

A Special Recollection of Thanksgiving in Prayer

An Examination of Prayer and Thanksgiving from Scriptures Studied Throughout 2017¹ One Week Study Guide – Thanksgiving Week

I am persuaded that the most natural dispositions for one who beholds the glory of God as revealed in the Scriptures are worship in fear and awe, worship in repentance and obedient change, and worship with thanksgiving and joy. It is my prayerful hope that all of these responses have been and will continue to mark your investment of study and laboring in the Scriptures. To this end this week we will refresh ourselves of the many times that “thanksgiving” has percolated to the top of our multi-faceted study in prayer as it has been both modeled and instructed from the Scriptures. I would encourage you to re-examine these portions of our studies over the preceding months of 2017 and consider how you might better and more consistently pray with theologically provoked and informed thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving in Jonah

In the introductory lessons on Jonah we addressed major themes of the book and one such theme was *salvation*. It was in this context that we observe the coupling of *worshipful thanksgiving* with *salvation*.

Jonah 2:9, "But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"²

In Jonah chapter two we see what is referenced to as *a psalm of thanksgiving* by Jonah, and its beautiful gratitude and joy serve as a model of a proper worshipful expression here. But later it serves as a rebuke that Jonah was delighted to experience this for himself, but not necessarily for his enemies.

Jonah chapter two provides a most unexpected and ultimately ironic reprieve in a narrative that is full of Jonah's consternation over his call to preach to the people of Nineveh for fear of their salvation. Here, having rebelliously fled his charge, he has found himself jettisoned overboard his escape vessel at sea and rapidly sinking to the depths of the abyss where men do not return to tell of their terrifying stories. However, Jonah experiences, testifies, and proclaims The LORD's great mercy in saving him. He prays his very own *psalm of thanksgiving* that culminated with "Salvation belongs to The LORD!" However, what is not apparent to Jonah or the readers through this chapter is that this magnificent salvation would serve to provide as the book's greatest irony as the prophet rejoices in that which he would have for himself, for his people, but not for others. He thereby demonstrates that while he understands the wonderful and saving character of God, he only rejoices in it with qualification and thereby betrays his own failure to truly appreciate the character and glory of God. The mirror of the narrative continues to bear many of our own reflections and continues to demand that we examine and address our own inconsistencies and qualifications to our *giving thanks* and rejoicing in the character and glory of God.³

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ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² An Overview of the Book of Jonah, Pg.11

³ Jonah Chapter Two Study Guide, Pg.1

Jonah chapter four left the book's readers in a place of unresolved tension centered on Jonah's inconsistent delight and frustration in the revealed glory of God as made plain in Exodus 34. This was addressed at various times throughout our study of Jonah, but in chapter four there was a return to this emphasis and its articulation throughout the Old Testament. Here we will again look at the declared glory of God from Exodus and three references from the Psalms that couple these expressed character elements of God with the response of thanksgiving.

The character elements of God that Jonah identified here were rooted in his self-declared glory. Moses requested to see The LORD's glory, but he could not. However, he was afforded the privilege of seeing its passing glimpse and hearing it declared. It was those high character elements that expressed God's glory that were present time and again when examining the ways and works of God, and they were exactly both what Jonah had in mind when originally commissioned and what he saw on display at Nineveh.

"Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.' And the Lord said, 'Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.'" Exodus 33:18-23

"The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'" Exodus 34:5-7

Those Exodus passages composed the context and core elements, but they are expressed throughout the Old Testament Scriptures and would have been very familiar to Jonah.⁴

In Psalm 103 David provides a Psalm of Thanksgiving to The LORD and includes a clear reference to the magnificent moment in Exodus 34 and its larger surrounding contexts. "He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Psalm 103:7-8

In Psalm 116 the Psalmist gives thanks to the God who delivers and in such references elements of these well-established character qualities. "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful." Psalm 116:5

In Psalm 145 David provides another Psalm of Thanksgiving of Praise to God in which he extols the character and works of God. "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Psalm 145:8

⁴ Jonah Chapter Four Study Guide, Pgs.5-6

Reflection and Application

What are some principles you have learned or that were refreshed in your re-examining the element of thanksgiving from our study in Jonah?

How might you be more intentional and consistent in giving thanks in prayer from these principles as you apply them to your own prayer life?

