

# Seven Thanksgiving Devotions



**Psalm 105:1  
Oh Give  
Thanks to the  
Lord**

**Call Upon His Name;  
Make Known His Deeds  
Among The Peoples!**

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## What Is Thankfulness?

Isaiah 12:1 You will say in that day: “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.”

The Bible is full of thanksgivings and encouragements to be thankful. But, just what is thankfulness? In a 2004 book entitled, “The Psychology of Gratitude,” scholars on the subject concluded that gratitude or thankfulness is “a celebration of undeserved kindness.”

The same object can produce all kinds of emotions when it is received, depending upon the circumstances surrounding its reception. If you valued an object at \$1000, but had to sell it for \$100, you might be disgusted, rather than thankful. If you worked with someone all day and were paid \$100, but the other person was paid \$200, you might be jealous or angry. If you were given \$100 as a gift, but all kinds of strings were attached to the gift (you have to buy this or that), you might be resentful.

True thankfulness is a natural human emotion, but it is highly dependant not only upon the nature of the object received, but the self-understanding of the person receiving the object. Thankfulness naturally erupts when we recognize a gift as something we truly need, but also realize that the gift is unearned and undeserved, arising out of the gracious character of the giver.

“I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess to You all my sins and iniquities, with which I have ever offended You and justly deserve Your temporal and eternal punishment.” So we confess, but do we really believe that?

Evidence of our belief is not found in a life of grumbling and complaining, nor will such evidence be found in a life of sadness and sorrow. “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.”

Isaiah was filled with joy and thanksgiving, for he understood both the forgiveness of God, and the fact that he didn’t deserve it. Everything he had in this life (the temporal), and everything he looked forward to in the life to come (the eternal), were not only gifts he needed, but gifts he didn’t deserve!

Prayer: Merciful Father, I confess to You my arrogance and pride, forgetting that even the simplest and smallest blessings of life are totally undeserved because of my sin against You. Help me to realize who I am, that I may daily rejoice in who You are and Your gifts to me. Amen.

## Thankfulness Changes You!

Psalm 111:1-2 Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. [2] Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.

Dr. Martin Seligman is the Director of the University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center and routinely researches activities that positively and sustainably impact mood. In a large study where numerous interventions were attempted, one stood out.

The assignment was to write and personally deliver a letter of gratitude to someone who had never been properly thanked for his or her kindness. Not only did this assignment have an immediate impact on personal happiness, but the effect generally lasted for at least a month.

As sinners, thanksgiving is not our automatic response to the blessings of God. Thanksgiving is a life style that needs to be studied and cultivated. “Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.” Research similar to Dr. Seligman’s confirms that when we cultivate a life of thanksgiving, it not only impacts other people, it changes us as well.

The story is told of a woman whose life was filled with tragedy. To the amazement of her friends she maintained an extremely positive outlook on life. Her example often inspired others to move forward in life when they faced seemingly insurmountable challenges. When asked what her secret was, she responded:

“When I go to bed, I begin my prayers to God with thanksgiving for every single blessing he has given me that day. I make sure that I list every blessing he has given. By the time I’m done with that I’m just too exhausted to talk about my problems, so I just commend those to God’s care and go to sleep.”

Studies confirm that 15 minutes at bed time writing down items for which you are grateful helps people get to sleep faster, sleep more soundly, and awake happier (Digdon, Health and Well-being, 2011). Studying and praising God for his blessings does change your life.

Prayer: Gracious God, I praise You most of all for the gift of Your Son and the forgiveness and eternal life I have through Him, but every day You bless me in many other ways. Help me to count my blessings each day, that in the remembrance of Your grace I may sleep and rise in peace, knowing that my life is safely in Your hands. Amen.

## Thankfulness Changes Those Around You!

Psalm 105:1-2 Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! [2] Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!

Thankfulness is not merely pleasant thoughts about someone or a positive outlook on life. Thankfulness is the celebration of a gift given by someone. Thankfulness expresses itself to the donor, and invites others to join in the celebration. What’s a party without guests? True thankfulness not only changes you, but it affects all of those around you.

