

Thankful for Many Things

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Phil 4:6)

Thanksgiving is just a few days away but as we’ve practiced in the past, we’re celebrating it today because we want to give thanks ahead of everybody else. So, we’re saying to God, “Thank you in advance, Lord.” But the thing is, one of the reasons we celebrate it ahead of time is that we want to celebrate it as a church family together with our friends and loved ones. As you know, some people usually go on a long weekend and so we won’t be able to celebrate with them.

Let me tell you a story about Rudyard Kipling the famous British poet and novelist. This is a true story. But before that let me tell you an untrue story. One person said to another, “Do you like Kipling?” The other person replied, “I don’t know. I haven’t kiplered yet”.

Now, here’s the true story. Rudyard Kipling was a great British poet whose writings have blessed many of us, including a generation gone by. Kipling was a very famous writer even before he died and made a great deal of money at his trade.

A newspaper reporter came up to him once and said, "Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over \$100 a word." Mr. Kipling raised his eyebrows and said, "Really, I certainly wasn't aware of that." The reporter cynically reached into his pocket and pulled out a \$100 bill and gave it to Kipling and said, "Here's a \$100 bill Mr. Kipling. Now you give me one of your \$100 words."

Rudyard Kipling looked at that \$100 bill for a moment, took it and folded it up and put it in his pocket and said, "Thanks."

That’s what the early pilgrims must have felt when they survived their first year in America. But not because of \$100 but because of lives that were saved. Lives that are worth more than \$100. It was 1621. They experienced a devastating

winter the previous year. In fact, 42 of the original 102 that landed in America died because of disease and famine. Because they were really grateful to God for saving them that winter, they held a three-day harvest festival to give thanks to God. They were joined by the Indians who helped them survive their first year. Now, these pilgrims were religious people. They were puritans and for sure their prayers during that celebration were laced with thanksgiving to God. Which leads us to our topic for today.

I'd like to talk about Thanksgiving and Prayer. This is part five of our series called, "Plugged In." If you've never been to this church, I just want to let you know that in this church we come up with a series of messages, usually 4 or 5 weeks long, that deal with the same theme. Our theme this time is about prayer and I and another pastor gave messages about the power of prayer, why we should pray, the meaning of the Lord's Prayer, and so on. Today, I'd like to talk about the things we can thank God for in prayer.

In the Bible, Paul tells us that when we come to God in prayer, whether we're praising him, or confessing our sins, or asking for guidance or healing or strength or whatever, one thing we should never forget to do is to give thanks to God. This is what he says in **Phil. 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."** Paul says "in everything." What does he mean? He means exactly what he says. Try to offer a word of thanks to God every time you pray.

I believe Paul wants us to make this a practice because our giving thanks to God is a sign of our dependence on God. We're submitting ourselves to God. We acknowledge that he is in control, not us.

Of course, there are many things we can give thanks to God for. If I ask you what they are, a lot of things would immediately come to your mind. Perhaps, your family, your friends, your house, your car, your job, your spouse. And I have to

emphasize that, your spouse! How about his forgiveness, his protection, his healing, his mercy, his love, his compassion, his salvation?

This afternoon, I'd like to share with you four things that I believe every Christian should really be thankful about. These are four things that every child of God has, without exception. And that's why, this Thanksgiving Day, I'd like to remind you of the privileges you have as a believer in Jesus. So that when you come to God in prayer, you can thank him for all these things. If you're not a believer in Jesus yet, please listen carefully as these things are also available to you. And I'll also show you how you can avail of them. Let's look at the first one.

1. I'M GRATEFUL TO GOD FOR THE GRACE HE'S SHOWN TO ME

The Bible says in **Ephesians 2:8** *"You have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from 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.