Thanksgiving in The Prayers of Paul: 2 Thessalonians 1

Paul's affection for the Thessalonian church is evident to anyone who gives attention to the two letters written to them. Though Paul was with them for a short time and was forced to leave by the unbelievers among them, nevertheless, he had a great love for them and it showed plainly in his prayers for them.

In our study of Paul's prayer in 2 Thessalonians chapter one there was a section titled, "Thankfulness for Signs of Grace"⁵ in which we addressed the precise nature in which Paul expressed thanks for the Thessalonians.

When establishing the contextual framework for his prayers for the Thessalonians, Paul begins by giving thanks to God for them. However, Paul's thanksgiving is not just a casual gratitude, but a precise thanks to God for his work in their hearts and lives.

Building off what had been established regarding the need for elements of greater weightiness of truth in one's prayers, D.A. Carson speaks to the *heart* behind a petition, particularly in thanksgiving.⁶

"...by and large, our thanksgiving seems to be tied rather tightly to our material well-being and comfort. The unvarnished truth is that what we most frequently give thanks for betrays what we most highly value. If a large percentage of our thanksgiving is for material prosperity, it is because we value material prosperity proportionately."⁷

Continuing the theme of thankfulness for signs of grace there was the subheading of: "An Element of Knowing and Loving One Another" where the dynamic of proximity and overlap of life were addressed as they also inform one's prayers.

⁵ Original section heading source: A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Praying with Paul; D.A. Carson; Baker Academic, 2014; (Hereafter: Carson), Pg.22

⁶ 2 Thessalonians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.2

⁷ Original quote source: Carson, Pg.23

Here it was drawn out that Carson provides three areas in which Paul expressed thankfulness to God for signs of grace in the Thessalonians' lives:

- 1) That their faith was growing.
- 2) That their love was increasing.
- 3) That they were persevering under trial.⁸

However, what must be understood before one can express a like thankfulness to God for others is that the implicit understanding is that one can only give thanks in this manner for those whom they genuinely know and love. Quality thanksgiving is birthed from genuine one anothering. The act of such prayer is birthed from love of others and the fuel by which it is fed is the intentional loving overlap and integration of lives. We can certainly express thanksgiving to God for others that we only know on a less personal level, but for those within the local church body and with whom our lives should be knit together, there is a greater privilege in giving a more complete and robust thanksgiving to God for their growing faith, increased love, and perseverance.⁹

Three additional areas that Paul expresses thanks to God for the Thessalonians are:

- 1) Thankfulness for Signs of Grace: "Paul gives thanks that his readers' faith is growing."¹⁰
- 2) Thankfulness for Signs of Grace: "Paul gives thanks that their love is increasing."¹¹
- 3) Thankfulness for Signs of Grace: "Paul gives thanks that they are persevering under trial."¹²

Reflection and Application

What are some principles you have learned or that were refreshed in your re-examining the element of thanksgiving from our study in 2 Thessalonians 1?

How might you be more intentional and consistent in giving thanks in prayer from these principles as you apply them to your own prayer life?

⁸ Carson, Pgs.23-25

⁹ 2 Thessalonians One Prayer Study Guide, Pgs.3-4

¹⁰ Carson, Pg.23

¹¹ Carson, Pg.23

¹² Carson, Pg.25

Thanksgiving in The Prayers of Paul: Praying for Others

Paul was a man of constant prayer and his letters make it plain that he gave no small amount of attention to praying for others and specifically giving thanks to them in prayer. Note the nature, reason, and content of such prayers in the samples provided.

Paul shares of his thanksgiving to God for the Corinthian believers and unpacks what this thanksgiving consists of.¹³

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Paul was affirming God's praiseworthiness in the context of victory in Christ and how this looks in this present age.¹⁴

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?" 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

Here Paul was primarily providing testimony, but with this there is articulation of thanks to God and the personal relationships of prayer.¹⁵

"For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! " 2 Corinthians 9:12-15

Paul demonstrates with great clarity the rich biblical roots from which his prayers of thanksgiving for the believers were drawn.¹⁶

"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to

¹³ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.6

¹⁴ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.6

¹⁵ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.6

¹⁶ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.7

come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Ephesians 1:15-23

Pastoral counsel finds one of its chief applications in driving you to prayer; Paul does no less here.¹⁷

