

Does Giving Thanks For Everything *Really Mean* “Everything?” Ephesians 5:20

Let’s begin by getting right into the text tonight. Turn in your Bibles to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the fifth chapter. We begin with verse 18. As we read, keep in mind that I am slightly modifying the way the NIV reads. I am actually reading it closer to the way it reads in the original language. If you have an ESV or a NJKV, it will sound just like them almost word for word.

Ephesians 5:18-21:

18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with (lit. by) the Spirit. 19 **Speaking** to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. **Singing** and **making music** in your heart to the Lord, 20 always **giving thanks** to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 **Submitting** to one another out of reverence for Christ.

By way of review, Paul is explaining God’s will to us (Notice verse 17: “...*do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.*”). Paul then goes on and describes this life as not being one of intoxication with mind altering substances, but instead being filled *by* God’s Spirit. Sin left us empty, gutted, lifeless. And God sent His Son to save us and the Father and the Son in turn have sent His Spirit to change us by filling us with the fullness of God. Another way of saying that is to say that God’s Spirit remains on site in our lives 24/7 to continually be working to restore us and make us fully human once again—which is yet another way of saying to make us like Jesus!

So how can we tell if we are being filled by God’s Spirit? Paul describes **three effects**. We talked about the first effect two weeks ago: You know you are being filled by God’s Spirit when you are *increasing in spiritual communication*. That communication is both horizontal and vertical: “**Speaking to one another** with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (that’s horizontal) and “**Singing and making music in your heart to the Lord.**” There’s the vertical. In short, you know you are being filled by the Spirit when His Word starts welling up in your heart in praise to God and the overflow from that becomes so irresistible that it begins to overflow in heartfelt spiritual communication with your brothers and sisters—both in corporate worship as well as in times of informal fellowship.

Transition: In verse 20, Paul moves to the second effect of being filled by God’s Spirit.

The second effect of being filled by the Holy Spirit: You will be **growing in giving thanks to God the Father**. So far so good. After all, we teach our children that it’s *good manners* to say things like “Please” and “Thank you.” And so we *should*. But Paul doesn’t stop there. He adds three words that elevate this effect from common grace to uncommon or special grace. He says: “always giving thanks **for all things.**” And that for me is where the rub is. Is it that way *for you?*

Question: Would you say it is easier to be thankful when things are going *well*—or when things are going *badly*? If you are like me, you are tempted to say it is easier when things are going well. So let's try thinking this through a little more.

If *circumstances are going badly*, we are *prone* to complain, to express sinful anger, to worry or be afraid. We might even be tempted to become discouraged. If it is a *severe* experience, we would likely feel overwhelmed with grief or despair. Certainly, we would not *easily* give thanks. In fact, we will see in a few minutes that God does not expect us to—at least right away.

Ok. So what about *positive experiences*? (like my trip to the store with my wife this week where I found nine items for 75% off and purchased and was out the door in ½ hour!) Situations like that one would *seem* to make us *happy*—but not *necessarily thankful*. (In fact, most of us tend to worship the experience, person, or thing) or even pride-fully take credit for it. (I.e. we worship ourselves). Let's take this a step further. *Anybody* can be happy because they have gotten their way. Who wouldn't be happy with a major promotion that increases your salary by 50%? Who wouldn't be ecstatic to find out that their cancer is completely gone? What student wouldn't feel overjoyed to discover that they have gotten a full ride scholarship to the school of their choice? What athlete wouldn't feel elated to play for a championship team or win a gold medal in international competition? Even a *mobster* can be happy and even nice when he is getting what he wants! What determines whether we are thankful or merely satisfied for the moment has to do with our *heart*.

The truth is—if you are not *learning* what it *means* to be thankful on the “bad” days, I doubt you will be truly thankful on the good ones. Why? Thankfulness has more to do with our passion for the *Giver rather than* our satisfaction with His *gifts*. Part of the very essence of sin is separating the gift from the Giver and trying to make the gift a substitute *for* the Giver. Just listen to what Paul writes in Romans 1:21:

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened...”

That is not just applying to the people of Paul's day. This talking about *you and me!* It is just as easy for us to lose our thankfulness and become impatient seekers of a false happiness that ultimately proves to be very *misguided* and highly *vulnerable* in a sin-cursed world.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned and plunged themselves and all their descendents into sin, we *naturally* set our hearts on some aspect of the creation—*apart from* the Creator. That is why God subjected creation to futility by putting a curse on the ground for man's sake and pain in childbearing for woman's sake. God want adding insult to injury. He wasn't like an out-of-control referee just piling on penalty after penalty! He was doing this to protect us and remind us. So now, when we set our desires on the here-and-now, it is susceptible to the effects of the curse. We get *sick*. People *die*. Things *break down*. People *let us down*. And when these things happen—guess what?! Life hurts!!! A lot!!!

