

# THANKSGIVING IS NOT A ONE-DAY CELEBRATION

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IT'S ABOUT A LIFE  
OF SURRENDER  
AND PRAISE



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BY ABBY TRIVETT

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**W**e are called to be grateful at all times, regardless of the circumstances. While that may seem like an utter cliché said by people of faith, there's a deeper truth and a greater joy that is found when we truly trust God and believe that He not only can and will do something for us, but that He already is merciful and gracious simply because of who He is.

I'm the first to admit that I am not always filled with gratitude. When things don't go exactly as I planned or in the timeline I set up for myself, I can easily fall into an attitude of bitterness and resentment because God didn't do what I wanted. What's even worse, is when God gives exactly what we planned or prayed for, yet the complaint exists because He didn't do something in the way that was desired. Yet, isn't that exactly human nature to become upset and impatient simply because the world doesn't revolve around every single thing we'd like it to?

We can easily look back at the Israelites and see the same thing in this group of people. They experienced hundreds of years of struggle, yet God always vindicated them and brought them out of the darkness and into the light. What did God do

after the Israelites spent 400 years in slavery? Their Egyptian captors experienced torment through plagues of disaster, unnatural impossibilities and death to their firstborns. What happened when the Israelites were pursued by these same people? God miraculously parted the Red Sea so they could escape while their enemies drowned. And yet, even after experiencing such refuge, this same group of people God had saved time and time again had enough nerve to complain about the food they were miraculously fed by God day after day.

We might think that the Israelites were just extra picky and ungrateful. But how often do we experience God do the supernatural and yet we still complain about what He's bestowed upon us?

Often we find ourselves complaining about the job we asked for, the friends that we prayed for, or the vast food selection we have to pick from. Just as the Israelites were blessed by God in supernatural ways, God has done the same for us. The Israelites were fed manna, drank from streams out of the rocks and were led by the Spirit of God by cloud by day and by fire at night. He provided for their every need, and He's done the same in our nation, whether or not we see it. While many still



have vast needs, we have been placed in a spot where resources are abundant if only we used them to help our neighbors out the way God has commanded us to love one another.

It's not unusual though that we wouldn't necessarily pay attention to the gravity of thankfulness. After all, the very definition of being thankful is "conscious of benefit received." Gratitude is not an innate part of our fleshly, sinful nature. Gratitude requires a mindful decision to take in all that we have been given, how God is moving in our lives and what we believe He will still do.

### **What Is the Purpose of Gratitude?**

Gratitude draws us closer to God. Thanking God for all He has done and for who He is keeps life in perspective. A few years ago, at a life group, my own perspective was completely shifted about thankfulness when we were asked one simple question. "If all you had was what you thanked God for today, what would you have?"

This simple, yet thought-provoking question hit me in an entirely new way. I realized how rarely I thanked God for the things He was providing for me. He had given me so much more than I ever considered: Family who loved me, friends who cared, top-notch educational opportunities, and yet, I hadn't even thought of those items as blessings. Instead, I only saw the issues that surrounded me, the complaints of what wasn't perfect in my life.

My mindset needed to shift, and during that time I began to take more time to thank God for what He had given me. I remember how this type of gratitude not only changed my attitude about life, but it increased my heart capacity to love God even more. While I am far from perfect and slip into moments of bitterness, I am constantly reminded of the beauty of gratitude because of this one short, profound question.

For most of us, "Thank You, Jesus, for the roof over my head," does not occur as the first thought of the day, but it should. Thanking God for the clothes, the job, the food, the family, the friends, whatever it is that you have, is something that God deserves the glory for. He literally created an entire world for us purely for

the reason that He loves His children. Not only that, He has provided for our every need and given us the greatest gift we could ever have through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Psalms are the perfect reading spot to find the wide range of every possible human emotion expressed to God through song and prayer. It's one of the books of the Bible that allows us to have a glimpse into the raw, beautiful and ugly human emotions experienced and how they relate to our Creator. They also show what it means to praise the Lord in all circumstances, whether it's at the top of the mountain or in the bottom of the valley.

Psalm 138 shows what it means to praise the Lord wholeheartedly: "I will

**“In this season of Thanksgiving when people acknowledge blessings, it's important not to forget that God has called us to be thankful each day.”**

praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing Your praise. I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your loving-kindness and for Your truth; for You have exalted Your word above all your name," (vv. 1-2). Psalm 100:4-5 demonstrates the pure, unadulterated purpose and affection of thanksgiving that the Lord deserves, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise; be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations."

A completely holy and faithful God who so willingly gave up Himself for us deserves every bit of praise with every ounce of our hearts. He deserves all the honor, glory and praise because only He could have seen us exactly as we were, torn and drenched in sin, and yet still

chose to die the most gruesome death of all history for our sake. We are called to praise God before every other thing, and to do so in a way that acknowledges He alone is the Lord. We are called to be grateful before God and men.

