

## Give Thanks: A Thanksgiving Message (2<sup>nd</sup> version from 2018)

This week, our country celebrates a wonderful holiday: Thanksgiving. For non-Christians and Christians alike, we meet together with families and friends to enjoy good company, good food, good time off from work, etc. And from one perspective, we remember the blessings of God on our country and the great prosperity He has given to us. But, for the Christian, thanksgiving means so much more than these things. Our thanksgiving is directed to God, from who ALL blessing come down to us. With this in mind, I would like to deviate from Hebrews this week and reflect on thanksgiving. I want to answer 3 questions: 1) Why do we give thanks; 2) What do we give thanks for; and 3) How do we give thanks. So, let's begin.

1. Why do we give thanks? In the beginning God created Adam and Eve. And though we do not see the word thanksgiving or "giving of thanks," I believe they were a thankful couple. I am sure after naming all the animals and seeing there were none like him that when God created Eve, his heart was one of great feelings of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving was imprinted upon their hearts. They knew they were the creation of God. They knew they were special in his eyes. They knew he loved them with great care. As they looked around the Garden of Eden and the surrounding world, I am sure they gave thanks in their hearts and in their words to God's great care over them. And such is the case of mankind. Eternity is written in our hearts; and part of our make-up is the ability to give thanks. (This goes for the world as well.) What a beautiful gift! And there is something about giving thanks, saying "*thank you*" that brings some kind of heart-felt satisfaction to the one who says it and the one who receives it. There is something within us that feels gratitude when good things happen to us. So, at the most basic level, we owe this beautiful gift of thanksgiving to God, the ONE from whom ALL blessings flow.

With this in mind, today, we find ourselves in a different situation than Adam and Eve. And as people of faith in Christ, from one perspective we have so much more to be thankful for. You might say, "*No way pastor Jon, Adam and Eve had it great. Look at my life. Look at my troubles. Look at the chaos surrounding my life and my family.*" Well, if that is the only way you see life, then you miss the point. You see, we live after the fall. Before the fall, there was no need for the goodness of God in showing mercy. Today, in Christ, we are the recipients of abundant grace and mercy. Sin and death give rise to mercy and grace! And this is the work of God in Christ. (Merciful high priest from last week) Therefore, the foundation of our thanksgiving is GOD HIMSELF as He displays WHO He is by what He does.

2. What do we give thanks for? What are the specifics? I will begin with one big blessing and then move down to some very special specifics. And the list is really endless. But, first . . .

We give thanks for the steadfast love of God. This truth encompasses everything else. It is the umbrella of WHO He is and What He has done, and will do. This is why in 1 Cor. Paul says faith and hope will pass away, but love will not. Love is eternal. For God is love! And then, we see a description of love, "steadfast love." As I looked up the words "*thanksgiving*," and "*give thanks*," I was overwhelmed with how many times Israel gave thanks for God's "steadfast love" (194 times). Psalm 106:1 is very common: "**Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!**" In Psalm 136 we see a beautiful picture of WHO God is and WHAT He has done in the life of his people. Let me read some of these words. And notice how the Psalmist begins with God, WHO He is, and then moves to His works, the things He has done for his people. In vv. 1-5 we read: "**Give thanks to the LORD, for he is**

good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever; to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Next, the Psalmist says it is the steadfast love of God that delivered Israel from Egypt. Vv. 10-12: **“To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever; and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures forever; with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his steadfast love endures forever.”** And finally, at the end, the Psalmist says God’s steadfast love is the why He does not forsake them. Vv. 23-24: **“It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever; and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever.”**

Now, let me ask, *“How many times do we see the words ‘steadfast love’ in the NT?”* Any guesses? Not once! Why do you think this is so? I am sure I know the answer. And when I realized it in my study, I cannot explain the feeling of praise and thanksgiving for the steadfast love of God. You see, in the OT, they felt God’s love by His Spirit. They knew he loved them because of the things we just read in Psalm 136. He pursued them. He showed them longsuffering. He protected them. He did not forget them, but loved them, even while they were yet sinners.

