

# “How to Be Thankful in All Things”

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**By Billy Graham**

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—*Are you thankful no matter what? Look at the story of man who had every right to be bitter—but wasn’t.*

The next footsteps in the corridor, he knew, might be those of the guards taking him away to his execution. His only bed was the hard, cold stone floor of the dank, cramped prison cell. Not an hour passed when he was free from the constant irritation of the chains and the pain of the iron manacles cutting into his wrists and legs.

Separated from friends, unjustly accused, brutally treated—if ever a person had a right to complain, it was this man, languishing almost forgotten in a harsh Roman prison. But, instead of complaints, his lips rang with words of praise and thanksgiving!

The man was the Apostle Paul—a man who had learned the meaning of true thanksgiving, even in the midst of great adversity. Earlier, when he had been imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote, “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:19-20, NIV).

Think of it: Always giving thanks for everything—no matter the circumstances!

Thanksgiving for the Apostle Paul was not a once-a-year celebration, but a daily reality that changed his life and made him a joyful person in every situation.

Thanksgiving—the giving of thanks—to God for all His blessings should be one of the most distinctive marks of the believer in Jesus Christ. We must not allow a spirit of ingratitude to harden our heart and chill our relationship with God and with others.

Nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. And nothing will do more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness.

In the ancient world, leprosy was a terrible disease. It hopelessly disfigured those who had it, and it permanently cut them off from normal society. Without exception, every leper yearned for one thing: to be healed.

One day 10 lepers approached Jesus outside a village, loudly pleading with Him to heal them. In an instant, He restored them all to perfect health—but only one came back and thanked Him. All the rest left without a word of thanks, their minds preoccupied only with themselves, gripped with a spirit of ingratitude.

Today, too, ingratitude and thanklessness are far too common. Children forget to thank their parents for all that they do. Common courtesy is scorned. We take for granted the ways that others help us. Above all, we fail to thank God for His blessings.

Ingratitude is a sin, just as surely as is lying or stealing or immorality or any other sin condemned by the Bible. One of the Bible's indictments against rebellious humanity is that, "although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (Romans 1:21, NIV). An ungrateful heart is a heart that is cold toward God and indifferent to His mercy and love. It is a heart that has forgotten how dependent we are on God for everything.

From one end of the Bible to the other, we are commanded to be thankful. In fact, thankfulness is the natural outflowing of a heart that is attuned to God. The psalmist declared, "Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving" (Psalm 147:7, NIV). Paul wrote, "Be thankful" (Colossians 3:15, NIV). A spirit of thanksgiving is always the mark of a joyous Christian.

Why should we be thankful? Because God has blessed us, and we should be thankful for each blessing.

### **Thank God for the material blessings that He gives you**

We seem never to be satisfied with what we have—rich or poor, healthy or sick. But what a difference it makes when we realize that everything we have has been given to us by God! King David prayed, "Wealth and honor come from you . . . We give you thanks, and praise your glorious name . . . Everything comes from you" (1 Chronicles 29:12-14, NIV).

Some years ago I visited a man who was wealthy and successful. He was the envy of all his friends and business associates. But, as we talked, he broke down in tears, confessing that he was miserable inside. Wealth had not been able to fill the empty place in his heart.

A few hours later I visited another man only a short distance away. His cottage was humble, and he had almost nothing in the way of this world's possessions. Yet his face was radiant as he told me about the work he was doing for Christ and how Christ had filled his life with meaning and purpose. I am convinced that the second man was really the rich man. Although he didn't have much, he had learned to be thankful for everything that God had given

him. Paul declared, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12, NIV). A spirit of thankfulness makes all the difference.

Are you constantly preoccupied with what you do not have? Or have you learned to thank God for what you do have?

### **Thank God for the people in your life**

It is so easy to take people for granted, or even to complain and become angry because they do not meet our every wish. But we need to give thanks for those around us—our spouses, our children, our relatives, our friends and others who help us in some way.

I once received a letter from a woman who began by telling me how fortunate she was to have a kind, considerate husband. She then used four pages to list all his faults! How many marriages and other relationships grow cold and eventually are shattered because of the sin of ingratitude?

Do you let others know that you appreciate them and are thankful for them? The Christians in Corinth were far from perfect, but Paul began his first letter to them by saying, "I always thank God for you" (1 Corinthians 1:4, NIV). When a group of believers (whom Paul had never met) came out to greet him as he approached Rome, we read that "at the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged" (Acts 28:15, NIV). Thank God for those who touch your life.

### **Thank God in the midst of trials and even persecution**

We draw back from difficulties, yet not one of us is exempt from some kind of trouble. In many parts of the world it is dangerous even to be a Christian because of persecution.

And yet in the midst of those trials we can thank God, because we know that He has promised to be with us and that He will help us. We know that He can use times of suffering to draw us closer to Himself: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2-3, NIV).

When the prophet Daniel learned that evil men were plotting against him to destroy him, "he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Daniel 6:10, NIV). The Bible commands, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thesalonians 5:18, NIV). Paul declared, "You will even be able to thank God in the midst of pain and distress because you are privileged to share the lot of those who are living in the light" (Colossians 1:12, Phillips).

I don't know what trials you may be facing right now, but God does, and He loves you and is with you by His Holy Spirit. Cultivate a spirit of thankfulness even in the midst of trials and heartaches.

## **Thank God especially for His salvation in Jesus Christ**

God has given us the greatest gift of all—His Son, who died on the cross and rose again so that we can know Him personally and spend eternity with Him in heaven: “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15, NIV).

The Bible tells us that we are separated from God because we have sinned. But God loves us—He loves you, He loves me—and He wants us to be part of His family forever. He loves us so much that He sent His only Son into the world to die as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. All we need to do is reach out in faith and accept Christ as our Savior and Lord: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).

Have you opened your heart to Jesus Christ? If not, turn to Him with a simple prayer or repentance and faith, and thank Him for what He has done for you. And, if you do know Christ, how long has it been since you thanked God for your salvation? We should not let a day go by without thanking God for His mercy and His grace to us in Jesus Christ.

## **Thank God for His continued presence and power in your life**

When we come to Christ, it is not the end but the beginning of a whole new life! He is with us, and He wants to help us follow Him and His Word.

In ourselves, we do not have the strength that we need to live the way God wants us to live. But, when we turn to Him, we discover that “it is God who works in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13, NIV). Jesus promised His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18, 20, NIV).

In many countries a special day is set aside each year for thanksgiving. But for the Christian every day can be a day of thanksgiving, as we are “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20, NIV).