

# Improving Your Life With Thankfulness

1 Thessalonians 1:2

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Why is thankfulness important?

**For one, thankfulness protects your heart.** Thankfulness is one of the divine ingredients to protect you from anxiety. **Philippians 4:6** says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (7) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Having a thankful perspective and attitude toward people and situations protects you emotionally and mentally. It guards your heart and mind from being consumed with anxious feelings and thoughts.

Thankfulness is important because it helps protect your heart, but thankfulness is also important because **God places a high value on thankfulness**. When you look at how many times God's Word talks about being thankful, being full of thankfulness, and giving thanks to Him and to others you get the idea thankfulness is significant to God and should be something significant to His people. Over 150 times God talks to us about being thankful in His Word.<sup>1</sup>

Let me give you some examples.

## **1 Timothy 2:1**

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of times the following words are used in the NIV: thanks 81, thankful 4, thank 34, thankfulness 3, thanksgiving 25, thanking 1, and thanked 2. (Based on Blue Letter Bible research)

### **1 Thessalonians 5:18**

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

### **Colossians 3:17**

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

### **Ephesians 5:4**

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

When you think about the alternative to having a grateful attitude you are left with a lonely cold bitter attitude of unthankfulness and ungratefulness. Who wants to be around someone who faces life with an unappreciative attitude?

To help us grow in this characteristic we need to consider several things about thankfulness.

- 1. Thankfulness is an attitude of the heart that recognizes the worth, quality, or significance of the person or situation.**

**Number one, thankfulness is an attitude of the heart that recognizes the worth, quality, or significance of the person or situation.** As the people of God we should understand more than anyone the worth, value, and significance of a person. When you give thanks to God for someone in your life you are saying, "God, I recognize the worth and significance of this person in my life." When you give thanks to God for a situation in your life you are saying, "God, I recognize the value and importance of what I'm going through." When you do this you are glorifying the Lord through your thankfulness. **Psalm 69:3** says, "I will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving." Every time we are not thankful when we should be, we are robbing God glory due His name.

## **2. Thankfulness can be developed in my life through others.**

**Number two, thankfulness can be developed in your life through others.** Notice Paul says, “We” thank God for you (1 Thess. 1:2). Thankfulness loves company. It is always good to have people around you who are thankful people. When you get to that point in life where you are having a hard time finding something to be thankful for, it is good to have grateful people around you to help you identify what is good in your life and what you can be thankful for. Sometimes we cannot see the worth or significance of a person, but someone else can and they can help us be thankful for that person.

**Proverbs 27:17** says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Some of you need to be sharpened in the area of thanksgiving. Somewhere along the way you lost that attitude of gratitude for your spouse, for your job, for your health, or for where God has brought you. When you get around people who are more mature in their spiritual development of thanksgiving and gratitude they will rub off on you and help you be a more grateful person. When you are a more grateful person you are in position to be a greater blessing to others.

But now watch this. On the other side of this coin you need to be careful. You can be a thankful person full of gratitude but if you allow the wrong people to be influencing you with the poison of negativity, doubt, and criticism about someone or something you can find yourself losing your thankfulness and becoming corrupted by someone else’s ungratefulness. **1 Corinthians 15:33** says, “Bad company corrupts good character.” You can have the good character quality of thankfulness, but bad company can cause you to become unthankful for what or who you use to be thankful for.

## **3. Thankfulness should be a habit in my life.**

**Number three, thankfulness should be a habit in my life.** Look at **1 Thessalonians 1:2** again, “We always thank God for all of you....” The word “always” (pantote) means “at all times” and “all occasions” which indicates a thanksgiving that was continual and regularly repeated. It was a habit. This does not mean they walked around babbling in their mind over and over of their thanksgiving for others (Matt. 6:7). They had chosen a lifestyle of thanksgiving. It was hard to find them in an ungrateful attitude toward

these believers. This spiritual dynamic called thankfulness was a major part of their character and lifestyle.

