

When Gratitude and Grief Hold Hands

Sue Bohlin has discovered that the ongoing habit of giving thanks for God's many goodnesses has mitigated her grief in her son's death.

It's been five months since [our son took his life](#) and we were thrown into a sea of grief. I can tell people are still praying for us because God's deep and beautiful grace is holding us up.

The day after Curt died, I was struck with the thought that a gigantic wall of awful grief was going to hit me. Hard. I knew that wall. It slammed into me the first time when our firstborn baby Becky died on her eighth day of life. It slammed into me again almost two years ago when [a third of my tongue was cut out](#) because of cancer. So I know how to recognize the unbidden, overwhelming feelings of loss and deep sadness.

But a second and comforting thought chased down the chilling first thought: *The Lord carried me through those times of great grief in the past, and He will carry me again. I don't need to fear the grief monster because my God is bigger than the grief monster. Thank You, Lord, thank You.*

That immediate prayer of thankfulness arose out of a 50-year-long habit that God impressed on me as a college student as I struggled to reconcile why a good God would let polio cripple me. I learned probably the biggest lesson of my life: that He wants us to give thanks not only IN all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18), but FOR all things (Ephesians 5:20). For a deeper dive, I invite you to read my blog post "[Giving Thanks for EVERYTHING?](#)"

I couldn't possibly know back in those early days of my walk

with Christ how the habit of giving thanks as a way of life would shape how I could handle the unthinkable loss of a second child decades later.

Giving thanks as a daily habit began as a step of obedience, but then it grew to become an intrinsic part of my everyday life—to the point that I shoot up many more “thank You” prayers than “please” prayers. And that has never been so true as it has been these past five months.

ALL of my “please” prayers for Curt, as he struggled for years with a deep, dark suicidal depression I could not begin to imagine, have been turned into “thank You” prayers. Every day I tell the Lord how grateful I am that my son is experiencing a level of joy he couldn’t have imagined any more than I can imagine the pain of his mental illness. I thank Him for the massive sense of relief that is Curt’s daily life in heaven. I thank Him that his hearing loss has been replaced with perfect hearing. I thank Him that Curt’s love of music, which was devastating because of that hearing loss, has been ratcheted up to enjoy new kinds of beautiful music (so I read in stories of those who have been allowed a glimpse of heaven). I thank Him that my son’s deep suffering is only a memory for him now, and he has all eternity to look forward to whatever God will allow him to do. I thank Him that Curt can look forward with clear eyes and unskewed thinking, to the next stages of his new life on the other side.

Every day I thank the Lord that I *know know know* where my son is, and that he is more alive today than he ever was on earth. I thank Him for the beloved family and friends who graduated to heaven before Curt, with whom he is enjoying restored fellowship and laughter and hugs. I thank the Lord for how real heaven is to me.

And because He has taught me how to turn hard truths into a “thank You,” I know what to do with the pangs of loss that inevitably strike me every day. When I see Curt’s handwriting

on my recipes from the tweaking we did together when cooking, a fresh wave of missing him washes over me . . . and I'm able to say, "Thank You for all the help he gave me in the kitchen over these past 17 years of his living here." When Ray and I wince at needing to find caregivers for our dog Lincoln when we go out of town—something we never needed to do because Curt never went anywhere—I'm able to say, "Thank You that he was our built-in dogsitter for all those years."

When I see his computer components gathering dust in a corner, or when we need computer help, I'm able to chase the pangs of missing him with, "Thank You for the gift of having an IT genius in our home all those years."

It might be easy to scoff and think, "You're just sugar-coating this horrible loss of your beloved son. Get a grip and face your grief squarely instead of trying to paint it with rosy colors."

But I am not a stranger to grief. I've endured a number of very big, very painful losses. I seek to be honest and authentic in this hard place we are in, but my reality is that gratitude softens the blow of grief. The Lord demonstrates His goodness to me in so many ways every day, I can't help but see them because I've grown more sensitive to recognize what I call His "hugs and kisses." Those hugs and kisses are one way He comforts me in this hard time.

Because gratitude and grief CAN hold hands.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/when-gratitude-and-grief-hold-hands/ on December 17, 2024.

