

HEBREWS 11 FAITH - PRAYER
The Prayer of Faith

My Dilemma – first world problem:

I wanted to start in on Heb 11 – the great chapter on faith, but I also like to begin each year with a sermon on PRAYER.

So, I'm combining the two by talking about faith and prayer as seen through the Biblical lens of THANKSGIVING. Hence The title, The Prayer of Faith.

I believe that prayers of Thanksgiving are the hardest and most necessary of all prayers.

The Christian life is a life of faith – The Magi came by faith (today is Epiphany Sunday – “King’s Day”) Those who have come to Christ understand that faith is central to our lives. We also know that our faith is not a feeling or wishful thinking. Our faith is grounded in the historic events and person of Jesus Christ. But at times the realities of God and Christ seem far from our hearts and minds, so our prayers are merely raw faith. Thanksgiving may often feel this way.

Biblically speaking, our faith is expressed through PRAYER.

Through prayer we are enabled to dig up gospel promises for our souls and for the well-being of others.

I'm not the first to view prayer in this way. In our “Reformed” circles, one of the biggest names is that of John Calvin (Jean Calvin). His famous work is his [Institutes of The Christian Religion](#) (BTW....There's an app for that...sounds like a fun read, right).

While Calvin is known for the doctrines of grace, known as Calvinism, the longest chapter in the Institutes was onPRAYER

“Prayer, which is the chief exercise of faith, and by which we daily receive God’s benefits”

Viewing prayer purely as a discipline gives it a feel of law, and law can never impart life. But seeing prayer as a spade for finding gospel nuggets is something else.

Calvin “We dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord’s gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.” ” (map and spade)

One of the things we may need to dig up is a THANKFUL HEART.

Thanksgiving is commanded in the Psalms in the context of worship and prayer. It is a primary theme and command of the NT letters, especially of Paul.

Thanksgiving is the practice of our Belief in the Incarnation – i.e. if we truly believe that God became man to be Savior for all the peoples, then we should be thankful. We have a gracious God who has made us his adopted children based on the work of Jesus. He did not give us what we deserved.

EX: my own experience of Thanksgiving being the thermostat of my soul.

Week before Christmas Garage Door and as we packed our truck to head home we had a dead car battery – small things, but can be annoying.

My best response is a quiet “thank you Lord” in the midst of it. That is not always my first response. Even when it happens, it doesn't change the problem, but it does change my soul.

Though we have a holiday call Thanksgiving, it's not a time when folks are truly thankful. It is rare for folks to name what they are thankful for. In an increasingly secular culture, there is no sense of a living God to whom we are giving thanks.

Consider how blessed we are as Christians –ROM 11: ³⁶All things come from God, through God, and return to God. Praise him for ever!

Yet scripture is filled with commands and exhortations and reminders to give thanks. The fact that we need to be reminded to be thankful is an indication of how ungrateful our hearts really are. It shows how deeply sin has penetrated every aspect of our hearts.

EX: Scrooge on Christmas morning is full of thanksgiving because he now sees his life and all of life from an eternal perspective. That is a reminder to ALL OF US as well. If we think about it, we could wake up every morning like Scrooge on Christmas – full of gratitude for grace and happy to be alive.

No one has more reasons to be thankful than the believer who knows and is known by God through Jesus Christ.

Yet, honestly, it is a struggle of faith to be thankful.
Let's look at three key texts on Christian thankfulness

Eph 5

17 So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

1 Thessalonians.1:16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Let's look at three main themes: **The Context, Scope and Fruit of Giving Thanks.**

CONTEXT OF GIVING THANKS – that of Holy Spirit filled life; that of rejoicing and praying.

It is a simple command with profound heart altering potential. Obedience to this command has immediate transforming power on the soul and in our relationship with God. It is the WILL OF God for us, so to the degree that we ignore it, we are walking outside of or even against God's will for our lives.

It is to breath "the air of heaven" (C.J. Mahaney) which is a place of endless praise and thanksgiving to the Lamb on the throne.

EX: giving thanks is like the oxygen tank that athletes go to when they are fatigued. They need a shot of pure oxygen to restore them. SO TOO, the practice of thanksgiving is the pure air of Heaven that fills our souls.

If you don't believe that, then TRY IT.

EX: during the worst moments of my life I have turned to thanksgiving, even through tears, to restore my soul. The moments between the onset of the trial or difficulty and my response of thanksgiving are the most despairing moments of my life.

Thanksgiving doesn't automatically change the situation, but it does change my heart and my perspective. It is like the oxygen mask for my soul.

EX: THE CPAP OF THE SOUL

SCOPE OF GIVING THANKS –not complicated, but it is startling.

“GIVE THANKS always for all things, in whatever you do; in all things”

<< Surely you don't mean...>> Friends, I'm just the messenger. God is the one who said it.

I am convinced that God means just what He says. That's why I called this the prayer of faith.

<<Isn't giving thanks when I don't feel like it hypocrisy?>> NO, IT IS THE MOVEMENT OF FAITH.

Thanksgiving is not to be a rare activity; it should be woven into every area of our lives. As Christians this should mark our lives before a watching world.

The DNA of the Christian led by the Holy Spirit leads us to practice thanksgiving. It is a spiritual discipline enabled by the Holy Spirit. In trials it is a response that can only be explained by the Holy Spirit. That is why it is connected to the passages of Eph and Col that describe the Spirit filled life.

This is one of the most difficult of all commands to obey. Regardless of our circumstances, the command is to give thanks in ALL things. This does NOT MEAN that we ignore or deny the reality of the trial or the sin that may be behind the trial. It does mean that we are to lean into the grace of the indwelling Holy Spirit to give thanks.

