

Thanking God in Prayer

1 Chronicles 16:34

God is good. All the time. The day before Thanksgiving an elderly man in Phoenix called his son in New York and said to him, "I hate to ruin your day, son, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; 45 years of misery is enough. We're sick of each other, and so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her."

Frantic, the son called his sister, who exploded on the phone. "No way they're getting divorced," she shouted, "I'll take care of this." She called Phoenix immediately and said to her father. "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?" The man hung up his phone and turned to his wife. "Okay, honey. The kids are coming for Thanksgiving and paying for their flights."

That joke is kind of out of place because we know that taking a flight nowadays is kind of risky and entertaining people, even our own relatives, from places where there's a surge in cases like New York and Chicago is not a good idea. So, we're in a situation where things are kind of messy and out of control. But guess what. God is in control. Amen? And God is good all the time. A vaccine or vaccines are on their way.

We're going through a series this month called **PUSH, "Pray Until Something Happens"**. Today I'm going to talk about something that will give us pause because we shouldn't always just be pushing. We should also pause and think about the goodness of God and thank him for that. Do you know that "think" and "thank" come from the same root word? That's why we must think of things that God has blessed us with and then thank him for his goodness.

The title of this message is “Thanking God in Prayer”. 1 Chronicles 16:34 says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

As we begin our celebration of Thanksgiving today, I hope we will take time to reflect upon the goodness of God. It is a time for us to ponder and give thanks for all that God has blessed us with. Even though times are not that so good.

You see, God wants us to be a people of thanksgiving and gratitude.

Col. 3:15 says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Note that Paul is talking about letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. And at the end of it, as if it's an afterthought, he adds, “and be thankful”. “Oh, yeah, I almost forgot-be thankful”. However, that couldn't be further from the truth. Being thankful was never an afterthought to Paul; it was a major focus. In his letters to the early Christians, he always says, “Give thanks, be thankful”.

We sing a song with the line, “Give thanks with a grateful heart”. That begs the question, well, what other kind of heart would you be giving thanks with? An apathetic heart. We're saying 'thanks' but we don't really mean it or there's not much feeling behind it. We could give thanks with an entitled heart. We're saying, 'thanks' but we might as well be saying, 'well, it's about time'.

We can say, 'thank you' as a formality without being very sincere. We can do this when we bow our heads at the dinner table. “Thank you, Lord for the food we are about to receive-yada, yada, yada.” There was this little girl who prayed over their food. “Dear God, please bless this food, in Jesus name, Amen.” Her father said, “Anne, when you pray, say it from your heart.” “Yes, dad”, the girl said. The next day, she prayed again and she said, “Dear God, please bless this food, really, really bless this food. In Jesus’ name from the bottom of my heart.” Prayer should not be a formality; but a heartfelt expression of thoughtfulness towards God for what he's blessed me with.

Now, in Col. 4:2, Paul connects thankfulness to prayer. He says, " Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." So, we see Paul attaching thankfulness to an important aspect of the Christian life which is prayer.

It's typical for us to ask for things when we pray. There's nothing wrong with that. We should be coming to God with our concerns and requests. However, that should not be the only component of our prayers. They should be also filled with praise and gratitude. In fact, I think it's good to have some of our prayers be only about praising God and thanking him for what he has already done.

Did you know that praying with thanksgiving helps us to relieve our anxiety and give us peace? Paul tells us in Phil. 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Many a times I've prayed with a heavy heart but when I start to think about the many wonderful and good things that God has done for me, there's a certain kind of peace that fills my being. God's grace just engulfs me and puts my heart at ease. His love endures forever.

We might do various things to try to relieve our anxiety but we see here that praying with thanksgiving plays a big role in relieving my stress and establishing peace. If I concentrate on all the things God has done for me, if I focus on all the times he's rescued me and come through for me then I realize that I don't need to be worried about anything. That will bring peace to my heart and mind. If I continue praying with thanksgiving in my heart I will continue to be able to give whatever is concerning me over to God and be at peace with it; no matter how things turn out.