"...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

Paul is operating off of the New Testament presumption that Christians pray, and in view of this he provides the Colossian believers ways in which they can effectively pray for his own gospel labors.¹⁸

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." Colossians 4:2-4

Paul loved the Thessalonian believers as is plainly demonstrated by his conduct: constantly mentioning them in his prayers.¹⁹

"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

An element of Paul's prayerful gratitude is that that gospel was received as it should have been – the effectual word of God.²⁰

"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers." 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Paul modeled a life of prayer that reflected the high priority that it deserves, and he demonstrated elements of thanksgiving and petition that were God-centered and Christ-exalting.²¹

"For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Paul clearly put an emphasis on praying for those within the church and their work, but he called on believers to be faithful to pray for all people.²²

¹⁷ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.10

¹⁸ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.10

¹⁹ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.10

²⁰ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.10

²¹ Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.12

²² Praying for Others Prayer Study Guide, Pg.13

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
1 Timothy 2:1-4

Reflection and Application

What are some principles you have learned or that were refreshed in your re-examining the element of thanksgiving from our study in Paul’s Praying for Others?

How might you be more intentional and consistent in giving thanks in prayer from these principles as you apply them to your own prayer life?

Thanksgiving in The Prayers of Paul: 1 Thessalonians 3

When studying Paul’s prayers in 1 Thessalonians 3 we were reminded of the crucial nature of that chapter – how up to that time Paul was expressing great anxiety that perhaps the Thessalonians had been overwhelmed by the enemy. Then... when Paul comes to Timothy’s report he was overcome with extraordinary joy and thanksgiving over their endurance and faithfulness.

“For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God,” 1 Thessalonians 3:9

Paul's thanksgiving - his unrestricted gratitude to God is for the Thessalonians, not for what advantage he might derive from them, but for the work of God being realized in/through them. Further, the wealth of thanksgiving that he desires to express is made plain by its lack of qualification as observed through the question that he poses as, though to say what would be sufficient in our giving thanks to God for you.²³

"For what thanks can we render to God for you...." 1 Thessalonians 3:9 NASB

"For how can we thank God enough for you...." 1 Thessalonians 3:9 NET Bible

²³ 1 Thessalonians Three Prayer Study Guide, Pg.6

Paul's joy was being rooted in God's graciousness to the Thessalonians, which reflects primarily a love for God as he is the central element of the source, aim, and culmination of the expressed joy and the recipient of gratitude/thanksgiving.²⁴

D.A. Carson provided the following insight regarding Paul's thanksgiving in prayer for the Thessalonians, "He encourages Christians by thanking God for his grace in their lives. More precisely, he encourages Christians *by telling them* that he thinks God for his grace in their lives. Thus he has simultaneously drawn attention to the Thessalonians' spiritual growth, thereby encouraging them, and insisted that God is the one to be thanked for it, thereby humbling them."²⁵

Reflection and Application

What are some principles you have learned or that were refreshed in your re-examining the element of thanksgiving from our study in 1 Thessalonians 3?

How might you be more intentional and consistent in giving thanks in prayer from these principles as you apply them to your own prayer life?

Thanksgiving in The Prayers of Paul: Colossians 1

Reading the various letters of Paul it is clear that he was a man of vigorous and constant prayer and as we observed here, in Colossians 1, the emphasis on his prayer for the Colossians was on his giving thanks to God for them.

In this first chapter we observed this pattern by means of the following breakdown of the text: 1:4, The Context of Paul's Thanksgiving in Prayer, and 1:5-8, The Reason for Paul's Thanksgiving in Prayer.²⁶

1:4, The Context of Paul's Thanksgiving in Prayer

Paul and Timothy did not directly participate in the planting of the church in Colossae, but the church's corporate testimony had reached them. The Colossian church was identified as a people who had submitted in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Colossian church was

²⁴ 1 Thessalonians Three Prayer Study Guide, Pg.6

²⁵ Original quote source: Carson, Pg.66-67 (Italics in Original)

²⁶ Colossians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.3

also identified as a people who bore the fruit of faith, namely they loved others redeemed in Christ. So, the testimony that reached Paul and Timothy was that these were genuine Christians and this was the catalyst for Paul's pattern of thanksgiving in prayer for them as he will develop in the next section.²⁷

1:5-8, The Reason for Paul's Thanksgiving in Prayer

In 1:5 Paul articulates the reason for his pattern of thanksgiving in his prayers for the Colossian church: because of the hope laid up for them in heaven - a hope that was wholly secured in the gospel. Their redemption in Christ was the means of his thanksgiving.²⁸

Paul was again expressing thanksgiving to God for the Colossians as he closed this section on prayer in verses twelve to fourteen – rooting his gratitude in their common redemption in Christ.