Spiritual life self-assessment....

Is my life characterized by thanksgiving in all things or by grumbling and disputing? i.e. Am I walking in the will of God or am I walking in the flesh?

What would a video of the past 3 months of your life (words and thoughts) reveal in this area?

Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Biblical Scholarship

– “Paul mentions the subject more often line for line than any other author, pagan or Christian....As thanksgivings abound, so God is glorified 2 Cor 4:15 2 Cor 1:11)”

https://books.google.com/books?id=QfLIDAAQBAJ&pg=PT82&lpg=PT82&dq=dictionary+of+paul+and+his+letters+-+Paul+mentions+the+subject+more+often&source=bl&ots=P3zBVsc6AD&sig=ACfU3U0WZKvYapJb3BNoYhrYbPAXFX1l_w&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjXKY2UnuXmAhWIGM0KHQmIDZAQ6AEwAHoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=dictionary%20of%20paul%20and%20his%20letters%20-%20Paul%20mentions%20the%20subject%20more%20often&f=false

We are to give thanks TO God IN ALL circumstances. It doesn't mean that we call evil good or ignore the bad effects of the fall, but we by faith give thanks in all things.

We can do so because we know the sovereignty of God over all things and that God is working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

We can do so because we know that even our momentary afflictions are preparing an eternal weight of glory for us.

We can do so when we keep an eternal perspective on life.

FRUIT OF GIVING THANKS –

1. **It moderates our relationships with others** ; Note Eph 5:21– give thanks is followed by “be subject to one another”. The Holy Spirit filled thankful heart is disposed to gospel thanksgiving and to rightly ordered relationships. If we don't obey God in the area of thanksgiving, we are less likely to submit to one another in the fear of Christ.

2. It moderates our relationship with our work and daily routine; -“Col 3 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

EX: my studies at college after becoming a Christian; my approach to loading trucks in summer of 1976, etc

3. It moderates our relationship with the will of God;

Why do we give thanks in all things?

It is God’s will for us IN CHRIST (full stop). It is Holy Spirit empowered by virtue of our union with Christ.

If you are laboring to know God’s will for your life, for 2020, here it is – “in everything give thanks”.

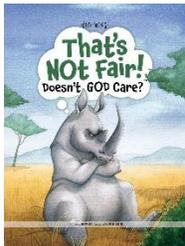
No matter how unclear your next step may be in terms of vocation, relationships, job, health, etc, THIS STEP IS CRYSTAL CLEAR: “in everything give thanks.”

<<But you don’t know what I’m facing. No one does>> God KNOWS, and He cares, and He wants you to breath the air of Heaven – thanksgiving.

This command applies to us corporately and individually. It is for “you” to practice. By His grace, you can obey this command.

4. It moderates the complaining of our hearts – especially in times of trial and suffering. This command is meant to carry hope to your heart, even in times of trials.

Trials tempt us to doubt the goodness of God. Trials carry attached messages from Satan that say, “Where is your God? Do you really think you can trust Him? Do you really think He loves you? If He did then He wouldn’t allow that to happen to you.”



When we suffer from chronic ongoing issues, we are prone to the messages to doubt the goodness of God. It becomes all too easy to ignore this command in times of trials and suffering and that is when we need the air of heaven the most.

Remembering the work of Christ, the suffering of Christ and the death of Christ for us reminds us that the mercy we receive from the hand of God far exceeds the suffering we experience in this life.

In times of trial this command comes to us to protect us from the sin of complaining, which being a chief form of godlessness, will rob us of our joy in God. Thanksgiving redirects our attention to the mercy of God toward us in Christ. This command is a gift to our hearts when we are suffering. I do not mean to weaken or disparage the reality of your suffering; nor does the Word of God. But scripture would call our attention to Christ who suffered for us to redeem this broken world and to open the way to heaven where all will be made new.

The thanksgiving prayer of faith puts all things in perspective, even when we are in pain.

Give heed to the pastoral thoughts of Jeremiah Burroughs – The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

Though I cannot know what your afflictions are, yet I know what your mercies are, and I know they are so great that I am sure there can be no afflictions in this world as great as the mercies you have. If it were only this mercy, that you have this day of grace and salvation continued to you: it is a greater mercy than any affliction.

Set any affliction beside this mercy and see which would weigh heaviest; this is certainly greater than any affliction. That you have the day of grace and salvation, that you are not now in hell, this is a greater mercy.

Jerry Bridges – “Everything this side of hell is grace.”

Thus, our mercies are more than the afflictions we deserve, so we are to give thanks to God as we consider His mercy to us in Christ. When we focus on the amazing grace of God then we can resist the temptation to doubt the goodness of God.

5. It promotes humility and weakens pride – ingratitude towards God is seen as one of the great sins against God. Rom 1 Ingratitude is a sign of arrogance against God.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

(another sermon for another day, but this explains so much about what we are seeing in our secular culture today

An ungrateful person is a proud person, and God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Archbishop Michael Ramsey...”Thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.”

We’re going to ordain and install new officers, so I would encourage them to take heed of the quality of thankfulness as you embrace your responsibilities as an elder or as a deacon. Obedience to this command cultivates humility as you express thanks to God and acknowledge your dependence on Him.

As we enter this new year, let us seek to be a community of Holy Spirit empowered followers of Jesus who are characterized by the practice of giving thanks in all things.

Even if it doesn’t change our circumstances, it will change our relationships and our hearts. And it will bring glory to God.

1 Thess 1:18 in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

AMEN

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