

# Cultivating Thankfulness in Prayer

## I. Introduction

- A. I wouldn't say that I am a very thankful person. I grumble a lot. I have high expectations and then get disappointed when they aren't met
  - 1. Leads to grumbling, blame shifting, escape, shame, repeat
- B. Maybe you can relate to that. If I was a fly on the wall in your house, would you say that your kitchen chatter is overflowing with complaints or thankfulness?
  - 1. Story about Don Wick and the ants (is that your family?)
  - 2. Story about a person suing Burger King b/c the burger doesn't look like the picture (is that your family?)
- C. Thankfulness is important. Think about it:
  - 1. It recognizes God's goodness; It counteracts entitlement and arrogance; It helps you focus on God (and shift your gaze from circumstance); It enhances your worship; It strengthens the church community (rubs off on those around you); **It's a powerful witness to the world**
- D. This last piece is important, b/c biblical thankfulness is different from the thankfulness that the world understands
  - 1. The world says to count your blessings, see the silver lining, etc
  - 2. Biblical thankfulness is deeper, richer, and can't be taken away...
- E. If we want to be thankful in our prayer life, we need to be thankful in our thought life first and foremost.
- F. True thankfulness flows: truth → thoughts → prayers → conversations

## II. *Colossians 2:6–7, Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

- A. Paul's letter to the Colossians mentions thankfulness quite a lot, which is ironic considering that Paul wrote it from prison
- B. We see in these two verses that believers should overflow with thanksgiving
- C. Here is Paul's thought process:
  - 1. The Colossians received Jesus Christ by faith (1:4) → explain faith in Jesus is what saves and we keep putting our faith in that
    - a) This faith was evidenced to Paul by their love for one another, and their hope in future grace (laid up in heaven)
  - 2. The church in Colossae must continue in that most basic faith focus, allowing the roots to grow down deep and the tree to grow tall and fruitful
    - a) This brings to mind Psalm 1 - the man who meditates on God's Word day and night is like the tree planted near a stream of water - strong, vibrant, green, bearing fruit in season
    - b) The gospel is the stream, and we want to be planted near it
  - 3. How does this kind of growth happen? Paul tells us that it is by faith
    - a) Begins by faith; grows by faith; flourishes by faith; ends by faith

- b) Ex: Let's pretend yesterday you had a bad day... works-based righteousness says... the gospel says... I feel this way... the gospel says... so I put my faith in the gospel over feelings...
      - 4. A tangible result of that growing faith is an overflow of thankfulness
    - D. Here is where we start to 'gulp'
      - 1. As David Macomber pointed out to me this week, *"If I am not overflowing with thankfulness, am I growing?"* → A great question
      - 2. I think we can answer it truthfully: If we aren't growing in thankfulness, maybe we aren't growing in maturity (down deep, built up);
        - a) More aptly stated - we aren't focusing on the gospel
        - b) We are getting sidetracked with Christian stuff, or the world
        - c) If I am trying to earn, I won't be thankful - I will be entitled
        - d) If I realize all is a gift, I won't be entitled - I will be thankful
- III. But it's not just counting your blessings... Let's jump back to chapter 1
  - A. *Colossians 1:12-14 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*
  - B. Paul is telling the Colossians how he prays for them, for their maturity and their growth. Here he prays that they would give thanks, but look at the foundation
    - 1. Paul does not say to give thanks b/c they have it better than him
    - 2. He doesn't say to give thanks b/c they can walk to the hot springs of Hierapolis anytime they want (which was true)
    - 3. He doesn't tell them to be thankful b/c they live in a wealthy, blessed city
    - 4. He doesn't say to be thankful b/c life is good, the weather is nice, etc
  - C. He tells them that their thankfulness is rooted in this reality: they have been delivered (rescued) from the domain of darkness, and have been transferred to the kingdom of light (his beloved Son)
    - 1. Once in darkness and chains... transferred and adopted
    - 2. Once disqualified from any blessing... now co-heirs with Christ
    - 3. Once guilty... now forgiven and redeemed
    - 4. If you are in Christ, that's your reality too.
      - a) No matter what kind of day you had, week you had, life you had
  - D. *Imagine a vast and desolate landscape, shrouded in darkness—an endless expanse where shadows loom and hope seems but a distant memory. In the midst of this bleak domain, a divine rescue mission unfolds. Suddenly, a radiant light pierces through the oppressive gloom, and the captives of the shadows feel the warmth of a love that knows no bounds. It's the merciful hand of God reaching down to rescue, to redeem. As they are dragged toward the light, the chains of darkness shatter, and the once-broken hearts find healing.*
  - E. *This is the reality for every believer—a miraculous transfer from the desolate dominion of darkness to the glorious kingdom of light. In the embrace of the Beloved Son, they discover a new citizenship, a realm where grace reigns, and love is supreme. The echoes of their former captivity are drowned out by the*

