



we do so with thanksgiving, with a thankful heart. And as we do this, the peace of God becomes ours.

It keeps our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. In Colossians chapter 3 and verse 15, Paul said, And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, which you also were called in one body, and be thankful. Thankfulness and peace go together.

It's when I'm not thankful that I'm not taking a stock of the fact that I actually do have, not only all I need, but more than I deserve. Being content is the sense that I have all that I need. Being thankful is the sense that I have better than I deserve.

And this is something that not everyone fully realizes. Again, if one has a sense of entitlement, they'll never feel that they have better than what they deserve. It's this reality that we have to have fixed in our minds that will keep us always thankful for what we have.

And, you know, some might say, well, you know, you have it better than I do, Steve, so, I mean, you don't understand, you know, how much of a challenge it is for me to be thankful. I'm sure there are people who have things far worse than I have. I know there are people who have things far worse than I have, and there's people who probably have some things better than I have.

But that's not relevant, because however difficult your life is, it could be worse. We don't, I think, take stock often enough of exactly how corrupt humans are and how much evil they are capable of, because God, by His grace, I think, withholds much evil. He doesn't withhold it all.

And all of us experience injustice. We all experience evil at the hands of other people or even just because of the fallen world we live in, because of accidents or disease or disasters. There are evils in this world, and we all have some of them in our lives.

But we don't know how many of them God is holding back, how many God is restraining. I've thought about this very many times when I've been driving and I see an accident. I think, there but for the grace of God, go I. I mean, the person who had the accident, his life is hurt, maybe ruined.

It might even have been ended. His car is wrecked. Maybe his passengers are injured.

Maybe he's in the hospital. Maybe he's dead. Maybe there's a whole family grieving because of that accident.

And I think, I feel sorry for that person. But I also feel grateful that it wasn't me. And that sounds selfish, but I mean, I didn't make it not be me.

I'm just grateful for the fact that it isn't. I wish it wasn't them either. But when you see

somebody else who's had an accident, you realize that they didn't expect that.

They got up this morning not expecting that to happen. They thought it was going to be a normal day. They had their plans.

Something came by surprise, and it was something that ruined their whole day, if not far more than their whole day. And I think how many hours, and if you total up the hours I've driven on freeways, in traffic, and the times I've been somewhat more careless than I should have been. I was distracted or something.

I almost hit something and got it out at just the right moment. I think, wow, praise God for his angels, you know. The angel of the Lord encamps about those who fear him and delivers him.

I wonder sometimes when we go to heaven if we'll find out how many things would have happened if we had not been guarded by angels, and to be thankful for the fact that every one of us got here safely today. And you might say, that's no big deal. I drive further distances than that all the time, and I get there safely.

Yes, be thankful for that too, because you can't count on that ever. Every person who's gotten into an accident today or any day could have said, well, I drive all the time and I don't get into accidents. True, that's the nature of an accident.

You don't expect it. It's not something that normally happens. And we all have something to be thankful for, no matter how bad our lives are.

We're walking. We're alive. We're breathing.

You heard, I'm sure, the old saying, I complained that I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet. You know, there's, I mean, that's how we need to understand things. You know, if I'm going through a trial, think about how many trials other people are going through.

Now, that should make us compassionate, by the way. It shouldn't just make us, oh, I'm glad they're going through it, not me. Sucks to be them.

But actually, it's, I mean, it should make us compassionate, but also grateful, because it could have been us. But for the grace of God, that would be me. And there's so many things to be thankful.

When I think about my life, and I've had, I could think about a different category of things. I've had some hardships in my life. I won't catalog them for you.

Some of you know about some of them. But I've gone through some really hard things in my life at times. But when I think about my life, I hardly even think about those things.

I think about how grateful I am that I have the parents I have, that I was born in a Christian home. Now, many of you were also. But if you weren't, you were at least born in a nation where the gospel is freely preached.

I know you were, unless you were born in another country and came here then. But the point here is we live where there are freedoms that many people all over the world would love to have. The whole problem with illegal immigration is that being here is so desirable.

