

CAP THANKSGIVING SERMON 2024

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At the heart of being thankful is cultivating an attitude of gratitude. As I reflected on Thanksgiving Sunday, I found myself taking a trip down memory lane, realizing the many things that God had done in my life, some known, some unknown, some noticed and acknowledged, some not. And all of these have carried through these years.

I am so thankful for my lineage. Both Sheila and I had grandfathers who were evangelists, and we are thankful for that legacy. Thankful for my parents who ensured that I attended church and Sunday school, laying a strong foundation of faith in my life. I'm thankful for the gift of music and other talents God has given, which have brought so much joy to my heart. I'm incredibly thankful for Sheila. I couldn't have asked for a better life partner. And for our three children – Ranjo, Natasha, Krista, their spouses, Caleb and Alita. And then our grandchildren, all five of them.

I'm also thankful that God is a God of second chances. Post my high school, I played around, played the fool and failed. And this desire for academics got stymied. I couldn't do anything. But 10 years after that, God opened a door for me to get back into academics, something that I loved, and continue to love. He gave me that opportunity and I'm so grateful for that.

I'm thankful for the health that I have – stents in my heart and being a diabetic for over 30 years. I've learned to rely on God's grace. And I tell you this, beloved, it has been wonderfully sufficient. I'm so thankful for the valleys through which God has allowed us to go. For in those valleys, we found brothers and sisters whose unwavering commitment to God helped us, strengthened us, and helped us navigate those difficult times.

I'm so thankful for the church, for each one of you, for the teams that we have, the leadership that God has given. Each one of you is such a blessing.

But most importantly, as Ajay alluded to it, we must be thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life so that we wouldn't have to bear the penalty of sin – eternal separation from God. Instead, we now have the assurance of eternal life, living constantly, eternally in His presence. We should also be thankful for the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts, guiding us into truth, warning us about sin and addictive behaviors, and helping us understand God's heart, His mind, His plans and His purposes for each one of us.

And finally, we need to be thankful to God the Father for His incredible love for us. The Bible tells us that God so loved each one of us, that He sent His only Son to die for us, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal everlasting life. and so we say thank You Lord, for all You have done.

We are not alone in this journey of gratitude. Throughout history, many have faced adversity and challenges, and yet, responded with hearts full of thankfulness. Look at some of the powerful examples. But before that, let me lay a foundation from scripture of God wanting us to be thankful in spite of everything that goes on in our lives. Just a few!

Thessalonians 5:18 *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"* It reminds us that we should be thankful not just as an occasional practice, but in all situations.

Colossians 3:15-17 *“15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 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.”*

Philippians 4:6 *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

Psalms 100:4-5 *“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” Why? For the Lord is good, and His love endures forever, and His faithfulness continues throughout all generations.”*

Ephesians 5:20, Psalm 107:1, Hebrews 12:28, Colossians 2:6-7. Read them later. All of these passages remind us to cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving in all situations, recognizing God’s provision, love, and sovereignty in every aspect of our lives.

EXAMPLES FROM SCRIPTURE

Job – Gratitude in the midst of suffering.

Job’s story is one of the most profound examples of maintaining a thankful heart, even in the midst of unimaginable suffering. Job lost his wealth, his children, his health. But, instead of cursing God, he said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” though he had moments of deep, deep anguish, he continued to trust God through his trials. And in the end, Job’s faith was rewarded. God restored his fortunes, blessing him with even more than he had before.

Corrie Ten Boom – Thankfulness in a concentration camp.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Christian woman who, along with her family, helped Jews escape the Nazi holocaust during World War 2. She was eventually incarcerated for what she was doing, and sent to a concentration camp. But in a book that she wrote, ‘The Hiding Place’, Corrie recounts how she and her sister, Betsy, gave thanks to God even in the most horrific conditions, including thanking God for the fleas that were in the barracks at that time, which seemed completely unreasonable. And yet, Corrie says, “Betsy reminded me of 1 Thessalonians – give thanks in all situations including this flea-infested place, for this is God’s will for you.” Later, they realized the fleas kept the Nazi guards away from their particular barracks. And they were able to hold prayer meetings for the women there, offering hope and encouragement.

Joni Erickson Tada – Gratitude despite disability.

Christian author, speaker – she was left paralyzed when she dove into the Chesapeake Bay, thinking it was the deep end, while it was the shallow end. And she broke her neck. She’s been a quadriplegic for over 50 to 60 years. but she says that giving thanks is not a matter of feeling thankful. It’s a matter of obedience. Joni has travelled the world, 195 countries, telling everybody who sits in a wheelchair that you still have a purpose in life.

Nick Vujicic – Born without arms or legs.

He didn’t let his physical limitations stop him from living life full of gratitude, joy, and purpose. Nick is now a motivational speaker and evangelist, sharing his story of overcoming adversity and trusting God’s plan for his life. Can you imagine that? No arms, no legs. And yet, out there talking about God’s plan for him in spite of his limitation. He says in his book ‘Life Without Limits’, “I never imagined that my lack of limbs would help me reach so many millions of hearts. People often ask me how I can be

so happy without arms and legs. The quick answer is that I have a choice. I can be angry about not having limbs, or I can be thankful that I have a purpose in life.” What a statement!