Paul talks about being thankful many times in Colossians. Whether the subject is peace, God's word, teaching, singing, praying or anything else in between, Paul wants there to be thanksgiving in our hearts. You'll see the biggest reason why in 2:6-7, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

There are many things you and I can be thankful to God for when we pray to him. In this message this afternoon, let me share with you a few of those things.

When I pray,

1. I SHOULD BE THANKFUL TO GOD FOR THE GRACE HE'S SHOWN TO ME

The Bible says in **Ephesians 2:8** "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—.*" What is grace? Grace is everything God does for you even though you don't deserve it. Grace is God giving you what you need, not what you deserve. The Bible says that everything you have comes by grace. Everything God does in you and through you and for you and to you and by you is by grace. You don't earn it, you don't deserve it, you don't work for it. It's just a free gift.

In **Psalms 103**, there's a laundry list of just some of the things God does in our lives by grace. David says, *Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*" Are those things to be thankful for? I'd say so.

Aren't you glad that God doesn't give you what you deserve? Aren't you glad instead that God gives you what you need?

If you don't understand grace, and if your heart doesn't explode with gratitude when you understand the grace of God, you have no idea of what bad shape you were in before you met Christ. Let me summarize it in one word – hopeless. You had no meaning, no purpose in your life, guilt, fear, bitterness, worry, regrets. You had nothing you could do to get rid of them. You had no hope for the future. You were headed for hell not heaven. There was nothing you could do about it. You would never be good enough to earn your salvation. But God came along in His wonderful love and said, "I'm just going to show you grace." So this thanksgiving, I am thankful to God for the grace that He has shown me.

2. I MUST BE GRATEFUL FOR THE PLAN HE HAS FOR ME.

Life is not an accident. You were made for a reason. You were made for a purpose. God has a plan for your life. Your parents may not have planned you but God did. No baby is ever born by accident. There may be illegitimate parents but there are no illegitimate babies. If you're alive and you're breathing and your heart and pulse are going, that means God has a plan for your life.

Now God's plan is a good plan. It's not a plan we have to worry about, that we have to be afraid of, be anxious about. It's a good plan. God says this in **Jeremiah 29:11** *"I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* Is that something you can thank God for?

God's plan is so good and so great that He even takes our mistakes, our faults, our failures and the things that other people do to hurt us and weaves them in and brings good out of those. God's plan for your life is not all happy, all comfortable. God's plan includes pain in your life. And God's plan includes some disappointments. And God's plan certainly involves some discipline. If you were never disciplined, you would never have any character. God's plan in your life involves some unanswered prayers. Yet He does it all for good. It's for a future.

He has shown me grace and He's given me a plan, a plan that when the more I discover it, the more I get in the center of it, the more my life unfolds and my true potential comes out. He says, I have good plans for you. I'm grateful for the plans He has for me.

3. I SHOULD BE THANKFUL FOR THE HOME HE'S PREPARED FOR ME IN HEAVEN

2 Corinthians 5:1 *"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."*

Human beings were made to last forever. Every human being that's ever been created, God made them, not for just the time here on earth. God makes human beings to last forever. One day your body is going to die, but that's not going to be the end of you. One day your body will decay and fall apart and cease to exist. But that's not going to be the end of you. The Bible says you were created in God's image and that means you have a soul. You will spend eternity in one of two places – heaven or hell, depending on whether you received Christ and trusted His grace or not. Heaven and hell are real places. They're not some figment of somebody's imagination. They're not some symbolism. They are real places. Jesus talked more about heaven and hell than He did about a lot of things. And I guess He knows more about it than you or me. He says they're real places.

As Christians, we don't have to be afraid of the future. Christians, of all people, are the most confident about death because we know where we're going. You're not ready to live until you're ready to die. Are you ready to die? Are you ready to meet your maker? You're not ready to live until you're ready to die.

Only a fool would go all through life totally unprepared for something you know is inevitably going to happen. You know you're going to die. The latest statistic tells us that in America the mortality rate is 100%.

The same in the Philippines. Everybody in this room is terminal. Every human being is terminal. It's just a matter of time. But we don't have to be afraid of that. We can actually be thankful to God because He's shown us His grace. And while we're on earth He has a plan for us and when we leave this earth, if we've trusted Christ and His grace, He's going to take us to heaven. And I'm grateful for that. A home in heaven!

