

## INTRODUCTION

I have been preaching through Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus which is God's inspired word to you and me right now in 1995. We're talking about what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We learned that if you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you will have a spirit of adoration praising God. You can't help but praise the Lord with music if you are filled with the spirit. I hope that this morning earlier as we sang, "Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul," I hope that every believer here sincerely sang that to the Lord, Jesus Christ. Also, we are going to see that there will be a spirit of appreciation. You'll be giving thanks as we'll talk about today and next week we will talk about how there will be in your life a spirit of accommodation. You'll be willing to submit to other people in the fear of the Lord. I think one reason more people are not thankful is because we don't sometimes recognize the quality of the gifts we receive from God.

There is a funny story of several brothers who were always trying to outdo each other in buying gifts for their old grandmother who lived out in the boonies of West Texas. One of them was a wealthy lawyer up East and he bought an expensive, exotic, bird called a Zirca bird. It could speak five foreign languages fluently. It could sing three operatic arias. He shipped the bird to her for her birthday. The next day he called her up and said, "Well, grandma, how did you like that bird?" She said, "Sonny, it was a little bit tough, but after I boiled it, it was delicious."

I think sometimes we don't really recognize the value of the gifts God gives to us but if you are filled with the Spirit, you will have a spirit of thanksgiving.

Ephesians 5:18. It says, "Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery," and here's the command. "Instead, be filled with the Spirit." and then if you are filled, verse 19 says, "You will be speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." Here is the second consequence. Every word is important. Verse 20. "Occasionally giving thanks to God" Wait a minute I'm sorry my eyes are getting a little bad. That doesn't say "occasionally," does it? Do you think it really means "always"? Sure. "Always giving thanks to God the Father for most things" Wait a minute I missed that one too I'm sorry, so you think it really means "always"? And "for every thing"? That's what it says, then here's the key "in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

## I. THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

### 1. NOT selfish greed

I want to talk to you today about gratitude Spirit-filled gratitude and say a couple of things about gratitude. First is the attitude of gratitude, because true Spirit-filled gratitude begins with an attitude and then it always becomes an expression. Sometimes we don't understand what it is. Spirit-filled gratitude is NOT selfish greed. Jesus gives us three examples of gratitude right there in the book of Luke. The first is in Luke 12. Jesus talks about a rich farmer. The Bible says he planted crops and his crops reproduced bountifully and he became wealthy but he didn't give any credit to God. In fact, he focused in on his own accomplishments and he said, "I will tear down my barns and I will build bigger barns and I will take my rest and I will eat, drink and be merry and say 'Self you've arrived!'" That's a selfish, greedy person who never says, "Thank

you." and Jesus said in that story on that very night the Lord appeared to this rich farmer and said, "You fool! Tonight your soul is required of you." It is the picture of a person who goes through life thinking they are responsible for everything they accomplish and they never thank God. A proud person can seldom be thankful, because pride poisons gratitude. A proud person thinks they deserve everything they get in fact, they think they deserve more than they are getting and so they just cannot thank God. It was Shakespeare who wrote in King Lear, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." Many parents understand the heartache and pain that comes from a child who grows up to literally bite the hand that feeds them that provided for them all of their life and children who never once say, "Thank you, Mom." "Thank you, Dad." In fact, sometimes they abuse what we have given them and they go off and cause shame to many families. Shakespeare is right! That's like a snake biting you. How painful it is when we don't receive gratitude. You can imagine how it must be with the Lord, because the Bible says we are to give thanks, but there are some people who seldom ever give thanks. Some people are like a hog eating apples that have fallen off a tree and he keeps his head down and he never looks up to acknowledge that those apples came from the branches in the tree in front of him. So many people go through life thinking, "This is for me. This is what I have done," and they never look up and thank God. So, it's not selfish greed.

