

Giving thanks can change lives! When we're not good, God is. When we are unmerciful, God demonstrates mercy. When we believe and even act on lies, we can turn to the one who always leads us in truth. When life's circumstances leave us in a cloud of anxiety, God meets our prayers and words of thankfulness with peace in Jesus. Even when life threatens to crush us, we have God's promise to work in the worst of circumstances for our good. What reasons to be thankful!

Taking It Home

Take a few moments to list five things for which you are thankful. Go ahead! Write them down right now on your bulletin/service folder. Include people, material blessings, and even problems! As you do, think about God's goodness in it all. *(Allow time for worshipers to do this.)*

We live in a negative, ungrateful world. In the midst of all the pessimism, God calls us to exercise thanksgiving. He is faithful to bless his will worked out in our lives. Like Matthew Henry, we all have a lot for which to be thankful—even if we have not been robbed this week! I pray this Thanksgiving gift will continue to remind you of those reasons in the days ahead.

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Thanksgiving

An Attitude of the Heart!

Introduction

One night on his way home the great Bible commentator Matthew Henry was robbed. After this unfortunate incident he recorded this prayer in his journal: "I thank Thee that I have never been robbed before. I thank Thee that even though they took my purse, they did not take my life. I thank Thee that though they took my all, it was not much. I thank Thee that it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed."

This almost unbelievable prayer reminds us that we always have something for which to thank our Lord. As Matthew Henry's words demonstrate, thanksgiving is an attitude, an attitude of the heart. It's not something we can keep to ourselves; thanksgiving bubbles up inside us and spills over into our relationships as we share with our whole worshiping community the wonderful things God has done for us!

Getting to the Heart

Both the Old and New Testaments accent the importance of thanking God. But why? Does God need our words of appreciation? Hardly! Instead, he commands us to give thanks because he knows all the good that he can work in us when we do so! Words of thankfulness and praise on our lips stimulate an attitude of thankfulness and worship in our hearts. This attitude, in turn, can totally transform our circumstances—even if we find ourselves in very difficult circumstances.

Why give thanks? There are many, many reasons. Let's look at just five of them now—three from the Old Testament and two from the New.

Psalms 100 encourages us to approach God with thankful hearts because . . .

The Lord is good (Psalm 100:5). Many people today don't view God as good. They view him as angry, indifferent, or distant. Fewer and fewer people view him as good. However, Scripture plainly shows us that he is good. We see his goodness in the creation, but most of all, we see his goodness in the cross of his Son, Jesus. Scripture tells us that God does not change. In Jesus, he had our best interests at heart. Therefore, no matter what we're going through, we can know he wants the best for us. We can approach him with thanksgiving.

God's mercy is everlasting (Psalm 100:5). Everyone needs mercy. We all desperately need God to be merciful to us because of our sins! Sin has separated us from a holy God—our thanklessness is but one symptom of a malignant spiritual disease. But God has demonstrated his mercy by giving his Son to die for us. In that sacrifice he has paved the way for each of us to enjoy a personal relationship with him. By doing good deeds or praying repetitive prayers, we will never manipulate him to show us his mercy. Instead, he has simply chosen to be merciful! And he chose this not for a day or a week or a short season, but his mercies “are new every

morning” (Lamentations 3:23), every day, forever! How can one not be grateful for God's undeserved mercy, lavished on us who have been so rebellious toward him?

God's truth endures for all generations (Psalm 100:5). Much frustration in life comes from believing lies. Satan is the father of all lies, and when we follow the devil's track toward happiness, we lose. On the other hand, our Lord is the author of truth; he never lies to us. When we know the truth and live the truth, we walk in freedom. Freedom of conscience. Freedom from guilt. Freedom to be his thankful children.

The New Testament picks up the accent on thankfulness. We demonstrate thankfulness because . . .

God commands it—for our good, our peace (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The apostle Paul tells us to give thanks in everything. He goes on to remind us that this is God's will for us in Christ. In another of his letters, one written from prison, Paul reminds us that we should bring all our requests to God with thanksgiving, and God's peace will be in our hearts and minds through Christ (Philippians 4:4–7)! Rejoicing in the Lord and giving thanks to him create an atmosphere in which anxiety evaporates and peace descends. God commands our thanksgiving, not because he needs it, but because he knows how much it will help us—especially in anxious times!

God promises to work in every situation for our benefit (Romans 8:28). Listen to the way the apostle Paul phrases this promise. *(Read it, slowly and with appropriate emphasis.)* All of us can think of times when we don't feel much like giving thanks. But since we have this fantastic promise, we can thank God even for life's hardest times, knowing he is at work in them—and in us—for our good! When we give thanks, even when we don't feel especially thankful, hope and encouragement begin to stir in our hearts. The feeling of thankfulness will follow. *(If time and your situation allow for it, take time to share with one another instances of God fulfilling this promise in the past.)*