People in very sad and difficult countries to live in, they weren't born here like you were. Now, I'm not saying they don't have things to be thankful for, too. I'm just talking about what we in this room have to be thankful for.

There's always a man who doesn't have any feet to counter you having no shoes. It can always be worse, and there are people who have it worse. The real problem is when we don't take that into consideration and don't live in thankfulness for all the things we have, that I'm standing up instead of in a wheelchair, that we don't... When you see the evangelist who's got no arms and legs, you say, well, I mean, God's using him.

Praise God. He's got the victory, but you've got arms and legs. I mean, do you wake up every morning thanking God that your hand is not crippled or gone? There are people who can't move their hands.

There are people who can't stand upright. There are people who are so crippled with arthritis or something like that that they can't do the things they used to do. I get a little bit of pain in my thumb once in a while.

I wonder, is this arthritis? Starting up at my age, it could be. And I think how much I take for granted the fact that I can, at will, just sit down and play the piano or play the guitar and enjoy myself doing that. Whereas if my hands would get arthritic, that's something I'd have to live without.

I wouldn't be able to do that. Now, I still have much to be thankful for. There's other things in life, but just those simple things.

Still got your new toy. Still my new toy, that's right. And many other toys, too, as a matter of fact.

Although I don't have as many as some people have, I've got more than enough. I've got more than I deserve. And then, you know, think about being thankful in your marriage.

Now, I have to say, I'm in a perfect marriage, so I've got a lot to be thankful for and for you to be envious of. But everyone here has a better marriage than they might have had. I know, because I've had a previous marriage myself.

And I think it's probably worse than any of your marriages are here. So I know there's a standard there above which all of you are probably living. As long as you have a husband or wife who's not out cheating on you, you've got a lot to be thankful for.

Even if you've got a husband or wife who isn't as warm, isn't as compatible, isn't as attractive as they were when they were younger. Even if you can look at other people and say, boy, you know, they have a happier marriage than mine. Yeah, but you can look at people who've got a miserable marriage.

And that could be yours. Why do you deserve better? This is the question you always have to ask. Why do you deserve better? The truth is you don't.

I mean, really, if you think about what do people deserve? What do sinners deserve? They deserve judgment. And really not much better than that. I mean, if you're not in hell or not going there, you've got nothing to complain about.

I think Spurgeon said something almost exactly like that. I think that was like almost a quote. So the Christian has got to focus on the grace that God has given, the benefits that God has given, even though we can always think of something else that hasn't been given to us.

Eve, of course, sinned because she thought about the one thing that God had not given her. If she'd been thankful for all the variety and all the wonderful things that God had created, I mean, the whole world, all the food in the world, all the animals in the world, all the beauty in the world, no disease, no disasters, in a perfect world. I'd say she had a lot to be thankful for, but she didn't know it.

Of course, she had nothing to compare it against, except that there's one tree over there she's not allowed to have, and that was intolerable. And I believe that thankfulness is a tremendous guard against sin in your life. It's when you begin to think you should have something that God has denied you, that God is holding back something that you really ought to have.

Other people do it, other people have it, and you think you should be able to too, and you're not focusing on the fact that you really have from God more things than you'll ever have time to thank him for. That's probably why we have eternity, so that we'll have enough time to thank him for all the stuff that we've always forgotten to thank him for, if you think about it. I mean, we live in a time where the bubonic plague isn't ravaging our land.

There were centuries in Europe where like 50% of the population was wiped out by the plague, and those who survived it weren't living in a very wonderful circumstance either. Frankly, we live in the most charmed time and place in history. We have comforts and luxuries that King Solomon could not purchase, though he had all the money in the

world, he couldn't purchase electric lights, he couldn't purchase hot water on tap.

He didn't probably have indoor plumbing in his bathroom. He might have, I don't know, but let's face it, we've got all kinds of luxuries that kings couldn't have before, and yet what we're mindful of is what isn't given to us. I wanted that promotion, I didn't get it.

My car is getting old. I really wish I could afford a new car, but I can't afford a new car. These other people have a house so much nicer than my house, and just thinking about the things that we don't have, we have the luxury to do that because we're spoiled.

