



How Can We Be Truly Thankful?

1 Thessalonians 5:18: (NASB) *In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Special Guest: Todd Alexander



In the United States, Thanksgiving Day is a day that was originally set aside as a national holiday to stop the activities of our busy lives and thank God for His providence. Fast forward a few hundred years, and what do we have? A day set aside for family, friends, food and football. Being "thankful" is rarely on the agenda anymore, and being thankful to God specifically, borders on political incorrectness! What about actually living with a grateful heart daily? That is a concept that is far from the collective consciousness of our tech-

savvy society today. Now, just because gratitude is not the general focus does not mean we as Christians have permission to ignore it. On the contrary, living a life of appreciation is a Christian requirement. How do we take that which is required of us and transform it into that which we seek each and every day?

Living every day in a state of Thanksgiving is really hard but it is not impossible. Today we have a guest with us who's going to help us crack the code on how to start walking that road of gratitude, Todd Alexander.

(Todd's comments are in purple and may be edited for clarity or brevity.)

Todd, who are you? We have had you on many times before, but for new listeners, tell us about yourself.

I live in Columbus, Ohio. I am married with two adult children. I'm an ad agency salesperson. I am involved in the Israel Training Leadership Institute, and one of my specialties as a Christian minister is sensory branding. It is one of the things I have translated from my business world to my ministry world. It is the idea that we can create a sensory environment where people can get excited. And I think that's what God has done with us with the human body, with our mind, with our heart and with the word He has written in the Scriptures.

Sensory branding?

Starbucks perfected it with the smells, the tastes, the environment... everything.

You are taking it to a level within the life of a Christian, and the subject of gratitude has a lot to do with it. As we will develop this, we are going to see sensory branding come through to help us have gratitude in every part of our life. Todd, let's get started. How would you define thankfulness?

I think in the Scriptures, thankfulness is all about *letting God answer our needs in our private story.*

What do you mean by "private story"?



As the world rushes on, we have a desire to serve and please our Heavenly Father and follow Jesus Christ, and we can see examples of this in the Bible. For instance, Jesus' private story was that he was going to give his life for the life of the world. No one knew this about Jesus; it was his private story. Daniel the prophet's private story was to serve his Heavenly Father in a foreign land, and God opened up rich secrets. God even pointed to the first advent of Jesus. The secret story is to let God take control of our thoughts, our opinions and our worries.

The private story is the part of us that others may not generally and easily see, but it is sort of the driving force within us.

And the only way we see each other's private story is through Christian fellowship.

And that is a whole different subject, but the idea of real true fellowship is not getting together on a Sunday saying, "Hey, how are you? Did you have a good week?" That's not what you're talking about. You are talking about getting down to what makes you, YOU. Thankfulness is all about letting God answer our needs in that internally driven part of you that makes you the person you are, the called-out one if you are a Christian.

And this was the promise of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Thankfulness as an equation equals humility plus faith in our past and in our future being under God's care.

True thankfulness comes from the ability to let things go so we can be humble, and the ability to have faith to draw something else to replace pride. Often we think about thankfulness and relate it to being happy. Are happiness and thankfulness the same? Are they related? How is thankfulness different than happiness?

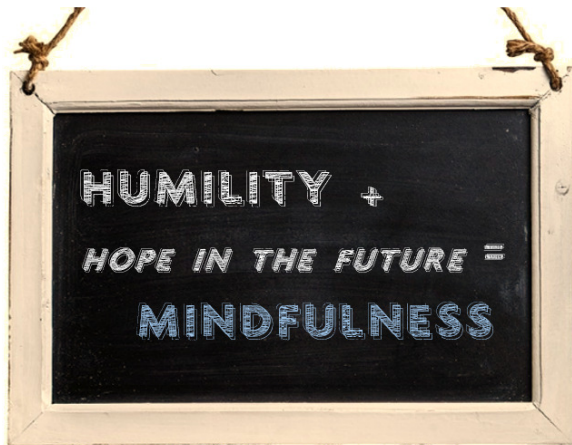


I think the difference is faith. I don't think you have to have faith to be happy. There are many people without faith in God who are very happy. It has to do when their interests and values are in alignment. When the things we are interested in match our values, our human body works with integrity, and it gives us peace in our private life and public life. That peace leads to happiness.



Exhilaration and excitement can have a sense of happiness, but sometimes the values are not in alignment with exhilaration or excitement, so happiness is not a result. It sometimes ends up as depression, because that exhilaration is an emotion that rises far beyond our regular state, and then tends to crash because something is out of alignment somewhere along the way.

A perfect example of this is our children's education. When they pursue vocations that align with their values, they can set themselves up for a life of happiness.



What is mindfulness?

Humility is a key part of mindfulness. Mindfulness equals humility plus hope. I'm defining it as humility plus hope in the future. You don't have to have faith to practice good mindfulness.

Mindfulness is simply thinking things through, being present in the things that are around you.

The woman we hear from next is not speaking as a Christian, but she has tremendous fundamentals in looking at thankfulness and gratitude in daily life:

 **Why me, How to Practice Gratitude During Difficult Times, Lisa Nichols**

- The last question you ever want to ask is, "Why me," because you might just get the answer why you. The quality of your answer is determined by the quality of your question. Ask a more empowering question. When you're going through something difficult, don't ever ask, "Why me?" Here are the questions you want to ask (you might want to write these down): What character, what part of my characteristic is being strengthened in this moment, in this situation? Another question: What lesson am I supposed to learn while I'm going through this challenge? What lesson am I supposed to learn? You want to give yourself permission to be pulled through the experience.*

Todd, in your notes you based thankfulness on the Beatitudes. Why are the Beatitudes so important to us as Christians?

The Beatitudes are at the beginning of Matthew 5. Matthew 5:6,7 is where Jesus delivers some of the most beautiful messages about his kingdom. With the nine Beatitudes, Jesus was setting the stage to restart the human mind. I believe the Beatitudes contain the code for the "software of thankfulness" that was written on the human heart when God created mankind.

Are you saying thankfulness is programmed into humanity?

Yes. I believe we are created in the image of God, and He wrote the software of thankfulness on our heart that Jesus was reminding us about in the Beatitudes. He was "activating" that software for all who would listen.



If we look at the Beatitudes as the activation of this preprogrammed response God built into us, they take on an even greater meaning. Todd, we are going to go through nine points you call the "Thank Full Nine."