Thanksgiving Quiz

Kerby Anderson offers a quiz concerning the origins of American Thanksgiving.

This nation was founded by Christians, and Thanksgiving is a time when we can reflect upon this rich, Christian heritage. But many of us are often ignorant of our country's origins, so we have put together a Thanksgiving quiz to test your knowledge about this nation's biblical foundations. We hope that you will not only take this test and pass it on to others, but we also hope that you will be encouraged to study more about the Christian foundations of this country.

1. What group began the tradition of Thanksgiving?



A day of thanksgiving was set aside by the Pilgrims who founded Plymouth Colony. This colony was the first permanent settlement in New England. The Pilgrims were originally known as the Forefathers or Founders. The term *Pilgrim* was first used in the writings of colonist William Bradford and is now used to designate them.

2. Why did they celebrate Thanksgiving?

Life was hard in the New World. Out of 103 Pilgrims, 51 of these died in the first terrible winter. After the first harvest was completed, Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer. By 1623, a day of fasting and prayer during a period of drought was changed to one of thanksgiving because the rain came during their prayers. The custom prevailed in New England and eventually became a national holiday.

3. When did Thanksgiving become a national holiday?

The state of New York adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom in 1817. By the time of the Civil War, many other states had done the same. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a day of thanksgiving. Since then, each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation for the fourth Thursday of November.

4. Why did the Pilgrims leave Europe?

Among the early Pilgrims was a group of Separatists who were members of a religious movement that broke from the Church of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1606 William Brewster led a group of Separatists to Leiden (in the Netherlands) to escape religious persecution in England. After living in Leiden for more than ten years, some members of the group voted to emigrate to America. The voyage was financed by a group of London investors who were promised produce from America in exchange for their assistance.

5. How did the Pilgrims emigrate to the New World?

On September 16, 1620, a group numbering 102 men, women, and children left Plymouth, England, for America on the Mayflower. Having been blown off course from their intended landing in Virginia by a terrible storm, the Pilgrims landed at Cape Cod on November 11. On December 21, they landed on the site of Plymouth Colony. While still on the ship, the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact.

6. What is the Mayflower Compact?

On November 11, 1620, Governor William Bradford and the leaders on the Mayflower signed the Mayflower Compact before setting foot on land. They wanted to acknowledge God's sovereignty in their lives and their need to obey Him. The Mayflower Compact was America's first great constitutional document and is often called "The American Covenant."

7. What is the significance of the Mayflower Compact?

After suffering years of persecution in England and spending difficult years of exile in the Netherlands, the Pilgrims wanted to establish their colony on the biblical principles they suffered for in Europe. Before they set foot on land, they drew up this covenant with God. They feared launching their colony until there was a recognition of God's sovereignty and their collective need to obey Him.

8. What does the Mayflower Compact say?

"In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland king, defender of the faith, etc., Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do by these present solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends foresaid, and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign Lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland."

9. Why didn't the pilgrims sail to the original destination in Virginia?

The Pilgrims were blown off course and landed at Cape Cod in what now appears to be God's providence. Because their patent did not include this territory, they consulted with the Captain of the Mayflower and resolved to sail southward. But

the weather and geography did not allow them to do so. They encountered “dangerous shoals and roaring breakers” and were quickly forced to return to Cape Cod. From there they began scouting expeditions and finally discovered what is now Plymouth. Had they arrived just a few years earlier, they would have been attacked and destroyed by one of the fiercest tribes in the region. However, three years earlier (in 1617), the Patuxet tribe had been wiped out by a plague. The Pilgrims thus landed in one of the few places where they could survive.{1}

10. What role did the lone surviving Indian play in the lives of the Pilgrims?

There was one survivor of the Patuxet tribe: Squanto. He was kidnapped in 1605 by Captain Weymouth and taken to England where he learned English and was eventually able to return to New England.{2} When he found his tribe had been wiped out by the plague, he lived with a neighboring tribe. When Squanto learned that the Pilgrims were at Plymouth, he came to them and showed them how to plant corn and fertilize with fish. He later converted to Christianity. William Bradford said that Squanto “was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation.”{3}

