bears record of this truth. In Romans 4:4, it says, "*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation (from his employer).*"

When you get paid, your job is obligated to pay you for work performed. But when someone gives you a gift, something you have not earned, then thanks are in order.

In James 1:17-18 it is written, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*"

The air we breathe and the food we eat are gifts from God. The articulation of speech and the ability to move our limbs are gifts from God. We can't do enough to earn these blessings thus when we receive them they would not be considered pay for work performed—they are gifts.

In fact the Bible teaches that in spite of our unworthiness, God still blesses us because of His great love for us.

Paul teaches this truth in Ephesians chapter 2. In verse one and two he writes, "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this*

world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”

But in verse five Paul writes, *“even when we were dead in trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...”*

When we thank God for life, limb and His provision, we are humbly acknowledging our unworthiness to receive these gifts from His hand. Humility and thanks go hand in hand.

So our lack of thankfulness—our ungratefulness may spring from our *pride*. Could it be that we don't give thanks because deep down we feel that we have earned or otherwise deserve the things that we have received.

We eat right, exercise, take our vitamins; don't smoke, drink or take drugs—our health is good because we don't abuse the temple we live in. Well I had an aunt who died of lung cancer but was not a smoker.

A commercial advertising a new car tells us that we deserve to drive their vehicle. A fast food franchise tells us that we “deserve a break today.” A vacation resort tells us that we work hard and “owe it to ourselves” to retreat to their exotic island.

However, when we have caught the biblical truth of our own sinfulness, our unworthiness for any of the things which we have received, then we begin to lift up our voice in praise and thanks to God. He has given us all of His gifts, in spite of the fact that we don't deserve them.

Our thanks to God should usher from hearts that recognize God's holiness and our own sinfulness. Our thanks to God should come from hearts that acknowledge God's mercy in not dealing with us according to our sin.

Our thanks to God should pour forth from hearts that are expressing appreciation for God's blessing to a person who isn't worthy of the blessing.

People fail to give thanks because of a lack of faith or belief in God.

People fail to give thanks because they do not see our own unworthiness for the things they receive.

C. People fail to give thanks and praise to God because they might question His goodness in their lives.

For some people, finding evidence of God's goodness and blessing in their lives is like searching for a needle in a haystack. They reason, “How can I give thanks for the good things in my life, if I can't find them?”

For these people they are there but buried under a mound of bitter experiences, disappointment, sickness, heartache or loss. Perhaps this describes someone in this sanctuary.

You feel like the prophet Elijah who sat discouraged and maybe even depressed under the juniper tree saying to God, *“I have had enough, LORD. Take my life!” (1 Kings 19:4)*

The Scripture says that *“Every good gift and every perfect gift come from above...”* But what about those times when life seems less than good?

Many are going through “not so good times” right now. This reminds me of the sarcasm in the theme song of the TV sitcom, “Good Times:”

*Just lookin' out of the window.
Watchin' the asphalt grow.
Thinkin' how it all looks hand-me-down.
Good Times, yeah, yeah Good Times*

*Keepin' your head above water
Makin' a wave when you can*

*Temporary layoffs - Good Times.
Easy credit rip offs - Good Times.
Scratchin' and surviving - Good Times.
Hangin' in a chow line - Good Times.
Ain't we lucky we got 'em - Good Times.*

And then you have the well meaning family members and friends try to encourage you with clichés:

- It could be worse
- You'll survive
- Every cloud has a silver lining
- There is a light at the end of the tunnel
- After the rain comes a rainbow
- It's always darkest before the dawn
- Cheer up, it's not the end of the world
- This too, shall pass

When life seems less than good, how do we give thanks? The apostle Paul doesn't spout off another cliché, he tells us in I Thessalonians 5:18, "*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*"

Do you think Paul is saying that we have to give thanks for the bad things? Paul is not saying to thank God for the bad things; what he is saying is that we ought to thank God in the midst of our *bad situation*.

We thank God in the midst of our bad situation because He uses bad situations for our good. Paul says in Romans 8:28-29, "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...*"

Paul is letting us know that God permits some bad things to happen in our lives that we might be "*conformed to the image or likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.*"

Our problem is that we don't always see that God is working *good* when we are encompassed by the bad. Our problem is that we only see the bad things.

Satan wants us to be preoccupied with the circumstances. He wants us love, protect, and pamper ourselves in order to numb ourselves from the pain of the circumstances.

God wants us to look for what He is teaching us through the circumstances. That is why James in his letter says, "*Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*"

James goes on to say, “If you need help in understanding God’s purpose for your trial”—or in other words, “*if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*”

Let me share with you a verse from Hebrews chapter five that is an amazing truth.

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. (Heb 5:8)

This verse is referring to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, *learning obedience*. The Bible teaches that Jesus was perfect and He never disobeyed His Heavenly Father; yet the Scriptures say He, “*learned obedience from the things which He suffered.*”

This phrase doesn’t mean that Jesus was ever disobedient. It means that He learned (through experience as a Man and through all His temptation and suffering) what it meant to suffer *and* triumph in a way He did not experience before He came to earth as a man.