One of the notable characteristics of the Epistles of Paul, is that nearly all of his letters begin with him thanking God for the people he is writing to. 1 Corinthians 1:4 is typical: “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.” Paul knew, and research shows, thankfulness powerfully impacts relationships.

In one study, researchers randomly divided university fund-raisers into two groups. One group made donor solicitation phone calls with no change to their work routine. The second group received a pep talk from the director of fund-raising, which included a high dose of praise and expressions of gratitude for their work. The next week, the second group made 50% more fund-raising calls than the first group.

From marriages to the work place, expressions of gratitude significantly raise the level of happiness and reduces stress in relationships. Unfortunately, from marriages to the work place, thankfulness is often in short supply.

Our sinful nature inclines us to talking about the negative rather than the positive. We find it easier to gossip about the faults in others rather than thanking God for the good they do. The media focuses on misdeeds and disasters, prompting the expression, “No news is good news.”

Living a thankful life is not just an attitude. It expresses itself in words and actions that weave their way into every relationship. It is a life that points out God’s gracious deeds and tells others of all his wondrous works. A life of true thankfulness encourages people to join us in singing praises to God, and points out God’s blessings in every place and relationship.

Prayer: Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

## Thankfulness Is Constant!

1Th 5:16-18 Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

A thankful life is not a mere yearly gathering on Thanksgiving Day, nor weekly gatherings to worship God. Thankfulness expresses itself in all circumstances of life. However, one of the great tragedies of our fall into sin is our daily blindness to the many opportunities for thanksgiving.

One of the thinking styles that push people into depression is called “Mental Filtering.” You might experience this on a drive home from work in heavy traffic. As you change lanes several drivers kindly slow down and wave you in, but one driver needlessly speeds up and cuts you off. When you get home most people will talk about the one bad driver, and never mention the several kind drivers. A week later, that’s all you will remember from that drive. It’s as if the kind drivers were erased from our memories.

In my work with depression, one exercise I developed was asking people to write a 500 word essay on the good things that happened to them in their worst period of life. This was not an essay on good things that developed later, but actual blessings they experienced in the midst of their severe trials.

Most people struggled in their first essay attempts, but eventually wrote about beautiful blessings they had blocked out of their minds. One class member kept protesting, through several re-writes, that nothing good ever happened in the period of life she had focused on. She kept harping on how all of her friends and her church had deserted her.

It was the 4<sup>th</sup> rewrite when she finally recalled that members from her church visited her unbelieving father in the hospital. Her father was near death. Countless times she had witnessed to him and constantly prayed that he would confess Christ as his Savior. Through her church friends, God created faith in his heart, and her father died with hope in Christ.

The exercise transformed her memory of the “worst” period of her life. She could no longer remember that time without giving thanks for her friends, her church, and God’s saving work. Like others in the class, she found that in all circumstances she could give thanks to God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in the midst of all the troubles and trials of life You are still present with Your grace and Your help. Help me to see through the darkness of this world Your amazing grace that surrounds me in life, and the grace that saves me even at this life’s end. Amen.

## Pray with Thanksgiving!

Php 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“In the cross of Christ I glory.” So begins just one of the many hymns praising and cherishing the device used to torture a beloved and innocent person to death. A transforming viewpoint of Scripture is the knowledge that even in the worst of life, God not only is present with his help and aid, but also uses disaster and suffering to bring great blessings to us.

Through the unjust and torturous death of Jesus, forgiveness and eternal hope was purchased by God for the world. God not only helps us in the worst of times, he transforms the worst of times into a means of blessing. This is not only true of the cross, but is also true about our own sufferings.

A fellow Pastor shared the unique opportunity he had to confirm a young a boy who came to church all by himself. Shortly after Confirmation the boy contracted Leukemia, and eventually died. However, ministry to the parents led to their joining the church and becoming devout members.

After accepting a call to another congregation, and while sharing tearful goodbyes, the Pastor and young boy’s father exchanged words. The Pastor remarked, “I’m so sorry about your son. I wish I could explain why such things happen.” The Father replied, “Pastor, you don’t have to explain anything to me. I understand! He was ready, and I wasn’t!”

Paul writes about finding peace “By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.” We often interpret these words as creating one list of prayer needs and one list of prayer thanksgivings. The boy’s father found peace in the death of his son by also finding a reason to give thanks for that death.