Matthew 5:3: (NASB) *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Maintaining a conscious need for God is about being poor in spirit. What is the connection between those two?

Jesus was speaking about looking around at the opportunities in the world and seeing they are ephemeral, short-lived pleasures of humanity. Now, remember he started delivering

these Beatitudes right after he got out of the desert in the wilderness and was tempted by Satan.

Satan tempted him with three things, summed up by the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. *Blessed are the poor in spirit* - for those of us who fight these three things - the pride of life, the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh, it is a "mind reboot."

It is interesting because Jesus, going through those temptations, maintained his conscious need for God, because in his response to each of those temptations, he went back to Scripture. He quoted how God would fulfill and take care of whatever his needs were, rather than what Satan had to offer.

In the wilderness, Jesus took time out to be able to understand the 27 principles of Christian living he would describe in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. It requires of us pure intention and to trust him. It requires us to look for the truth and ask the right, powerful questions, just like the Lisa Nichols audio clip you played.

We go through this process as a "coming of age." It is a desire to know and please God, to understand the truth. It is this type of person Jesus was speaking to on the Mount of Beatitudes. He wasn't going to the temple to speak to the educated people; he was going outside to meet the people where they were in all of their troubles, uncertainties and worries. He delivered this beautiful message, opening up this "software code" written on their heart.

We are born with a "hardware" - our ability to think and feel, our body's health, and the "software" written on our heart at creation. This is what Jesus was activating.

Intentions, trusting, looking, asking:

Psalms 1:1-2: (NASB) *¹How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ²But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.*

This points us to maintaining a conscious need for God. Blessed are the poor in self-spirit, because that is where we get gratitude from as a foundation.



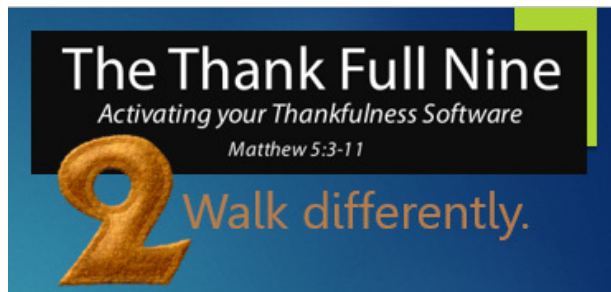
THANKFUL THOUGHT:

Make sure our emotional compass labels God as its "True North."

**Thankfulness is the awareness of our needs and their fulfillment.
How does this change what we do?**

As with any profound and life-changing process, the development of gratitude always begins with internal thoughts, intentions and decisions. It is only after this process is in place that we can begin to act in a way that reflects something different. Here is where others can take notice.

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. — Melody Beattie



Walking differently is looking at the choices the world gives us and deciding it is not good enough. Instead, we are going to follow the principles in the Scriptures. It is more than that, though. It is looking at what the world has to offer and mourning over it, lamenting. This is the ability to see beyond our physical senses to our spiritual senses.

Matthew 5:4: (NASB) *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

This is like the expression "walking to the beat of a different drummer," but with the dimension of mourning the unfulfilled way we previously walked.

We see this in our children. Perhaps they are in junior high or elementary school. Perhaps they are being bullied by other people. The bully is trying to force their narrative on your child. This is what happens in our worldly experience. The world is the bully. The Christian is the child, and the Christian should not settle for this worldly narrative that puts pleasure at the center of our life. I call it "pleasure treasure." It is easy to live in this world as if we don't need God and Jesus. We can be invisible to God. I think the Rich Man and Lazarus parable is a good example. The rich man was a self-sufficient rich man who felt he could live without needing God.

It is hard and painful to walk differently in the world. When you walk in such a politically incorrect way, people tend to notice, and you tend to get ridiculed. We will be dealing with this in detail later on.



Developing the proper life values will determine your life results:

The Christian vs. the Worldly Wise

- *The Christian intuits higher truths, having faith in a set of absolutes from which life itself is based. The Worldly Wise believes ALL truth is relative, that it changes all the time and is different for each person.*

There are at least two ways to collect information - by experience or through intuition. The word of God in our life guides us into higher truths. If we understand the Scriptures, we are a spirit-begotten child of Jesus Christ and can intuit these higher truths; we have faith in a set of absolutes from which life itself is based.

That is the Christian side - having faith in a set of absolutes.

- *The proper Christian intuits truths beyond the grasp of his rational mind. The Worldly Wise simply want to be right, to win above all else.*

The Worldly Wise believe all truth is relative. This is what Jesus was fighting Satan about in the wilderness. Satan was saying truth is relative, it changes all the time and is different for each person. But the proper Christian intuits truth beyond the grasp of his rational mind, and that's what the Bible provides. It provides the spiritual food, the spiritual medicine and the code that activates the software put in our hearts when we were created. The Worldly Wise simply wants to be right, to win above all else.

The Christian finds truth beyond the grasp of the rational mind. As an imperfect human being, it is more sensible to have truth be what I need it to be in my personal experience, because others have not had my experience and cannot possibly know my experience. Therefore, truth is how I interpret it. That is the rational mind.

Yes.

What you are saying is to get to absolute truth, we have to go beyond the rationalizing of the mind to see absolute truth, in order for us to be able to walk differently.

Yes. We have to go beyond what we can see with our physical senses to the spiritual world, as we are created as both physical and spiritual beings.

Instead of wanting to be right, we should want to be godly righteous. Instead of wanting to win, we should want to win the battle against ourselves.

Rhetoric vs. Truth and Wisdom

- *Rhetoric is a tool of persuasion. (The Pharisees used rhetoric.)*
- *Truth and wisdom are tools that provide meaningful information. Jesus used truth and wisdom. A "Thank Full" life requires us to seek the wisdom and truth from God's Word.*



As proper Christians, we should be using truth and wisdom in our speech. The Worldly Wise will use rhetoric. Rhetoric is a tool of persuasion, and we see the Pharisees tried to use rhetoric against Jesus. What did he use against them? The sword of the Spirit. He used truth and wisdom. Truth and wisdom are tools available to us that provide meaningful information. Just like Jesus used wisdom and truth, we have it within our grasp. A thankful life requires us to seek the wisdom and truth from God's Word.