If you're spoiled, you have only the luxury to think about what more you want to spoil yourself more with. But if you're thankful, see, this is a God-word attitude. I mean, there are, no doubt, non-Christians who are thankful for whatever, but Christians have no excuse not to be thankful because we see ourselves in a creation governed by a creator who dishes out circumstances for different people, different things for different people.

Some are given one talent, some are given five talents, some are given ten talents. Some people have more advantages than others and more responsibility too. But the fact that we have been given so much is something that it's a sin not to be grateful for.

I think of the story often about the ten lepers that Jesus healed. Even from my childhood, I had this impression about this story that there were ten lepers. Jesus said, listen, go show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice that Moses said to offer if you're a leper who's healed.

Well, they weren't healed when he said that, but they started going back to the temple, present themselves to the priest. As they went, they found that they were healed. And one of them returned to thank Jesus.

Now, the other nine, of course, did what most people probably would do. They wanted to get home. Being a leper means you've been isolated from family, friends, whatever, who knows how long, maybe years.

They haven't been with their children, haven't been with their spouses, haven't seen the inside of their home for however long they were diagnosed to be lepers, and it could have been years. No wonder they were in a hurry. I'm well.

Let me go to the priest, get a clear bill of health, and I can go home to my family. One doesn't wonder that they would do that. But this one guy stalled on that and decided to go back and thank Jesus for it.

And I remember as a child thinking, that's so heartwarming that he would do that. I'll bet Jesus was really impressed. I'll bet Jesus was just really, his heart was warmed that this guy thought to go back and say, thank you.

And instead, Jesus said, well, where's the other nine? He didn't indicate that it was a particular virtue that this man came back and said, thank you. What else are you going to do? Why didn't these other guys think about that? It's like he was disappointed with the other nine. Not because Jesus has some kind of an ego that has to be stroked with people affirming him and thanking him all the time, but it just is a commentary on the human condition, that we receive blessings from God all the time, and it just never occurs to us to thank God for them.

It's a sin. It's something Jesus actually complained about, that the nine did not return to him. Look at Romans chapter 1. Paul's talking about the depravity of society, and he describes this very ugly spiral downward from a point of people knowing God intellectually, but not wanting to know him in a relationship, and then how God gives them over to more and more vile and awful behaviors.

And in Romans 121, Paul says, because although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. If you look on further down, you see that it gets worse and worse for them. In verse 20, it says, and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind to do those things which are not fitting, et cetera, et cetera.

God, the judgment came upon them of having reprobate minds. Why, where did it start? Well, it started with them knowing about God and not being thankful. They chose not to glorify him or to be thankful.

It obviously is in Paul's mind that this is the basic human responsibility. If you know God, what are you going to do but glorify him and be thankful? But even we as Christians often, we're spoiled. We've known God a long time.

We kind of take for granted perhaps that we know God. And when you think of how many people are in the world who don't know God at all, have had no opportunity to really know him well, and the misery of their lives, the grief they experience when loved ones die, the hopelessness, the meaninglessness really of life. Well, people who don't know God actually have to manufacture some kind of meaning for life, some kind of purpose for living.

You know, atheists sometimes say, oh, you don't need to have God in order to have purpose in life. Well, you actually do. You can pretend that there's a purpose in life.

You can manufacture a purpose in life. My purpose is going to be to be a good person. My purpose is going to be rich.

My purpose is going to be to live long. Or whatever, you can have a purpose like that, but it's just an arbitrarily chosen purpose. It doesn't have any transcendent validity.

If there's a God, then there is a purpose for existence because we're made by him for a purpose to please him and to serve him and so forth. And having that purpose gives us direction in life, and it's not an artificial direction. It's one based on reality.

And, you know, a purposeful life is a fulfilled life. A purposeless life may be filled with all kinds of stimulations, fun, entertainment, or whatever, but it's empty. That's what Solomon said, you know, in Ecclesiastes.

He tried all that stuff, and it's all emptiness. It's like striving after the wind. A person who doesn't know God and is just seeking fulfillment under the sun has no basis to feel like life is meaningful at all.