It is hard, for example, at the moment of a trial such as when you’re laid off, to say, “Lord, I am persuaded that your way is best for fulfilling your purpose in me.” Yet Jesus responded in this way when “*He came unto His own and His own received Him not.*” (John 1).

When you are filled with sorrow over the loss of a loved one, it’s difficult to look to the Lord and say, “*You give and take away, you give and take away; blessed be the Name of the Lord.*” But this is what Job did when all of his kids were killed.

When your heart is broken and the stinging pain of betrayal and treachery has you in its grip, it’s difficult to look up and say, “*Lord, I know that you love me with an everlasting love.*” Yet Jesus responded in this way when Judas betrayed Him and Peter denied knowing Him.

Some have a hard time giving thanks unto the Lord because they question His goodness in their lives. In the secret place of their heart they ask, “How can God call Himself “good” when He allows me to suffer so much?” Is this you?

People fail to give thanks because of a lack of faith or belief in God.

People fail to give thanks because they do not see our own unworthiness for the things they receive.

People fail to give thanks and praise to God because they might question His goodness in their lives.

D. People fail to give thanks because they don't count their blessings.

This is not the answer that person in the middle of a bitter experience might expect to receive. How many of us would say to a couple whom have lost a child, “*Don't cry; count your blessings. You have two other healthy children.*”

A better answer would be, “*Have faith in the power of Almighty God to bring you through this valley and to bring glory to Himself even in this.*” Yet we *must* count our blessings. Yet we *must* praise God for “two healthy children.”

As we count our blessings we will soon find that our lives are filled with so much goodness from God. As we count our blessings we will soon find that our lives are not the hell our human sin deserves. As we count our blessings we will soon find that our Heavenly Father loves us with an everlasting love and is drawing us with His loving-kindness. (Jeremiah 31:3)

I dare you to count your blessings. I dare you to take a piece of paper and to make two columns on it—one side for blessings and the other side for trials—watch your “blessings” quadruple your “trials.”

The Bible frequently calls us toward praise. In Psalm 103 we are called upon to praise or thank God with all that we are: *"Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name."*

Psalm 107 gives several reasons from Israel's history to give thanks unto God.

In this hymn of praise, the psalmist presents four word pictures of the nation's deliverance from captivity (vv. 4-32). He presents Israel as:

- Travellers in distress being guided to a city (vv. 4-9);
- Prisoners in a dungeon being released (vv. 10-16);
- Sick men being restored to health (vv. 17-22); and
- Sailors on a turbulent sea safely brought to their destination (vv. 23-32).

Each of these word pictures starts with *a problem* (vv. 4-5, 10-12, 17-18, 23-27), mentions *a prayer* (vv. 6a, 13a, 19a, 28a), watches *God's provision* (vv. 6b-7, 13b-14, 19b-20, 28b-30), and ushers forth *praise* (vv. 8-9, 15-16, 21-22, 31-32).

Our lives are no different than the men and women who lived during the time Psalm 107 was written.

- When we have problems; we can pray
- When we pray; God provides
- When God provides we have an opportunity to praise Him.

After these word pictures in Psalm 107, the psalmist says:

"Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, And praise Him in the company of the elders." (Psa 107:31-32)

II. How are we to express "Thanks?" (Three ways)

A. *We are to live thankfully.*

Ezra 3:10-11 says, *"When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel."*

When we come to church on Sunday we have a time of praise and worship of our God. But you need to know that Scripture teaches that what we do in weekly worship is only a token of the entire direction of our lives. Remember what Paul said in Romans 12:1, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."*

Paul writes in Ephesians 5:20 that we should be, *"giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."*

In Colossians 3:17 the following command, *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."*

In Hebrews 13:15 we are told, “...By Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

Thanksgiving should be a way of life for the Christian—we are to live thankfully. This truth is illustrated in the life of a little boy of a Vietnamese refugee family who was having a difficult time learning English. He had a particular problem with "g's" and "l's."

On Thanksgiving Day he attended church services with his family. After the service he tried hard to join in on the Thanksgiving greeting. He went up to the pastor and shook his hand and said, "Happy Thanksliving, pastor!"

Hopefully that is where you are. Happy Thanks-living. We are to live thankfully.

B. We are called to present thank-offerings.

Psalm 107:22 says, "Let them sacrifice thank-offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy."

This verse refers to the Old Testament worship in the temple. When one thinks of the word "sacrifice" in this context he or she usually thinks of an offering of a lamb or a goat. However, the Old Testament sacrifices were not all bloody sacrifices. Many sacrifices were expressions of *thanks to God* for the gifts He had already given.

When the harvest came, the faithful Israelite worshiper would present a sacrifice of the first fruits.

When a couple received their first child, they would present an appropriate sacrifice of thanks to God.

Presenting "thank-offerings" is a part of who we are as children of God. When you give a percentage of your income each pay period, you are saying, "Thank you Lord!"

