

What a Day of ThanksLIVING Looks Like

"Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father . . ." (Ephesians 5:20). That's a pretty tall order: *all the time?* for *all* things? Seriously?

When I was first challenged to obey this scripture, some 44 years ago, I thought that surely it wasn't translated properly. Or maybe there was a footnote. Or an asterisk. Surely *some* kind of loophole, right?

Nope. It means just what it says. We can continually give thanks for all things because if God is truly in control, then everything He allows us to experience comes with His permission-and thus He has a plan. For everything He allows. Even if we can't see it.

It became a way of life for me, and has been a habit for over four decades. With the celebration of Thanksgiving looming next week, I paid attention to what that long-standing habit sounds like in the course of a day.

[Upon waking] "Oh, it's morning. Thank You, Lord, that my radio came on at the right time. That means we had uninterrupted electricity all night." Alternatively, "Oh, it's morning. Thank You so much for the blessing of being able to sleep till I woke up, with no alarm! What a blessing!"

[Upon turning over in bed] "Lord, thank You so, so much that I can shift position without pain now! Thank you again for the stem cell treatment that made it possible!"

[Upon getting out of bed into my mobility scooter] "Lord, {ouch ouch ouch} I thank You that the pain of moving from the bed to my scooter will dissipate quickly. And thank You again

that I have a scooter for getting around.”

[Standing up to transfer from the scooter to the commode] “Owwwww! But Lord, I thank You for the grab bars to lean on, and thank You for the new tall handicap toilet. It is so much easier to use this than the regular ones everywhere else.”

[Riding to the kitchen] “Lord, thank You for speed and painlessness! I love being the fastest one in the house!”

[Making coffee] “Lord! Bless You for creating coffee! Thank You for caffeine! Thank You for my coffee maker, and half and half, and sweetener. Thank You for mugs. Thank You for Central Market and the wonderful flavored coffees I can get there. Thank You for blessing [our son] Kevin in the coffee world—Lord, order his steps today in Nepal while he’s investigating becoming coffee partners with farmers there, and use him to help fight sex trafficking through coffee instead.”

[Moving to the couch] “Oh Lord, owwwww—thank You that the pain will subside quickly, and thank You for our couch and the table to hold my coffee while I read Your word. Thank You for a Bible in English and the ability to read. Thank You for the Holy Spirit to illumine its meaning to me. Thank You for an online Bible reading program from my church that allows me to join with thousands of people worldwide in reading the same passage and then reading a devotional from one of our members. Thank You for the technology that allows me to affirm the devotional and share my take on today’s reading.”

[Preparing to take a shower] “Thank You again, Lord, for this magnificent roll-in shower You gave us in the recent renovation to make our house handicap-friendly. Thank You for the grab bars and for the bench seat that lets me sit down. Thank You for the hand-held shower. And for hot water. And for clean hot water! And for 24/7 clean hot water! Thank You for the blessing of being able to take it for granted, but Lord, I don’t want to take it for granted.”

[Getting in the car] "Thank You, Lord, for [our son who lives with us] Curt's availability to help me get in and out of the car and take care of the scooter. Thank You that the barometric pressure is stable today so my pain level is lower. Thank You that no rain is forecast. Oh, there's our trash bin at the edge of the driveway; thank You for helping Ray remember to get it out before the garbage truck came by. And thank You for garbage pick-up, Lord! Thank You for people willing to take care of that for us!"

[Driving] "Thank You for paved roads, Lord. And for traffic lights. And for the engineers who set all that up. Thank You that everybody drives on the same side of the street. And thank You for everybody honoring that red lights mean stop and green lights mean go. Thank You that I can read all the road signs and street sights because they're in English. I remember sounding out the Cyrillic letters in Belarus like a kindergartner, and thank You for helping me do that when I was able to go, but today I'm thankful to be surrounded by English!"

[Arriving at church for Bible study] "Thank You, Lord, for the growing number of friends in 'Sue's Scooter Army' who are trained to help me by getting the scooter out of the car and bringing it to me at the driver's seat. Thank You for their sweet joy in genuinely being glad to help. Thank You for making my love language acts of service, so it makes me feel so loved!"

[Riding into the church] "Lord, thank You for electricity, and comfort because of the heating and air conditioning. Thank You there's nobody threatening to arrest or persecute us for coming to church. Thank You for the freedom to study Your word publicly . . . and Lord, today I am so very very grateful for the privilege of teaching Your word to precious women who are so teachable and so appreciative. Thank You for the ramp that allows me to ride my scooter onto the stage. Thank You for the face mic that lets me keep my hands free. Thank You for the

lights, and the padded chairs, and the audio system, and for Powerpoint that's working so everybody can see the slides I prepared. Thank You for the other leaders who helped me do my run through the other day so I could make my lecture even better. Thank You, Lord, for your Holy Spirit to empower me to speak Your truth in Your strength, to Your glory."

And that takes me to 10:30. That's what thanksLIVING looks like.

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Dealing with Disappointment



There seemed to be a gigantic collective gasp at the 2016 Rio Olympics when American gymnast Simone Biles bobbled on the balance beam and had to steady herself with her hands. Instantly, the girl expected to win five gold medals lost the

gold, even before finishing her otherwise excellent routine. She still won a bronze, but Simone (and the entire media machine) knew she was capable of a gold.