And we see, of course, far more suicides now than we saw a generation ago or half a generation ago. It seems like it's just multiplying, people committing suicide. Why does a person commit suicide? Well, obviously, because of despair.

But why do they despair? Well, obviously, they don't see their life as fitting into anything meaningful enough to perpetuate it. There's not enough purpose to give them meaning. And, you know, if you've got meaning and purpose, then no matter how hard things get, you slog through it.

You keep going on through it because you know there's a reason. There's a reason for you being here. There's a reason for you fighting these battles.

There's a reason for you moving forward. There's a goal at the end that God has in mind. You might not know what the goal is, but you know he's got it, and that's the purpose for you to live on.

But when you give up on that, when you have no purpose, when there's no reason to live, that's when you give up. When you think of it, you have purpose, and that puts you in a much more advantaged position than most of the people who live in your town and most of the people in the world because you know God. Now, these people, it says they knew God, but they didn't glorify him, and they weren't thankful.

We should be just thankful that there is a God. You know, you ever heard somebody go, God, I thank you just for being you, you know? Well, I don't know that he needs to be thanked for that because he can't do anything else but be him. But that's, nonetheless, something that's good to appreciate.

I appreciate who he is, and I can be thankful that I live in a universe that is governed by God, that God, the God who sent his son, thank you, the God who saw us going the wrong way and was not willing to just leave us going the wrong way and came after us. And the fact that many of us, at a time when we still have most of our lives still ahead of us, had the good fortune to hear about him and learn about him and become followers of his. I know some young people right now that are close to me or used to be close to me,



and they are, they're not following God.

And I pray for them all the time that they'll come to know God. But I think their life is getting away. If they come to God now, they've already lost half of their lives.

They can live the rest of their lives for God. There's always a chance to start doing the right thing. But if they ever do that, they'll just be, they'll just think, man, why did I waste so much time? Some people have said, yeah, well, I'll just repent on my deathbed and I'll go to heaven, right? Well, if you really can repent at that point, you'll go to heaven.

But if you really do repent on your deathbed after a life of sin and rebellion against God, the one thing that repentance will do is it'll put into you a total grief that you didn't do that earlier. Because true repentance, any saving repentance, is a true regret about ever having done the wrong thing. And one thing that a person who repents on his deathbed will regret is that he lived the only life he was given on this earth to live and didn't do the right thing until the last breath.

You know, we have had the advantage of hearing about Christ, receiving Christ, beginning to direct our ways in His ways from an early age. Some of you got saved as adults, some of you as children. But none of you got saved at the last moment.

You've been living for years for Christ and that's something that you should be extremely thankful for. There's so much to be thankful for. There's a lot of models of thankfulness among the godly in the scripture.

In Psalm 119, this verse has always struck me. For years I always thought, should I be doing this? It's interesting. The psalmist says in 119 and verse 62, At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you because of your righteous judgments.

I think about, I'm going to set my alarm clock to wake up at midnight just to thank God some more. It almost makes it sound like the waking hours, that's not enough time. There's just too much to thank Him for.

So I better lose some sleep in order to catch up, make up for lost time, you know, thanking God. I've never actually done that, but I've actually contemplated it at times. Maybe I should just set the alarm for midnight, although sometimes I will have only been asleep for a half hour at that time.

But in the middle of the night, see, they went to bed when the sun went down in those days. They didn't have indoor lighting, except for expensive oil lighting, which they didn't want to spend money on. So they would just, people went to bed when the sun went down, got up when the sun came up.

But he said, I want to wake up. I don't like having a whole 12 hours of not thanking God. I'm going to rise up at midnight and thank you.

Now that guy's got actually the right attitude. I don't know if, I don't know that we could say that that's a mandate for people to do that. But I'd like to think that that's something that would actually seem realistic, because there's so much to be thankful for, and it's so good for us and so proper.

And it is pleasing to God when we thank Him. Daniel, you know, we know that he was thrown in the lion's den. I don't know if you remember exactly why.

Darius had made a decree that for the next 30 days, no one could pray to any God except him, King Darius. And of course, Daniel defied that decree. And he didn't do it really very secretly either.