11. Were the colonists dedicated to Christian principles in their lives on days other than Thanksgiving?

The Pilgrims were, and so were the other colonists. Consider this sermon by John Winthrop given while aboard the Arabella in 1630. This is what he said about the Puritans who formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony: “For the persons, we are a Company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ. . . . For the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual consent through a special overruling providence, and a more than an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seek out a place of Cohabitation and Consortship under a due form of Government both civil and ecclesiastical.” They established a

Christian Commonwealth in which every area of their lives both civil and ecclesiastical fell under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

12. How did the Pilgrims organize their economic activities?

After the first year, the colony foundered because of the collective economic system forced upon them by the merchants in London. All the settlers worked only for the joint partnership and were fed out of the common stores. The land and the houses built on it were the joint property of the merchants and colonists for seven years and then divided equally.[\[4\]](#)

When Deacon Carver died, William Bradford became governor. Seeing the failure of communal farming, he instituted what today would be called free enterprise innovations. Bradford assigned plots of land to each family to work, and the colony began to flourish. Each colonist was challenged to better themselves and their land by working to their fullest capacity. Many Christian historians and economists today point to this fundamental economic change as one of the key reasons for the success of the Pilgrims at Plymouth.

13. What has been the significance of the Pilgrims and their legacy of Thanksgiving?

On the bicentennial celebration of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, Daniel Webster on December 22, 1820, declared the following: "Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary."

The legacy of the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving is the legacy of godly men and women who sought to bring Christian principles

to this nation. These spread throughout the nation for centuries.

14. How were Christian principles brought to the founding of this republic?

Most historians will acknowledge that America was born in the midst of a revival. This occurred from approximately 1740-1770 and was known as the First Great Awakening. Two prominent preachers during that time were Jonathan Edwards (best known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") and George Whitfield. They preached up and down the East Coast and saw revival break out. Churches were planted, schools were built, and lives were changed.

15. How influential were Christian ideas in the Constitution?

While the Constitution does not specifically mention God or the Bible, the influence of Christianity can plainly be seen. Professor M.E. Bradford shows in his book *A Worthy Company*, that fifty of the fifty-five men who signed the Constitution were church members who endorsed the Christian faith.

16. Weren't many of the founders non-Christians?

Yes, some were. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin are good examples of men involved in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence who were influenced by ideas from the Enlightenment. Yet revisionists have attempted to make these men more secular than they really were. Jefferson, for example, wrote to Benjamin Rush that "I am a Christian . . . sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others." Franklin called for prayer at the Constitutional Convention saying, "God governs the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his notice?" While they were hardly examples of biblical Christianity, they nevertheless believed in God and believed in absolute standards which should be a part of the civil order.

17. How important was Christianity in colonial education in America?

Young colonists' education usually came from the Bible, the Hornbook, and the New England Primer. The Hornbook consisted of a single piece of parchment attached to a paddle of wood. Usually the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, and religious doctrines were written on it. The New England Primer taught a number of lessons and included such things as the names of the Old and New Testament books, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and John Cotton's "Spiritual Milk for American Babies." Even when teaching the alphabet, biblical themes were used: "A is for Adam's fall, we sinned all. B is for Heaven to find, the Bible mind. C is for Christ crucified, for sinners died."

18. How important was Christianity in colonial higher education?

Most of the major universities were established by Christian denominations. Harvard was a Puritan school. William and Mary was an Anglican school. Yale was Congregational, Princeton was Presbyterian, and Brown was Baptist. The first motto for Harvard was Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae (Truth for Christ and the Church). Students gathered for prayer and readings from the Scriptures every day. Yale was established by Increase Mather and Cotton Mather because Harvard was moving away from its original Calvinist philosophy and eventually drifted to Unitarianism. The founders of Yale said that "every student shall consider the main end of his study to wit to know God in Jesus Christ and answerably to lead a Godly, sober life."

19. If Christianity was so important in colonial America, why does the Constitution establish a wall of separation between church and state?

Contrary to what many Americans may think, the phrase

“separation of church and state” does not appear anywhere in the Constitution. In fact, there is no mention of the words church, state, or separation in the First Amendment or anywhere within the Constitution. The First Amendment does guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.

