

# **GOD IS THE GIVER WE ARE THE THANKS-GIVERS**

Pastor Jeff Wood  
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There are many blessings which God gives to us and one of the best of the blessings is gratitude itself, the ability to see, note, and feel the blessings that are ours and others'. The experience of gratefulness, the ability to be appreciative ... these actually make life richer and are among the gifts he gives us. Life would be just bland at best and cranky at worst. No, blessings are a gift and gratitude for the blessings is a gift.

Now while gratefulness is, in a sense, a miracle gift *God* works in us, that does not mean it is not a mindset and heartset which *we* cultivate. This happens over and over in the scripture, this gift and effort combination. (For by grace you have been saved ... work out your salvation with fear and trembling.) I can do nothing without God but if I do nothing it will be without God. He's not interested in us doing nothing any more than a parent is interested in their kids doing nothing in their growing up. This is a hand-in-hand faith.

I want to speak with you today about receiving the gift of gratitude and cultivating the mindset and heartset of thankfulness. I think you'll agree, a thankful life is a good life. How does that kind of life happen? Our text today suggests some of it in three of its verbs. Let's pray.

***Imagine having had a gratitude-ectomy or being gratitude impaired.***

*In the name then of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit these words:*

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

[2] Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.

[3] Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

[4] Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.

[5] For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Psalm 100

*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.*

Shout to the Lord. Shout. v. 1

Marta Bennet is one of the pastors at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle and she once spoke of a dramatic family camping adventure. What made it dramatic was that there was enough rain in the little canyon they were camped in that some flash flood warning sirens blared. They collected their food from a little brook where they had stashed it to keep cool and then move on to higher ground. Just as they did they looked down on the main ravine and witnessed a wall of chocolate water barreling down the canyon plowing up trees and boulders and everything in its path. They were immensely grateful to have been alerted and moved out of its path.

Sometimes gratitude is like that, even like that wall of water. It just happens in an instant; it just crashes over us. We have been so sick and the doctor announces that we are well, and what do we experience? Gratitude. And how do we experience it? It just washes over us. We have been under such a financial strain and then an unexpected check comes putting all the strain to rest, and gratitude washes over us. (Me and looking for a job.) We have been so misunderstood and finally there is one who really connects in such a way that you know they really do understand, and gratitude washes over us. We have come to truly see what a terrible mess of things we have made, and what a burden unknowingly we have been and as we mumble that we are sorry, the person most affected touches us with genuine regard and says, "That's okay," and gratitude simply washes over us. By and large these are simply visitations and over their coming and going we have little control. We cannot manufacture these. These are experiences of gratitude which are simply like flash floods over our hearts and souls and we shout.

I bet you can think back to times when gratitude crashed upon you. Take a trip in your mind this week to those times. Let God bless you with visiting there again.

Give thanks to him. He is the Giver, we are the Thanks-Givers.

Know that the Lord is good. Know. v. 3

Sometimes gratitude is less like a wall of water that crashes over us and more like a gentle rain that falls upon us. As such it is less like a lightning strike and more like a dawning.

It's not like a wall of water when I drive along the Indian River but my mind will turn from the radio in the

car to the wind and light dancing over the water, the shimmers around the islands, the hue of the morning sky. And I'm grateful. This comes in a way of gentle knowing.

It is the noticing that trees sway in the wind and have foliage that cleanses the air and makes color against the sky. And there is gratefulness. It is noticing you have had food, shelter, work, and peace not war around you this week. And there is gratefulness. It is noticing music, art, friends, your education, your faith, and there is gratefulness. Much of this kind of thankfulness is the result of a gentle calling and our opening to life and to God. It is the scent and then the smelling of the roses.

A fellow by the name of Tim Hansel tells a story about a Native American man visiting his close friends in Manhattan. They are walking along a busy street in the holiday time and suddenly the Native American stopped exclaiming, "Did you hear that?" His friend asked, "What?" "A cricket. I hear a cricket." The New Yorker friend said in a disbelieving way, "We are in downtown Manhattan with horns and squealing tires and whistles. You cannot be hearing a cricket." But the Native American walks across the intersection and part way up the street to a tree planter box. Then he stooped over, turned a leaf or two, and said, "Hey there, little fella" to a cricket! The New Yorker was dumbfounded.

The friend said, "Your ears are no different than mine. It all depends on what you are open to. Then to add to his point, he reached into his pocket and took out a fist full of nickels and dimes and quarters and dropped them on the street. Every head for a block turned and looked. It all depends on what you are open to. Do you look for ways God is good to you and those around you? Do you look? Listen?"

Take a moment right now to be conscious of your breathing. Aren't you grateful for lungs and air? For how they can let out words and song? Do that sort of attending every day, especially this week.

Give thanks to the Lord. He is the Giver, we are the Thanks-Givers.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving. Enter. v.4

Sometimes gratitude is neither like a wall of water or like gentle rain. It's more like an aqueduct. We have been able to go to Salt Lake City a couple of times and whenever I'm there I think of how brown the valley floor seems. That it is a dry spot is confirmed by the fact that when we drive up into the mountains beside the road one can see snaking down the mountain an aqueduct. It carries the waters of the melting snow to the dry floor below.

