

Thanking God

by R.T. Kendall

This sermon emphasizes the importance of gratitude and thanksgiving, sharing a powerful story of how a teacher's words impacted a student's life, leading to a significant honor years later. The speaker delves into the significance of knowing God's ways through His Word and spending time with Him. Gratitude is highlighted as a key aspect of pleasing God, with a call to be thankful for salvation, blessings, and even challenges. The sermon concludes with a reminder of America's history of honoring God and the importance of maintaining a spirit of gratitude as a nation.

Scripture: Philippians 4:6, Hebrews 3:10, Romans 8:28, Psalms 107:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Hebrews 11:6, Psalms 84:11, James 1:2, Luke 17:11, Romans 1:21

Topics: "Gratitude", "Honoring God"

Description

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Transcript

It says, Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. I want to talk to you today about thanksgiving, that is, being thankful. Many years ago, my Grandma McCurley was a schoolteacher in Springfield, Illinois.

Now, this is before she got married, when she was known as Lottie Maddox. And she told me this story, that she taught to kids around 10 years old, and there was one black boy in the class who was hard to manage, because he was always fighting with the kids in the class. And she went up to him and said, Why is it that you pick on the boys during the class? She said, he said, Well, Miss McCurley, no, I think he said Miss Maddox, that was her name then.

Out on the playground, the boys gang up on me, and I can't defend myself, but I come into the classroom, and I get to fight them. She said to him, Would you like to get even with those boys? He said, More than anything in the world. She looked at him and said, Look, you have a good mind.

You've got a great future. Let me tell you how to get even with those boys. And that is to get a good education, make the best grades, because you can do it.

Well, that's the story. Forty years later, a phone call came from the state house in Springfield, Illinois. They said, Mrs. McCurley, are you the former Lottie Maddox that taught school many years ago? She said, Yes, I am.

Would you be willing to come to a banquet at the state house next week and be in the seat of the guest of honor? Well, she said, Yes. She didn't know then just what it was, but she and her husband went and showed up. And it turns out that a black senator, the first black senator in the history of the state of Illinois, told the story that I've just told you, because he wanted to speak on the subject, the person who has influenced me most in life, and told how her word to him changed his life and made him want to amount to something.

And here he was, a senator, and he thanked her publicly and put her in the honor seat. Now, this is a story of saying thank you. It's about gratitude.

And I want to talk about that today, except to say more about gratitude. By the way, just being thankful is a good thing. Did you know, some years ago, the Mayo Clinic came up with this conclusion? And they weren't basing it on the Bible or the words of Jesus.

Statistically, they said it can be proved, thankful people live longer. And during the same time, the American Psychological Association came up with a similar conclusion, thankful people live longer. Well, what they've shown statistically, that these two organizations, they're not trying to prove anything.

And as I said, they weren't trying to prove the Bible. They found out that those who are depressed, wallowing in self-pity, demanding entitlement, living by what's in it for me, and they just don't live as long. Well, now, that kind of gratitude is important, and it refers to being thankful generally.

However, in this talk today, I refer to being thankful to God. And I want to show the importance. And the first thing I want to point out, if you want to know why we should be thankful, it has a lot to do with knowing God's ways.

In Hebrews chapter 3, verse 10, God said of ancient Israel, they have not known my ways. And the more I read that, I almost can sense the tear in God's voice, His lament, His sorrow. My own people don't know my ways.

Well, now, it lets us know God wants us to know His ways. And there are two things that God wants you to understand, His Word and His ways. Now, His Word refers to the Bible.

Could I ask you this question? How well do you know your Bible? Well, it means spending time in the Word. I would suggest to you that you have a Bible reading plan. My mentor back at Westminster Chapel many years ago, Dr. Mart Lloyd-Jones, introduced me to his Bible reading plan.

It's one that was designed by the Scottish minister of the 19th century, Robert Murray McShane. And I follow this system. And for over 40 years, I've been reading the Bible through the New Testament twice.