- **Lord**—He rules over all.
- **Jesus**—(“You will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sin.”). He is our Savior. Our rescuer—ultimately in *every* way!
- **Christ**—God’s anointed One. The promised deliverer of God’s people!

You have to look at the whole verse to get the picture right. In fact, you have to look at the whole book of Ephesians to really begin to understand the heart of thankfulness in the most gut-wrenching moments we experience in a sin-cursed world.

Ephesians 1 *starts* with thanksgiving. Why? Because, *wonder of wonders* we are objects of God’s eternal and electing love! In spite of the fact that we absolutely are unworthy of such love (See chapter 2:1-10). No way to explain it. Paul doesn’t even try. He just says: “For by *grace* you have been saved!”

Which brings us to an important and interesting connection. The word for “giving thanks” is linguistically related to two other words. The word in this text is **Eucharistein**—which means to give thanks. But closely related to that is the word, **charis**—which means “grace” and also **chara**, which means “joy.” You ask: What is the connection? Listen to this answer—and make sure you note the difference between joy—and its substantially lesser imitation known as “happiness.” Pastor Ben Patterson describes joy this way: “**Joy** is what you experience when you are **grateful** for the **grace** that has been given to you.”

Gratitude without an understanding of grace cannot produce joy. Consequently, it offers no comfort to us in gut-wrenching tragedy and no escape from our idolatrous enslavement to people and things.

But what is behind that word, “grace.” Grace is not just a word. It is a whole story. It is a story from Genesis, the Book of Beginnings to the Revelation of Jesus Christ in the end. The story has so many strands to it—so many ways of telling it, that we could spend days, no, *years* telling it. Let’s grab on to just one strand. The theme of a Garden:

Garden of Eden. (Explain this Garden. Describe the beauty, joy, and size). Then sin. Expulsion. Unspeakable loss. More than we can even comprehend.

Jump to the end of the Book. What do you see? *Another* garden. Just listen to this: in Rev. 22:1-3:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the **tree of life**, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.*

What is this? Sounds like a garden to me. And notice what is in it? Tree of life! That is what lies ahead for us. Why? Because of His grace. Is there hope for people in gut-wrenching tragedies in verses like this? You bet! We call it, “Future Grace.”

But in between these two gardens is another garden. The garden of Gethsemane. It is a place of pain and suffering. Of unspeakable agony. Just listen to Matthew's account:

*³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be **sorrowful and troubled**. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is **overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death**. Stay here and keep watch with me." ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, **if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me**. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

Why did Jesus go through all of this? Grace. His **redeeming** grace caused him to suffer for me in ways we will never fully comprehend. Redeeming grace caused Him to drink the cup of His father's wrath that had been prepared *for you and me*.

Earlier, I mentioned to you about my friend Jerry and the horrible day he discovered that his family was gone from this life. Let me conclude by telling you tell you another tragic story.

Illustration: When God Weeps, by Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes, page 69.

Travel in your mind to an area of the world that for many has become virtually synonymous with terrorism—the Middle East. Below is a sketchy but accurate account of one man's private horror there. He was a public figure in his country, although not well-known. Due to his wide-ranging charitable work spurred by his religious convictions, he became a hero among the lower class and many sophisticates. But in certain political quarters he was viewed as a threat. The group that took responsibility for his seizure acted at night. As with many desperate organizations, they sought to paint their actions with a veneer of legality. A kangaroo court was convened, the charges stated, the defendant declared guilty. He was taken down a hall and thrown to thugs who beat him skillfully to a pulp. Then they attached him to a crude torture instrument where he was stretched unmercifully and had various body parts skewered. As intended, the widely loved man did not survive the procedure. Outraged and grief-stricken friends remembered him as a humble, helpful person who always had time for others. His murderers were never brought to justice.

You talk about a **bad day**. This was an unspeakably horrible day! But His **bad day** has become our **greatest** day! The day that the lover of our soul gave His life so that we might have life. A day we celebrate here tonight.

Perhaps it is no irony that the NT word for "giving thanks" does double duty. In several of the early church writings, "eucharistia" means not only "thanksgiving" but is also used to refer to the **Lord's Table (or Eucharist)**. And so as we thoughtfully observe the Lord's Table together—we begin to see how grace breaks through our worst moments and can turn them into a time where we can say "Thank you" and really mean it!

Prayer: *Jesus, as you fill us with yourself by your Spirit, you give us words to speak to each other, You give us songs to sing to you. You stir in us thanksgiving to the Father in your name. Lord, as we contemplate your grace to us, thanksgiving, even in this sin-cursed world starts to make sense. Your redeeming grace. Your future grace. In light of all your grace, how can anything more be asked of us? The only answer to grace is "Thank you!" And so Lord, accept our thanks in Jesus' name.*