## **2. NOT hypocritical prayers**

Number two, it's not hypocritical prayers. Some people can thank God in a prayer but not be sincere about it. Jesus gives an example of that over in Luke 18. He talks about two men who go to church one is a sinner a tax collector but the other one is a Pharisee a very religious man and in Luke 18:11, he gives a hypocritical prayer of thanksgiving. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. "God, I thank you that I am not like other men robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." That was a prayer of thanksgiving, but it was a hypocritical prayer. He was not sincere. He was talking about how important he was. There are some Christians who become so familiar with the Lord that they sometimes forget to be sincere in their praying. Have you ever found yourself sitting down before a meal especially if it is something you do three times a day just saying, "God, thank you for this food. Thank you for these blessings." But you are not really sincere, you are just mouthing the words. It's almost like the Pharisee. "Lord, I thank you that I am not like other people." Sometimes we are even sarcastic in our thanksgiving. You ladies probably understand what a "back-handed compliment" is. You may hear other women say, "Oh, I like your hair. It doesn't make your face look as fat." or something like that. They are saying, "I like your hair," but it is a back-handed compliment and usually the response to a back-handed compliment is sarcastic thanksgiving. You say, "Thanks a lot!" or "Thanks a million" you are not sincere you are not really thankful you are just saying the words. So be careful that you don't just thank God but you are sincere.

## **3. Humble expression of thanks**

What is true spiritual gratitude? It is the humble expression of thanks the humble expression of thanks. You are either humbly grateful or you are grumbly hateful, one or the other. If you go through life humbly grateful to God, you will always be expressing thanksgiving to God. In Luke 17, Jesus gives this example. Ten lepers came to the Lord Jesus and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Jesus said, "I'll tell you what to do. Go show yourself to the priest" and out of

obedience to the word of Jesus their faith, coupled with obedience brought about a miracle in their lives. They went and showed themselves to the priest and he said, "You are clean." Out of those ten men, only one came back to thank Jesus. Is the Lord trying to tell us only about 10% of us are truly grateful? Or maybe we are only grateful for 10% of the blessings we receive? Because when this one person came back to Jesus, he fell on his face. There you see the humility and he said, "Lord Jesus, thank you thank you." Jesus was amazed! He was appalled! He said, "Wait a minute. Were there not ten? Where are the nine?" I wonder if the Lord Jesus looks out upon congregations and upon families and says, "Wait a minute. Didn't I bless this many people? Why did so few people come and say "Thank you, Lord"?"

### **Being thankful ≠ Giving thanks**

Being thankful does not equal giving thanks. You say, "I am often very thankful in my heart." That's not the command. The command is not to be thankful. The command is to give thanks. You must express it. It is a humble expression of thanksgiving. Take those nine men who were healed of leprosy. If you were to ask me "Do you think those men were thankful to Jesus for what he did?" I would say to you, "Yes I believe they were. I believe they went rejoicing on their way." "Oh, I'm so glad that Jesus healed me!" but they still failed because they didn't go to Jesus and express their thanksgiving to him.

If I were to ask you if you were thankful for the blessings in your life, you'd probably say, "Oh, yes, pastor. I am thankful." Have you *expressed* your thankfulness to God? We are not talking about horizontal thankfulness (although that's a very important thing for us to do), I'm talking about vertical thankfulness. I can make an analogy by talking about horizontal thanksgiving. If one of you knew I wanted a certain book and you brought me that book, I would take that book and read every page and say, "Oh, I'm so thankful that this person gave me that book. I'm so happy they gave me this book. I love this person for thinking about me and being so generous." I could think all that all day long, but you would not be blessed until I called you up on the phone and said, "Hey, thanks for that book." or until I wrote you a thank you note and said, "Thank you for that book." There is a difference between being thankful and expressing your thanks. This command is not just to be thankful it is to give thanks unto the Lord. I imagine the Lord must say, "Why aren't my children more thankful to me?" We are to enter his gates with thanksgiving. We are to enter his courts with praise. How many of you pray and you approach the Lord with a "gimme" list? A petition? A shopping list "Lord, this is what I need. Help me, help me." We are supposed to approach him with thanksgiving and with praise.