And you need a Bible reading plan. Now, even if you don't use the one I suggest, you can go online and look Bible reading plan, a plan that will take you through the Bible in a year. Let me tell you why this is

important.

If maybe you would like to get on God's good side, if I may put it that way, or if there's anybody watching, you would like to get on the Holy Spirit's good side, I can tell you the quick way, the fast track is to know His Word. You see, the Bible is the Holy Spirit's greatest product. He's unashamed of what He's written.

And if you really want to know God, you need to read His Word. So there are two things God wants you to know, His Word, but also His ways. And I can tell you the way to get to know anybody's ways, you get to spend time with them.

There are people that know my ways. They spend time with me. And I get to know certain people's ways.

Pastor Delina, a close friend, I've got to know his ways. It comes from spending time with him. And if you want to know God's ways, I can tell you, spend time with him.

So I'm asking you, how much do you read your Bible? How much do you pray? And so these are two things God wants you to know. Now, there are two things about God's ways you should know. Two things, one, He's a jealous God, and secondly, He loves gratitude.

Now, when I refer to the jealousy of God, I have to say, there are those who don't like that about God. And jealousy in the Bible is not a good trait. We don't admire people that are jealous, those that are consumed with jealousy.

But God is upfront about it. He says, my name is Jealous. And it's really like being the first cousin to the glory of God, the jealousy of God, the glory of God.

They're much the same thing. The great theologian of the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards, said there is one thing that the devil cannot produce in a person, and that is a love for the glory of God. Another way of saying it is that you love it, that He's a jealous God.

And so I would just say to you, the fact that God is jealous, does that turn you off? Or can you say, I love it that He's jealous? You see, here's the reason you should love it. He's looking after you. He doesn't want you to make mistakes.

He doesn't want you to do foolish things. And because He's a jealous God, He's watching you. And He wants you to be committed to Him, because if you put Him first, you love His glory, you love His honor, then you can be sure of this.

He's watching after you. A great verse in Psalms 84, verse 11, says, No good thing will He withhold from those that walk uprightly. Well, that's because He's a jealous God.

He wants the very best for you. All right, two things you need to know about God. The first is, He's a God of glory.

That means He's a jealous God. But there's another thing. He loves gratitude.

Now, what does that mean? Well, He wants to be thanked for things. You know, we're like that. Have you ever said to somebody, thank you so much.

I appreciate it. And they say, don't mention it. Or you've done something for someone and they come up to you and they say, I am so grateful.

And we say, not at all, nothing, nothing to it. We say, don't mention it. But woe unto them if they don't mention it.

We don't like it if they're not thankful. Because when we do things for people, it's not that we want them to bow and scrape, but just to show that they appreciate what we've done. God is like that.

We are made in the image of God. And when He does things for us, He wants us to thank Him. Well, this is a theme running right through the Old Testament.

You can read it in the Psalms. In the New Testament, here's a verse, 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 18, where Paul says, In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Now, he didn't say, thank God for everything.

No, there's not a requirement in us to thank God for everything. I don't thank Him when I'm sick. I don't thank Him if I miss a plane.

I don't thank Him for the coronavirus. I don't thank Him when I hear of a death of a loved one. I don't thank Him when I think of the evil in the world.

I don't thank Him for it. But that's not what God said. He said, thank Him in all circumstances.

In other words, you don't panic. You don't lose your faith. You may not understand what's going on.

It may be hard to understand. And you think, Lord, I don't understand this. But choose to be thankful and to say, I don't know what's going on, but I love you anyway.

Let me put it to you like this. Which gives you more pleasure? When God is doing things for you and making you happy? Or when you make Him happy? Well, you say, well, how can I make Him happy? I can tell you. Faith.

Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. And there are those times when, because He's not making us happy at the moment. He's not doing what we want Him to do.

He's not answering our prayer. And if we're not careful, we will begin to feel sorry for ourselves and maybe sulk. He doesn't like that.