How disappointing!



Simone handled her letdown with grace and realism, limiting her disappointment to the one missed skill rather than globalizing—as we so often do—by saying things like, “I am such an idiot! I can’t *believe* I did that!” Then, quickly moving beyond her setback, she delivered an almost perfect floor exercise the next day, earning her fourth gold medal and propelling her into gymnastics history.

What is the wise, biblical, God-honoring way to handle disappointment?

Fortunately, we have lots of examples of people in the Bible who wrestled with disappointment:

- Women carrying the pain of years and years of infertility (measured month by month)—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson’s mother, the Shunammite woman, Elizabeth.
- Joseph served for years with faithfulness and integrity

inside a prison for a crime he did not commit; after correctly interpreting the dreams of fellow prisoners with access to the pharaoh, his hopes of being freed were dashed when the cupbearer forgot him.

- David was anointed as future king, but the years dragged on as he was chased by a mentally ill king consumed by paranoia.
- The Psalmists anguished numerous times: “How long, O Lord?”

Solomon, with his wisdom super-power, wrote in Proverbs that “hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov. 13:12). The distance between our hopes/expectations and reality—“hope deferred”—constitutes disappointment.

The way to handle disappointment doesn’t change, because **the key is re-focusing on God**, and He doesn’t change. He is good, and He is faithful, all the time. No matter what.

I have found two “power tools” for dealing with the pain of when our hopes and expectations are deferred or, worse, obliterated.

First, take a firm hold on the comforting truth of the sovereignty of God: **a good and loving God is in control**.

He permits nothing to touch our lives without His express permission, with a perfect purpose. If God allows disappointment to darken our days, it is His good gift of a “something better” later. (Please see my post “[Rejection is Protection](#).”) Disappointment may be preparation for something in the future. It may be a [just-right tool](#) for producing Christlikeness—spiritual maturity—in us. It may prevent something bad we couldn’t possibly foresee.

The other power tool is **God’s command to give thanks** for all things (Ephesians 5:20), *in* all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We don’t have to *feel* goose-bumpy, warm-and-fuzzy thankful; giving thanks is a choice of the will. When we give thanks for

something God has chosen to allow into our lives, we are acknowledging He is Lord, that He is “large and in charge.” We are acknowledging that He has the right to allow disappointment to cast its shadow on our lives, and it keeps us connected rightly to our Creator, as His creature. “Lord, I thank You for allowing this deep disappointment into my life, even though I don’t understand how You could possibly redeem it and make it okay.” That’s what trust looks like, and it pleases the Lord. It also helps us maintain an eternal perspective, that everything—*everything*—is part of a much bigger picture we cannot see.

Olympic athletes aren’t the only ones to encounter disappointment. It is inevitable in a fallen world. How will *you* respond?

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Giving Thanks for EVERYTHING?

Early in my walk with Christ, I learned the life-changing, perspective-changing discipline of giving thanks for everything. EVERYTHING.

Initially, I stumbled over Ephesians 5:20, “always giving thanks for everything,” thinking that surely that must not be an accurate translation, or there was a footnote or asterisk or *something* that would mitigate the implication of the absolutes of “always” and “everything.” I even bought a Greek-English interlinear New Testament so I could check out the original language.

Yep, that's what it says.

But it's awfully hard to embrace this command without an understanding of why God would tell us to give thanks always, much less why this command, like all the others, was given "[so it may go well with](#)" us.

It starts with the reassuring truth that *a good and loving God is in control* of everything that touches our lives. His sovereignty cloaks and protects us like spiritual bubble wrap; whatever makes it through the layers of His protective love and purpose has been given express permission to touch us. It means God has a plan that includes the good and the painful things that enter our lives. It means that He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Apparently, God thinks that giving thanks is important, since He directs us to do it several times.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil 4:6-7

I love that God wants us to bring everything to Him instead of being anxious. I love that God knows the value and importance of thanksgiving to help us stay balanced, so He tells us to weave thanksgiving into all of our communication with Him (the first, general word "prayer") and all our supplication (asking for what we need), as we make our requests known to Him (telling Him what we're asking).

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; *in everything give thanks*, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thess 5:16-18

For all the books, CDs and pulpit messages out there on

finding God's will for our lives, there's nothing like starting with the passages that spell it out plainly! God's will for us is to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything. Pretty much covers everything, all the time! Giving thanks isn't just a good idea: it's God's will for our lives.

"Understand what the Lord's will is. . . *always giving thanks for all things* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" Eph 5:17-20

This is the passage that first challenged me to bring my thinking into alignment with God's word, a passage that spells out His will: not just giving thanks *IN* all things, but giving thanks *FOR* all things. And of course we can't do it with our fleshly, fallen feelings and we can't do it in our own strength, which is why this command is followed by the directive, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." We can do things in Jesus' name and in Jesus' strength that we cannot do on our own. But when we step forward in obedience despite our feelings, He meets us there with His more-than-sufficient grace and enabling!