A pastor friend of mine told a true story about a man in his church who is a business traveler. He got off an airliner at a major airport and was getting off the runway into the gate area. He looked down and there on the carpet was a wad of money. He looked around and it was obvious nobody was close enough to have just recently dropped it and nobody was claiming it, everybody had their heads up trying to walk out. He picked it up. He stood around for a minute to see if anybody would come. Nobody did, so he took it to the airline office and they made an announcement over the speaker. Of course, they disguised the announcement. They did not say, "Did you lose money?" Anybody would come for that. Instead, they made the announcement in such a way that if a certain person lost something in a certain gate area they should come to the

office. This Christian businessman was standing there meanwhile, they counted the money. It was \$40,000 in hundred dollar bills rolled up with a rubber band. This Christian businessman said about 10 minutes later this guy came into the office sweating profusely out of nervousness and the Christian businessman said he was a very messy kind of person, not cleanly dressed, had not taken care of himself and even smelled bad. What we would call a very unsavory character. He went up and was able to give them enough information about the wad of money to convince them that yes it was his. The airline official said, "This man," pointing to the Christian businessman, "found the money and he brought it here to return it and here it is we give it to you." The Christian businessman said the man grabbed the money, stuck it in his blue jeans, turned and walk out without a word. The Christian man got in a taxi and said he just really got very honest with God thinking back "Wait a minute! That was probably drug money! That was the devil's money. Why didn't I just keep it? I could have given it to the church or something." He was getting angrier and angrier and he was talking to the Lord and he said, "Lord to make it even worse that guy didn't even say, 'Thank you.'" That Christian businessman said he was all huffy and proud about that and suddenly when he said, "That man didn't even say thank you to me!" It was as if God said to him "Son now you know how I feel!" How many times do you think the Lord must bless us and maybe he's expecting us to say, "Lord, Thank you that I was preserved from that accident," "Thank you, Lord, that I had the health to get up and go to church today." We just never tell him "Thank you." Humble people are thankful proud people are not.

One of my spiritual heroes, of course, is C.S. Lewis. After C.S. Lewis had been a Christian for many years, he made an observation about thanksgiving in his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*. "I observe that the humblest and most balanced minds thanked most while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least. A healthy and humble man even if luxuriously brought up could give thanks for a very modest meal and the snob found fault with everything." The attitude of gratitude means you are humbly thanking God and you express it to God.

## II. THE MAGNITUDE OF GRATITUDE

I want to talk about the magnitude of gratitude. How large and encompassing is our thanksgiving? When I was a kid growing up in lower Alabama, we always looked forward to the Sears & Roebuck catalog, because there were no stores in Florala where you could buy things so we ordered from the Sears & Roebuck catalog. Years ago Sears came up with a fascinating marketing plan, where they would take one product and offer three different qualities of the same product. For instance you would open the page and there would be lawn mowers there would be the basic, no frills model it said "Good \$79.95." Then they would have a middle of the road with a few more features it would be "Better \$99.95." Then over here they would have one that had all the bells and whistles and everything and it would say, "Best \$109.95." and they gave you a choice. When it comes to giving thanks there are times and things that it's good to give thanks for there are times and things that it's better to give thanks for and some of you aren't going to like it and you are going to disagree with it, but I'm going to show you today there are some times and things that it is best to give thanks for.

### **Good to give thanks for: Past blessings**

First, what's good to give thanks for? Past blessings. That's obvious, isn't it? James 1:17 says,

“Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.” Every good thing in your life came from God so you might as well thank him. It doesn’t require a lot of faith to thank God for the good things in your life. The only faith it requires is to believe it came from God. Some people don’t even believe *that*. Have you ever heard somebody say, “I thank my lucky stars I wasn’t hurt.” Don’t thank your lucky stars, thank your heavenly Father. The only kind of luck we believe in is L.U.C.K.—Living Under Christ’s Knowledge. It’s not luck. There is a loving heavenly Father who cares for you and gives you gifts. Each of us should periodically make an inventory of the blessings in our lives just like in that hymn, “Count Your Many Blessings.” Write down the blessings, large and small. Write down all the great relationships in your life all the good things and say, “God, thank you for this. Thank you for this. Thank you for this.” You are thankful, but have you expressed your thanks to him. That requires some faith.

### **Better to give thanks for: Future challenges**

Do you know what is even better? Not only to thank him for past blessings, but number two to thank him for future challenges and that’s better, because it requires more faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Thank him for future challenges. It doesn’t take a lot of faith to say, “God, thanks for my food.” “Thanks for my health.” “Thanks for my job.” It requires more faith to say, “Lord, I’m facing a challenge and I want to thank you, God, that you are going to give me victory in this challenge.”