Rhetoric is incredibly powerful and commonly used, especially in the political environment. Essentially, all sides use rhetoric in wars of politics. You are saying rhetoric is not Christian language; truth and wisdom are.

rhetoric (noun)

1. the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.
2. Language designed to have a persuasive or impressive effect on its audience, but often regarded as lacking in sincerity or meaningful content. "All we have from the opposition is empty rhetoric."

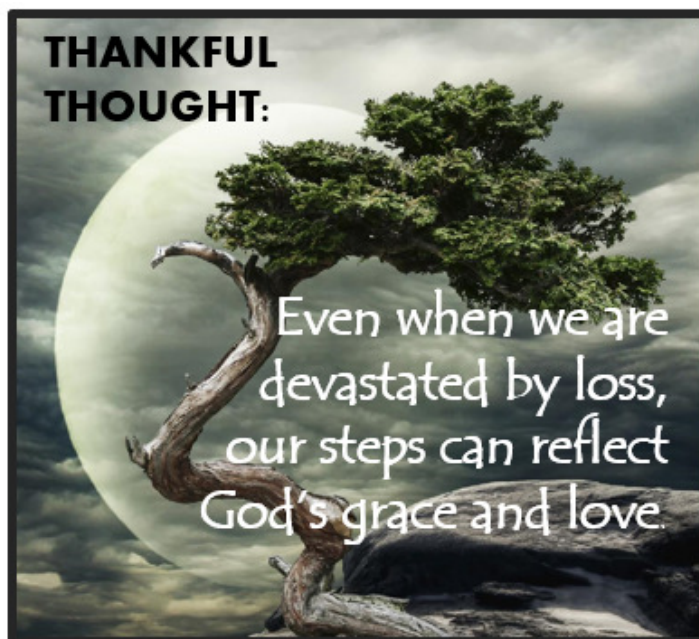
You are right. That is language of the Worldly Wise.

To walk differently is to not engage in rhetoric.

Yes. And frankly, we don't have to be concerned with the politics of man, because we believe God has everything in the palm of His hand.

To be a thankful Christian, the first point was to be conscious of our need for God all the time. Next, we are to walk differently because our conscience says, "I need God."

Psalm 40:4: (NASB) *How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood.*





CQ contributor, Vicki, shares how to be thankful in a practical way:



Part 1, Thankful List, Vicki

- *When I am feeling unthankful there is a silly, yet very practical exercise I learned long ago from a beautiful Christian woman, while discussing the counting of our blessings with children at a Bible camp. She reminded the kids (and myself) to count blessings in a specific way, not in generalities. Here is what may seem to be a silly exercise but has worked for me...*

Look around and begin naming, as specifically as you can, all the things we should be grateful for:

1. *I am lying on a bed instead of the floor.*
2. *I have sheets and blankets on my bed to keep me warm.*
3. *I have a pillow under my head that is soft and comfortable.*
4. *I have clothes to wear daily; to keep me warm (and from being embarrassed).*
5. *I have a dresser or closet to put my clothes in, so they are not just in a heap on the floor.*



To be teachable is to have a growth mindset. It is to be just like Vicki said - to look at every opportunity to be blessed and realize we are receiving the blessing of God. We can open up our mind's eye to the word of God and be taught by Him.

Matthew 5:5: (NASB) *Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

Being teachable is one of the steps toward true thankfulness. *Blessed are the gentle.* How does being gentle and teachable fit together? What makes them work?

The *gentle* used here means meek, humble, mild. It is like a tamed horse when the horse is all worn out. When we are all worn out, it is the exhaustion of all human strengths. Being teachable is when the fight has gone out of us.

We see this in examples in many people in the Bible, including Moses, who God said was the meekest man in all the earth (Number 12:3). The Apostle Peter talked about the hidden man of the heart (1 Peter 3:4). We have wonderful examples of people in the Scriptures who were taught of God when all the fight was gone out of them. They became gentle and teachable. This is the setting Jesus brings us to when he said *blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth.*

Blessed are the teachable. When the fight goes out of the horse, it becomes teachable and an incredible asset to its owner, to its rider. It can now be directed.

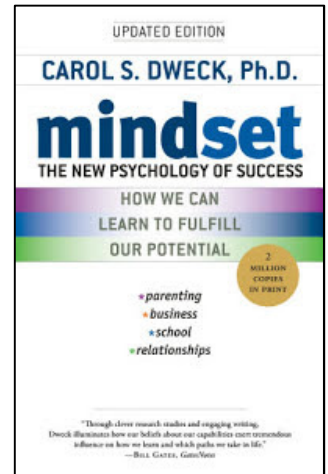
Your notes mentioned having a growth mindset vs. a fixed mindset. What is that about?



Carol S. Dweck wrote a great book on this, *Mindset, The New Psychology of Success*.

When we have a growth mindset, we manifest a life of learning. When we live a life of learning, it is as if we never quite arrive.

It is a beautiful journey I have been on for a long time. One of the ways to find our purpose is to find the example of the prophets of old who inspire us - David, Joshua, Isaiah, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul. All of these people inspire me because they manifested a growth mindset. By contrast, the Pharisees manifested a fixed mindset.



Give us some practical examples of the two.

I have two grandsons. When I'm trying to teach them something, especially when I'm using my hands to point to something, you know what they do sometimes? They push my hand out of the way, because they think they know it all. A seven-year-old boy thinks he knows it all. To be honest with you, he is pretty sharp. But the idea of being teachable - he will have to learn that. It will be a little more difficult, and that's sometimes the way we deal with God. We sometimes push the finger of God out of the way when He is trying to sanctify us. He's giving us the blessing of experience, even difficult experiences mixed with beautiful experiences. We reject, sometimes, those difficult experiences and don't learn that lesson.

Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset

- *In a fixed mindset, individuals believe they are either born with talent or they are not. Individuals with a growth mindset (the right mindset) believe talent comes through effort.*
- *Individuals with a fixed mindset seek to validate themselves. Individuals with a growth mindset focus on developing themselves.*
- *Families come together in thankfulness, and through a growth mindset they become one.*

A perfect example of this is Thanksgiving we are about to celebrate on Thursday this week. If your families are coming together with a fixed mindset and individuals just like to come and argue, they are not really coming together; they have a fixed mindset.