The phrase is found in a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to Baptist pastors in Danbury, Connecticut in 1802 in which he gave his opinion of the establishment clause of the First Amendment and then felt that this was “building a wall of separation between church and state.” At best this was a commentary on the First Amendment, from an individual who was in France when the Constitution and Bill of Rights were drafted.

Notes

1. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), Chapter XI.
2. Bradford Smith, *Bradford of Plymouth* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1951), 189.
3. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 81.
4. Marshall Foster, *The American Covenant* (Thousand Oaks, CA: The Mayflower Institute, 1992), 86-87.

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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, owwww—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 devo writer 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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on August 23, 2016.

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.

Sit and Brine a While

I brine a turkey for Thanksgiving. When the bird sits in a salty, savory water bath overnight, it absorbs the flavors of the brine and the chemical composition of the turkey is changed to make it juicier. Delicious, juicy turkey—what’s not to love?

Except when you learn the hard way that all giant brining bags are not created equal, and your bag opens up in the refrigerator, spilling a gallon of brine all over the fridge and the kitchen floor. Which my rock-star husband cleaned up without complaint because he’s just wonderful that way.

Our Thanksgiving turkey was still delicious because the remaining brine did its magic on the bottom half of the turkey, and then I turned it in the morning for a few more hours of brining before roasting it.

That day a godly, wise friend of mine snapped a picture of her

Bible open, with 1 Thess. 5:16-18 highlighted ("Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"), and posted it to her Facebook with the insightful comment, "I need to 'brine' in this truth. I need to soak in it, it needs to change me, make me more tender..."

Amen!

That is how we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2)—by "brining" in the truth of God's word. Memorizing it, meditating on it, and being very practical in how we choose to develop a perspective that agrees with what God has revealed.

Recently my husband entered the fray of hostility in the comment section of an online magazine article featuring his role in vetting the science textbooks that the Texas State Board of Education would be voting on adopting. It's quite the assault to be called ugly names and have one's intellect and character impugned by people who cannot understand how a scientist can entertain any possibility of the supernatural and still call himself a scientist.

I walked by his computer and found a number of index cards next to his laptop on which he had written several scriptures. Before he put his fingers to the keyboard to respond to commenters, he was reminding himself to focus on the unseen and eternal, not the visible and fleeting, and to choose to speak truth that honors God instead of giving into fear and anger or hurt.

Ray was brining in God's Word. It blessed me deeply.

Recently, our friends at Igniter Media created a marvelous video about preparing to be with family, which was shown in the worship services at our church. Our pastor said it was his favorite of all the videos they had produced, because it shows how spiritual transformation happens.

This is what brining looks like.

Bon Appetit!

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Turning Thanksgiving Inside Out

Time to be thinking about the holidays. Next one up, Thanksgiving.

Oh joy.

It's not too hard to come up with a list of reasons to grump about the Thanksgiving holiday:

- Lots of work in the kitchen
- Lots of cleaning to do
- Lots of cooking to do
- Lots of buying food to do
- Crowds in the stores as we prepare
- The stores already have their Christmas decorations out—like since Halloween
- Spending time with family where the worst in people easily spills out
- Too much football on TV

- Too much food

But to cultivate a biblical mindset, we can take this list and turn it inside out to reveal the embarrassment of riches and lavishment of blessings that are attached to each item by invoking our own personal thanksgiving:

Lots of work in the kitchen: Thank You, Lord, that I have a fully functioning kitchen! Thank You for my stove and my oven and my refrigerator and my sink and my counters and my storage of my many many kitchen items.

Lots of cleaning to do: Thank You, Lord, for running water that is safe and tastes good. Thank you for a sink that drains. Thank You for buckets. Thank You for dusting cloths and my vacuum. Thank You for the energy to clean!

Lots of cooking to do: Thank You, Lord, for recipes. Thank You that my stove and oven work! Thank You for the various pots and pans that enable me to cook more than one item at a time. Thank You that I can store cooked things in my fridge until it's time to bring them out, and thank You for the microwave to zap them to serving temperature.

