

## Thanksgiving Is a Choice

Colossians 2:6-7 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

<sup>6</sup> *Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,<sup>7</sup> having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and **overflowing with gratitude.***

Colossians 3:15-16 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

<sup>15</sup> *Let **the peace of Christ**, to which you were indeed called in one body, rule in your hearts; and **be thankful.*** <sup>16</sup> *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.***

## Introduction

This morning, we will think about one thing that distinguishes believers from the rest of the world. I will call it the mark of a believer in Christ. That is, being thankful and overflowing with gratitude in our walk with God.

A spirit-filled Christian exudes thankfulness in words and deeds. She never runs out matter of thanksgiving both to God and to people. As soon as she opens her mouth, you hear a word of thanksgiving to God and to people. She overflows with thanksgiving.

Now, let me tell you what I mean by ‘overflowing.’

Imagine it’s a hot summer day. You want to have a cup of ice coffee. You stop by at Starbucks to get one. As soon as you get it, you open the lid and take a sip and, ah, it is heavenly! It tastes so good. You are happy and content. Then, something happens on your way out. Someone accidentally bumps into you, and you spill your cup. The coffee spills all over on you, and on the other person as well!

That’s the image of overflowing. Flooding or flowing over you from within. Keep it in mind.

## Content

**Are you one overflowing with gratitude?**

If someone meets you today for the first time, what impression would you leave to that person? Will the attitude of gratitude spill out of you? Or something else? Let me tell you. Your attitude of gratitude will surely rub off on everyone around you.

Let me put this way. When was the last time you met a believer, and you were so impressed with his attitude that you wanted to be like him? On the contrary, we often get the opposite impression—whining and complaining. Once I personally experienced it.

E.g. One year I was serving as one of the ushers at the Greater NJ Annual Conference. That day, we were directing the hungry crowd (over 1,000) to their lunch tables. Our goal was to serve everyone on time. To do so, besides a few tables reserved for the handicapped at the front, ushers directed the crowd to fill the tables from the back corner first. Most were cooperative, but I encountered several individuals who didn't fail to show their whining attitude: *why do I have to walk all the way back when I can sit at the nearest table here?* Now, if you had been one of the people there, would you have been thankfully following the directions, or do you see yourself 'whining?'

## Jesus

Let me introduce to you, our Lord Jesus. Imagine you met Him for the first time in person. What kind of impression would you get from Him? Most of us would notice right away His grace, love, compassion, wisdom, strength, miracle worker, teacher, righteous anger, justice, etc.

Would you come away with the image of gratitude in Jesus? The Lord Jesus who is overflowing with thanksgiving? I would.

Three things in the Bible convince me so. The first one is His prayers at the Last Supper—the first 'Eucharist' he ever had with His disciples. That night, He broke the bread with "thanks" to God at the table (Luke 22:19). By the way, did you know that the word 'Eucharist' is a Greek word meaning 'thanksgiving'?

The second image that comes to my mind is this: Jesus feeding multitudes of people twice: one time 5,000 people and the other time 4,000. Both times, He broke the bread with 'grace'—'thanksgiving' to the Giver (Matthew 14:19, Matthew 15:36).

Third image is this: Jesus even thanked God in advance for answering His prayers all the time; *"And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I **thank You** that You have heard Me'"* (John 11:41, NKJV). Right after this prayer of thanks to God, He raised Lazarus from the dead.

May I say that Jesus' life and prayers were filled with thanksgiving? His life of thanksgiving was rooted in His relationship with God, not based on things happening to Him.

He would sing praises to His Father in Heaven all the time. Both in good times and in bad times. He was able to do so, because He obeyed God with delight. It was His joy to please Him and to do whatever God was pleased with. Such reverent obedience to God made His prayers heard by His Father (Hebrews 5:7). Of course, when His prayers were answered, more thanksgiving followed in His words and actions. And the cycle of gratitude continued.