- *Thankfulness requires a growth mindset. A fixed mindset will not allow thankfulness to take root.*



If we want to be thankful every day - not just on Thanksgiving - we need to be teachable. To be thankful, our mind has to be open.

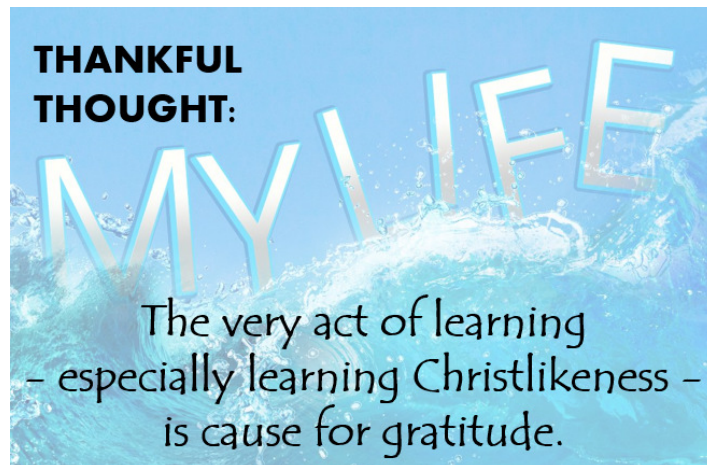
Matthew 11:29-30: (KJV) *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

This growth mindset versus fixed mindset is the difference between someone who is willing to continually learn and someone who thinks they have learned enough and certainly cannot learn any more from you or their present experience.



Yes. So often teenagers want to go on their own hero's journey. You've heard that before - it is the subject of many screen plays in Hollywood movies. But here we have the opportunity to become heroes in the godly sense, in the sense of following in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus is our hero. He is our mentor. We are his subjects.

To be thankful, be teachable.

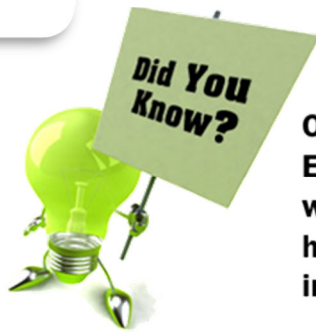


Walking differently and a focus on learning bring us to a more active level of gratitude. What's next?

This ladder of thankful living, by definition, gets more challenging as we step up to each new rung. The next two rungs seem to contradict one another even though they are actually in harmony. This seeming contradiction serves as an important object lesson - living this way is full of challenges. There is simply no way of getting around that.



Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.
— *Marcus Tullius Cicero*



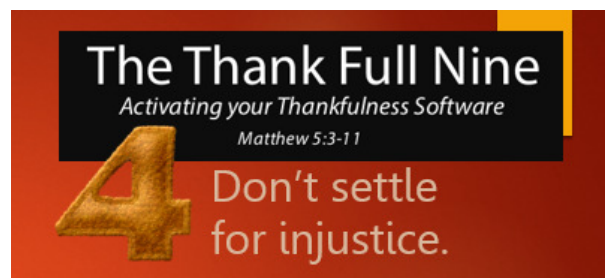
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Every week we present **THANKFUL THURSDAY**
with something specific we are thankful for
here at Christian Questions. Follow us for new
inspiration every day of the week!



Gratitude is wise, mature and leads by example.

That's how gratitude acts. For us to be able to grab ahold of gratitude, we want to follow that example. If we have gratitude, others around us will begin to have a little bit more.

The next points are about justice. One says don't settle for less; the other says be satisfied with less. Which is right?



Matthew 5:6: (NASB) *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.* (Lamsa Translation: "hunger and thirst for justice.")

This has to do with how we act towards other people.

Hunger and thirst - a metaphor using our human body. Just like our human body, we will never become mature if we do not hunger and thirst after food and drink. We will never become spiritually mature if we are not righteous. Only when we are no longer proud can we be filled with Jesus' love and enjoy his presence in our daily life. Spiritual growth requires a good appetite for righteousness.

We must not settle for injustice in our own characters, in our own actions, when we react to others who are treating us unfairly. Do not stoop to the level of our attackers. We have several great examples of this: Daniel in the lion's den, Joseph in prison, Peter in prison, Paul in prison, Stephen when he was being stoned.

Things can happen to us and whether they are just, right or indifferent is irrelevant to how we stand for anything less than righteousness. To stand in righteousness is directly related to a life of thankfulness, because we see the



need for God, we look upward, are being teachable and are standing on something bigger and stronger.

Luke 16:16: (NASB) *The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.*

Todd, that sounds kind of odd. *Everyone is forcing their way into it.* They are showing how everyone wants God's righteous kingdom even though they may not know how to define it or how to find it.

That is a beautiful intro and is exactly what Jesus did. When Jesus was on the earth, he was doing the healing and preaching of God's kingdom. It was basically God's kingdom in its early form. Everybody followed him like they were mobbing him. They were demonstrating they wanted to live in God's kingdom, but they didn't know how to define it or where to find it. The Pharisees prevented them from going toward it.

To be able to live thankfully daily, we cannot settle for injustice in our own responses. That makes sense, because when you start to stoop to the level of unrighteousness, bending the truth and rationalization, there is seemingly nothing to be thankful for.



Bob in our live chat room asks: Could your guest comment on the issue of the problem that it's never enough, and the importance of being thankful for what we have and not complaining about what we don't have? It seems that being insatiable is a common human failing.

What a great question. We will hold it until the next segment...



Energy grows, *How to Practice Gratitude During Difficult Times*, Lisa Nichols

- *What part of my character, what characteristics am I displaying that's causing me to end up here, at broke, again? Because it's probably not the first time that you've been in a situation like this. Now, when you look at gratitude, gratitude becomes the doorway. Gratitude becomes the soil for something new to grow. That oftentimes when people go through a challenge they contract. Well, all you do is increase. Energy grows where energy goes. When you contract, and you focus on the problem, the energy around the problem grows. The energy, the feeling - every time you relive the experience that you've had, and when you don't like the experience or when it's been traumatic, your body relives it again. But if you can move to gratitude, what lesson am I supposed to get? How am I going to be stronger? What does the*



other side get to look like on my best day? All of a sudden, energy grows where energy goes, and then there's just this force - and I'm not saying I'm magical - this is not magical sprinkle fairy dust, potion, lotion and wands. I am not speaking like that, because you need to get up and be in action about transforming your life.