Lots of buying food to do: Oh Lord! Thank You for money to buy our Thanksgiving meal! Thank You for well-stocked grocery stores with a dazzling number of choices. Thank You for 24/7 electricity that powers refrigerators and freezers, both in my home and in the stores, which means I don't have to go to a market every single day for provisions. Thank You that I have the luxury of making a list, driving to the store, and getting everything on my list because it will all be there and I don't even have to think about it.

Crowds in the stores as we prepare: Thank You, Lord, that all those people also have the money to be able to make our purchases. Thank You for a culture where people will wait in line instead of all demanding to be served first. Thank You for stores to go to in the first place.

The stores already have their Christmas decorations out—like since Halloween: Thank You, Lord, that we live in a place that still celebrates Your birth even if many forget YOU. Thank You for Christmas decorations period. It means we are in a country that understands the importance of Your impact on our culture.

Spending time with family where the worst in people easily spills out: Thank You, Lord, for giving us families. Thank You for people to love, even if sometimes it needs to be in Your strength because we don't like them right then. Thank You for these people You chose to be in our lives. Thank You that being with family, even if it's church family and not bio-family, means we are not alone and isolated.

Too much football on TV: Thank You, Lord, that we even have a television. Thank You for a culture and a lifestyle with the luxury of offering entertainment instead of constant, unrelenting survival mode. Thank You for living room furniture to sit in or lie on while we watch TV. Thank You that the football is only for a few days and not every day!

Too much food: Thank You, Lord! Thank You! Thank You! Millions of people are starving and cannot even imagine the abundance of food at our meal. We are so blessed for every single dish and every single item we get to prepare and serve and then eat. You have lavished blessing and honor on us, and we don't deserve any of it. Thank You. Thank You.

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Thanksgiving Roots

We live in an uncertain moment in history when everyone is looking for “Roots.” November, especially, is a time to reflect upon family and traditions. Curiously, we Christians tend to be strangers to what is best in our own tradition. I refer to the Puritans, the historic source of our Thanksgiving heritage and much of what is still good about America.

We can still feel today the impact and the echoes of this robust community upon our own lives—in family, in work, in education, in economics, in worship, and in national destiny. But let them speak for themselves:

On the God-Centered Life: “I was now grown familiar with the Lord Jesus Christ; he would oft tell me he loved me. I did not doubt to believe him; if I went abroad, he went with me, when I returned he came home with me. I talked with him upon my way, he lay down with me, and usually I did awake with him: and so sweet was his love to me, as I desired nothing but him in heaven or earth.” —John Winthrop.

On the Sacred and the Secular: “Not only my spiritual life, but even my civil life in this world, all the life I live, is by the faith of the Son of God: he exempts no life from the agency of faith.” —John Cotton.

On God and the Commonplace: “Have you forgot. . .the milkhouse, the stable, the barn and the like, where God did visit your soul?” —John Bunyan.

On Spiritual Vitality: “Therefore the temper of the true professor is. . . to advance his religion. . .In the cause of Christ, in the course of religion, he must be fiery and fervent.” —Richard Sibbes.

On the Centrality of the Bible: “The word of God must be our rule and square whereby we are to frame and fashion all our

actions; and according to the direction received thence, we must do the things we do, or leave them undone.” –William Perkins.

On the Family: “The great care of my godly parents was to bring me up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord: whence I was kept from many visible outbreakings of sin which else I had been guilty of: and whence it was that I had many good impressions of the Spirit of God upon me, even from my infancy.” –Cotton Mather.

The Puritans viewed themselves as pilgrims on a journey to God and heaven. That journey led through this world and was not an escape from it. The Puritans saw themselves as participants in a great spiritual battle between good and evil, God and Satan. As warfaring and wayfaring Christians, they were assured of victory because they were on God’s side.

Dartmouth, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and many other colonial universities were originally founded for the express purpose of propagating these principles. Perhaps these universities would still be for us objects of thanksgiving rather than uneasiness if the substance of Christian thought which characterized their historic beginnings was still primary in their philosophies and curricula.

But there are still glimmers here and there. And herein is our great task and challenge for the new century: to rekindle the fires and recapture the spirit of the Puritan lifestyle which was fed by the spiritual springs of new life in Christ. These are roots worth searching for this Thanksgiving. May the Lord find each of us diligently seeking to find and emulate them.

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