

“Six Surprising Biblical Stories of Gratitude”

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OLDSMAR, Fla.—There are some surprising stories of gratitude in the Bible.

It’s easy to thank God when life is going well. My heart naturally swells with gratitude on days when my kids are easy to parent and playing well together, at times when a prayer is boldly answered or in seasons when I have money enough for fun extras rather than shelling it out to fix a broken water heater.

But when parenting pushes me past my limits or I’m waiting longer than I hoped for God to answer or money squeezes the fun right out?

Gratitude doesn’t flow so easily. But scripture is clear about the power of gratitude. God calls us to be thankful in all things.

When I dug deep into a gratitude study in the Bible, I saw gratitude in places I didn’t expect.

Let’s look at six surprising stories of gratitude in the Bible.

Daniel gave thanks despite the risk

Daniel was born into a noble life but became enslaved as a teen. Daniel was exiled from his homeland, cut off from family and trained to assimilate into Babylonian culture. Yet Daniel followed God with his whole heart and continually distinguished himself during the rise and fall of two kingdoms.

When the Persian king wanted to promote Daniel to second highest in the kingdom, the other officials conspired to take Daniel down. They convinced King Darius to issue an irrevocable edict: pray to the king or suffer the lion’s den.

With his life at risk, Daniel could have knuckled under. He could have accused God of injustice. But Daniel stayed steadfastly faithful. Per usual, Daniel bent to pray and give thanks to God three times a day. Daniel chose gratitude despite the risk.

I’d love to know for what Daniel thanked God.

- God's constant provision?
- God's faithfulness at every turn?
- Or God's goodness no matter what?

God was all of this even if he never rescued Daniel. True to the king's edict, Daniel was thrown into the lions' den for an entire night, but God shut the lions' mouths and Daniel emerged not only alive, but without so much as a scratch.

Jonah gave thanks in the belly of a fish

Unlike Daniel, Jonah found himself in dire straits of his own making. God had told Jonah to go warn Nineveh of imminent judgment if they didn't repent. Instead, Jonah jumped the next ship to Tarsus. When a violent storm threatened to capsize the ship, Jonah knew it was God's judgment for him and told the sailors to throw him overboard. He was promptly swallowed by a large fish.

Jonah could have sulked or given up, but in the belly of the fish, he repented and thanked God. After Jonah's prayer with gratitude, God commanded the great fish to spit him up on dry land and Jonah headed to Nineveh to preach.

Hannah chose the Giver over the gift

Hannah's story is so tender to me. Beloved by her husband, but barren of children, Hannah endured contempt and taunts from her husband's other wife, who had many children. Hannah couldn't even eat for her anguish. In deep pain, she went to the tabernacle and cried out to God, promising if He gave her a son, she would give him back for life-long service.

God did give Hannah a son. For the next few years, when her husband went to annual sacrifices, Hannah remained at home with her son, Samuel. Hannah kept her vow and, once weaned, took Samuel to live with the priest in Jerusalem.

Hannah neither regretted nor resented her promise. Instead, she was deeply grateful. Though she loved her Samuel, Hannah chose to worship the Giver, not his gift.

1 Samuel 2:1-2 (NIV): "My heart rejoices in the LORD! The LORD has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me. No one is holy like the LORD! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."

Paul gave thanks in the middle of a storm

This story in Acts 27 reads like a modern-day action adventure. Paul had been imprisoned and put on a ship for Rome under Roman guard. The ship was soon caught in a violent hurricane.

The crew first tried to hold the ship together by passing ropes underneath, then they threw cargo and later ship's tackle overboard. By the 14th day, when they'd seen neither sun nor stars, "they gave up all hope of being saved."

But that night, an angel appeared to Paul in a dream, assuring him no one would die. The storm raged on and the ship looked like it would be dashed against rocks. They dropped four anchors and prayed for daylight. No one had eaten for 14 days, and just before sunrise, Paul urged everyone to eat to regain strength.

In the midst of the storm, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God before the entire ship, broke the bread and distributed it. The next day, all 276 aboard made it safely to shore.

Paul did not give thanks after the storm had passed, but right in the midst of the storm. Therefore, we can give thanks in our storm as well.

Jesus gave thanks before there was enough

When Jesus fed the 5,000, He was grieving deeply—having just learned His cousin (John the Baptizer) had been beheaded. He was also weary and had tried to get away to a quiet spot with his apostles for rest.

But the crowds followed and with great compassion, Jesus taught for hours. Seeing the people were hungry, Jesus took five loaves and two fish, and “looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves.” The apostles distributed the food to the crowd, the people ate until satisfied and they gathered 12 baskets of leftovers.

The odds are 100% God will meet our need. We may not see it yet, but God has promised and He will do it. When we ask God to meet our need, we can thank him in advance for his sure provision.

Jesus gave thanks before going to the cross

On the evening of His Last Supper, Jesus said He had “eagerly desired to eat this Passover” with His disciples. Knowing He was about to be betrayed, arrested, mocked, beaten and crucified, Jesus gave thanks.

During the supper, Jesus paused to give thanks. He gave thanks for the bread, which represented His broken body. And He gave thanks for the wine, which represented His spilled blood.

May we have our own surprising stories of gratitude

- Like Daniel, may we offer gratitude to God no matter what we face.
- Like Jonah, may we offer gratitude to God for hard consequences that bring good repentance.
- Like Hannah, may we offer gratitude to God for who He is over what He gives.
- Like Paul, may we offer gratitude to God, not after, but in the midst of the storm.
- Like Jesus, may we offer gratitude to God before He supplies our need.
- Like Christ, may we offer gratitude to God even when following His will means suffering.