"Gratitude becomes a doorway or a soil for something new to transform your life." That is so positive and definitely takes you in the right direction.

Thinking about soil, sometimes our life gets "soiled," but that is the kind of soil from which something can grow.

It is a perfect example of how people want to press into the kingdom of God, but they're not sure where to find it or how to define it. Notice, she was very true in everything she said, but she spoke from a worldly perspective. But we have the secret code to activate that software in our heart, coming right from Jesus' words.

That fits in as a precursor to the next piece, especially when she is talking about difficulties being the soil where things can grow.



Matthew 5:7: (NASB) *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

Todd, the previous one was, "Do not settle for injustice in yourself." This next one is "be satisfied *without* demanding justice from others."

Yes, believe it or not, we need to remember that we are under the finger of God. And God will allow good

things and bad things to come into our life according to His will. All we have to do is practice the principles of righteousness, and sometimes that might mean being merciful in not demanding justice from other people.

This is a tough one. When someone does us wrong, the gut reaction is to want to get back what is rightfully ours or what should be rightfully ours, in accordance with the way things are supposed to be. You are saying *blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy* has a "thankfulness translation" of be satisfied without demanding justice from others.

When we push our energy toward wanting that which we think we deserve, as Lisa Nichols just said, "energy grows where energy goes." If we pour energies into demanding, it is a fruitless endeavor.



Yes, it leads to nowhere.

We need to learn and believe that God gives us what we need, even though we may not receive what we want.

We should be actively compassionate. We should be actively merciful, and we can only release God's mercy when we experience it. Once we experience



mercy, we have a responsibility to share it. What did Jesus say? You are the *light of the world*. You are the *salt of the earth*. That's our job.

This is an important connection. Our gratitude is focused on the knowledge that we have received a clean slate because of Jesus' sacrifice.

We do not deserve the clean slate:

Romans 6:23: (KJV) *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

This is where our gratitude comes from. If we have received mercy, we must position ourselves to be able to give it to others.

If we want to use the software of thankfulness, we've got to do it. This is one of the key points.

Thankfulness will be generated much more readily when we relax our demands on those around us.

Amen, and we will be more like in the image of God.

Titus 3:2-5: (NASB) ²*To malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.* ³*For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.* ⁴*But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,* ⁵*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*

There are some powerful metaphors in here. Definitely we were *foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved to various lusts and pleasures*. Again, I call that "pleasure treasure," which is no pleasure at all. When we receive the kindness of the grace of God, we have the opportunity to be washed, be renewed and then to spread that light to other people. How? To be satisfied without demanding justice from others. When we can do that, and I've seen it - I've had the opportunity to live it - when we can see the testimony delivered through that experience, it is more powerful than anything we could ever say.

I've had that experience where I've had to let go of some things. Even to have the opportunity to be molded into the footsteps of Jesus is a cause for gratitude. To do the hard things that come with being molded into a footstep follower of Jesus is a cause for gratitude. This is one of the hard things, because if we are being tested as Christians, we will come across circumstances where we are being pushed and treated unfairly and need to respond as Jesus responded.

I'm going through one of those experiences right now, and I can tell you it's very, very difficult to practice this idea of being satisfied without demanding justice from others.





But it is a Christlike thing to do. Even if we attempt and fall down and get up and fall down, that's still cause for gratitude because we are working on it.

1 Peter 1:3: (KJV) *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

Psalm 89:14 tells us that God leads with mercy and truth, and He follows with justice and judgment. These are four attributes of God. If we want to be Godlike, we should lead with mercy and truth in all of our actions and then follow with justice and judgment afterward.



Thankful Christian living requires us to have higher standards than others - how do we get this done?

It is fascinating that developing real gratitude requires us to be accountable to God and especially to others in a much higher way than we would expect them to be accountable to us. This is challenging since we are now proclaiming ourselves to be playing by a different, higher set of rules for living. It is a matter of elevating our game to a place where most people never think about going, but that is where gratitude grows.

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

— *Albert Schweitzer*

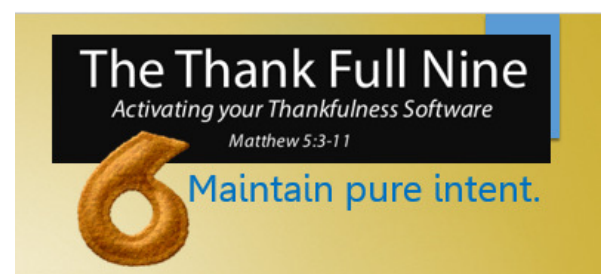
JONATHAN: I love this thought, Rick. It reminds me of my wife when she picks me up when I'm down, and then I can help bring her up when she is in need. That support system in Christ is such a blessing.

Matthew 5:8: (NASB) *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

This is a good place to stop and talk about Bob's question:



Could your guest comment on the issue of the problem that it's never enough, and the importance of being thankful for what we have and not complaining about what we don't have? It seems that being insatiable is a common human failing.





A perfect example for Bob is the example of Matthew before he was an apostle when Jesus walked past his tax table. Remember, Matthew was a publican, equated with the same level as sinners in the Jewish culture. He was a Jewish man working for the Romans as a tax-collecting citizen.

But he maintained pure intent, and that is the answer to Bob's question. As soon as Jesus said, *follow me*, Matthew left everything and followed Jesus. This was a big deal, because Matthew lived in a favored position apart from his other Jewish friends. We can see that pure intent activated his mind, because he quoted more prophecies from the Old Testament than all of the other gospels combined.

He had a mind that had pure intent, and when he was approached by Jesus Christ who could read his mind, he immediately left everything and followed him. The answer to Bob's question is to realize that this pleasure treasure offered by the world will never satisfy. But we *will* be satisfied if we plant our roots by the river of the waters of truth and we live and breathe by it. It is a biological system.

It is. In our society where more and more of that insatiable desire is planted in us, suicide rates are statistically higher than ever. Why would that be? Because it's never enough.

Depression is at all-time highs. More people are living with depression. Why? For many it is biological, but for others it is brought upon them because they are always living in a state of disappointment...because it is never enough.



Gratitude says God's grace is more than enough.

Ephesians 1:7-8: (NASB) ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸which he lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight...