But in Daniel 6.10, it says, now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home and in his upper room, with the windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Now, I don't know. I can see praying in those circumstances.

Giving thanks would not be the most natural response. You know, if we found out that Congress had just passed a law, that it's illegal to believe in Christ, it's illegal for Christians to assemble, it's illegal to have a Bible. Now, I could imagine getting down three times a day and praying, because I'd be feeling kind of desperate.

You know, that'd be a scary situation. Many people live in that situation right now in other parts of the world. But we are not used to that.

I could see praying about that, but thanking God? Thank you, Lord, that I've just lost all my freedom. You know, Daniel was risking going to the lion's den by the very act of kneeling and praying with the window open where people could hear him. And yet, he's thanking God for what he no doubt suspected would happen unless he'd be thrown to the lions.

And he didn't have any way of knowing he'd be delivered from them, by the way. That was unpredictable. And yet, he thanked God.

No doubt he thanked God that he had the privilege of knowing God in a pagan land like these Persians around him did not know. But that thankfulness was such a habit that he didn't give it up. And I could say, I mean, it's prayer that was being forbidden, not thankfulness.

But he prayed anyway, and he thanked God. And that thanking God is additional to his prayer. And that's something that's, in a sense, that's something more than prayer.

You know, we read in Philippians 4 a moment ago that be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your request known to God. Prayer and thanksgiving are not the same thing, but they go together well. You

know, the Lord's prayer that he taught doesn't have anything about thanks in it.

It doesn't say thanks, God, for anything in it. There's only these few lines about things to ask for. There's no thanks in it.

But that's not because thanksgiving doesn't go along with prayer. It's just that thanksgiving isn't the same thing as prayer. You can pray without being thankful.

In fact, most people do. Non-Christians often pray without being thankful. But we're told to pray with thanksgiving.

We're supposed to have thanksgiving along with our prayer. And that's what Daniel did. Jesus was thankful on many occasions.

Although he was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, the Bible says, that didn't prevent him from seeing things to thank his Father for. In Matthew 11, 25, Jesus said, He's thanking his Father that there are people that are getting it. It's not the wise and prudent in society.

It was these uneducated, these peasants that followed him. But he's thanking God that God has revealed it to them so that his message would live on after he was no longer there to preach it. Some people were getting it.

Apparently, most people were not. In chapter 15 of Matthew, in verse 36, Jesus said, It says, Now, here he's thankful, although all he's got is two fish and five loaves of bread, and he's got 15,000 mouths to feed. You ever think you don't have enough for what you're required to do? You ever think that you need more? Well, Jesus certainly had reason to believe he needed more.

He's got 15,000 mouths to feed, 5,000 men plus women and children, maybe 20,000 mouths. And all he has is two fish and five loaves of bread. What's he going to do with that? Well, one thing he's going to do is thank God for it.

It says, Now, usually you give thanks over a meal. If you don't pray much at all, you at least probably pray before you eat. That's a kind of a custom for religiously oriented people and Christians.

If your prayer life is not, you know, all that it should be, you probably still don't neglect to pray before you eat. And Jesus and his disciples probably prayed before meals too. But this is different.

This wasn't a regular meal. This is where you want to feed thousands of people, and this is all you have. Thanks, Lord.

Thanks that it's not less. Thank you for providing for this. And of course we know, everyone knows a miracle was done to meet the need.

But the point is, before the miracle was done, Jesus was thankful for the little bit that he had. And God always provides for us. You know, because you're here and you're breathing.

I'll bet everyone here has had a time when you thought, I don't know where the money is going to come from. I don't know how we're going to meet the mortgage payment. I don't know how we're going to afford to keep this car running until we can buy another car.

I just don't know how we're going to have enough food for all these kids. Most people, unless they're just like the Trump family or something, have times when they can't afford stuff or they think they can't afford stuff. And they see the need and they see what they've got, and it's way too little for what's needed.

I don't know how we'll get through this. And yet, every one of us is here. We've never missed a meal.

Or if we missed a meal, at least we had enough to stay alive or else you wouldn't be here, right? You didn't starve. You got clothes on. You drove here.

