

**Giving Thanks To God**  
Luke 17:11-19  
Rev. Jean Smith

Here we are – the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Come Thursday we will all be giving thanks, right? The irony of it is, very little thanksgiving actually takes place on Thanksgiving Day. Most Americans spend the day traveling to be with family and friends, cooking, eating, and watching the parade or a football game on TV. Honestly, almost no thanksgiving takes place on Thanksgiving. The only thanks offered on Thanksgiving is maybe a few second prayer around the table before eating the turkey. If we get anything out of the story of the ten lepers it's the importance of giving thanks. Clearly God expects us to come back to him and thank him for the good things he does for us. But even more, it's actually part of the healing process for us to express our thanks to God.

So how do we do that? How do we express our thanks to God? How do we make thanksgiving more a part of Thanksgiving Day and everyday of our lives? The Bible says there are four ways we give thanks to God. I want to encourage you to do these four things, not just on Thanksgiving Day, but every day of the year. Our lives are to be a continual thank offering unto the Lord. How do we do that? How do we live our lives so that they are a continual thank offering unto the Lord? How do we give thanks to God?

**The FIRST way we give thanks to God is by SINGING to Him and ABOUT Him.** When we sing to God it's a prayer set to music. When we sing about God it's a testimony set to music. The Bible says, *“Sing out your thanks to Him. Sing praises to our God.”* (Psalm 147:7) It also says, *“Shout for joy to the Lord. Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful singing. Acknowledge that the Lord is God. He made us and we are his. Enter his gates with thanksgiving. Go into His courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever.”* (Psalm 100) When we sing his praises, we feel his presence. Why is that? What's going on there? The Bible tells us, “God inhabits the praise of his people.” So when we praise him, he is there in our praise, receiving our praise.

Now I know some of you don't like to sing. You're sitting here thinking, “Oh, pastor, you don't want to hear me sing. I can't carry a tune in a bucket.” Here's some good news for you. The Bible doesn't say that God only inhabits the well sung praises of his people. The Bible doesn't say we are only supposed to sing if we're good at it. The only qualification the Bible gives is that our singing is to be joyful. It says, *“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.”* (Ps. 98:4, Ps. 100:1) You can do that. Even the little piglets do that when they're eating. God only asks you to make a joyful noise unto him. You

can do that. Some people are what they call “prison singers”. They’re always behind a few bars and never have the right key. It doesn’t matter! The Bible just says we are to make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

There’s no doubt about it – Christianity is a singing faith. There have been more songs written about Jesus throughout history than any other single thing. God wants us to express our thanks by singing to him and about him. Some people don’t understand that. They come to church and when everybody else is singing, they just stand there. They don’t even try to sing. That’s a big mistake – a major mistake. If that’s what you’re doing, I want you to understand – you’re cheating yourself out of experiencing God’s presence. You may think you’re doing your neighbor a favor, but you’re cheating yourself. At least once a week you need the emotional release that comes from singing thanks to God. If you don’t do that, your heart shrivels. You can’t be a healthy Christian and not sing.

Now I realize that some people just can’t sing in public; they’re just not comfortable singing in public. One Sunday after I gave a sermon on the importance of singing to God and about God, a woman greeted me at the door and told me her husband refuses to sing in church, but he sings hymns in the shower every morning. He just won’t sing in public. That’s ok. If you’re like that man, it’s ok. I had a little guy in my choir one time and I just couldn’t get him to sing. He just sat there. He was listening. He wasn’t causing any trouble, but he wasn’t singing. I mentioned it to his mother privately one evening when she came in to pick him up and she said, “Really? He sings the songs you’re teaching him all the way home in the car.” I was so glad I hadn’t given that boy a hard time for not singing. I don’t want to give anyone here a hard time either for not singing. I just want you to know that you need to sing. You need to let it rip to the Lord, whether in the shower or driving down the road all alone in your car. Singing to the Lord is therapeutic. It heals the soul. Like the leper who returned to thank Jesus, you’re faith will make you well because it draws you into the presence of the Lord.

I read about a Christian Psychologist who would ask his patients if they sang when they went to church. If they said, “No,” he would say, “I want you to do something for me. When you go to church next week, I want you to sing when the rest of the congregation stands to sing.” Why did he ask that of his clients? Because he knew that singing to God and about God lifts our spirits and renews us.

When I least feel like singing, that’s when I need to do it the most. When I don’t feel like praising God, when I don’t feel like singing thanks, when my heart is drained and empty, when I’m under a heavy burden and emotionally exhausted, that’s when I need to sing thanks to God the most. When I do I am lifted up into God’s presence and he fills me with the joy of his presence. There is no doubt about it: singing to and about God is a mood lifter. If you’re feeling a little tired or discouraged

today, try singing a little louder than you usually do. Sing with great gusto and see what a difference it makes.

**The SECOND way we express our thanks to God is by PRAYING to him.** In Psalm 105, verse 1 it says, *“Give thanks to the Lord and pray to him.”* In Philippians, chapter 4, verse 6, we read, *“Don’t worry about anything....”* That has to be the hardest command in the entire Bible – don’t worry about anything? How in the world are we supposed to do that? The second part of verse six gives us the answer. It says, *“Don’t worry about anything. Instead pray about everything....”* If we would pray as much as we worry, we’d find we’d have a lot less to worry about. So when you start to worry, start to pray! The Bible says, *“Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”*

There’s something very important to remember when you’re praying. When you pray, be sure to balance your requests with thanksgiving. Make sure you aren’t asking more than your giving. There needs to be a balance between asking and giving. Think of it this way: how many of you parents would be very happy with your children if they were always asking you to do things and never thanking you for the things you’ve already done. We teach our children to say “thank you” not because we need them to say it, but because we know they need to say it for their own good. That’s the same with God. He doesn’t need us to say thank you. We need to say thank you for what it does for us. Over twenty times in the Bible we are told to ask. But when we ask, we are also told to give thanks.