There is a spiritual consciousness that needs to be attained through the blessing of the Holy Spirit - to realize we have redemption through the blood of Jesus. It doesn't have anything to do with the works that we do. It has to do with redemption through Jesus' blood and the forgiveness of our trespasses. It is because of the riches of God's grace.

This adds to the answer to Bob's question. It is what bought us, what gave us a reason for gratitude. As a Christian, when we ignore what gives us reason for gratitude, we are ignoring our very core of life.



What are some practical applications of what being pure in heart means?

Understanding our origin story and where we are on the timeline of our life will help us understand our purpose:

- *We were born into a family - we were raised with an education and value system.*

What if your origin stinks?

You can't choose your family.

What if you were taught all kinds of corrupt things? What if your family had no moral values? You are saying we should look to this for maintaining pure intent. I'm going to give you a hard time with these points, because it is practical and our lives are not a storybook. How do we make that non-storybook story fit gratitude?

I'll give you an example. There was a little girl who grew up to be my wife. She was born into a very difficult experience. She went outside one night and was on the swing set, probably about ten-years old, looking up to the stars saying, "God, if You're up there, please reveal Yourself to me." That was her origin story. She was raised in a difficult situation, but she saw the witness of God in the creation of the earth and asked for help.



And the rest, as they say, is history.

Yes, 38 years of history.

Here is how it plays out: We are born with a certain set of hardware - our human body. We have software written in our human heart that Jesus is activating with these Thank Full Nine, the Beatitudes.

- *You enter your adult years with a skill set.*
- *You were then called of God.*
- *You answered that call.*

We are *cleansed from within* according to Ephesians 1:7,8. Then God trains us for a purpose and uses our inherent abilities for the ministry, just like He did for Saul of Tarsus and the Apostle Peter. We live in that purpose. We overcome trials. We gain victory, small and big.

Throughout all of those transitions in life, we must maintain pure intent, and that is when Jesus will have the opportunity to speak to us and take us to the next level.

What if along the way you are not really sure of your purpose? You know you love God, you want to honor Him and praise Him, but you don't feel like you have a special talent or something specific. What if in your trials you fall down and fail a lot?



You need to seek out a mentor. Jesus is our ultimate mentor, but we need to seek out a righteous mentor around us who can provide wisdom without prejudice.

I am going to add: seeking out a mentor who has Christlikeness to guide you along the way. Your life may not open up in such a way that everything makes absolute perfect sense, but if you have the direction that comes from the redemption of Jesus, that can help you to say, "I want to serve God with a pure heart." And even in our failure, there lies success.



THANKFUL THOUGHT:

Striving for purity in heart is an acknowledgment that grace covers our actions.

We are never going to be completely pure in heart. Jesus said *blessed are the pure in heart*. We will try but will have defects along the way. That's okay. Striving for purity in heart is an acknowledgment that grace is there to cover our actions, even if they're flawed, because we continue to strive. This is a cause for gratitude.

Let's see what else we can glean from Vicki's thankful list. What about the things we take for granted?

Part 2, Vicki, Thankful List

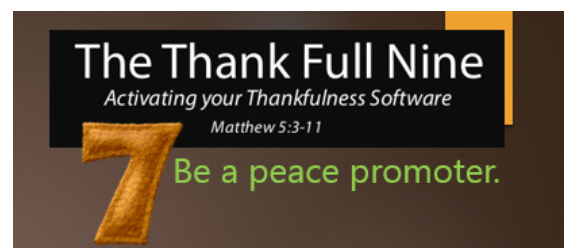
6. *I have windows in my room to let in the sunshine.*
7. *We have heat in our home to warm us in the winter months.
(Some have air conditioning for the summer months.)*
8. *We have a shower or bathtub to clean ourselves with running water.*
9. *We have warm running water; what a special comfort.*
10. *Many of us have parents that work each and every day to support us; or children who give of their busy lives to care for us as parents.*

AND THE LIST GOES ON... it doesn't take long until we begin to realize how very thankful we should be for things we take for granted each and every day...and thankfulness returns once again!

"Practice makes perfect." Thankfulness will return! I think this is a great way to get out of a slump. This will re-energize us to see what is most important.

Vicki's list fits very well with this admonition to maintain a pure intent, because it is just rehearsing the obvious things to be thankful for, so we can get refocused, stand up and try again.

Matthew 5:9: (NASB) *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*





There is a big difference between a peacekeeper and a peacemaker. For more on being a peacemaker and not a peacekeeper, please see the June 11, 2018, CQ Episode 1025: "Should We Be Peacemakers?"

A peacekeeper keeps everyone calm and will make compromises so nobody gets out of hand. A peacemaker is going to deal with the hard issues and take the steps everybody else is afraid to take to actually make peace, not just keep things from blowing up. There is a big difference.

A good definition of what you are talking about is that a peacemaker manages things but leads people. This is important with our family, friends, employees and co-workers. Being a peacemaker means what we say and do is important. The way we relate to each other is through our emotions. In our communication, our words are only seven percent of what the other person hears. What does that mean? It means that the rest is heard through the emotional brain of the recipient of our words.

An example of being a peacemaker is, I was in the Baltimore airport with my wife and daughter just a couple of weeks ago. And I said, "Follow me," and took them over to meet one of my friends who happens to own the sushi restaurant there. He is such a beautiful soul. He warmed up to my wife and daughter and gave us about \$10 worth of green tea. He offered for me to drive his car whenever I'm in Baltimore. He says it is just in the garage collecting dust. That is the opportunity to be a peacemaker. There was no controversy, but he was showing that he is a warm, gentle human being who loves me and is willing to extend that love to my wife and daughter.

It is about building equity in our relationships. What does that mean and how does it relate to peacemaking?



Well, there's an emotional bank account that we keep with everybody. We relate to people through our emotional bank account. A perfect example of this is the brand, *Life is Good*. Bert and Johnny Jacobs started this brand in Boston, and their whole life is based upon trying to be peace promoters, trying to say, "We get to do this; we get to do that." Their whole brand is based upon gratitude and optimism, which sets peace throughout their customer base. We get to build equity in our lives. How? By providing a positive balance in the emotional bank account of our friends, our family and employees or co-workers.



This means when you have a positive balance, if it is a big enough balance, when you need to make a withdrawal, something is there.

The withdrawal is simply a benefit of the doubt. I'll take a benefit of the doubt.



