

GRATITUDE
EVANGEL ARTICLE
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"You are not a grateful person!" It was silent thunder. My conviction and trial lasted only a split second. I plead guilty. For three days, God spoke to me about thanksgiving. I had been rushing into prayer without thanksgiving. That reveals us. It is a relationship without a history. Thanksgiving is critical to a fruitful prayer-life because of what it says about the relationship. We "enter into his gates with thanksgiving." It is the dominate attitude gauge of the heart.

Chesterton noted, "Thanks are the highest form of thought – gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder." The word *thanks* is from the word *thought*. It's a mindset rising out of reflective moments that gaze on the goodness of God. But we are not a thinking culture, we are feeling culture. Our anxious feelings about tomorrow cloud our thinking today. Mark Twain once said, "I am an old man and I have known a great many troubles, most of them never happened." This focus of fear paralyzes faith-based praying.

Here is how. We pray "God, help me!" prayers that are really frantic expressions of fear, not really prayers at all. They are heart-rumbles. Try pushing back "God, help me!" prayers. Reflect on the goodness of God. Name things for which you are grateful. Make a list. You will see the fingerprints of God on your life. Faith will rise. Praise will pour out of your heart. That discipline of gratitude will transform your attitude! Peace will come.

Thank him. "God, I am thankful that you saved me, delivered me, healed me, watched over me, provided for me!" A baptism in gratitude will awaken your heart to God's goodness. You will ask, "What kind of God does these things?" Only a saving God, saves. A healing God, heals! A delivering God, delivers. Here is a God like no other – provider, protector, friend, guide, companion. Tomorrow's worries will fade. Suddenly, thanksgiving will give way to praise. Praise is beyond thanksgiving. Thanksgiving celebrates the actions of a benevolent God, but praise celebrates the goodness of God himself. These are the ways we brag on God! The words *thank* and *thanksgiving* are translated from the Hebrew *yadah!* It means to acknowledge or declare publicly. Your thanksgiving was never meant to be a private matter. It is an expression of our Godward joy! Contagious.

Ingratitude is now a cultural disease. Selfish people are "lovers of themselves ... *unthankful*." (II Timothy 3:1-2). On the ground of ungratefulness, a society pivots and self-destructs – "they knew God, but they did not glorify Him as God, *nor were they thankful* ... and God gave them up." (Romans 1:20-21) A Laodicean church, shaped by its culture - rich, wealthy and in need of nothing - is no help at all. It only reflects the sickness around it.

Our most underutilized evangelism tool – is thanksgiving. Henry Beecher declared, "Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally

grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.”

The ark of the Lord was coming into Jerusalem, and a chorus of thanksgiving rang out: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! (I Chronicles 16:8-9). There are three movements here – given twice. 1. Give thanks – that’s a call to gratitude. 2. Call on His name – that’s prayer that invokes his name. 3. Make known his deeds – that’s evangelism. The triplet repeats in verse nine. 1. Sing – that’s praise! 2. Sing Psalms – that’s scripture-based worship. 3. Talk of his wonderful works! – that’s evangelism. Thanksgiving leads through prayer and worship to evangelism. Evangelism flows most naturally out of grateful heart. Ungrateful people never make good evangelists. And guilt-based evangelism rarely has lasting results. Enduring conversions result from encounters with positive thankful Christians.

Thanksgiving is the gratitude of a satisfied Christian. Offered sincerely, it is one of the few remaining ways to publicly witness in an increasingly pluralistic age. “Thank God! I prayed – and I got an answer! I am so grateful to God! God spared me, he helped me! It was an answer to prayer!”

If gratitude to God in good times is an underutilized evangelism tool, think about the power of a grateful and positive attitude in tough times. Assume that *the good life* is a right – and you will diminish happiness. You will also eliminate a powerful component in your witness. Seeing God’s goodness in lean times, praising him in the midst of trials, singing in the face of fury – that is when a grateful becomes a great Christian. In Hebrew, the word for gratitude is *hoda’ah*, also used for confession. My confession is never stronger, than when I dance in the face of difficulty.

The first American thanksgiving was celebrated in 1621 by people whose venture had been so hazardous that they had been admonished to draft their “last will and testament” before sailing. They journeyed into the jaws of death. The crossing was rough enough. Instead of making land-fall in Virginia, they ended up in the wilderness of Massachusetts. Winter was near. Within weeks, nearly all were sick. Within three months, half were dead. Bradford called their plight “sad and lamentable.” Hardly happy terms. Their spring crops failed. Shipments to England were pirated. Supplies ran out. London refused to help. And they were facing another winter. So they decided to give thanks to God! What an incredible gift they gave to history, to God, to the Indians who celebrated with them – and to us! Thanksgiving is not about material bounty. It is about having bountiful hearts, even in hard times. It is about attitude. That invites the favor of God.

Dennis Prager, radio personality and author of Happiness is a Serious Problem! writes, “There is a secret to happiness and it is gratitude. All happy people are grateful, and ungrateful people cannot be happy.” Prager says, “Become grateful and you will become a much happier person.” The attitude of gratitude determines direction. Action follows attitude!

INSET ... with the article ...but apart from it!

Launch a gratitude campaign! Great people are grateful people! Here are some practical ideas:

1. Read Luke 17:11-19. Launch a family campaign to “make up for the nine!” At dinner each day ask, “Who made up for the nine today?” Tell stories.
2. True gratitude involves action. Add a coin to a bowl on the table for every act of thankfulness your children demonstrate – your family thanks-offering. Give it away!
3. Say ‘thank you’ at the beginning of each hour! Seize opportunities to say, “Thanks!” Go back and say, “I forgot to say, ‘Thank you!’”
4. Ask your spouse, “How can I thank you for all you have done for me?” Pick them up, and then ask the question a second time! Act thankful.
5. Write “Thank God for you!” cards to people who have touched your life. Consider those for whom we are not always grateful – the dry cleaners’ attendant, grocer, lawn-care person, paper-boy, mail-person, receptionist, power-company clerk, bank-teller, nursery workers.
6. Give a thanks-offering – to a ministry or person. Pass on to them the goodness of God in your life.
7. Throw a thanksgiving party at work for some underappreciated fellow-worker.
8. Invite a few families over to your house and have a “thanksgiving celebration” for them. Pray for them. Thank them.
9. Bake brownies. Take them to the local police station or fire house.
10. Find a way to say ‘thank you’ to the teachers of public and private schools.
11. Thank neighbors and friends. Bake. Volunteer. Serve. Call. Care. Send flowers. Take them out to dinner. Listen.
12. Give the gift of enthusiasm – transform yourself into a happy Christian! Smile more. Laugh. Be fun to be around!
13. Reach out to a new neighbor, work associate, a new family in church.
14. Start a church-wide campaign – “Making up for the nine!” (Luke 17:11-19) Engage in conspiracies of kindness, acts of gratitude in the community!
15. Have a thanksgiving celebration at home. Read a Psalm of thanks. Share a thanksgiving memory. Have each family member say why they are thankful one for the other. Extend the blessing to an offering of thanks by all members of the family. Create name plates with thanksgiving Bible verses. Read them during the meal. Trim a thanksgiving tree – with memoirs of thankfulness to God. Use paper autumn leaves to write the notes. Rehearse your family spiritual history. Give thanks.