Here's what He likes. That when He hides His face. That's a Bible phrase.

When He doesn't seem to be showing His glory to you. He's not letting you feel His presence. Your prayers are not being answered.

He can do that. He can hide His face. You know what? There is an opportunity to please Him.

You see, I would urge you, and I don't say this is easy. But I would urge you to make it as a goal. Get your joy from knowing you please Him.

And when you know you're pleasing Him, that's a good feeling. Now, there are times when He's pleasing you and I think, oh, good. Thank you, Lord.

And there are times when things don't go my way. And I think, wait a minute. R.T., what is it you preach? You preach, get your joy from knowing you please Him.

I thought, I need to practice this. Because right now, I'm not feeling very good about the way things are going. But then I think, this is my opportunity to show that I will be for Him.

I will thank Him in this. I don't understand why this has happened. I have a friend.

He's fairly well known. I don't know if you've ever heard of Arthur Blissett. He's a man that has carried a cross around the world.

He started doing it December 25th. I think it was 1967. People laughed at him.

He said God told him to take the cross down from the wall in the restaurant that he'd started called His Place. He said if I knew I was going to have to carry it one day, I wouldn't have made it so big. But he says God told him to carry the cross around the world.

And I'll tell you what, he has done it. In fact, he's carried it around the world and half of the world again twice. He's got the Guinness Book of Records for the longest walk.

That's not what he set out to do. But I've got to know him very well. He came to us at Westminster Chapel.

And he told me a story that I want to share with you. He was in northern Israel. And it was cold.

And he didn't make arrangements where to sleep that night or where to put the cross. And it was getting late. And there was nothing to do.

There was this bus stop, a bench, no covering. And he thought, well, I'll just sleep on the bench and had the cross laying behind him. When all of a sudden, it started to rain.

And so Arthur sat on the edge of the bench and said, rain, in the name of Jesus, stop. What do you suppose happened? It began to pour. Lightning, thunder, the water beat down in his face.

Arthur said, God, I love you. I don't know that I could have done that. But you see, that's what Paul meant, thanking in all circumstances.

Job could say, though he slay me, yet will I trust him. And so when bad things happen, it's not that you're thankful for them. But you show your faith when you can be thankful in them.

And that's a moment where you get satisfaction. Think, well, things aren't going my way. But I know one thing, I'm pleasing God.

And that's a good feeling. In James, chapter 1, verse 2, he started his epistle with these words, count it pure joy. Count it pure joy when you fall into all kinds of trials.

Now, at the time, it's hard to do that. The word count is the same exact Greek word that Paul uses in Romans 4 when it's translated impute, where Paul says our faith counts for righteousness. So God imputes righteousness to us because we believe the gospel and the death of Jesus.

Well, James uses the same exact word. When you are in a trial, he says impute to the trial, count it pure joy. Well, that's not easy to do.

It's not easy to do. But why should you? One reason, one day you will treasure what you're going through. I mean it.

One day you'll look back and think, I complained at the time, but that was so good for me. Or I can tell you, personal illustration, some weeks ago, I had the privilege of speaking to you, I don't know whether you will remember it, a sermon I preached, I call it Total Forgiveness, and I was in what was at the time, Louise and I, greatest trial of our lives, greatest trial ever. The future was bleak.

It looked awful. I just thought there's nothing to live for. I can tell you something now.

You can put me under a lie detector, and I'll tell you now, best thing that ever happened to me, that very trial, I look back and I think, I don't know what I'd do without it. It's changed my life. It was so good.

But you don't feel that way. So it's not always easy. That's why James says count it pure joy.

If you're going to count it pure joy anyway, you wouldn't need to say it. But it's not easy. There's an old hymn, God's will sanctify you, or sanctify to you, your deepest distress.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow will not overflow. For I will be with thee, thy trials to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress. It's only a matter of time that you will look back on the worst things in your life and be thankful.