There you go. And if there is no balance, there is no benefit of the doubt. When something is even off a little, peace does not prevail.

Godly wisdom is necessary to become a peacemaker:

James 3:13-18: (NASB) ¹³*Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

I think this is one of the most powerful levers we have to pull in our life of Christ. We have the opportunity to put emotional value into the bank account of all of our friends and families. It is much easier to live a life of gratitude when we fill the emotional bank account of our family and friends.

I like the way the Scripture ends: *The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* When we are of that mindset it is cause for gratitude, because that is what Jesus did.

THANKFUL THOUGHT:

One of the primary results of the act of peacemaking is gratitude.



Even if peacemaking does not result in absolute peace, the true effort still brings gratitude, because we know somebody really tried hard. Gratitude goes a long way.

**So far, building gratitude has been challenging.
Now what about having it when others do not like you?**

Inevitably the conversation had to go down this road of difficulty. We have seen thankfulness work its way into all areas of our daily lives, and now we need to see how it fits when we are being maligned or misunderstood. If we can get this part right, we can truly live thankful lives.

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. — John F. Kennedy



Matthew 5:10: (NASB) *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

One of the perfect examples of this happened the day before Jesus was crucified, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter brought a sword to the Garden. When Jesus was being threatened by the captain of the guard, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus. What did Jesus do? He healed Malchus' ear. Now, Peter's objective was to protect Jesus. But Jesus' objective was to provide the sacrifice that would take away our sins. What did Jesus do next? He said "Peter, put away your sword." Then he weaponized the question and said to the soldiers who were there to grab him, "Do you come here to take me as a thief with your swords and staves?" The soldiers fell back and fell down. This experience was not lost on Peter. He was expecting to protect Jesus, but Jesus showed him he could protect himself if he wanted to. But Jesus was fully willing and able to be judged unfairly, and this example of Jesus spurred the Apostle Peter to a powerful ministry.

This example was the beginning of a night of being judged unfairly again and again, tormented and tortured unfairly again and again. We could have been like Peter witnessing these things from afar saying, "I should have protected him." But it was not what Jesus was there for.

He showed us there how to be judged unfairly and how to walk the walk we are now trying to walk. Jesus walked in gratitude. Just to finish that particular experience, when he's in the Garden of Gethsemane praying and sweating these great drops of blood (Editor's note: some manuscripts omit this detail so it may be spurious), his conclusion was, *Nevertheless, not my will but Thy will be done.* That is a prayer of gratitude under great duress.

1 Corinthians 4:9: (KJV) *For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.*

I think the Apostle Paul was telling us we are living in a scientific laboratory where we are a spectacle to men and angels. People are watching us. They are observing us, and just like Peter learned from Jesus, people can learn from us *if* we practice the principles of righteousness, *if* we maintain a conscious need for God, *if* we find the satisfaction to our story in the word of God.

What happens in a laboratory? Things grow, and that's what we are going to do. We are going to grow, because we are thankful and that software of thankfulness is activated by Jesus.

So far in this podcast, being thankful every step of the way has not been described as an emotion, a momentary realization of, "Oh, it's something to be thankful for." We have described our thankfulness as a life-changing work.



We have an example of this in the Parable of the Sower. The parable teaches us that spiritual warfare is guaranteed. So, get ready! Get your mindset straight and get that proper software activated.

A portion of the Parable of the Sower:

Matthew 13:20-21: (KJV) *²⁰But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; ²¹Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*



Spiritual warfare is guaranteed. When tribulation and persecution arise, we have to be ready. "Fair-weather Christianity" does not hold up with gratitude when there is warfare about.

It is going to be hard. My advice for everybody is, "Duck!"

2 Timothy 3:12: (NASB) *Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

To be persecuted is to be pursued or followed after. The idea is not necessarily to have physical pain; rather, to be chased down. It could be emotionally, verbally, physically or even spiritually.

All of these are allowed by Jesus and orchestrated by God. He is pulling the levers, giving us experiences so we may develop into righteousness, that we might use the software written on our heart and intentionally activate it in our desire to become like Jesus.

Will all who desire to live godly in Christ be persecuted?

The Apostle Paul is the poster child on that. He was the one who was persecuting the Christians and it came back on him. He saw it as the opportunity for him to suffer for righteousness sake, because he was once misdirected. I think that's the blessing of being converted and receiving the redemption through the blood of Jesus. We can look back on our own experience and project it into the lives of others and bless them because of it.

We can look back on our own experience, even if it was bad, and use it as a cause for thankfulness to move forward because we have learned or are learning from it.





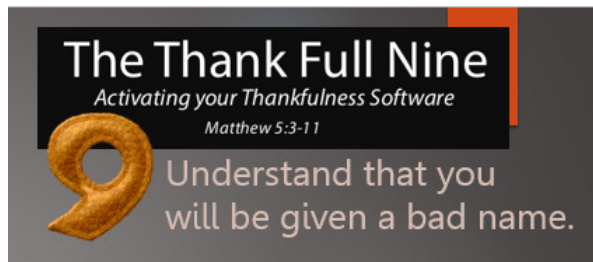
This is a relief, because no matter what happens in our lives, it will not match what our Lord went through. It will not match the ignominy of being the Son of God and being tried unfairly, tormented and tortured and then crucified as a blasphemer of God. You cannot get a more diametrically-opposed character and sentence. The two are as far apart as they possibly could be. Jesus went through it first. Todd, when you say your advice is "Duck," I say, "Yes, duck, but then get up and charge forward."

 I'm grateful, *How to Practice Gratitude During Difficult Times, Lisa Nichols*

- *But if you can start the journey, start the journey. I'm not saying get up and run, but I am saying to lift up your head and say I'm grateful that I can hear the words coming out of her mouth right now. I'm grateful that I have the wherewithal to even look for something to inspire me. I'm grateful for the opportunity to prove my strength again. I'm grateful for the opportunity to forgive the perceivably unforgivable. I'm grateful for the opportunity to love the perceivably unlovable. I'm grateful that even though I don't know how, I don't know when, I'm going to get through this. I am grateful that I know, like I know, like I know, like I know - see you have to have unwavering faith.*

"Forgive the perceivably unforgivable. Love the perceivably unlovable." We can go through a situation, trial or experience with gratitude.