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and *be thankful*." Col 3:15

I love this verse. Letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts means letting it be an umpire, calling out "Safe!" or "Out!" For years I have counseled friends, "Let God's peace be your umpire. Follow the peace, and go wherever it leads you." Choosing to be thankful (note that it doesn't say *feel* thankful, just *be* thankful. Give thanks regardless of your feelings!) is like getting a fluoride treatment at the dentist: it lays a protective layer over the peace, the way the fluoride is a protective layer over your teeth. I love that although Paul's directive is to the whole church at Corinth, it can and should be implemented on an individual basis as well. So when we give thanks in our faith

communities, we help seal the peace in the body of Christ, and our thankful hearts also help keep our own personal peace quotients high. Talk about a win-win situation!

But why is it so important to give thanks? I had a lightbulb moment when reading Romans 1 and saw the incredibly important role of giving thanks in protecting ourselves from spiraling down into a really bad place:

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

“For although they knew God, they never glorified Him as God **nor gave thanks to Him**, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

“Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” (Rom 1:18-23, emphasis mine)

Giving glory and thanks to God is a *spiritual retaining wall* that keeps us from descending to the next level, where our thinking becomes futile and our foolish hearts become darkened. And after this point, a downward spiral into depravity is inevitable.

So giving thanks as an ongoing self-discipline is a protection for us! But far more than that—it helps keep us in a healthy relationship to God. The warning from Romans 1 is that people who knew God but refused to give thanks to Him were refusing to embrace His sovereignty. There is an ugly spirit of

rebellion in rejecting God's right to be God!

When we give thanks for everything that God allows into our lives, we are saying, "I acknowledge that You are God and I am not, and You know what You're doing. Even if I don't like this thing You have allowed to touch me, I trust You to make it turn out okay in the end." I think that kind of trust is pleasing to the Lord. And my own experience is that getting (and staying) in the habit of giving thanks for everything keeps our hearts tender toward Him.

For an example of this, three years ago I blogged about this in "[Giving Thanks in a Hard Place](#)." And my story of learning to give thanks for a lifelong disability is [here](#). Where can you start giving thanks for what God has allowed to touch YOUR life?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/giving-thanks-for-everything/ on April 21, 2015.

Giving Thanks in a Hard Place

My husband and I are ministering in part of the former Soviet Union while I've been reading Ann Voskamp's book *One Thousand Gifts*. She focuses on seeing and living life through the filter of *eucharisteo*, the Greek word for "giving thanks." The title refers to the fact that she recorded a thousand little ways in which God revealed Himself and His goodness to her, most of which were a pleasure to receive, some of which were painful. She worked to practice gratitude, which not only built her faith but also made her aware of how deeply she was loved.

This is a physically and spiritually challenging place to be,

so I've had many opportunities to practice *eucharisteo* here. I find that multiplying the "thank Yous" keeps my heart tender and makes me aware of how comfortable and privileged is my life in America.

Thank You that the tap water is not safe to drink. But I thank You that safe bottled water is easy to obtain at the little market a block away. I thank You that my husband is more than willing to walk to the market so I don't have to. I thank You that replenishing the bottled water at the Bible College where we teach is a high priority, especially since it's so dry here that we need to keep drinking from our water bottles all day long. Speaking of which, thank You for my Aquafina bottle that Ray bought me at the Dallas airport. The whole label is in English!

Thank You that this is a handicap-unfriendly country, that there are stairs everywhere and elevators only in buildings over five stories high. Thank You that there's no point to bringing my scooter or wheelchair. Thank You that at home, I have plenty of mobility assistance. Thank you for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Thank You for allowing me to live in a country that is mainly accessible to polio survivors like me. Thank You for Lufthansa Airlines, which takes such good care of people who can't walk (or walk long distances) once I get to Germany next week.

Thank You that I got strep the day *before* we left Dallas and not *the morning of* our flight here! Thank You that my doctor could see me on short notice. Thank You for antibiotics that knocked it out immediately. Thank You for protecting our health while we are here.

Thank You that languages were splintered at the tower of Babel and we are surrounded by Slavic tongues we do not speak. Thank You for providing several gifted translators. Thank You for patience on the part of our friends here when we try to make our mouths produce unfamiliar, strange-sounding words. Thank

You that in heaven, we will not need translators because we will all speak the language of the Lamb.

Thank You for churches with outhouses rather than heated indoor restrooms. Thank You that we are using them at the end of March rather than in January! Thank You for bathrooms at home with indoor plumbing, flush toilets, and flushable toilet paper. And thank You that our bathrooms don't stink.

Thank You that our luggage was delayed on the way here. But thank You for getting it to us only 24 hours later! Thank You for the lesson about what to include in my carry-on. I didn't learn that lesson when we were stranded for four days by the [Iceland ash cloud](#) two years ago, and I thank You for giving me another chance to learn the importance of packing a nightgown and a change of clothes and anything else I really need.

Thank You for sheets that don't cover the mattress and come undone every night. Thank You for fitted bottom sheets on all our beds in our home. Thank You for top sheets with plenty of width and length.

I've never thanked You for many of these things, Lord, and I am so grateful for them now!

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