Horatio Spafford – Thankfulness in the midst of tragedy.

He was a successful lawyer and businessman, who experienced great personal tragedy. First, his only son died of pneumonia. Second, he lost all his business in the fire in Chicago in the early century, 1918. Then, seeking solace, Spafford sent his wife and four daughters on a ship to Europe, intending to join them later. Tragically, the ship sank, and his four daughters perished. His wife survived and sent him, what is now known as a very famous telegram: ‘Saved Alone’. While travelling to meet his grieving wife, Spafford passed the spot where the ship had gone down. and in the midst of his profound grief, he penned the words to the hymn: It is Well with my Soul.

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot. Thou hast taught me to say,
it is well, it is well with my soul.

And his gratitude in the face of such unspeakable loss has inspired millions through the timeless message of this hymn, reminding us that faith and gratitude can sustain us through our darkened trials.

Why does gratitude matter? Because gratitude isn’t just a nice feeling. Gratitude is a powerful spiritual practice that transforms us. How?

- Gratitude shifts our focus. When we are thankful, we take our eyes off of our problems and fix them on God’s provision.
- Gratitude builds faith. By remembering what God has done in the past, we trust Him even more in the future.
- Gratitude leads to peace.

Philippians 4:6 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, and the peace of God will rest upon you.”

So, beloved, where are you in this part of your life? do you need to practice gratitude in some area. Maybe it’s to do with relationships. Maybe it has to do with your finances. Maybe it’s to do with your job or your health.

HOW DO WE CULTIVATE GRATITUDE?

1. Reflect on God’s goodness.

Take time to daily reflect on what God has done for you. The song “Count Your Blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”

For me, the most important word there is the word surprise. Because we forget the things that God has done. And when we think about it, we are surprised and say, “My goodness! I didn’t realize that.” Start with gratitude, reflecting on God’s goodness.

2. Give thanks in all circumstances.

Like Job, Paul and Silas, singing in the prison. When we live with thankful hearts, we inspire others to do the same. Take time, maybe this week, to thank someone who has been a blessing in your life, whether it’s a family member or a co-worker or a friend.

3. Share gratitude with others.

Gratitude is contagious. When we live with thankful hearts, we inspire others to do the same. People look at us and say, "My goodness! In the midst of what you are going through, you have such a grateful disposition," and they are inspired. So, maybe as you look at this week, think about how you can allow the wonderful aroma of God's presence to rise as a fragrant offering to Him, that will touch people around you as well.

I want to challenge you today. Let's not wait for everything to be perfect in our lives before we express gratitude. Whether life is easy or hard right now, we are called to give thanks. And it is this act of thankfulness that we draw nearer to God and experience His peace, His joy, and His provision in our lives. So, let's commit to being a people who practice gratitude, who see God's hand in every season of their life and choose to say, like Horatio Spafford: It is well with my soul.

I want to close with these two illustrations.

Roy Lessin wrote a poem that goes like this.

It's easy to be thankful when life is going well,
When days are warm and sunny, and the world feels right and swell.
But what about the storms of life, the trials, pain, and strife?
It's then a thankful heart we need to guide us through the night.

A heart that knows God's perfect will in all things works for good.
that sees His hand and hears His voice and trusts Him as we should.
For in the hardest times of all, when life feels most unfair,
God calls us to be thankful still, for He is always there."

So let us not just thank him for the blessings we can see,
but for the grace and strength He gives in every victory.

Many of you have read Matthew Henry's commentaries over the years, and they've been such a blessing to us as we've done Bible studies. At one point, he writes that he had his wallet stolen by thieves. After the incident, he sat down to reflect on what had happened, and surprisingly expressed gratitude. Here's how he phrased his thoughts. He wrote down 4 things as he reflected on the incident.

- "I'm thankful that I was never robbed before;"
- "Although they took my purse, they did not take my life;"
- "Although they took all I possessed, it was not much;"
- "I'm thankful that it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

What a beautiful expression, of being thankful even in that kind of a situation. And his example challenges us to view life's difficulties through a lens of gratitude. Even in moments when everything seems to go wrong, when we face loss or pain or disappointment, there's still room for thankfulness. Like Matthew Henry, we can choose to focus on that, not on what we have lost, but on what remains and what God is still doing in our lives. This attitude is not just about being thankful for the obvious blessings, but about cultivating a heart that trusts God in all situations. It's about remembering that no matter what happens, God is with us, not just in the good times but in the bad as well.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever. Take a moment church. I want to invite you to bow your heads. And maybe think of two or three things that you can be thankful for. Then take those things to the Lord and say, "Lord, today, in spite of all that is going on in my life, I want to say thank you. Thank you. And all God's people said, "Amen."