It will take time. But what James is encouraging us to do, be thankful now. Not easy.

Now I want to share three principles. Three. Number one, God loves gratitude.

Number two, God hates ingratitude. Ingratitude. Number three, gratitude must be taught.

Now, the reason I say this, I've learned it. I've learned this as a pastor. I'll tell you another story, if I may.

The text that I use at the beginning of this talk, if I could just read it one more time. Philippians 4, 6. Here's what the Apostle Paul says. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Now, when I was at Westminster Chapel, we would always go through a book. I preached through many books. And we went through Philippians.

And when I came down to chapter 4, verse 6, and I was preaching to my servant and all that, I had in my notes a word about remember to be thankful. But I didn't have much to say. And something happened to me that day.

Never happened before. Hasn't happened since. I wish it happened all the time.

But it did that day. When I came up with that phrase, reading it, with thanksgiving, my whole life came before me. In the middle of the sermon.

I've heard stories about people who, at the end of their lives, see their whole life flash before them. I'm not talking about that. What I'm saying, when I was going through that verse, and I came up with that phrase, through thanksgiving, remember to be thankful.

I saw one thing after another, my whole life, how God had blessed me, and I hadn't thanked him. I mean, those obvious things, not remote things that one might forget. But, well, the big, for example, this is what I heard, I thought I heard God say, because when I came through that in Philippians, I felt so horrible.

I said, Lord, help me to get this sermon finished quick so I can go into my vestry and lock the door and pray and vow to be a different man. Well, when I went into my vestry to start to pray, it came back. And one of the things God seemed to say to me, R.T., here you are at Westminster Chapel.

You're from Kentucky. And here you are at Westminster Chapel. Are you thankful? Well, yes, Lord, you know, I'm thankful.

He said, well, you never told me. Well, you know, I'm thankful. And then he said, you know, when you came to Oxford and you come from Kentucky, where the educational standards aren't the highest, and all those other students around you, you thought you can't compete with them, and you were so afraid you would fail.

You made it, didn't you? Yeah. Are you thankful? Well, yes. You never told me.

But you know I'm thankful. You know my heart. You didn't tell me.

You know what? I felt so horrible. I made a vow that day. I can tell you it's a vow I have kept.

That was 34 years ago. A vow to be for the rest of my life a thankful man. And here's one way I try to demonstrate it.

I keep a journal. You could call it a diary. I've kept it for years.

I could tell you where I was on April 4th, 1984 at three o'clock in the afternoon. That's just something I do. Well, I decided to do something starting that day, and I've kept it up.

I go through my journal for the day before. I go through all the little things of the day. I did it this morning before I came here.

I thanked God for the good time I had with Pastor Delina. I thanked him for the nice breakfast that we had down the street. I thanked for different people I met, conversations we had.

And the day before was my son's birthday, and everybody was so good to him. I thanked him for that. And there were four, five more things.

Do you know how long it takes me to go through yesterday's diary just to say thank you? Ten seconds? It doesn't take long, but I make it a habit, just thanking for every little thing. And I'll make a suggestion to you. This is something my wife and I do.

We think of three things every night before we go to bed that we're thankful for for that day. The three things. It doesn't take long.

Here's my point. God notices gratitude. He loves gratitude.

And that's the first principle. God loves gratitude. And if you want a fast track into an arena whereby you can be comfortable knowing you're pleasing God, be a thankful man, be a thankful woman.

Be a thankful old person. Be a thankful young person. God loves gratitude.

But then, principle number two, he hates ingratitude. I'm sorry, but he doesn't like it. He notices it.

Example. You may know the story. It's in Luke chapter 17, verses 11 to 19, where there were 10 lepers, and they were crying out for mercy.

And guess what? Jesus healed all 10 just like that. Healed them one. One leper came back and said, thank you.

What do you suppose was the first thing Jesus said in response to that? First thing he said, he said, where are the nine? I healed 10. You're the only one. Where are the nine? You see, that lets you know.