Interesting, because we are in the middle of saying, "Understand you will be judged unfairly," and you are saying, "Love those whom we perceive to be unlovable." Love your enemies.



Matthew 5:11: (NASB) *Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

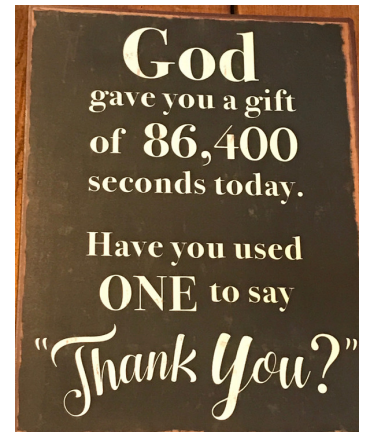
Jesus told us to get ready and brace ourselves. There are four ways to respond to persecution:

- Retaliation
- Resentment or Bitterness
- Depression
- Rejoicing
Acts 5:40-42, Philippians 1:29, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Romans 8:18

Jesus taught us how to rejoice. The Apostle Paul taught us how to rejoice. The Apostle Peter taught us how to rejoice when we are given a bad name. This is the secret. We do not need to submit to the world's narrative. We do not need to submit to the bully who is charging at us and trying to change our narrative to their narrative. We should remember to live in the light we were founded in.



Because retaliation, resentment, or bitterness and depression are all the natural responses against those who are persecuting us. Remember, to be persecuted is to be pursued. If we are being pursued because we are righteous, because we are living a life different than they are, it feels like sometimes they deserve to have something bad happen to them. "I have a right to be bitter, and I'm depressed because here I am standing for everything that is good, and I am receiving seemingly everything that is bad." But what you are saying is, Jesus taught us how to rejoice instead of the other responses. Even if we are given a bad name, so was Jesus.



He was preparing us to live in the righteous kingdom of God.

Acts 8:1: (KJV) ¹And Saul was consenting (gratified) unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. ³As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

This is the example of Stephen who is being stoned to death, consented to by the Apostle Paul. Stephen, by his very actions, showed us that he was thankful and lived a righteous life:

- He maintained a conscious need for God.
- He walked differently.
- He was teachable.
- He did not settle for injustice.
- He did not demand justice from others.
- He maintained pure intent.
- He was a peace promoter.
- He was judged unfairly.
- He was given a bad name.



And guess what? He was a witness. The testimony of Stephen's death was one of the important things that brought Saul back to the work of God after becoming the Apostle Paul.

Stephen died a *grateful* death. He died with thankfulness to be able to suffer for Christ. Many of us are not going to have that kind of a dramatic end to our lives, but he showed us what it means to be in that position.



THANKFUL THOUGHT:
Whatever bad name
we are given,
we look forward to
a new name in Heaven.



The bad name does not matter now. There is a new name coming. Stephen knew it. Jesus knew it.

We are coming together at a thankful time of the year when we celebrate Thanksgiving. Let us not forget that our words and our actions are important. Let us make sure that we live a testimony to all of our friends and family by maintaining a conscious need for God, to be successful in God's eyes, to not trust the world's narrative, to not be fooled by the rush to be successful in the eyes of others. Maintain a growth mindset in all humility and look for the gentle leadings of God in Jesus Christ in our life and be truly thankful for all the gifts that we have been given.

It is all about living thankfully each and every day. This is not easy or simple; it takes effort each and every day. But the effort we put out is rewarded with incredible blessing. Sometimes the blessing is in trial. Sometimes it is in tribulation and persecution, but this is where the blessing was for Jesus as well. Let us be thankful.

It comes down to our personal daily decisions. How am I going to view today in my experiences?

What did yesterday's experiences carry over with me today?

What am I carrying from yesterday that I need to let go so I can replace it with thankfulness that we find in the Beatitudes?





*So, how can we be truly thankful?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*



Join us next week for our podcast on November 26, 2018:
Ep. #1049: "Are You a Mary or a Martha?"

Bonus Material!

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. — Melody Beattie

A biblical perspective on Thanksgiving:

Old Testament:

Thanksgiving: Strong's #8426, *towdah*, an extension of the hand, i.e. (by implication) avowal, or (usually) adoration; specifically, a choir of worshippers; confession, (sacrifice of) praise, thanks(-giving, offering)

This word seems to imply a strong action and not merely a strong feeling:

Psalms 26:7: (KJV) *That I may publish with the voice of **thanksgiving** <8426>, and tell of all thy wondrous works.*

Psalms 50:14: (KJV) *Offer unto God **thanksgiving** <8426>; and pay thy vows unto the most High:*

Thanks: Strong's #3034 *yadah*, literally, to use (i.e. hold out) the hand; physically, to throw (a stone, an arrow) at or away; especially to revere or worship (with extended hands); intensively, to bemoan (by wringing the hands)

Again, action is paramount:

Psalms 28:7: (KJV) *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I **praise** <3034> him.*

Psalms 30:4: (KJV) *Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give **thanks** <3034> at the remembrance of his holiness.*

New Testament:

Thanksgiving: Strong's #2169 *eucharistia*; gratitude; actively grateful language (to God, as an act of worship)

Philippians 4:6: (KJV) *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving** <2169> let your requests be made known unto God.*



Thanks: Strongs #3670 *homologeō*, to assent, i.e. covenant, acknowledge

Hebrews 13:15: (KJV) *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving **thanks** <3670> to his name.*

A theme text for finding gratitude where it looks like there is only sadness and misery:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10: (NASB) *⁹And he has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

If we believe that God's power is perfected in our weakness, then gratitude for weakness is in order:

1 Peter 4:12-16: (NASB) *¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of his glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.*

Some keys to gratitude:

- True gratitude is a heartfelt expression that is specific in detailing the object of one's gratitude to the giver of that object or to others to stimulate their gratitude.
- Gratitude is built on faith.
- Gratitude is appropriately expressed creatively, and often to others and to one's self.
- Pause - perceive - praise!



The Thank Full Nine

Activating your Thankfulness Software

Matthew 5:3-11

1. Maintain a conscious need for God.
2. Walk differently.
3. Be teachable.
4. Don't settle for injustice.
5. Be satisfied without demanding justice from others.
6. Maintain pure intent.
7. Be a peace promoter.
8. Understand that you will be judged unfairly.
9. Understand that you will be given a bad name.