There are things that you have that there's probably a time in your life, how am I going to afford to keep this up? Well, God provides, right? But at times, we don't have enough and we're waiting for Him to provide. And that's when Jesus, thank God, He needed God to provide more food for these people. And He knew God was going to do it too.

Just like you ought to know that God's going to provide for you. But He didn't wait until the food was abundant and say, thank you, God, for that. You know, look at this great feast.

He thanked God for the little provision, knowing that God was going to take care of everything. In Matthew 26 and verse 27, it says, then He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to Him. You know, this is at the Last Supper.

Now, did He have anything to thank God for that night? Apparently. Apparently, He did. Now, He wasn't just thanking God for the food.

This was Passover. This was a ritual where they had to... The cup wasn't just something you drink to... because you're thirsty. The cup was something you drink to remember something, namely, the Exodus.

Now, Jesus was about to go to the cross like in less than 24 hours, probably 18 hours and then He was on the cross. And He knew it. He knew that was happening.

If you're on death row and you know that in 18 hours you're going to get the electric chair, you'd be pretty much in a situation very similar to what Jesus was in at that meal.

And here He is thanking God for what? For the cup, yes, but not just so they have a little wine. I'm sure that would be the least of His concerns at that time.

I've always thought that when people are on death row and they bring them, you know, whatever meal you want, you can have for your last meal. I think it was me, I think, keep it, you know. I lost my appetite, you know.

What does it matter what my last meal is? If it's my last, it's not going to be enjoyable, right? Jesus was having His last meal before His execution. And He was thanking God for it, not because He's going to enjoy the meal. He was thanking God because of what God had done and what God was about to do.

God had brought His people out of Egypt in the Exodus. That's what they were celebrating there at the Passover. That can always be celebrated.

You can always thank God for things in the past, even if you have no idea how the future is going to turn out. And that's the right thing to do. Say, well, God, You've been good in the past.

I need You to be good again, but whether You are or not, already what You've done is enough for me to be thankful for even moments before I'm executed. That's, I mean, if you can learn the perpetual habit of happiness, well, you'll be about like Jesus, as a matter of fact. Paul also, of course, was very thankful, though he is persecuted extremely most of the time, but he's continually giving thanks for people, for his readers and so forth.

1 Thessalonians 2 And verse 13, Paul said, For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you welcomed it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. This is what Paul was thankful for. He had been run out of Thessalonica probably a few weeks earlier, maybe not even that long earlier.

He had just gotten a church started there. He preached for three Sabbaths and then he got run out of town. All these baby Christians were left behind, untrained, undisciplined, without resources.

And yet, he got news. The word of God, which they'd received from him, was effectually at work in them. The work of God was going on in Thessalonica.

He said, I praise God continually, without ceasing, I thank God for you. Now, I don't know how he found time to thank God for anything else. He was thanking him all the time for just that one thing.

But obviously, Paul was a man, and ideally, Christians should be people, who are thanking God continually. Because there's, frankly, you'd never catch up. Because the

breath you are using to thank God is a new breath that God gave you that didn't deserve you.

Every breath is from God. That's what Daniel said to Belshazzar. You've praised the gods of wood and stone, but you haven't praised the God in whose hand your breath is.

Every breath that you take is a gift from God. You take it for granted, of course. It even happens when you sleep.

God even provides, and even the breath you use to thank him with, at that moment, you're not catching up on old business. You can thank him for this breath that I'm using right now to thank him for. You should be thankful at all times.

You can't always be saying thank God every moment. There's other things to say, by the way. There's conversations we had.

You can't be saying thank you. But being thankful always, having a heart of thankfulness, is the best predictor of personal happiness and spiritual good health. The living creatures, of course, in Revelation 4 and 9, they fall down continually, or the 24 elders fall down continually and cast their crowns before the Lord.

And the living creatures, too, are always thanking God. Now, it's interesting when you read that vision in heaven because it sounds like they never have any time to do anything else. And it says that the... This is Revelation 4. It says, The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.

They did not rest day or night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is to come. And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. Now, the living creatures never cease to give thanks.