Sometimes we are in places that are dry. It seems like there is nothing with which to grow any thanks. The loneliness is pervasive. The bills are unending. The work stress is unrelenting. In this space there is no flash flood of appreciation. There is no gentle rain of gratitude. Yet with persistent labor aimed at thankfulness, there can be a real thanksgiving. You and I can build aqueducts to irrigate our lives and yield a harvest of thanksgiving. It doesn't crash upon us. It's a little harder than just slowing to smell roses. There's an effort involved.

Speaking of effort involved, let me suggest what this kind of thanks might be like to God. Your children or grandchildren when they were little drew a Crayola picture in two seconds and gave it to you proudly and, of course, you loved it! But compare that to the letter you got from your grandmother with severe arthritis and failing eyesight. You know it took her rubbing her joints

so the fingers would work and a magnifying glass so her eyes could make out the letters. You love the child's drawing and you love the grandmother's note but there's something more to you because of the effort involved in your grandmother's note. Right? So make the thanksgiving effort.

How can we build the aqueducts? One, find people who are thankful people and make them friends. We are all a little bit like chameleons, we change perhaps not a lot or perhaps a lot by the influence of others. It may only be with certain people or with all people. But we all change a bit. My singing changes when I'm standing next to a good singer, for example. Be around grateful people. There are those who are more that way than others. Find them. We can't just have grateful people all the time ... but do you have those who are close to your heart who are basically thankful people?

Another way to be thankful is to serve those less-fortunate than yourself. As they say, those who are busy rowing tend not to complain about the cruise. When our choir goes to Joe's Club, a meeting place for those with memory issues, they always, afterward, are elevated. I've never seen a group return from a mission trip where they were not thankful. Or people helping with hospice. Or disabled vets. Helping others helps us ... and it helps us be thankful.

A final way of building the aqueduct of thanks is to have a set time of remembering. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." (Ps. 103) "I will remember the deeds of the Lord." (Ps. 77)

Frederick Buechner tells of going to a hotel and staying in an absolutely marvelous room. He felt so connected in it and strengthened. He leaves and comes back to the hotel sometime later. He gets registered to a

room but it is just a room. It doesn't have the power of the other. So he goes to the desk and says, "I was in a room here once that was so good for me. But I don't remember which it was. I'd like to be put there." The clerk replied, "I know exactly which one you are speaking of. It is a room that has a name. Whenever you come, ask for it by name. It is a room actually called 'Remember.'" You may go to it whenever you like and be strengthened there.

Go the room of remember specifically with the promises and goodness of God. That's what a Sunday appointment is all about. We remember a Bible to read. We remember every act of God that touches us: creation out of nothing "and it was good," a savior who said, "Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest," a good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep, a Lord who said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid," but "be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." Go with God to the room called remember and remember specifically him.

What would your life be like if every Sunday, before you got out of the car, you paused and remembered all the blessings you could for five minutes? If we remembered that this is what Sundays are for – giving thanks. Coming before the Giver and being Thanks-Givers.

We're coming up to Thanksgiving and it is interesting to read about the history of the holiday. We generally think of the Pilgrims and how they landed in Plymouth in December of 1620 unprepared to face the winter. Half of them died. When the survivors the next fall found they had ample provisions with which to face the winter, they had a three day celebration feast. That's

what we think of as the foundation of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Some scholars suggest that we should look not only to the 1621 celebration but maybe even more so to one in 1623. The two of these form the real foundation and they reveal the effort, the prayer, and the setting aside of a specific time to thank.

That 1623 year a drought threatened all the crops and Gov. William Bradford called for a day of prayer and fasting. Bradford described that day this way:

*Notwithstanding all their great pains ... and the great hopes of a large crop ... the Lord seemed to take away the same and to threaten further and more sore famine unto them by a great drought. We set apart a solemn day of humiliation, to seek the Lord by humble and fervent prayer, in this great distress. And He was pleased to give them a gracious and speedy answer, both to their own and the Indians' admiration that lived amongst them. For all the morning, and the greatest part of the day, it was clear and hot, not a cloud or any sign of rain to be seen; yet toward evening it began to overcast, and shortly after to rain with such sweet and gentle showers as gave them cause of rejoicing and blessing God. It came without either wind or thunder or any violence, and by degrees in that abundance as that the earth was thoroughly wet and soaked ... And they set apart therefore a day of thanksgiving.*

The first Thanksgiving then had to do with a prayer and a setting apart of a time, a time to remember



the Lord's faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see. He gives. We thanks give.

Shout; it just erupts. Know, it takes awareness. Enter, it takes some work.

In concluding, here's a real question: Do *you* (you) want to be more thankful? Then open your heart to receive his goodness and train your heart to remember his blessings ... for the Lord is good. He is the Giver, we the Thanks-Givers.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. [pastorjeffwood@gmail.com](mailto:pastorjeffwood@gmail.com)  
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