

Prayer and Gratefulness

P. Douglas Small - *Resource for the Great Days of Prayer*

THESIS: All prayer is to be wrapped in an attitude of gratitude! Great and godly people are *grateful* people.

Key Ideas:

- ◆ Gratitude forces a review of the gracious acts of God in our behalf, and it alters our perspective in prayer.
- ◆ Gratitude fuses with humility, which invites God's further grace. "*He resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble*" (James 4:6). Gratitude is the gateway to greater grace.
- ◆ Tracing the gracious hand of God on our lives increases faith, and releases us from fretful and faithless praying.
- ◆ Turning to see the goodness of God in our lives, his deliberate interventions, heightens our sense of His love for us, and "faith works by love!" (Gal. 5:6) As we know, faithless prayers fail to get heaven's attention.
- ◆ Gratitude is the evidence that acknowledge the Father's loving actions, his involvement in our lives. For the most part, we don't have a *faith* problem, we have a *love* problem. We do not doubt the *ability* of God nearly as much as we doubt the *willingness* of God.
- ◆ Counting our blessings heightens our sense of God's love.

Prayer Plan:

1. Begin with songs of thanksgiving. At any point, after you begin to pray, be prepared to move back into song, but do so spontaneously. Pray, and then sing. And then pray again – as the Lord leads. Be less formal, more impromptu.
2. Read Thanksgiving and Gratitude Passages. Use those in the power point presentation. Or have a few individuals read their favorite gratitude passage, and then pray out of that passage.
3. Share the principles (below).
4. Do Gratitude Praying.
 - a. Everyone lifts their voice and prays corporately. "Individually, together" - they offer thanks to God with voices blended.
 - b. Have 2-3 people come to a microphone and pray specific prayers of gratitude to God. You may do this several times in the evening.
 - c. Do a directed prayer segment. Ask the congregation to complete a sentence prayer in a spontaneous manner – one at a time. You may have to repeat the words and phrases so all in the audience can hear each response. You are now slowing the rhythm of prayer to get everyone involved individually. Don't confuse the more deliberate speed and the less intense volume with a reduction in spirituality. Here are some prayer starters. The leader prays the first section of the prayer, and then allows the audience to respond.
 - i. *God, you have been so good to me. I remember when you ...* (people pray some specific intervention of God in their life.)
 - ii. *This week, you answered a prayer for me when you ...* (again, you are looking for short prayers, only phrases. Long prayers will bog the process down.)



iii. *God, I want to thank you for ...*

(NOTE: The temptation is to *share*, not *pray*! Going horizontal changes the dynamic. It affects the texture of the moment. It moves the focus *from God, to us* – one another. Insist, “*Don’t share it. Pray it.*” It may be awkward at first, but it will become natural and flowing.)

5. Use the power point slides to reinforce the principles. Have the people read the pride-humility contrasts. Have certain people read the passages about thanksgiving. Choose certain themes around which you can pray as a congregation. Read, and pray! Lace prayer and thanksgiving into the whole evening.
6. Go into small groups and have people pray in the groups. Remember that intimate groups are 3-5. Optimal groups for a prayer circle like this is 5-7. Larger groups lose intimacy both in terms of physical space (distance) and participation. Insist – no lines – circles of prayer. If some prefer to pray alone, or at the altar, don’t force the issue. You may move in and out of small groups several times in the course of the evening.
7. Let the Holy Spirit lead. Open the altars. Tell people, “At any time, you are free to come the altar, or turn and make an altar of your seat.” Structure your prayer event, but allow for flexibility. Give God the leadership.

PRINCIPLES



All of prayer can be understood in three categories [Power Point Slide #2: contains 2 animations] – *Communion with God*, *Petition* (personal prayer requests) and *intercession* (prayer for others, especially for the lost). The heart of prayer is communion with God. This is our love relationship with Him. In fact, the right of requesting things from God (petition) is dependent on the quality of our communion with Him – “*You may ask anything,*” Jesus said, “*if you abide in me!*” (John 15). Of course, prayer should never be a selfish thing, a practice and privilege only used for ourselves. If the *highest* call of prayer is communion with God, then the *noblest* use of prayer is intercession for others.

Yet, all of this – *communion, intercession and petition* – is wrapped in a fourth element of prayer. That element is “*thanksgiving.*” Thanksgiving orients the posture of our heart before we pray. As we trace the hand of God through thanks, our minds are injected with faith as we pray. Thanksgiving recalls the active role of God in past answers to prayer. It is the ultimate attitude adjuster in prayer. We are told to “give thanks” thirty-nine times (NKJ). To bring a “thanks offering” four times. To bring a “sacrifice of thanks” nine times. Over one-hundred times in Scripture we find the word “thanks.”

“*No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.*” [Power Point Slide #3] So said Saint Ambrose. Henry Ward Beecher charged, “*None is more impoverished than the one who has no gratitude. Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grows. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.*”

C. S. Lewis observed, “*We often, almost sulkily, reject the good that God offers us because, at the moment, we expected some other good.*”¹

¹ Kevin and Jackie Friedberg. *Boom – Seven Choices for Blowing Business Off the Doors as Usual* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN; 2007), 138.



*“An ungrateful heart always sees what is wrong with the world and cynically makes nothing out of something. Gratitude, on the other hand, sees what is right with the world and usually finds something meaningful in nothing.”*² Thanksgiving is the pivot point separating pride and humility. [Power Point Slide #4] Gratitude is the child of humility. Ungratefulness is the child of pride. Thanksgiving expresses dependence! Pride expresses independence. Thanksgiving remains tender! Pride tends to be hard. Thanksgiving is appreciative! Pride is demanding. Thanksgiving is sweet and optimistic! Pride is often bitter and disappointed. Thanksgiving gives credit and praise – easily! Pride desires credit and praise addictively. Thanksgiving knows a big God! Pride knows a small God. Thanksgiving says, “God is so good!” Pride says, “I am so good!” Thanksgiving is full of God! Pride is full of self.