But whenever they do it, the 24 elders throw their crowns down. I'm not sure how that would really be acted out on film. Whenever the living creatures give thanks, and they never stop doing it, the elders throw their crowns down.

But they must keep doing it. I mean, it's all very impressionistic, I'm sure, rather than literal. But the truth is that John depicts heaven as a place where God is being continually thanked and praised by those who are enlightened enough to know that that's what is appropriate.

Now, I'm going to wind this up here, but let me just talk about some of the things in the New Testament about instructions for our being thankful. For one thing, in Psalm 100, in verse 4, it says, Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. Now, entering into the presence of God is the privilege of believers.

It says in Hebrews chapter 10, Let us come boldly before the throne of grace. Or, you know, having a high priest over, you know, let us come boldly. We can come before God any time, but there's an appropriate way to come.

We enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. The imagery is of approaching a king in his palace. You come through the gates first, and then you enter into the courts where he is, and you are in his presence.

The gates are where you go first. Thanksgiving comes before praise. Praise goes beyond Thanksgiving, by the way.

Praise and Thanksgiving are not just synonyms. Thanksgiving is when you're giving, you're showing your gratitude for something that someone has done. If somebody does something for you, it's the polite thing to say thank you.

What you're thanking them for is something they did. Now, if it's somebody you really admire, and you want to talk about them, then that's going to be praise. You can say, I thank you for that wonderful gift, and you are so generous.

The first is thanksgiving. The second is praise. Everybody thanks God once in a while.

Even atheists say thank God. You know, when they somehow get through some kind of disaster they thought they were not going to get through. I mean, everybody almost instinctively says, well, thank God for that.

There's plenty to thank God for. Even unbelievers do it. But praising God is something that only believers can do because we alone know Him to know of His virtues, to know of His attributes.

Praising Him is talking about Him. Thankfulness is talking about something He did. We enter into His gates when we come to God.

Even when we pray, we're coming before God. We enter initially with thanksgiving, and then we come before Him with praise. It starts with being thankful.

We can't really praise properly unless we've at least been thankful. And when we've been unthankful, that's particularly sinful. It seems strange that we want to come before God very freely, but we don't always remember to be thankful.

Hebrews 13, 15 says that that's our spiritual sacrifices. Now, you know we're a kingdom of priests, and we offer up spiritual sacrifices. Peter said that in 1 Peter 2, 5, that we are a living house, living stones built into a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices.

Well, what are those spiritual sacrifices? Well, there are several different ones that the Bible mentions, but one of them is giving thanks. It says that in Hebrews 13, 15. It says, Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of

our lips, giving thanks to His name.

So praising God and giving thanks to Him is a sacrifice that's offered, a sweet-smelling savor to Him. It's what is pleasing to Him, like the sacrifices of Israel were pleasing. It's also the means by which we remain filled with the Spirit.

Paul says that when he tells us to be being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 2, 18 and following. Excuse me, Ephesians 5. Excuse me. 18 and following.

He says, be not drunk with wine, but he says, be filled with the Holy Spirit. And of course, I'm sure you've heard the phrase there. And the Greek means be being filled with the Spirit, remain filled with the Spirit.

But then he tells us how to do that. Well, how do I be being filled with the Spirit? How do I remain filled with the Spirit? Well, speaking to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. Now, these are ways that Paul says, this is how you be being filled with the Spirit.

You make melody in your hearts to the Lord. You give thanks to God in everything, for everything. And now, when you are continually thankful to God, your focus is always on Him.

You can't thank somebody without thinking about them at the moment. If you're continually offering thanks to God for everything, then your heart and mind is going to be directed toward God. This is one of the ways in which we remain filled with the Spirit, as opposed to drifting away from that.

Now, I realize that there are things that happen that sometimes you feel, I just can't thank God for. Paul said, give me thanks in everything. But, they're just things that aren't happy things.

How can I thank God that, you know, my child is sick, or that my child is strained from God? How can I thank God that I lost my job? How can I thank God that my car broke down in the most inopportune time and place? How can I thank God for that? And yet, Paul certainly knew his share of disappointments, disasters, imprisonments, beatings. And yet, he was so optimistic about this. He seemed to think that thanking God all the time was what had to be done.