Paul was no fool, he was not born yesterday. He was not naïve and his head was not in the clouds. He knew there were problems; he knew there were difficult people to handle; he knew there were tensions that arose from time to time; he knew there were clashes of personality. He knew all that, but in spite of all their hang-ups and shortcomings, he had chosen to give thanks more than to complain more. Your life and my life should be a “thanks-athon.”

#### **4. Thankfulness acknowledges God in the blessing.**

**Number four, thankfulness acknowledges God in the blessing.** Back to **1 Thessalonians 1:2**, “We always thank God for all of you...” Paul’s thanksgiving was God-ward. Although Paul was full of thanksgiving because of the good report concerning the Thessalonians, he did not simply congratulate them on their “success,” for he was aware that any praiseworthy spiritual results were ultimately from God to whom belonged the glory. Paul does not thank the Thessalonians. He thanks God who was at work in their lives.

When you thank God for someone or you tell them you thank God for them your saying, “I believe God placed you in my life and He is using you to make me a better person and bring Him more glory. You are a blessing to me.” In your prayer time be sure and thank God for those in your life, but let those in your life you are thankful for know you are thankful for them. They need to hear that. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to hear it.

#### **5. Thankfulness for others does not depend on their maturity.**

**Number five, my thankfulness for others does not depend on their maturity.** Look closely at **1 Thessalonians 1:2** again, “We always thank God for all of you...” Now think about this for a moment. The “all of you” phrase is an “all inclusive” phrase. Paul knew, just like you know, there are all types of believers at all types of maturity with all types of personalities in the church. He knew they still had imperfections. Over in **1**

**Thessalonians 3:10** he says, “Night and day we pray earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” We can and should be thankful for our fellow believers in spite of their imperfections and in spite of what they are lacking.

Let me ask you a question, what person is in your life that gets on your nerves the most and you think is immature? Are you thankful for them? If not ask God to do a work on your heart and to help you grow and increase your level of thankfulness even for those who rub you the wrong way. You don’t have to like them, but can you be thankful for them?

## **6. My life should evoke thankfulness from others.**

**Number six, my life should evoke thankfulness from others.** Let’s look at this phrase “for all of you” from a different perspective (1 Thess. 1:2). Now let’s say Paul was writing that about you. You are included in that “all of you.” In reality, there are some people it is easier to be thankful for than others. Some people are high maintenance and difficult. They say things that rub you the wrong way, they complain, grip, belly ache. Some people are just mean and selfish. Hopefully, you are not that way.

But my question is, how easy do you make it for others to be thankful for you? Do those around you have to work at it in order to be thankful for you? Do you make it difficult or easy for people to appreciate you and thank God for you being in their life? Instead of being a source of pain and grief, are you a source of joy and thanksgiving?

## **7. Thankfulness reveals my values.**

**Number seven, thankfulness reveals my values.** What I’m thankful for reveals what is important to me. What you are grateful for reveals what is truly significant to you. If your thanksgiving surrounds only your house, car, job, and money; then you value materialism. Notice what Paul was thankful for... “you.” He was thankful for the relationships he had in life, specifically those who were believers. He loved the family of God.

When you look throughout the Bible you find what Paul was really thankful for and through this you begin to pick up his values and what was important to him. Let me show you.

### **Romans 1:8**

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.” He was thankful for the believers because of their growing faith. He was excited about that. It was important to him.

### **1 Corinthians 1:4**

“I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus.” Paul was grateful for the believers who were demonstrations of God’s grace. He goes on to talk about how God’s grace was revealed in them through their speaking, knowledge, testimony, and spiritual giftedness. That’s what he was thankful for.

### **Philippians 1:3-4**

“I thank my God every time I remember you.” What does he remember about them? He goes on to talk about their *partnership in the gospel* and their *spiritual growth*. That’s what he was thankful for because it was important to him.

### **Colossians 1:3**

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, (4) because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.” Paul was thankful for these believers because of the love they were showing each other. Paul thought demonstrating love was important and he was thankful for it.

Paul was thankful for the relationships he had, he was thankful for the love people had toward one another, their growth in their faith, demonstrations of grace, and their partnership in the ministry of the Kingdom of God. Through his expressions of thankfulness we see his values and what is significant to him.

So let me ask you, what are you thankful for and what does that say about your values and what is significant to you?

## 8. Thankfulness is enhanced by remembering.

**Number eight, thankfulness is enhanced by remembering.** Let me explain. **1 Thessalonians 1:2** says, “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.” This “mentioning you” is two Greek words that means “to remember.” When Paul is praying and he is thanking God for people in his life and he begins to think about the believers at Thessalonica their faces and names come to his mind and remembers them as he is praying.

I can see Paul, Timothy, and Silas praying together and one of them mentions a believer and all three of them remember how that person blessed them and they thanked God for them. Have you ever looked through an old church pictorial directory or photo album or your old High School year book and thought about people and your mind was jogged into remembering them and the good times. That’s kind of what’s happening here. The reason they are mentioning them in their prayers is because they are *remembering* them and how God has grown them and used them in their lives.

To help you concentrate on being thankful, maybe you need to pull out that church directory, family photo album, or that High School year book and let your mind filter through who you see through the filter of thanksgiving. Sometimes we need to be reminded of how God has blessed us through others.

*Remembering* is a significant part of our prayer life and sometimes we need help to remember. Let me show you the connection between praying and remembering.

### **Romans 1:9**

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you (10) in my prayers at all times....

### **Ephesians 1:16**

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

### **Philippians 1:3**

I thank my God every time I remember you.

## **2 Timothy 1:3**

I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefather did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

## **Philemon 4**

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers.

Remembering is a key ingredient to thankfulness. So let's help ourselves remember. A prayer list, a prayer diary, a prayer card – these are all useful tools that enable us to tap the potential of heaven on behalf of one another. If we write a name down, or stick a photo on the fridge, we are less likely to forget to intercede for that person. So Paul thanks God for them and he talks to God about them.

## **9. Thankfulness is a key ingredient to good leadership.**

**Number nine, thankfulness is a key ingredient to good leadership.** The phrase “in our prayers” reminds me of who God is using to write this letter: Paul, Timothy, and Silas. These were three leaders in the church. It is important that the leaders take the time to pray together and thank God for those who are ministering alongside them and for those that God has saved and grown spiritually over time.

How essentially important it is for those in responsible positions in Christian ministry to take time out to pray. Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence. Down on our knees is where burdens are shared, battles are fought, and victories are won. It was standard practice when they met together, par for the course. They did not think about it, they did it!

To many Christians, prayer is about as exciting as changing a flat tire on a narrow country lane. To Paul and his ministry partners, time spent in prayer was never seen as wasted time. It is astoundingly profitable, paying handsome dividends. It is quite remarkable to realize that a year down the road these folks are still lovingly upheld at the throne of grace; they remain on the apostle's prayer list. He genuinely cared for them, in the most profound way, by praying for them.

## **10.Thankfulness should be a significant part of your prayer life.**

### **Number ten, thankfulness should be a significant part of your prayer life. 1**

**Thessalonians 1:2** says, “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.” There all kinds of prayers. For example there is the prayer of **praise** (Ps. 50:23) where you tell God how great He is. There is the prayer of **confession** (1 John 1:9; Ps. 41:4) where you tell God about your sin. There is the prayer **intercession** where you ask God to do something in the life of someone else (1 Tim. 2:1-6). There is the prayer of **petition** where you lay your request before God. Of course there is the prayer of **thanksgiving** giving where you express your attitude of gratitude for what God has done in your life.

### **Conclusion**

Thankfulness is important because it protects your heart, mind, and emotions. Also, God places a high value on it and we should focus on developing it in our lives. We should allow God’s Word and God’s people to help grow in this quality of gratitude.

Let me close with one more verse on thanksgiving. **1 Corinthians 15:57** says, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” You can have victory today over that attitude of ungratefulness and unthankfulness, but it begins with a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you ready to give your life to Jesus? Are ready to receive Him as the Lord of your life? [Explain salvation]