Who is heaven made for? The Bible tells us in **1 Peter 1:4-6 (LB)** *“God has reserved for His children the priceless gift of eternal life. It's kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God in His mighty power will make sure you get there safely to receive it because you're trusting Him so be truly glad.”*

Does everybody go to heaven? Absolutely not. No, everybody does not go to heaven. If God let Hitler and ax murderers and rapists and genocidal dictators into heaven it would be hell. So, heaven is only for His children. How do you get to be His child? By asking in faith to become a part of His family, by trusting in His Son, Jesus Christ. You say, “After I become a believer, what if I sin as a Christian? What's going to happen?”

What do you mean “if”? It's not a matter of if, it's when. You will sin. You will blow it. You will make mistakes. Christians aren't perfect. They are forgiven. There will be times in your life that you will want to let go of God's hand. The day when you trusted Christ, you put your hand in the hand of God and He grabbed onto it like a heavenly Father. There are days when you want to let go but He's not going to let go because He loves you too much. There will be days when you say, “God, I don't want to be a Christian today. It's too difficult, too hard, too unpopular. There's too much cost.” Or whatever. There will be days when you have doubts.

Yet the Bible says, God in His mighty power will make sure you get to heaven safely. Once you put your hand in His hand it's His responsibility to keep the commitment that you made.

Aren't you glad for that one? Aren't you glad that when you doubt God, He doesn't doubt you? Aren't you glad that when you feel far away from God, He still loves you and nothing can ever stop Him from loving you? Aren't you glad that it's His power that keeps you saved, not your own? That's something to be thankful for. Of course, if you had to earn your way to heaven doing good works, then obviously, logically, the moment you stopped doing those good works, you'd lose your salvation. But you're not saved by works so you don't stay saved by works. You're saved by simply accepting God's gracious gift of grace. Once you've accepted that gift, you put your hand in His hand and it is His power not your own power that keeps you saved. I don't care what happens in my life, I know the finish line. I know the end of the story. No matter what happens in the rest of my life, I'm ending up in heaven. I'm thankful for that. I am grateful to God that He didn't put my salvation in my own hands and leave it up to me, because what if I blew it in the last hour before I died?

I'm grateful to God for the grace He's shown me. And I'm grateful to God for the plan He has for me. And I'm grateful to God for the home He's prepared for me. But there's one thing that really overwhelms me. My heart explodes when I think about this issue.

4. I MUST BE GRATEFUL FOR THE CHANGES HE'S MAKING IN ME.

I am so glad that I am not the same person I used to be. I am so glad I'm not that same person. God is helping make changes in my life that I could never do on my own. I'm so grateful for that.

God looks at us and says, "I see that lump of clay. I could do something with that." God saw your potential when nobody else saw it.

And when maybe everybody else is writing you off and saying, worthless! God says, “No. I see the diamond in you and I made you and I value you. I’m going to start making some changes in you.”

The moment you became a believer He started that personal improvement program. He’s chipping away at your life, changing you and making you different.

God does love you just the way you are. When you come to him you don’t have to say, “God, I promise to clean up my whole act, get it all together.” You just come to Him with the good, the bad, the ugly. He loves you just the way you are. He loves you far too much to let you stay that way. So, He starts making changes in your life and in my life. **Philippians 2:13** “*for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*” He not only gives you the desire to do the right thing, He gives you the power. God never asks you to do something He doesn’t give you the power to do. Many of you have seen radical transformation of your life that no one else could have ever made, no human being, no program, no therapy could have ever possibly done. Changes in your marriage, changes in your relationships, changes in your own life. You ought to be thankful from the bottom of your heart.

The Bible says that when we come to Christ He starts changing us. **2 Cor. 3:18** “*And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him.*” (NLT) This is God’s goal for us – to make us godly, to make us Christlike.

So, folks this thanksgiving I want us to take pause, think about these things and other things God has given us and thank him from our hearts for his goodness and his love that endures forever.