Someone said, *“The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.”*³ According to Scripture, we are to give thanks [Power Point Slide #5-6]:

- ◆ AT HOME – Daniel 6:10
- ◆ AT MEAL TIME – in Public (Matthew 15:36)
- ◆ COMMUNION - MATTHEW 26:27
- ◆ TIMES OF CRISIS - Acts 27:33-35
- ◆ IN WORSHIP - I Corinthians 14:16
- ◆ CONTINUALLY – Hebrews 13:15
- ◆ IN EVERYTHING - I Thessalonians 5:18

Thanksgiving is not limited to “spiritual or church environments.” We are to give thanks [Power Point Slide #7-9: 1 animation in slide #9]:

- ◆ AT THE GATES OF THE TABERNACLE. Coming in to the house of the Lord – I am to offer thanksgiving! The sound of gratitude begins in the parking lot.
- ◆ IN THE CONGREGATION – Public (Psalm 35:18)
- ◆ AT THE GATES OF THE CITY – Nehemiah 12:24
- ◆ AT THE WALLS OF THE CITY - Nehemiah 12:27
- ◆ THROUGHOUT THE CITY – Nehemiah 12:31-42
- ◆ AMONG THE UNSAVED, WE ARE TO SING! (II Sam. 22:50)

Thanksgiving may be the most underutilized evangelism tool in our soul-winning arsenal.

Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name. (II Sam. 22:50)

Let me shout God’s name with a praising song, Let me tell his greatness in a prayer of thanks. Psalm 69:30

In II Chronicles 16:8, the Bible declares [Power Point Slide #9: contains 1 animation]:

Give thanks unto the LORD, Call upon his name, Make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, Sing Psalms unto him, Talk ye of all his wondrous works.

Watch the principles here – Give thanks unto the Lord. That’s *thanksgiving*. Call upon his name. That’s *prayer invoking the name* of God. Make known his deeds among the people. That’s *open thanksgiving*. It is *a declaration of God’s present action*. He is alive. He answers prayer. He is a good God.

² Friedberg, 133.

³ Freiberg, 137.

Movement - II Chronicles 16:8

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| • Give thanks unto the LORD, | □ Thanksgiving |
| • Call upon his name, | □ Prayer – Invoking His name! |
| • Make known his deeds among the people. | □ Evangelism! |
| • Sing unto him, | □ Worship/Praise by Song |
| • Sing Psalms unto him, | □ Scripture-based Worship |
| • Talk ye of all his wondrous works. | □ Evangelism |



The psalmist continues. Sing unto him. That's *thanksgiving* again. Sing psalms. That's *Scripture-based praise*. Talk of all his wondrous works. That's *proclamation*. Arguably, *evangelism*.

Give thanks	Thanksgiving
Call on his name	Prayer invoking his name
Make know his deeds	Evangelism

<i>Sing</i>	<i>Worship in song</i>
<i>Sing Psalms</i>	<i>Scripture-based praise</i>
<i>Talk ye of his works</i>	<i>Evangelism</i>

Thankful, Worshipful people are the best evangelist! Evangelism flows out most naturally from a grateful heart!

Why give thanks? [Power Point #11-12]

◆ **FOR THE GOODNESS AND MERCY OF GOD! - Psalm 79:13**

Give thanks to the LORD; he is good; his mercy endures forever. Say, Save us, God our salvation, gather us ... deliver us ... that we may give thanks to thy holy name.

◆ **FOR HIS HOLINESS - Psalm 30:4**

Sing ... saints ... give thank as you remember his holiness. We magnify him for those who cannot yet see Him – Psalm 69:30-33

I will praise the name of God ... and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This pleases the LORD better than a sacrifice ... The humble shall see this, and be glad and your heart shall live that seek God. For the LORD hears the poor, and despises not his prisoners.

◆ **REDEEMED – Psalm 107:1-2**

O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endures for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.

◆ **RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENTS – Psalm 119:62**

At midnight I will rise to give thanks because of your righteous judgments. I am a companion of those that fear you ... that keep your precepts. The earth, LORD, is full of your mercy: teach me your statutes.

◆ **VICTORY – I Corinthians 15:7**

But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 15:7

Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, II Corinthians 2:14

◆ **INHERITANCE – Colossians 1:12-14**

Giving thanks to the Father, who has made us partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ... has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even forgiveness of sins: Col. 1:12

It is obvious. We are not to be silent about the goodness of God. Even among the unsaved, we are to declare and credit the hand of God. Our silence is a sin. [Power Point # 13]

Move again to random praise. Use the power point as prayer cues. [Power Point # 14-15]



PRACTICAL TIPS

If you simply ask people to offer thanks, the session will be short and perhaps, not even sweet. So some coaching is important.

Here are some practical tips:

1. Introduce the principle – *All prayer is to be wrapped in thanksgiving. It is the way we enter the presence of God. We come “thanking!”*
2. Have one or two people, no more than three, *plan* to pray a prayer of thanksgiving for some special thing God did in their life. Ask them beforehand. Tell them to pray a sincere but brief prayer. No more than 2-3 minutes.
3. Read Scriptures on Thanksgiving!
4. Have people randomly call out the things for which they are thankful. Have them use only words or phrases. As they call the words and phrases out, repeat what they prayerfully offer to God.
5. Use circles of prayer – 5-7 people. Encourage them to pray around their circle, each praying, one after the other.
6. Have moments in which everyone lifts their voice together, in passionate thanksgiving.
7. Have quiet prayers, where everyone listens to one person pray, and quietly agrees. Don’t fear quiet.