He loves gratitude. He notices ingratitude. And he noticed how over the years he's been good to me, so good to me it's embarrassing.

And then when I was found out and the way it came to me preaching that sermon, I just determined that the rest of my life I would be a thankful man. I would urge you to take this seriously. You will never be sorry.

And I can tell you another thing. It will change your life. Just to let you know how much God hates ingratitude.

In Romans chapter 1, there's a description of people doing all kinds of terrible things. Horrible sins. I would even hate to read it over at this moment.

Embarrassing things that people did. And right in the middle where God says that by revelation, they know that there's a true God. And in all this, they were unthankful.

It's right in the middle of all those awful sins. As a matter of fact, in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 2, Paul said in the last days, perilous times will come. And he began to describe all kinds of evil things.

And right in the middle of it, they will be unthankful. You see, God regards ingratitude as equivalent to the worst kind of sin. Now, you may not think it's so bad because it isn't known by anybody.

And it's not necessarily scandalous. But that's the way God looks at it. Well, now, I want you for the moment to think of things that you should be thankful for.

Now, let me tell you why I'm bringing this up. When I say God loves gratitude, he hates ingratitude, and gratitude must be taught. After coming to that conclusion about being thankful, I decided to teach it to my church at Westminster Chapel.

And we had a prayer meeting every Sunday for an hour before the evening service. And so that day, I said to everybody, we're going to do something different now. I want us to spend the first 15 minutes thanking God for things.

No petition. Don't ask him for anything. Just start saying you're thankful.

I said, does everybody understand that? Yeah. No petition. No request.

Just start thanking him for things. Then I said, let us pray. Quiet.

Quiet. I said, is nobody here thankful for anything? And quiet. I said, well, thanking for Jesus.

Are you thankful for Jesus? Will somebody say, I'm thankful for Jesus? One said, thank you, Lord, for sending us your son. I said, that's good. Quiet again.

Can you not think of anything? How about thanking him for the Holy Spirit? One other said, oh, Lord, we thank you for the Holy Spirit. And quiet. Then what about the Bible? Thank him for the Bible.

Do you know what? I had to spoon feed them. Literally to tell them things because they felt awkward. This is why I say gratitude must be taught.

Well, it took several weeks, but after a couple of months, would you believe? Those 15 minutes went by like seconds. People were climbing over each other, interrupting each other to be thankful for things. They thought, thank God for the weather.

Thank God that the flood didn't come that was being dreaded. They thanked him for things that were going on in Africa where they'd been. Listen, when you stop and think of things, you will find a lot.

And let me give you some example. When is the last time you thanked God for salvation? That you're saved. Do you realize the fact that you are a Christian? I hope you are.

It's no accident. Because Paul said, Philippians 2, 8 and 9. For by grace are you saved through faith that not of yourselves. It's God's gift.

Not of works. Does anyone brag about it? If your salvation were by works, you'd say God owes me something. But he owes you nothing.

And you just are indebted to him. Just say thank you. My teacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, used to say, a Christian is a person who is surprised that he's a Christian or that she's a Christian.

Does that surprise you? Well, it shouldn't. Because if you realize you are saved and God did it, you think, I can't believe it. And you try to get others to join you.

You get nowhere sometimes. You go to your best friend. Oh, I wish this could happen to you and your relative.

It's a work of the Holy Spirit. And the fact that you're saved, you realize God did it. Thank him that you're alive.

Thank you that you've got good health. Thank you that God supplies your need. He's never too late.

He's never too early. Always just on time. Oh, here's something to thank him for.

That you didn't get caught. That if you got caught, it could have destroyed you. Things that people know about you, only you know.

And you say, thank you, Lord. They don't know. You see, God is so good to us.

He's looking after us. Thank him that you've got a job. In this day, when I had breakfast with someone today, and the person said, 90% of my friends have lost their job during this crisis.

And my heart goes out to people like that. Here's what I would say to you. If you don't have a job, I would urge you.