Therefore, I can easily say that Jesus' life began and ended with gratitude. He was overflowing with thanksgiving in every way and every day. It rubbed off on everyone around Him. So should it be our lifestyle.

I have three practical suggestions for all God's children. When you put them into practice, your walk with God will be revolutionized.

**1. Make thanksgiving a mark of your life.** Christ commands us to “*be thankful*” (ευχαριστοι γινεσθε, Colossians 3:15). “*Be the thanks-giving People*” would be more accurate translation. Be the one who gives thanks to God always. For all things. In all circumstances. Fill your mouth with words of thanks, not “*filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks* (Ephesians 5:4).

*E.g. Two cars waiting at a stoplight. The light turned green, but the man didn't notice it. A woman in the car behind him is watching traffic pass around them. The woman begins pounding on her steering wheel, blowing her horn and yelling loudly at the man to move. The man doesn't move. The woman is going ballistic inside her car, ranting and raving at the man, pounding on her steering wheel and dash. The light turns yellow, and the woman begins to blow the car horn, flips him off, and screams profanity and curses at the man. The man, looks up, sees the yellow light and accelerates through the intersection just as the light turns red. The woman is beside herself, screaming in frustration as she misses her chance to get through the intersection.*

*As she is still in mid-rant, she hears a tap on her window and looks up into the barrel of a gun held by a very serious looking policeman. The police man tells her to shut off her car while keeping both hands in sight. She complies, speechless at what is happening. After she shuts off the engine, the policeman orders her to exit her car with her hands up. She gets out of the car, and he orders her to turn and place her hands on her car. She turns, places her hands on the car roof and quickly is cuffed and hustled into the patrol car. She is too bewildered by the chain of events to ask any questions and is driven to the police station where she is fingerprinted, photographed, searched, booked and placed in a cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approaches the cell and opens the door for her. She is escorted back to the booking desk where the original officer is waiting with her personal effects. He hands her the bag containing her things, and says, “I'm really sorry for this mistake. But you see, I pulled up behind your car while you were yelling, blowing your horn, flipping the guy off in front of you, and cussing a*

*blue streak at him.” “Then, I noticed the ‘Choose Life’ license plate holder, the ‘What Would Jesus Do’ bumper sticker, the ‘Follow Me to Sunday School’ bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk.” “So, naturally... I assumed you had stolen the car” (“Mistaken Identity” --- a story from Internet). Fill your mouth with words of thanks.*

**2. Thank God for the people in your life.** Begin with your loved ones who are living together. Between husband and wife. Between parents and children. Between siblings. Also, let them know your thankfulness for their presence in your life. I personally thank God every day for my wife, my child, and my extended family. For the people in our church as well.

**3. Begin with small things in life.** Being thankful in all circumstances takes time and practice. How about “five things I am thankful for” in small things each day? As you get better, move onto bigger ones. Don’t expect to be like Job over night. Not grumbling against God in the worst circumstance was not his overnight decision. Rather, it was an outcome of his life-long practice of worship, giving thanks and praises to the Lord (Job 1:5). Thank God daily and begin with small things.

## Conclusion

Some of you remember the story of Daniel and the lion’s den from Sunday School. How many of you remember, though, why he was thrown into the den in the first place? Because Daniel refused to obey King Darius who ordered Daniel and others to stop praying to the LORD for thirty days. The king’s edict was this: “*that anyone (kc--in his kingdom) who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to King, shall be thrown into the lions’ den.*” It was the enemies’ trap to destroy Daniel. “*Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, **giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.***” Of course, the enemies found Daniel praying and asking God for help, accused him before the king, and the king had no other choice but to throw Daniel into the lion’s den (Daniel 6:8-12).

Let me read it to you again. Daniel *gave thanks to his God* when he knew he was about to be thrown into the lion’s den. Can we give thanks to our God as Daniel did in times of trouble? Also, note here, *just as he had done before*. It was his *daily practice* that enabled him to continue giving thanks even in the day of trouble.

Be the thankful people. Let your gratitude overflow onto others around you.

Let us pray.