Here is an example from the Bible. There was a king in the Old Testament called Jehoshaphat. Our kids remember him because a couple of years ago our Children’s Musical was Fat, Fat Jehoshaphat. That’s easy to remember. King Jehoshaphat was King of Judah and there was a group of kings who formed an alliance against Judah. They had a large army and were well-equipped. The army of Judah was outnumbered and out-equipped and they were facing a challenge, a battle. Jehoshaphat gets on his face before the Lord and says, “God, what are we going to do?” Have you ever come to that place in your life when you are facing a challenge? It may be an economic challenge, a physical challenge, it may be something to do with your job you just know it’s out there ahead of you and you are afraid of it. You do exactly what Jehoshaphat did, you get on your face before God and say, “God what am I going to do?” and the Lord says to you the same thing he says to Jehoshaphat. “First of all, don’t worry, because the battle is not yours—it’s mine because you are mine this battle is mine.” So, Jehoshaphat says, “That’s great, Lord, I’m glad it’s yours but what do you want me to do in it?” God said, “Jehoshaphat, all I want you to do is offer songs of praise.” He said, “Wait a minute, Lord. Did I hear you right? Didn’t you say you wanted me to offer you swords and spears and soldiers?” “No, I want you to offer me songs of praise I want you to offer me thanks.” This is what the Lord said, “Jehoshaphat, when you go into battle tomorrow, I don’t want you to put your Green Berets or your Navy Seals or your Special Forces up front. I want you to put the choir, unarmed, up front and I want them to sing and you lead the way.” The story is in 2 Chronicles 20. Find out what happened when they obeyed God. It says, “Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army singing.”

Give thanks to the Lord. We are talking about giving thanks for future challenges. Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever. Here’s the application: It takes faith when you are facing a

challenge for you to say, "God, I don't know the outcome, but I thank you in advance. The battle is yours. It's not mine. You're going to carry me through. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord." Can't you just see the choir at the head of this battle line saying, "Give thanks to the Lord. His mercy endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord. His mercy endures forever." They centered themselves upon God and praising and thanking him instead of the problem and God brought them through. So what happened? Verse 22, "As they began to sing and praise" (by the way it doesn't happen until you start thanking him, but when you start doing your part, God starts doing his part) "As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mt. Cyr, who were invading Judah and they were defeated." I'm not telling you it is easy. I'm just telling you the Bible says to do it. It doesn't take much faith to say, "God, thank you for past blessings." It does require faith to say, "Thank you, God, for future challenges." You can't do it unless you are full of the Holy Spirit.

### **Best to give thanks for: Present difficulties**

There's a category even better than that: Thank God for present difficulties. Some of you aren't going to write that down, because you don't believe it. Thank God for *present difficulties*. Those two words I intentionally misread were the words "always" and "everything." Look at those three categories: past, future, present; all things: blessings, challenges, difficulties. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." You say, "Wait a minute. My child has cancer." "My parents have cancer." "My mother was just in an automobile accident and was killed." "I'm facing bankruptcy." "I'm sick myself, are you telling me that I need to give thanks?" No I'm not. The word of God is. It is not a matter of feeling thankful. It is a matter of obedience.

Joni Erickson Tada was a vivacious teenage girl living on the west coast. She dove into water that she thought was deeper than it was broke her neck and has been a quadriplegic for years. She is a delightful Christian. When asked her about her condition, she quoted Ephesians 5:20, "giving thanks always for all things." They said, "How can you give thanks for your condition?" She said, "Giving thanks is not a matter of feeling thankful it is a matter of obedience." She said, "I don't have to understand why I should do it I don't have to feel thankful I just have to do it."

I remember what Jack Taylor used to say. "Thank God when you don't feel thankful. Keep thanking him until you do feel thankful and then thank him some more." You just do it as an act of your will. Romans 8:28 is the umbrella verse over all of this. "We believe and we know that all things work together for good." God's glory, our good. All things work together for good. All things may not be good, but they work together for good for them who love the Lord who are the called according to his purpose. So many people trip up at this point. Thanking God for past blessings is no problem. Thanking God for future challenges, "I can handle that." But "You want me to thank God for the difficulty I am facing right now?" You can't do it unless you are full of the Holy Spirit. Don't even try on your own. It is Spirit-filled gratitude.