Through Christ he learned that his son was in heaven, and for that alone he could give thanks. However, he also knew that God used the death of his twelve year old to bring himself and his wife to saving faith, that they might one day join their son in heaven and together sing praises to God. God used the cross, and will use the crosses we bear, to bring blessing.

Prayer: Merciful Father, we praise You that in the cross of Jesus You brought eternal blessing and forgiveness to all who trust in You. Open our eyes to the ways we can give thanks for our own crosses in life, using them to bring blessing to ourselves, or blessings through us to others. Amen.

## Thankfulness Is Generosity!

2Co 9:11-12 "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. [12] For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

In the psychological study of philanthropy, a clear relationship between thankfulness and generosity is well established. The two acts feed each other. Acts of generosity make us more thankful, and feelings of gratitude make us more generous. As one author put it, "There is something generous about the virtue of gratitude." (Emmons, "The Psychology of Gratitude.")

Someone who gives with the motive of getting will ultimately be disappointed. Yet, the more we give the more reasons we find to be thankful. Thus Proverbs states (Pro 11:24) "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want."

One reason generous people are more thankful people is because generosity reflects our attitude toward "stuff." Worldly stuff isn't the key to happiness. People who are givers are content with very little. (1Ti 6:6-8) "But godliness with contentment is great gain, [7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content."

We don't give to gain, but as Proverbs observed, gaining often results from giving. Dave Ramsey of "Financial Peace University," strongly encourages generosity. He says, "Tithing was created for our benefit. It is to teach us how to keep God first in our lives and how to be unselfish people. Unselfish people make better husbands, wives, friends, relatives, employees and employers. God is trying to teach us how to prosper over time. . . . If you cannot live off 90% of your income, then you cannot live off 100%. It does not require a miracle for you to get through the month."

It is worth noting that some of the richest people in the world were generous before they were rich. J.C. Penny, John D. Rockefeller, William Colgate, J.L. Kraft, Henry Crowell (Quaker Oats), are among many billionaires who became great givers before they made great wealth.

Prayer: Almighty God, You enrich us not only to provide for our own needs, but so we can be generous and bring thanksgiving to You. Help us to not value the stuff of this world. Rather, help us to use that which You have given to us in a way that will cause others to rejoice. Amen.

## There is Always Reason For Thanksgiving!

Psalms 106:1-2 Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! [2] Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD, or declare all his praise?

The traditional Jewish Passover features a song entitled "Dayenu" which means "It would have been enough." The song recounts the mighty acts of God, and with the word "Dayenu," suggests that if God's blessings stopped there, Israel would still be eternally grateful. To the traditional Jewish version, Christians add the work of Christ in Christian Passover (seder) meals. Condemned by physical death and eternal hell, do we really need any other reason to give daily thanks to God beyond the gift of His Son? It would have been enough! Yet, God does give us even more.

The more we recognize God's gifts and celebrate them, the more peace and joy we will have in our lives, and the more we can help others find the same peace and joy we have in life. Those who seek their joy elsewhere, who try to find their peace outside of God's gift through Jesus Christ, find only disappointment. While secular studies can't precisely prove how Jesus changes lives, they strongly suggest that he is key.

The secular world would guess, for instance, that all charitable volunteerism has equal value. However, in studies of the effects of volunteering on depression, religious volunteering had a sustained positive impact on depression. Political volunteering (not surprisingly) made people more depressed, and other charitable volunteering had no effect (Am. J. Epidemiol. (2015)Vol: 182)

When generosity is studied, religious attendance is the only life activity that consistently raises generosity not only to religious groups, but to secular charities as well. When happiness is studied, religious attendance has a greater impact on personal happiness than any other regular life activity. Religious belief unaccompanied by attendance has virtually no effect.

The life of a Christian is often unremarkable. We aren't necessarily richer, healthier, or face less challenges than others, but even by secular measures, we are happier, more thankful, and more generous.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, "Dayenu." It would have been enough if you had sent Your only Son to pay for our sins by his death, and give us eternal life through his resurrection. Yet, You daily surround us with countless other blessings in family, friends, food, and shelter. For all this we will continue to thank and praise, serve and obey You. Amen.