As stated, here, in the final element of Paul's prayer was the giving of thanks to the Father, and he finishes 1:12 and continues through 1:13-14 by expressing the means by which our magnificent inheritance has been made secure: through deliverance and through redemption. The Father has delivered us – who are united with the saints in light – from the domain of darkness, and he has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. In the Son we have redemption by the forgiveness of our sins.²⁹

Reflection and Application

What are some principles you have learned or that were refreshed in your re-examining the element of thanksgiving from our study in Colossians 1?

How might you be more intentional and consistent in giving thanks in prayer from these principles as you apply them to your own prayer life?

Thanksgiving in The Prayers of Paul: Philippians 1

As Paul was consistently giving thanks for the Colossians, so also was he consistently giving thanks for the Philippians. He expressed in Philippians 1 that recollecting thoughts of the Philippians produced thankfulness in him toward God for them. With this we observe

²⁷ Colossians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.3

²⁸ Colossians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.3

²⁹ Colossians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.3

that it was a consistent pattern for Paul to reference "remembering" someone in direct connection with his praying for them - almost as to communicate that remembering them will inevitably be identified with praying for them so as to remember is to pray and to pray was to give thanks.³⁰

Reflection and Application

What are some principles you have learned or that were refreshed in your re-examining the element of thanksgiving from our study in Philippians 1?

How might you be more intentional and consistent in giving thanks in prayer from these principles as you apply them to your own prayer life?

Thanksgiving in The Prayers of Paul: Ephesians 1

A consistent element to Paul's prayers was the relationship between the testimony of the believers in a local church and his thanksgiving to God for their salvation and growth in grace. This was the nature of Paul's theologically rich opening to the letter to the Ephesians where he bridges the glories of Christ in salvation to that salvation's outworking in the Ephesian's lives.

So here in this context an immediate source of Paul's thanksgiving to God for the Ephesians, while rooted in their magnificent salvation in Christ, was the fruit of their salvation, which was their expressed faith in Christ and their love for the redeemed. Paul's prayers for them were invigorated by the testimony that had propelled out from this body of believers: their faith and love.³¹

Further, in giving thanks in prayer for the Ephesians, Paul prays that they who are bearing evidence of God's magnificent work in them might have more of what God provides by way of wisdom and revelation in knowledge. Paul petitions that they might have the eyes of their heart enlightened that they may know the hope to which they have been called - the scope of the redemptive work of Christ both now and in eternity. He is petitioning that they would properly appreciate and understand the glorious truths that he has already affirmed for the church at large as vital and real elements of their own lives and let such truths work an

³⁰ Philippians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.1

³¹ Ephesians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.4

effectual work in them. He is not simply praying for them to have greater knowledge, but knowledge rooted in the gracious insight provided by the Spirit of God, and a knowledge that *transforms those who possess it*. Therefore, he was not only giving thanks for the Ephesians and their evidences of grace, but was also petitioning in such a way that there would be continued thanksgiving to God on their behalf.³²

Ultimately one of the precious elements that Paul was modeling here was a clear emphasis on praising God, not just affirming his works and securing continued petition. This is because it is imperative to recognize that when it is God who effects the work, then it is God who receives the praise and thanksgiving. Therefore, a proper response to hearing of God's work in strengthening, maturing, and growing the church is to express thanksgiving to him for what he has done in and through his redeemed. This is theologically informed thanksgiving – recognizing that thanksgiving for others and their progress is ultimately a necessary thanksgiving to God.³³

Reflection and Application

What are some principles you have learned or that were refreshed in your re-examining the element of thanksgiving from our study in Ephesians 1?

How might you be more intentional and consistent in giving thanks in prayer from these principles as you apply them to your own prayer life?

³² Ephesians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.5

³³ Ephesians One Prayer Study Guide, Pg.7