*triumphant melody of freedom—a melody that resonates eternally in the kingdom of their Redeemer.*

- F. Paul says that this reality, and its result (qualified to share in Jesus' inheritance & the forgiveness of sins) is the foundation of our thanksgiving
- IV. Fast forward to Colossians 3
- A. *Colossians 3:1–4, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*
  - B. You have died
  - C. God hid your body in Jesus (like Han hiding Luke in the TonTon)
    - 1. The Church is his body... his body was crucified... his body died... therefore you died
  - D. God raised you from the dead when he raised Christ from the dead
    - 1. 'You have been' (past action w/ continued result), not will be
  - E. Jesus (and you, hidden in his body) is seated at God's right hand
    - 1. You are there too... spiritually, of course
  - F. Now, Jesus is your life. You live b/c he lives.
    - 1. *Galatians 2:20, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
  - G. When Jesus comes back (to enforce his reign and rule), you will appear with him, glorified (b/c you are hidden in his body)
  - H. This isn't your future, it's your CURRENT reality, and it is unseen
    - 1. Therefore, seek the things that dwell up there, not the things down here
    - 2. Therefore, focus on the things that are of heaven (spirit), not earth (flesh)
    - 3. Therefore, fix your mind on the things that are unseen, not seen
  - I. Thanksgiving in Colossians goes beyond counting your blessings:
    - 1. It is about recognizing the foundational role of Christ in your life and responding with a deep sense of gratitude and awe.
    - 2. It's a reminder to be continually thankful for the spiritual abundance that comes through faith in Christ.
    - 3. True thankfulness and gratitude is not rooted in the temporary, 'seen' blessings of the day, but in fixing our eyes on what is heavenly, above, unseen, and eternal → present spiritual realities and future grace
    - 4. **Biblical gratitude is rooted in your heavenly reality, not your earthly circumstances.**
  - J. If you want to be thankful, stop looking down here and start looking up there to things that cannot be taken away, they don't fade, don't rot. True treasure
- V. What's the result of this mental shift in focus?
- A. *Colossians 3:15–17 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing*

*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

- B. The overflow of your transference from darkness to light, Paul reinforces again, is thankfulness
- C. When you allow the TRUTH of the gospel to reign... you have peace... Let peace reign (not anxiety, not complaining, not covetousness)
  - 1. What reigns in your thought life? Be honest?
  - 2. Are you letting coveting reign in your mind?
  - 3. Complaining? Anxiety? Slander? Frustration?
  - 4. Let peace reign
- D. How? By letting the Word of Christ dwell in your heart, in your mind, in you
- E. The easiest way to cultivate thankfulness in prayer is to fix your mind on truth
- F. The easiest way to fix your mind on truth is to saturate your mind with the Word
  - 1. Dwell in the Word. Let it dwell in you.
- G. Friends... Do you realize how much always comes back to that reality?
  - 1. Let the Word dwell in you richly...
- H. When the Word dwells in your heart → changes your prayers → change your thoughts → change your actions and words

#### VI. Practical Application

##### **A. Start your day in the Word**

- 1. Read the Word.
- 2. Reflect on the Word.
  - a) What is the big, biblical reality God wants you to see? (ex: I am transferred from darkness to light... my life is hidden in Christ...)
- 3. Respond to the Word in prayer and action as the Lord leads

##### **B. Keep a Gratitude Journal or Index Card Box:**

- 1. Those biblical truths, write them down.
- 2. Regularly write down BIBLICAL TRUTHS that you are thankful for.
- 3. Of course be thankful for the day's blessings, but I want you to see the biblical truths, b/c they remain when everything else fades

##### **C. Pray with Bible-Centered Thanksgiving:**

- 1. When you pray, incorporate that thankfulness into your prayers.
- 2. Pull out those cards and use them as prompts → Jesus is my Good Shepherd... God is My Father... I am secure in Jesus' hands
- 3. Don't just be thankful to God for earthly things. Focus on what is above.

##### **D. Express Thanks in Community:**

- 1. Share words of thanks and encouragement with fellow believers.
- 2. Encourage a culture of gratitude within your church community by appreciating the efforts of others.
- 3. Spend time every day being thankful with your family (for the day's blessings, which come from God, and for biblical truth)

#### VII. Conclusion

- A. Thankfulness in prayer is more than counting your blessings.

- B. It is a determination to acknowledge God's grace and the transformative work of Christ as your only lasting hope and joy.
- C. Since we've been transferred from darkness to light, we always have a well of gratitude from which to draw
  - 1. despite circumstances, despite failure, despite disease, despite death.
- D. Biblical gratitude is rooted in your heavenly reality, not your earthly circumstances.**
- E. So, if you want to be thankful in your prayers, in your life, stop looking down here and start looking up there.
- F. Fixing your mind on the truth of God's Word is the best place to start