When we are filled with this type of genuine, heartfelt gratitude, God can and does answer our prayers according to His good and perfect plan. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God."

Just as the Lord is pure, He too is looking for pure hearts that are refined daily to be more like Christ. When we position our prayers with the grander understanding and belief that He is good, we can expectantly come to the throne of grace knowing that God will hear us and answer according to His perfect will and timing.

### **Thanksgiving Is for Every Day of the Year**

In this season of Thanksgiving when people actively acknowledge blessings and what they have been given, it's important not to forget that God hasn't called us to be thankful one time a year, but each and every day. Thanksgiving can easily become a one-day event that has little to do with actual gratitude; a blink of an eye wedged in between a season of spiritual darkness as the world celebrates Halloween and the Christmas season that has evolved from being about Christ into a day about how many gifts we will give and receive. But the danger of skipping out on a true season of thanksgiving shows the actual condition of the human heart. We desire more to receive than to give. Yet, the Scriptures tell us that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," (Acts 20:35).

If we allow thanksgiving to be just another holiday, we miss out on rest and peace rooted in Christ. The immediate rush of scouting out midnight specials of marked down TVs pales in comparison to the long-term glory that can only be experienced with a heart-posture of gratitude. Thankfulness isn't about the materialistic things that we will receive. It's about the One

who delights to give us far and above all that we could ever ask for or imagine.

What I've always loved about Thanksgiving isn't the turkey, football or the pumpkin pie. It's a time to celebrate those that we care most about. It's a reminder of the gift God has given each of us to love and be loved by others. Ephesians 5:20 advises that believers give thanks to God always for all things. What better gift to praise God for than the gift of the people you love?

It's a time to reflect on the faithfulness of the Lord and all that He's given to us. Deuteronomy 7:9 is a reminder of this faithfulness as it reads: "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps covenant and mercy with them who love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations."

When you put God's faithfulness in perspective, it's amazing to see that He cares about our livelihood even more than we do, and He desires to bring blessing and favor to our families and that will extend into a legacy long after we are gone. Spending time with those we have been graced to know and love is what the Thanksgiving holiday should be all about. While the food may be delicious and the entertainment may be amusing, it is the faithfulness of the Lord that allows us to walk in this kind of fellowship with the ones we care about most.

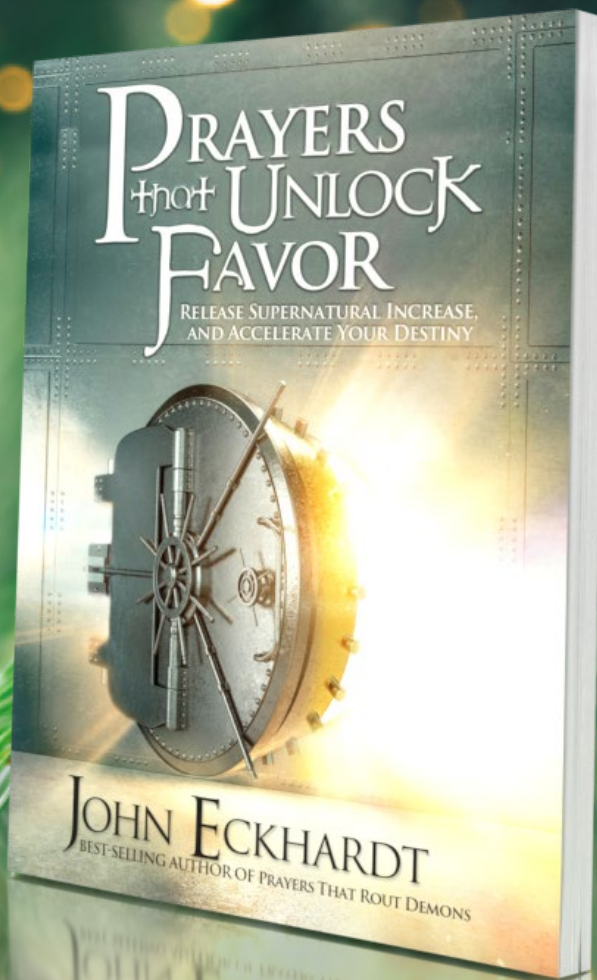
I encourage you as we approach this time when shopping becomes more frequent, cooking starts to increase and commotion grows, do not take your eyes off the One who has made all of it possible. It is a gift to celebrate with family and friends, and this gift is not one that we provided for ourselves. From the very breath in our lungs to the people and jobs in our lives, it is all a gift from God. Every good and perfect gift comes directly from Him.

Do not take for granted what has been freely given by God who so intimately loves you that He took your very place on a rugged cross all for the sake of love. ◀

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