Giving Thanks

Our Astonishing Debt of Gratitude

November 29, 2026

If you thought Thanksgiving had come and gone, you're wrong!

But first, *two* questions: ***Who* wants to *be* in *debt?*** Normally, *nobody.* But: ***Who* wants to *do* God's *will?*** Well, we have a *bit* of a *thanksgiving conflict* here, because: ***Giving thanks* is how we *express* our *unending debt* of *gratitude* to God,** which can *never ever* be *repaid!* And therefore:











No matter *what* happens, [we must] *always* be *thankful,* for *this is* God's *will* for *you* who *belong* to *Christ Jesus*. – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NLT

Because our *faith presents* a *paradox:* **We *owe* God *everything,* but we can't *repay* Him for *anything.*** Which is *why* we should be *eternally grateful* that: **He *doesn't* desire *repayment FOR* His goodness, but a *response TO* His goodness.** And that *response* is *trust expressed* through *thankfulness.* So:

Give *thanks* to the Lord for His *unfailing* love – Psalm 107:8 NIV

Give *thanks* … [because] His *faithful* love *endures forever*. – Psalm 136:26 NLT

[Therefore] My *God*, I will *give thanks* to You *forever*. – Psalm 30:12 NKJ

[I mean] *How* can I *repay* the *Lord* for *all* His *goodness* to *me*? [I *can't*; I can *only respond*, therefore] I will *lift up* the *cup* of *salvation* [with *thankfulness*] and *call on* the *name* of the Lord. – Psalm 116:12-14 NIV

Is not the *cup* of *thanksgiving* for *which* we *give thanks* a *participation* [in the *only way* we *can*] in the *blood* of *Christ?* – 1 Corinthians 10:16 NIV

[So] Give *thanks* to the Lord because of *His righteousness* – Psalm 7:17 NIV

I will *give thanks* to You, Lord, with *all* my *heart* – Psalm 9:1 NIV

No matter *what* happens, *always* be *thankful,* for *this is* God's *will* for *you* who *belong* to *Christ Jesus*. – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NLT

For you were *bought* with a *price*. So *glorify* God [with *thanksgiving*] – 1 Corinthians 6:20 ESV

So, as believers: ***Why* are we *usually less* than *always thankful?*** Let's get *right* to the *root:*

The *heart* is *deceitful* above *all* things and *beyond cure*. – Jeremiah 17:9 NIV

See *that?* **There's *no cure* for *self-delusion* that *expresses* itself in *self-righteousness.***

Just a *recovery program. Here. Right now.* Because we're *in* this *battle together.* And *you're* my *support group.* And each *other's.* I'm *Bruce,* and *I'm* a recovering *Pharisee.* "Hi Bruce."

You see, *gratitude* is a *debt.* And we *don't like* to be *indebted.* **Our *deceitful heart* wants everyone *indebted* to *us.*** It *gives* us the *upper hand. Removes* any *sense* of their *control* over us. It's *how* we're *wired* by *nature. Sin nature.* And it's a *big problem* we can't *afford* to *ignore.*





Ever have someone *give* you an *extravagant gift,* and you said something like: "That's *too much;* I can't *accept* it." *Why?* What's the *problem?* What's going on *down deep* in our ol' *subconscious?* And what about the ol' *debate* over who's *paying* for the *meal?* "I *got* it." "No, let *me* get it," "It's *my* treat." "You get it *next time*." ***Why* do we *fight* for the *privilege* of *paying?*** You say, "*I don't*." You're either *very mature* … or a *big mooch!* **This is purely a *prideful adult* predicament.** *Imagine* your *kids* acting this way at *McDonalds.* "*You* picked it up *last time,* mommy." It's *perplexing,* even *frustrating,* for *kids* to *watch.* But what do *they* know? They're like, *"Take* it and *thank* 'em! What's *wrong* with you?" ***When* do we *outgrow* this?** *Why* do we *outgrow* this? Because of *fear.* Fear of *what?* Being *indebted.*

What *is* wrong with us? **We don't *see* it as *free.*** Because, *deep down* in our *deceitful heart,* **we *desire* to be *indebted* to *no one.*** Including the *Lord,* who *claims* to *own* us! **We *tell* ourselves we're *just* very *generous* and *giving* and *unselfish.*** That's a good *Pharisee* … *not* a good *recovering* Pharisee. "*Put* your *money away! YOU* will be *indebted* to *MY* unselfishness." We don't *respond* that *well* to *gifts, unless* we can *offer* something of *equal* or *greater value* in *return.* Otherwise **it *makes* us feel *weak* and *needy* and *oh-so vulnerable* to the *giver.*** Even if the *Giver* is *God!* Ever *heard* the expression: "*No* good deed goes *unpunished*"? Well *now* you know *why!* Deep down in *our deceitful heart,* we *resent* being put in their *debt* – *even* (and sometimes *especially*) if it's *only* a *debt* of *gratitude!*




We're *fine* being *thankful* if we *think* we *deserve* what we're thankful *for.* Which is *crazy,* because **we *can't* actually *be* thankful for something we *deserve.*** You don't *thank* your *employer* for the *"gift"* of your *paycheck* – you *earned* it. But if there's an *unexpected bonus* in there, *wow!* Thank you. But even then, *deep down* in our *deceitful heart* we're *thinking,* "It's *nice* to have my *value* acknowledged in a *tangible* way."