Tell God you will be so thankful when he gives you a job. And never forget that. If you don't have the virus of COVID, vow to God that you will be thankful.

That you have a God, or if you get it and you come through it, thank him for that. You know, General Douglas MacArthur, many decades ago, used to say, there are no atheists in foxholes. Because people then, they call out to God.

But what happens is, when the war is over, they forget. And that's what I'm saying to you. If you come through this, and you do get a job, and you get your health, don't be like those that forget.

Don't be like that. Be a thankful person. Thank him for the Bible.

Thank him for great promises. One of my favorite verses, Romans 8, 28. We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

Hebrews 12, 6. Do you know, the Lord loves who he disciplines. Be thankful, because it's a sign God loves you. And I've already referred to Psalm 84, verse 11.

No good thing will he withhold from those that walk uprightly. Now, here's a teaching that I want to share with you in my closing moments. I call it the doctrine of gratitude.

Sanctification is the process by which we become more and more holy, or more and more like Jesus. One of the purposes of all of Paul's letters was to teach sanctification. 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, verse 3. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you would abstain from immorality.

Now, why must it be taught? Well, some people automatically, they have changed lives, and just overnight, they're never the same again. And we thank God for those. But I know other people that struggle after they become Christians.

And they think, I thought I wasn't going to have this problem. I knew of a lady who was both a prostitute and a dope addict, and read a tract and was converted. And she said, instantly, she lost all desire for drugs.

And it was just wonderful. She decided to have a ministry to dope addicts and prostitutes. And she found out that there were some who, as soon as they were saved, or just like her, they dropped it.

No drug problem at all. But she found others that were just as converted that struggled. And you see, this is why we have the New Testament.

We need to be taught. And even those who change at first, they later need it. This is important to know, that sanctification is what you need in order to be thankful.

You see, when I was young, I was in a particular denomination. They thought you could live above sin. And I used to wonder, if we live above sin, why do we have the Lord's Prayer that says, forgive us our trespasses? Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 20.

There is nobody who never sins. Sanctification, therefore, to be holy, is not in order to get to heaven. God loves gratitude.

He hates ingratitude. Gratitude must be taught. And the proof He deals with ingratitude is that He chastens those who need the slap on the wrist, to need the protection.

God will deal with those saved by the blood of Christ who show ingratitude. And be thankful for that. Be thankful even if you did get caught.

And sometimes that's the way God gets your attention. Well, as you may know, we're getting close to the era, a time of the year, we're talking about Thanksgiving. We've seen that God lamented of Israel, that they did not know His ways.

God wants us to know His ways. We've seen this. It's so neglected.

He loves gratitude. And I close with this comment. The pilgrim fathers knew this about God.

They were, therefore, determined not to be ungrateful, but to show gratitude to God for the way He had blessed them after they had suffered pain and hunger for so long. And they were gripped by a psalm. Psalm 107, verse 22.

Where it reads, And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of His deeds and songs of joy. That's how Thanksgiving got started. And yet it was not until President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation in 1863 that Thanksgiving Day became an official holiday.

I close. God loves gratitude. He hates ingratitude.

I believe that God's hand on America can be traced in part to the fact that America chose to honor God from earliest days. One significant difference between America and Israel. God chose Israel.

America chose God. And the thought that America would cease to be a grateful nation is very alarming and troubling. And I would urge all Americans who are unashamed of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, that they exercise the freedom that we have and show our gratitude, not only by our personal thanks, but that America also will retain the 4th Thursday of November at a time that we remember as a nation how good God has been to us.

By the way, do you know for sure that if you were to die today, would you go to heaven? If you don't know for sure, pray this prayer. Lord Jesus, I need you. I want you.

Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. Wash my sins away by your blood. I welcome your Holy Spirit into my heart.

As best as I know how, I give you my life. And I want to live a life of gratitude, to thank you for saving me. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/w54r8ArSueM.mp4>
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