

Thankful Hearts

Thank You Lord
for all the blessings.



We are at the close of the year. So much has happened last two years. It will do us good to take time and do a stocktake of God's goodness in our lives, and give thanks to Him for His faithfulness.

You might be saying, 'What have I go to thank God for? So many discouraging things have happened to me this year.'

A. Protocol of Approaching God

'None shall appear before Me empty (handed).' (Ex 23:15)

'Give to the LORD glory due His name; Bring an offering and come into His courts.' (C.f. Ps 96:8)

What offerings do we bring to honour the LORD besides finance? (Prov 3:9-10)

'Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.' (Heb 13:15)

Praise and thanksgiving. Offering continual thanksgiving and praise along with prayer and intercession is the basic function of the New Testament believers as priests to our God.

B. Entrance into God's Presence (Ps 100)

God has made our body fearfully and wonderfully (v3). There is no need for gender fluidity or reassignment, gene therapy or engineering, etc. We do not need to remake ourselves because God has done a complete job. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

There are two doors through which to enter into God's presence (v4).

(i) Gate - thanksgiving.

(ii) Court - praise.

Be thankful to Him and bless His name (praise).

What is the basis of our thankful heart and praise?

(i) 'For the Lord is good.'

(ii) 'His mercy is everlasting.' ('hesed' - covenantal love)

(iii) 'His truth endures to all generations' The root Hebrew word here is 'Amen', denoting God's steadfastness and faithfulness.

Often when we thank God for something because of something He has done for us. However in this psalm we are instructed to thank the Lord for His unchanging and unending goodness to us. We can always thank God because His nature never changes. Our thanksgiving does not depend on our feelings or our circumstances. God is always good. His love and faithfulness toward us never change. At times we need to look away from our own feelings and circumstances and fix our eyes on God Himself and bring before Him '*sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise*' (Heb 13:15). This is very precious to God. It is a powerful key to God's presence and His heart.

C. Thanksgiving Releases Deliverance (Jonah 2:9-10)

Jonah's disobedience brought him lower with each step he took – from the coastal plain to city, to harbour, to ship, to the lower deck, into the sea, and finally into the fish's belly. Jonah prayed and cried out to the Lord for three days and three nights with seaweed around his neck. Nothing much changed during that time.

Then Jonah's prayer changed. '*But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pray what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.*' (2:9) '*So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*' (2:10) Jonah's sacrifice of thanksgiving in the belly of the fish was a precious offering that pleases the Lord. It released God's mercy, and God spoke to the fish and fish vomited Jonah out onto the land.

It takes faith to thank and praise God when you are in the belly of a fish, slowly getting digested. Was God still good, merciful, and faithful when Jonah was in the belly of the fish? Then even in the belly of the fish, we can give God thanks. This is the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

If you feel you are stuck in the belly of a fish, why don't you try thanking God and praising Him?

D. Thanksgiving Releases God's Abundance (John 6:11, 23)

Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children – easily 10,000+ people – with five loaves and two fish. How did Jesus perform this miracle?

'And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to the disciples...' (John 6:11).

'...where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks...' (John 6:23)

It was the Lord's thanksgiving that released the miracle of abundance. When we give thanks to God, we connect with the grace of God. The word 'Eucharist' is directly related to 'giving thanks', which is connected to the word 'grace'. Thanksgiving is the result of God's grace touching our hearts. It is also the fertile soil that can receive God's grace. If we are to walk in the grace of God, we must cultivate thankful hearts. In the long run, you cannot help anyone who is unthankful.

Thankful hearts are also directly related to the will of God and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.' (1 Thess 5:16-19)

'And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...' (Eph 5:18-20)

E. Thanksgiving Completes the Work of God in Your Life

'So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?'' And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well ('sozo' – complete salvation).' (Luke 17:17-19)

The Lord healed ten lepers. That was the work of God's mercy, but only one Samaritan out of the ten lepers who were healed, returned to Jesus to give thanks to God. And only that Samaritan received the salvation of his body and soul. Thanksgiving completes the work of God in your life.

The opposite is also true. Unthankful heart shortcuts the work of God's grace in our lives. Let us cultivate thankful hearts and continually give thanks to God even when our life is challenging. Unthankful Christians are living dangerously. Grumbling heart is the breeding ground for demons. It is an open invitation for demons to enter our lives. (C.f. 1 Cor 10:6-10; Rom 1:21ff)

F. Thanksgiving - Essential Key to Effective Prayer

(i) Petition: *'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'* (Phil 4:6-7)

(ii) Intercession: *'First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world...'* (Rom 1:8-10; Eph 1:15-16; Phil 1:3-4; Col 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Tim 1:3)

We need to pray for our nation. There are great concerns about the direction Australia has taken politically this year. Let's remember to pray with thanksgiving, otherwise the weight of the burden can overwhelm us. When we give thanks to God, we are focusing on God's goodness and God's power to deliver us from the circumstances.