In Psalm 103, there's a laundry list of just some of the things God does in our lives by grace. The Psalmist says, *"I will not forget the glorious things God does for me. He forgives all my sins. He heals me. He ransoms me from hell. He surrounds me with love. He fills my life with good things. He is merciful and tender to those who don't deserve it. He is slow to get angry. He never bears a grudge. He has not punished us as we deserve for our sins."* 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. Before you met Christ, you had no meaning, no purpose in your life, all you had was guilt, fear, bitterness, worry, regrets. There was nothing you could do to get rid of them. You had no hope for the future. You were headed for hell not heaven. 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.”

Personally, I’m really so thankful to God because of the grace he has shown to me. There was a time when I was lost. I had no direction. I was doing many crazy things in life and I thought I was hopeless. But God’s grace came and he lifted me out of my troubles. That experience caused me to write a song which I’d like to share with you.

By Your Grace Alone I Stand

So this thanksgiving, I am thankful to God for the grace that He has shown to me.

2. I AM GRATEFUL TO GOD 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.

Now God’s plan is a good plan. It’s not a plan we have to worry about or be anxious about. The Bible says this in Jeremiah 29 *“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”* That is God’s promise to you. Is that something you can thank God for?

Now, you may be in some kind of a fix right now. Things are not going well. Things are not going as they should. But life has its ups and downs. And in the ups and downs, God is with you. He has never forgotten you. Because he has a plan for you.

I like this story about a Scottish minister named Alexander Whyte who was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful.

One Sunday morning the weather was so gloomy that one church member thought to himself, "Certainly the preacher won't think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this." Much to his surprise, however, Whyte began by praying, "We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this."

Even in the most gloomy weather, this minister was optimistic that God will prevail. It's the same way with your situation. You may not understand it right now, but God knows already what's going to happen and it's for your good.

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. **Romans 8:28 (CEV) says, "We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him."**

Let me warn you though. God doesn't plan for you to be happy and comfortable all the time. 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.

I'm grateful because of God's grace. I'm grateful because of his plan for me. and

3. I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE HOME HE'S PREPARED FOR ME IN HEAVEN

2 Corinthians 5:1 "We know that our body will be destroyed. [Some of you think it's been destroyed already!] But when that happens God will have a house

for us. It will not be a house made by human hands. Instead it will be a home in heaven that will last forever.”

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. 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.

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?

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 the mortality rate of mankind is 100%. 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** *“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.”*

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. Why should you trust Christ? Because Christ died for you. You're a sinner just like anybody else in this room. In fact, just like anybody else in the whole history of mankind. Our sins are those which separate us from God. But God loves us so much that he doesn't want to leave us in our sinful state. What did he do?

He sent his own Son, Jesus, to save us from our sins. And Jesus did this by dying for us on the cross. We were condemned to die because of our sins but instead it was Jesus who died for us. He shed his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. As the Bible says, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." So, Jesus took your place. But as the Bible says, he didn't remain in the grave forever because on the third day, he rose again. And he went to heaven. He therefore demonstrated that he has conquered sin and death forever.

Now, if you will believe in Jesus and accept him as your Lord and Savior, you too can conquer sin and death forever. All you need to do is to admit that you're a sinner and you need forgiveness. Then, ask God for forgiveness and then, accept Jesus in your heart as Lord and Savior. It's as simple as triple A. Admit you're a sinner, ask for forgiveness, and Accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Admit, Ask, and Accept. Later on, I'm going to give you a chance to do just that.

So, 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.

4. I'M GRATEFUL TO GOD FOR THE CHANGES HE'S MAKING IN ME.

I am so glad that I am not the same person I used to be. God is helping make changes in my life that I could never do on my own. 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. **Philippians 2:13** “*God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him.*” 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.*” This is God’s goal for us – to make us godly, to make us Christlike.

This is the purpose of Fil-Am Community Church. The bottom line in everything we do – why we do what we do – is that verse. We are in the life-changing business. That’s why if you look at your bulletins, you see underneath the name of the church on top these words, “where truths are learned, hearts are touched, and lives are changed.”

When you boil it all down, it’s not buildings, it’s not programs, it’s not music, it’s not message. We are in the life-changing business. Jesus has the power to change you that nobody else can do.