He says, I never cease to give thanks for you. Remain filled with the Spirit, giving thanks in all things. And also in 1 Thessalonians 5.18, he says, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

You ever wonder what the will of God is for you? Ever thought, well, I wish I knew the will



of God. Well, you've just been told. In everything give thanks, for you to do so is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

God wants you to give thanks, in everything. But, does that make sense? Aren't there some things that we should be grieved over rather than thankful for? Yes, but, we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, and who are called according to His purpose. We don't see that work for good immediately, but we have a promise about it.

And we can and should thank God for that promise, and for the fact that's behind that promise. This too will pass, and when it does, it'll work for my good. And it'll work for the good of the body of Christ.

Whatever trials I'm going through. The last trial I went through that was very significant was a long time ago. I go through little trials, of course, all the time.

But there's a really major trial I went through. And I remember thinking at the time, there's just no way that this can ever work out for the good. It was a disaster.

And many people were adversely affected by that. There's just no way this is going to be working out for the good. And yet, I won't go into detail, but the things that happened precipitated other things in my life that made my life far better than I would have ever imagined would be possible.

And it was through the loss of something that was of great value to me, and a permanent loss of it. And yet, God worked it out so that it's far better for me as a result. And I've seen that as a pattern in my life.

I should have known it at the time. I'd seen it many times in my earlier life. But there are sometimes things that are so bad, just so unimaginably bad, you can't just imagine that they could get better.

And yet, God, He's smart. He's a genius. He's competent.

And He works everything for the good. Now, the way I see it, when God works things out for the good, then I'll thank Him for it, right? Well, if I know that's true, then why should I wait till then to thank Him for it? Do I know it's true? Do I believe? I mean, I know for a fact that at the end of my life, I'll look back at every single thing, including the hard things, maybe especially the hard things. I'll say, that was so necessary.

That was so instrumental in shaping who I am. Or in an effect it had on me or some other people. It was so right that that happened.

It was so wrong at the time, it seemed. But it was so right as I look back. And I know that there won't be anything in my life, when I look back in retrospect upon it at the end of

my life, that I can't thank God for.

I just believe that when we see what God has finally done, or even maybe after we die, we have to see it. Because we may not even see it clearly before we die. But after we die, we'll see it clearly.

And then I'll say, thank God for that. Even that thing there that I was so upset about, thank God that that happened. Now, I believe that.

I do believe that. I believe the Bible's true about that. And because I believe it, it only makes sense that while I'm going through the thing that I don't know how that's going to work out for the good, by faith, in the promise of God, why can't I enjoy it now? Why wait until it gets better to enjoy it? Why not celebrate God's faithfulness and thank him for his generosity and his goodness, even at those times? That's what I think really pleases him.

Daniel thanking God when he's facing the lions. Jesus thanking God when he's going to the cross. When things are really bad, and the person who knows God just says, there's no reason here to stop thanking God.

God deserves to be thanked. If I rise up at midnight every night to thank him, I still won't catch up. There's just not enough time.

But I can certainly use the time I have wisely. And thanking God, you know, sometimes we thank people for things just as a perfunctory thing. You send people a thank you card when they did something nice to you and so forth.

And, you know, you think, well, I've received thank you cards from people many times. And I think, well, that was a nice thought they had. I wonder if they remember it now.

It's two days ago. This is mail. They probably just sent out, they probably sent a whole bunch of thank you cards to people.

And they probably felt thankful at the time they wrote it. But now they probably have forgotten it altogether. You know, we can just say thank you just to be polite.

And it may not mean much to us really deeply. But thankfulness to God connects us spiritually with God. It brings us into his gates and into his courts.

And this is something that is the place of health. This is the place of healing. I'm not talking about physical health per se.

I'm just talking about spiritual health and happiness and fulfillment and purpose. And that's why being thankful in all things is not only mandated, it's just, it just makes sense. It just is being in touch with reality.

A person who's not thankful to God has lost touch with reality and that's never a

spiritually healthy place to be.