A new Christian was put to work ushering and receiving the offering and was very enthusiastic about his duties. One day, while collecting the offering, he stopped in front of the town's old miser, who was known never to put anything in the plate.

This man paid no attention to him, but the young fellow remained standing, with the plate under the miser's nose. Some of the other ushers tried to signal him to move on, but he continued to stand there.

Finally, in a loud voice that carried around the church, he asked the miser, "Ain't you goin' to put anything in the offering?"

"No," answered the miser gruffly. "Well, then," said the usher, "take some out. After all, it's for the heathen."

That usher's tact may have left something to be desired, but his understanding of faith was on target.

How can we say that we are a follower of Jesus, how can we say we are genuinely thankful for all the blessings God has bestowed upon us, when we fail to present thank-offerings to him?

How do we express "thanks?" First, we are to live thankfully. Second, we are called to present thank-offerings.

C. We are to tell of God's works with songs of joy.

Besides expressing their gratitude to God through thank-offerings, the Old Testament worshipers would sing or chant a psalm which described God's goodness to them. Many psalms in the Bible are "thanksgiving hymns" for God's goodness to the writer.

Psalm 107:22 is a call to give thanks in worship. Part of the reason we are to come to worship week by week is simply to give God praise and thanksgiving for His goodness to us.

Sometimes we come home from a church service and we are disappointed. The music did not fit our taste. The sermon did not fit us. We may even think, "What a waste of time. I didn't get anything out of the service." When you think that way you should ask yourself, "What did I come for?"

We need to remember that the primary reason we come to church is not get something out of it but to give something. We come to church to give praise to God for what He has given us all week.

Let me tell you something very important. When church meets and you're not there, you have robbed God of the praise due Him because the Word of God says, "*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His Name.*"

Someone might be thinking, "I have no problem in this area—I am at church every Sunday." My question to you then is this: 'Do you worship? Do you praise Him? Do you offer up thanks to Him?'

The Bible teaches that God deserves our faithful worship more than our formality. Psalm 69:30-31 says, "*I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs.*"

I believe that the Psalmist is saying here that the giving of thanks to God is more precious to Him than the formality associated with coming to church. Some people go to church just so that they can say that they went to church. But God wants us to come in order to give Him thanks with songs of joy!

The Psalmist also says that there is a side benefit that occurs when we give thanks.

It should be no secret that we at GraceWay Church is concerned about reaching our community. The Psalmist says that the giving of thanks is a *testimony* to our community. In Psalm 69:32 the psalmist says, "*The poor will see and be glad-- you who seek God, may your hearts live!*"

How are we to express our thanks? First, we are to living thankfully. Second, we are called to present thank--offerings. Thirdly, we are to come to church and praise God. We are to express our thanks by being in worship and singing songs of praise.

Conclusion

In 1860, a ship went aground on the shore of Lake Michigan near Evanston. Edward Spencer, a ministerial student, one of those rescuing those trapped in the water, threw himself repeatedly into the frigid waters to rescue 17 passengers. In the process, his health was permanently damaged. Some years later at his funeral, it was noted that not one of the people he rescued ever thanked him.

The Bible says in Romans 5:6-8:

"... At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

While we were powerless to save ourselves, Christ saved us.

While we were struggling to keep afloat, spiritually speaking, Christ rescued us.

While we were coming up for that last gasp of air, Christ died for us.

A lady was on a steam boat when her little girl fell overboard. Needless to say, the mother was frantic. A man on the boat had a large dog. The dog was directed to leap into the water and save the child. That is just what the dog did and swam ashore with the little girl pulling her along with part of her dress in his mouth.

As expected, the mother grabbed her saved child, and kissed her again and again and again. Then turning to the dog, she hugged and kissed that dog, with a heart full of gratitude to the animal.

That's more than some people have ever done for Jesus Christ, although He hung on the Cross to save them from sin and hell.

Are you more like one of the 17 passengers who never offered one word of thanks to their rescuer, or this grateful mother who would stoop so low as to hug and kiss a dog. I'm not suggesting that you kiss a dog but I am strongly encouraging you to kiss the Son of God. *Psalms 2:12* says, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

Remember the sinful woman that Jesus forgave? Jesus was at a party when this woman decides to pour all her expensive perfume on his feet and wash them. The Pharisee who had invited Him to the party was embarrassed and complained that if Jesus was a real prophet, He would know that a "sinner" is touching Him. Luke writes:

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." (Luke 7:44-47 NIV)

As a Christian, the more you realize the depth of sin that you were rescued from and the more you comprehend how much you have been forgiven, the more you will want to express your gratitude to God in living for Him.

We are to live thankfully. We are to present thank-offerings. We are say "thanks" with songs of joy.

Let's end this message together with a song of joy that expresses our gratitude to the Lord:

Thank You Lord; Thank You Lord Thank You Lord....I just want to thank You Lord.

'Cause you've been so good; You've been so good; Been so good... I just want to thank You Lord.

You saved my soul; You saved my soul; Saved my soul... I just want to thank You Lord.

Let's pray.