Ok, so we're to give thanks to God because of his grace, because of his plan, the home he has prepared for me, and the changes he's making in me. But you know what, thanksgiving, when not actually lived out, is merely lip service. We must do life service for Thanksgiving to become Thanksliving. How do we do this? Let me give you three practical ways.

1. By singing. Psalm 147:7 says *"Sing out your thanks to Him, sing praises to our God."* Nothing makes you more aware of God's presence faster than praising God. The Bible says to sing our thanksgiving to God. You say you can't sing? You don't have to. The Bible says make a joyful noise. Some of you couldn't carry a tune but you can still sing to the Lord. You're a prison singer – always behind a few bars and never have the right key.

Where can we sing to God? Everywhere. Since God is everywhere you can sing your praise to God everywhere. You can sing to God in your home. You can sing to God in your office. You can sing in your car. You can sing in the bathtub or the shower. You can sing your praises playing golf or shooting pool or washing dishes or planning a program. You can sing to God putting your kids to bed. You can sing to God when you get up in the morning. Christianity is a singing faith. Did you know that more songs have been written about Jesus Christ than any other single subject in history? More than love songs or anything else. More songs are written about Jesus Christ than any other subject. Why? Because He's the one worthy of our praise. And now, Kanye West, is singing about Jesus. Did you hear his latest album called "Jesus is King"? All his songs are about Jesus. And they're nice songs, btw. Jesus is transforming that person's life. Whether you agree with that or not, doesn't matter. It's between him and Jesus. The important thing is that Jesus is being lifted up.

2. By serving. We sing with our lips but we serve with our lives. The Bible says, *"Serve the Lord with gladness."* and Hebrews 12 says *"Since we have a kingdom*

that nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving Him with thankful hearts.”

When we serve God, it's not some chore, some duty, some obligation. It's a privilege. The motive for serving God, the motive for using my talents and gifts is serving God and others in ministry.

We give God thanks by singing, serving, and

3. By telling. Tell others about Him. Every time you tell somebody the good news you're thanking God. Isaiah 12:4 says *“Thank the Lord, praise His name. Tell the world of His wondrous love and how mighty He is.”* We have the greatest news in the world and the good news keeps getting better because the news in the world keeps getting worse. It's better than the cure for cancer. Everybody needs Jesus. Everybody needs what we know. You can only be the authority on your testimony. You are the authority on how God's worked in your life. And if you don't tell it, who will tell it? Not me. If you don't tell your story, if you don't share your faith, it's not going to get shared and the world is at a loss because of that.

This Thanksgiving, look for somebody who you can share your faith with, somebody you can invite to church where you can communicate and say, “Jesus loves you.” That's giving thanks to God when you do that.

This power of thanksgiving is amazing. There's miracle-working power in praise and thanksgiving. There's a great story in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas had been out talking about the Lord and they were thrown in prison in Philippi. They're in this dark, dank dungeon of a jail and in the middle of the night, at midnight, they decided to start thanking God in their circumstance. They start singing and praising God and God does a miracle.

He sends an earthquake the earthquake is so powerful that it rattles all the jail doors loose. It's the original Jailhouse Rock. The jailer goes, “I'm going to kill myself because all the prisoners are loose now and they'll kill me.” Paul says,

“No, we’re all here.” The jailer says, “What kind of prisoners are you?”

“Christians,” Paul says. So the jailer takes Paul and Silas to his home and they pray and they bind up their wounds with bandages and Paul tells them about Christ and that night the jailer’s whole family accepts the Lord and are all baptized that night. The prison doors were unlocked when they began to praise and thank God.

What prison are you in this morning? An emotional prison? A financial prison? A relational prison? Are you locked up with guilt? Are you locked up with worry? Are you locked up with discouragement and disappointment? Are you locked up in a habit that you can’t break loose from? Conflict? Whatever it is, start thanking God. And watch the prison doors open wide.