The Bible also tells us to be specific when we make our requests know to God. God wants us to be specific when we pray. He doesn’t want generic prayers. It’s not because he doesn’t already know what we really want, because he knows all things even before we ask. He wants us to be specific because of what it does for us. When we pray for something specific, it means we’ve thought it through. When we pray for something specific it means we’ve prioritized our needs. We’ve figured out what’s really important to us and maybe that’s all God is waiting for before he gives us what we’re asking.

In the same way, God wants us to be specific about what we’re giving him thanks for. Make a list if it helps, of things you’re thankful for. Then go down through your list and thank God for what he has done for you.

It’s also important to thank God for what he hasn’t yet done for you. That’s where the faith factor comes in. Exercise your faith and thank God for what you’ve asked him to do before he does it. When we have that kind of faith that’s when miracles happen in our lives. One of the keys to really

seeing God work miracles in your life is being thankful for both what he has done and what he has yet to do. The more thankful we are the more God's power is unleashed in our lives.

There's a **THIRD way to express your gratitude to God and that is by GIVING to him.** Psalm 50, verse 14 says, *"Give an offering to show your thanks to God. Give him what you have promised."* In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians we read, *"Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."* We give to support the work of the church as an expression of our gratitude toward God and it results in others being able to thank God as well.

When I was a young Christian there was a bumper sticker that said, *"Honk if you love Jesus."* As a young Christian, I thought that was pretty cool so I bought one of those bumper stickers and since I didn't have a vehicle, I put it on the back bumper of my father's pickup truck. About a week later I noticed that my bumper sticker had been ripped off. I asked my dad what happened to it and he said, "I was driving down the road and somebody started honking their horn and it startled me so much I almost went off the road." He didn't have to say any more. I understood. Over the years my faith has matured and so has my taste in bumper stickers. Now I prefer the one that says, **"Love Jesus? Tithe! Any fool can honk."**

Thankfulness and giving go hand in hand. The Bible says, *"Celebrate the harvest festival, to honor the Lord, your God, by bringing him a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing he has given you. Be joyful in the Lord's presence, together with your children."* (Deuteronomy 16:10) Notice that this passage links together bringing an offering to the Lord with being joyful in the presence of the Lord. Notice also that all this giving and being joyful is to be done so your children can witness it. How else are they going to learn to give if they don't see us giving? I still remember my father writing checks to pay his bills and laying them out on the dining room table as he wrote them. The first one was always the check to the church. That taught me more than anything, the importance of giving to the Lord. Parents, let your children see you giving in proportion to the blessings God has given you.

There's a **FOURTH way we are to thank God and that is by SHARING him with others.** Isaiah 12:4 says, *"Thank the Lord. Praise his name. Tell the world about his wondrous love and how mighty he is."* When we tell others about the Lord and what he has done for us, that's called a testimony. We all know what a testimony is from watching court room dramas on TV or in movies. A testimony isn't what the lawyer does. A testimony is what the witness does. A witness doesn't try to convince anyone of anything. A witness doesn't pressure anyone for a decision. When a witness gives a testimony he simply tells what he knows, what he saw with his own eyes or heard with his own ears.

Have you seen God work in your life? If you have, then you have a testimony. Nobody else can give your testimony for you. Only you can give an account of what you've seen God do in your life. If you don't share your testimony, it won't get shared. How God has worked in your life and in your heart will never be shared if you don't do it. When you do it, you are expressing your thanks to God in a way that leads others to know him.

In a scientific study by psychologist, Dr. Karl Menninger, two attitudes were seen to be most prevalent in people who possess good mental and physical health. Those two attitudes are **generosity and gratitude**. Menninger wrote, "**Generous people are rarely mentally ill.**" The study showed that people who have the attitudes gratitude and generosity are far more resistant to disease and illness and are considerably more healthy and happy than their counterparts. We need to build these two attitudes into our lives if we want to be healthier, happier people.

The Bible says, "*Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God.*" (Col. 3:17) God doesn't want thanksgiving to be one day a year, but every day of our lives, every moment of our lives. In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians we read, "*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" It doesn't say, give thanks **for** all circumstances, but rather **in** all circumstances. God doesn't expect us to be thankful for the terrible things that are happening to us, but he does want us to figure out a way to be thankful as we go through them. Figuring out a way to be thankful as we go through difficulties will help us get through.

Think of Paul and Silas when they were beaten and thrown into jail. They didn't thank God for the beatings they suffered or for their imprisonment. But they got through it by remembering all God's blessings and they offered thanks to God even while they were still weak from their beatings and locked up in prison. In the middle of the night there was an earthquake and the doors fell open. They were set free but they didn't leave because they knew if they did the jailer would be killed for letting them escape. That got the attention of the jailer and he asked Paul and Silas why they were so compassionate to him. They were then able to share the gospel with the jailer and he came to believe in Christ because of their testimony.

What kind of difficulty are you experiencing? What kind of problems are you dealing with? What kind of sorrow are you going through? It is in the midst of your pain and suffering that God calls you to give thanks for all that he has done for you. You will find that giving thanks will be the think that heals you and restores your health. This Thanksgiving Day, take time to really be thankful no matter what your circumstances, and let that thankfulness spill over into every day of your life.