### **Spirit-filled gratitude doesn't say evil is good, it acknowledges that God is good**

Number one Spirit-filled gratitude is not saying, "Evil is good." It is saying, "God is good." Some of you are wondering, "How can I thank God for cancer? Cancer is bad." You are exactly

right. You are not thanking God for cancer; you are thanking God for God. You are thanking God that he is good. You are not thanking God that the cancer is good, that evil is good, you are thanking God.

Ron Herrod is a pastor friend of mine. When he was pastor of First Baptist Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas, his 18-year-old-daughter was abducted and raped. As if that wasn’t bad enough, she became pregnant from it. I’ve heard Ron talk about it and he said that it became more than just a slogan when it said, “Abortion is not a choice it is a child.” They decided not to terminate the pregnancy so she bore the child. I remember hearing Ron and his wife talk about how difficult it was in the middle of all of that tragic experience to give thanks to God but they did it anyway not because they felt thankful they did it out of a sense of love for God and obedience to God. Ron says, “Now that we are on the other side of it and can look back on it, we know that it made perfect sense to thank God in the middle of it because now we have a 2-year-old grandson and he is the joy of our lives! He’s going to be raised to know the Lord and he’s going to be raised to serve the Lord.” He said, “Romans 8:28 works for whatever problem you face in life. Just give God enough time.”

### **Spirit-filled gratitude doesn’t focus on self, it focuses on the Savior**

The other way we learn about Spirit-filled gratitude is it doesn’t focus on self it focuses on the Savior. If you are looking at it from the perspective of yourself and your feelings, you never will thank God for difficulties, but if you are looking at it from the perspective of the Lord, Jesus Christ, who went to the cross and suffered and died and was buried but he was resurrected again then you can say, “In the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ.” If you take out that last phrase in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:21 would be a farce. There is no way you could say, “Always giving thanks to God, the Father for everything” if you put a period there. But “In the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ” is what empowers you and enables you to do that.

All I’m asking is you seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, there will be a spirit of appreciation in your life and you’ll understand that in the end God is going to be victorious.

### **CONCLUSION**

When I was 12 or 13 old, I was a voracious reader (even then). I used to read the Hardy Boys mysteries and I loved to read them. Joe and Frank Hardy were high school students who were always trying to solve crimes and mysteries and were always getting in trouble. One night I was reading along and Joe and Frank Hardy were hanging on the side of a cliff and their rope was falling apart and there were rocks below and they were going to fall and die! I just knew it! My Mother came in right at that moment and said, “David, turn out the light and go to bed!” “Wait a minute, Mom. I can’t go to bed now. They’re on the side of the cliff they might die.” “Turn off the lights and go to bed now!” I did this more than once—I flipped over to the very back page briefly and read just one sentence that said something like this, “and Joe and Frank sat down with their parents for a delicious meal.” Then I could close the book. I didn’t know how they were going to get from the cliff to the dinner table I just knew they would. Do you know what empowers you and enables you to give thanks in difficult situations? I’ve read the last chapter

and in the end—we win! In the end Jesus Christ is victorious and no matter how you get from where you are to where you are going know in the end that Jesus Christ wins. Because of that you can say, “God I thank you that you are good and whatever is happening to me is going to work out for your glory and for my good.” The Bible says we are to always give thanks to God, the Father for everything in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

## OUTLINE

### I. THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

1. NOT selfish greed *Luke 12:19*
2. NOT hypocritical prayers *Luke 18:11-12*
3. Humble expression of thanks *Luke 17:19*

Being thankful ≠ Giving thanks

### II. THE MAGNITUDE OF GRATITUDE

GOOD: Thanks for past blessings  
BETTER: Thanks for future challenges  
BEST: Thanks for present difficulties

...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. *1 Thessalonians 5:18*

### SPIRIT-FILLED GRATITUDE

1. Doesn't say evil is good, it acknowledges that God is good
2. Doesn't focus on self, it focuses on the Savior

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. *Psalms 100*



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes