

#248 "Thankfulness"

T.H.R.I.V.E. part 1

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We often talk about taking things for granted, but the great irony is that we tend to take thankfulness itself for granted. We don't value it as a high spiritual priority. Yet the reality is that thankfulness is required for spiritual fulfillment and enjoyment in God. There is no way around this. If God is indeed the Giver of all good things and if we are indeed dependent upon Him as insufficient beings, then it follows that we should acknowledge Him in all of our ways (Proverbs 3:5-6). He deserves a thank you and a pausing to praise Him. The longer we walk with God, the more we will have testimonies to share of God as Jehovah Jireh, our Provider. He does give good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). Some may be trials for teaching us, while others may be deliverance and provision at the perfect time. His ways are beyond our ability to totally figure out, and that is alright. After all, He is God. He ought to be far smarter than all of us. What counts is that He is good (Psalm 107:1), and when He does as Scripture promises in leaving a legacy of goodness and mercy in our lives (Psalm 23:6), we must be willing to thank Him. If we are not thankful, something has gone seriously wrong with our hearts.

The more we see God as our loving Father Who withholds no good thing from His children, the more we will thank Him. Psalm 84:11 says, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; *No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly*" (italics mine). When we are in a trial, we may feel like God is keeping good back from us, but the reality is that He never does that. We must let the truth of those words sink in. **He will never withhold anything good from those who walk uprightly**, from those who are His own and who walk by faith in holiness before Him. We get concerned that God is keeping something good from us when, in reality, the issue is that we are failing to thank God for the good that He has already done, that He is doing, and that He will do.

As we ask God to cultivate thankfulness in our lives, let us be sure that we understand that it is impossible to just "be thankful." There must be a Source that we are crediting as the cause or reason for our thanksgiving. Thankfulness is more than just being happy about something; it is crediting provision and care toward our loving Father Who is behind it all. Otherwise, what are we crediting for our thanksgiving, the universe, chance, ourselves, etc.? Obviously, since God is the Giver of all good gifts, it is He alone Who deserves credit. And credit is what we ought to give Him.

From the perspective of the believer, we have so many things that we can thank God for. We should praise Him for His wonder and power as revealed in the created world (Psalm 139:14). Even more, we should thank God for the cross and His demonstration of love to us while we were yet sinners who had only spite for God. 2 Corinthians 9:15 says, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" If nothing else, being bought with the blood of Christ ought to move us to give thanks. In addition to being thankful for the creation and the cross, Paul was thankful for conversions and for his brothers and sisters in Christ. He said in Colossians 1:3-4, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints." He found great encouragement and joy in crediting God for continuing to be at work in the world around him, calling to people everywhere to repent and being faithful to work through the proclamation of the gospel. 2 Corinthians 4:15 says, "For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God." The result of the spreading of the gospel was more people who could give God thanks, for, plainly and simply, God delights in thankful hearts.

Thankfulness will only well up in our hearts if we continue to believe, like Paul, in God's love, faithfulness, goodness, and power. It is because we have a God Who is working and involved in the course of our lives that we can have hope and a reason to give thanks. In fact, our God cares so much about His children that He wants us to bring our requests before Him in prayer. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." It is always with an attitude of thanksgiving that we are to pray, even in places of desperation, for our God is never out of options. Colossians 4:2 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." Thanksgiving has a way of keeping our prayer lives active, alive, and alert. Those who have given up on God's care and love and thus an overarching, good, and sovereign purpose for their lives will struggle to want to pray and to pray as the Spirit leads. Thankfulness is thus a potent measuring stick of the state of our walk with God because it overflows into how we relate to Him and to others.

Thankfulness is a high priority in Scripture. For example, in Leviticus 7:13, offerings were given to God for thanksgiving. In 1 Chronicles 16:8, David put Asaph in charge of composing songs of thanksgiving to the Lord. In Psalm 100:4, we are told to enter the house of God with thanksgiving. In Nehemiah 12:8, Nehemiah designated particular individuals for the express purpose of giving thanks. In Matthew 15:36, we see Jesus giving thanks to the Father for even simple things such as food. Thankfulness is all over the pages of Scripture. Thus, let us make mental notes of the following three passages of Scripture. First, Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then, let us *continually* offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (emphasis added). By being thankful continually, it is not to say that we have to be praying prayers of thanksgiving every minute of the day, but it is to say that we ought to be regularly introspective as to whether we are thankful in our present circumstances. Second, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "*In everything* give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (emphasis added). Being thankful for everything doesn't mean that we should rejoice in evil, but it means that we are to maintain a spiritual vision that is consistent with the faithfulness of God and His goodness and mercy in our lives. Thirdly, Psalm 109:30 says, "With my mouth I will give thanks *abundantly* to the LORD; And in the midst of many I will praise Him" (emphasis added). Our thankfulness is to be continual, in everything, and to an abundant degree. Just how thankful we are to God will tell us a lot about what we really think of Him. If our God is abundantly good and faithful, so, too, should be the level of thanksgiving in our hearts.

Hebrews 12:28 says, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe." God has given us a glorious creation, He has given us His only Son in Christ, He has blessed us with the fellowship of the

church, and He is alive and working for conversions of souls. In light of His kingdom power and work, we are to be thankful toward Him, and we demonstrate this as we serve Him in obedience and faithfulness in an attitude of reverence and awe. If God doesn't move us to be in awe of Him or if we don't respect His Word, why would we bother to thank Him, let alone serve Him? We must exalt in our heavenly calling in Christ in order to keep gratitude alive in our hearts. Then, the Spirit will quicken our hearts to service and worship rather than going through some empty religious motions. **It is gratitude out of which true worship flows, and it is thus thankfulness that enables us to thrive.**

Next up: Hopefulness

What is T.H.R.I.V.E.? God has promised His children the abundant life (John 10:10), even when life is full of trials (John 16:33). Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, sometimes life feels like surviving more than thriving. Yet, even there, God provided for them bread from heaven and water from a rock. More importantly, He helped them learn that man does not live on bread alone but upon His Word (Deuteronomy 8:3). It is feasting upon the inviolable truths of Scripture that can enable us to endure. Even in times of earthly abundance, we will starve without the food of doing God's will (John 4:34). 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." This six part series will feed our souls so that we do not lose heart by strengthening the inner man despite what may be happening to us on the outside. To thrive is to live life fully alive.