How do you know someone loves you? You know it because of what he/she does. Wives, you know it when your husband brings you flowers. You know it when he does acts of kindness, especially acts of sacrificial love. Israel knew the steadfast love of God! But, that’s all they had, acts of power. And they did have a sacrificial system. But, there was no end to the death of those animals, the daily sacrifices year after year. And yes, God gave that system in love, as they looked beyond the death of those animals to the ONE who could bring life. But, the fulfillment of that steadfast love was yet to come. In the meantime they were saying, **“Thank you God for your steadfast love!”**

But, when we get to the NT, we see the COMPLETE fulfillment of God’s steadfast love Today, Christ, his person, and his work, is the steadfast love of God. (From last week, He is the Faithful & Merciful High Priest!) What we have in Christ is fulness! Yes, we give thanks for ALL the works of God. But, when we think of God’s steadfast love, we can look no further than Christ. This is the Gospel! This is why I believe we don’t see the word “steadfast love” together in the NT. Everything, EVERY bit of who God is, EVERY single work, etc. is found in Christ. If you want to see steadfast love. Look to Christ! **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son . . . “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”** (1 John 4:10). **“But God shows his love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Rom. 5:8). This is the steadfastness of God’s love **“even while we were yet still sinners.”** We don’t have to look forward to see the steadfast love of God in Christ. The greatest act of steadfast love is the sending of the Son, particularly the cross! So today as Christians, we give thanks for Christ, who is the steadfast love of God. And here we must begin. Every thought, every word, every ounce of thanksgiving to God flows through Christ, who is the image of the invisible God!

Now, I want us to consider (from the NT) some of the things we give thanks for.

We give thanks for the great power of God. **“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign . . .”**

We give thanks to God for his work of salvation in people’s lives. 1 Cor. 1:4: **“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus . . .”** 2 Thess. 2:13: **“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”** Here, Paul gives thanks specifically for what God has done in salvation.

We give thanks when God answers our prayers. 2 Cor. 1:11: **“You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.”**

We give thanks as we pray for one another. Eph. 1:16: **“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers . . .”** 1 Thess. 1:2: **“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers”** There are a number of verses like this.

We give thanks for the will of God in our lives at all times; this means difficult times. 1 Thess. 5:18: **“I give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”**

We give thanks for acts of kindness. Rom. 16:4: **“who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.”**

We give thanks to God for how he is working in the lives of his people. A good example is growth in faith and love. In 2 Thess. 1:3 we read: **“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.”**

With these in mind, I would like to spend a few minutes with some specifics within our own congregation. I think I represent the elders in these. There are so many!

We are thankful for all the folks that serve weekly without any compensation. Home group leaders, SS teachers, Anita and Sharon and Kinzey for Lord's Supper prep through the years, musicians, vocalists, Greg, JB, Caleb, and the sound/ video team, Pam and our coffee, and so much more.

We are thankful for our deacons and their wives who serve so faithfully behind the scenes. There is so much work and we don't always know how much. (Nobody knows how much Michael does with our finances.) But thank you!

We are thankful for a church willing to spend money to make mission trips affordable.

We are thankful for godly parents in our congregation raising kids who love the Gospel.

We are thankful for your willingness to do meals and serve those in need.

We are thankful for a congregation willing to follow their elders.

We are so thankful for simplicity.

We are thankful that as a whole, you have a great desire for the truth and you care deeply about holding on to the gospel of Christ! Personally, I am grateful for all your patience for so many years as I preach.

We are thankful for all of those who meet together during the week, reading books, praying together, and keeping one another accountable. I give thanks for the 8 guys that are committed to meet this year as we read good books and think about important things, pray together, memorize Scripture, as we grow in godliness. What a blessing!

Also from the elders: We are thankful of your love for us.

We are thankful that you care for us.

We are thankful for the trust you have for us; for the confidence you have in us to be your shepherds.

We are very thankful you hold us accountable.

We are thankful that you support the Bible so willingly in your desire to have a plurality of leadership. Many churches are not so blessed!

Personally, I must say thank you to the elders who care for me and look after me. I could not do this without them. And, I could mention a THOUSAND other things through the years. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! So many other things I could say.

3. In closing, How do we give thanks? We give thanks continually and with a heart of thankfulness.

**“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers . . .”** This is a characteristic of the people of God. We are ALWAYS thankful! We cannot help it! If you are not a thankful person, and these truths do not resound with your heart, you must ask yourself, how is your heart. For God’s people are thankful always, in season, out of season, good times, bad times, through life and death, God is good! For his steadfast love (in Christ) surely endures forever.

And not only do we do it always, we do it with a heart that is grateful. It is one thing to say, “thank you.” But it is another to be grateful in your heart. Heb. 12:28: **“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe . . .”** This is really key: the heart. God’s children have a heart that flows with thankfulness, with gratefulness. It is who we are. We have so much to be thankful for every day. But, here at Thanksgiving, we are reminded of it more specifically. Let’s pray and give thanks in closing.