[Because] To the one who *works*, *wages* are not *credited* as a *gift* but as an *obligation*. – Romans 4:4 NIV

[But] Surely the *righteous* shall *give thanks* to *Your* name – Psalm 140:13 NKJ

[For] He Himself *gives* everyone *life* and *breath* and everything else. – Acts 17:25 NIV

Everything *comes* from *You*, and we have *given* You *only* what comes from *Your* hand. – 1 Chronicles 29:14 NIV

For *from* Him and *through* Him and *for* Him are *all* things. [Therefore] *To* Him be the glory [and *honor* and *thanksgiving*] *forever!* – Romans 11:35–36 NIV

A *typical server* who receives a *typical tip* is typically ***gratified,* but not *all* that *grateful.*** We *confuse* the *two. Tipping* has become *expected.* So it's *insulting* to receive a *less-than-typical tip.*

Servers* might *express* their "gladitude" that you *did* your *duty, and *left* what was in the *expected range* of what they *felt* they *deserved.* But *imagine* the *surprise* of finding a *$100 bill* on *top* of a *30% credit–card tip!* From a *stranger. After* they leave. **It's *above* and *beyond* with *no way* to *repay,* and no *weird sense* of *vulnerability.*** There'd be *rejoicing* in the *kitchen! Why?* Because, they're *100% grateful. Why?* **They *see* it as *beyond* what they *deserve* without the *baggage.*** And *that* wonderful *perspective* is a *struggle* for *Pharisees* when it comes to *God,* because it *forces* us to *feel* the *vulnerability* of being *totally* and *utterly indebted forever.*

Pharisees like to *deal* in the *realm* of *paychecks* and *proper compensation,* because **we *like* the idea of *deserving* God's *mercy* … for being *good.*** Whereas *recovering* Pharisees *begin* to see *every* good thing as ***benevolent bonuses* and *gracious gifts.*** It's a much more *wonderful* life and oh-so *freeing* to *fully realize,* when it comes to *earning* or *deserving* God's *grace,* that:

> *No one* will be declared *righteous* in [God's] sight by *observing* the law; [but] rather, [get *this*] *through* the law we become *conscious* of *sin.* – Romans 3:20 NIV

The *law* was *designed* to show us our *hopelessness,* so that *thankfulness* could *abound.* So:

> Let no *debt* remain outstanding, *except* the *continuing debt* to *love* one another, for he who *loves* his *fellowman* has *fulfilled* the *law*. – Romans 13:8 NIV

> For *Christ* is the *end* of the *law* for righteousness to everyone who [*actually*] *believes.* [in *undeserved* and *unrepayable*, *Christ*-for-righteousness] – Romans 10:4 ESV

> … that in *Him* [*alone*] we might *become* the [*astonishing* and *unrepayable*] righteousness of *God*. – 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV



As *opposed* to the ***self-righteousness* that offers *gratified gladitude* when God *performs* as *expected.*** Do you like *feeding ducks? Just* for the *joy* of watching them *receive* from your *hand* and *heart* what *they* did *nothing* to *deserve?* I *do.* Unless it's a *flock* of *feathered Pharisees. They* think they've *earned* my *benevolent bread* by how *well* they *swim* and *flap* and *quack.* But *recovering ducks* realize that **the *bread* depends *solely* on the *goodness* of the *bestower.*** That's *how* it is with *us* and the *Bread* of *Life.* In fact, every *flap* and *quack* should be an *expression* of *joyful appreciation* and *gratitude.* Not *gladitude.* Cuz when it *comes* to *picking up* salvation's *tab,* **God's got us *completely covered,* and we're *eternally deep* in His *debt.*** But *feathered* Pharisees *sabotage* their *faith* and their *fruit* by turning *righteousness* into something *seemingly attainable* through all *manner* of *flapping* and *quacking.* Which is why:

> To some who were *confident* of their *own righteousness* … Jesus told *this* parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a *Pharisee* and the other a *tax collector*. The *Pharisee* stood up and prayed about *himself*: 'God, I *thank You* [Oh, *good*] that I am not like *other* men—*robbers*, *evildoers*, *adulterers* [Oh, *not good*]—or even like this *tax collector*. [And here's *why*] I *fast twice* a week and give a *tenth* of *all* I get.'" – Luke 18:9-12 NIV

You see, Pharisees *establish standards* to *measure* their *own righteousness* against *others.*

Because, **this *self-deceiving system* allows *us* to *calculate* how much *God* should *compensate,*** by *comparing* ourselves to *those* who *don't* measure up, *can't* measure up, or couldn't *care less about* measuring up. But when you *know* that you *know* that ***you've* been given *unfathomable, unrepayable mercy,*** you're *just* so *thankful* that you want the *whole world* to have it!








Giving thanks is so *tied* to God's *grace* that the *absence* of *overflowing gratitude* is an *indication* we've *fallen off* the *wagon.* And **our *response* to God's *grace* must *come* from a *place* of *grateful astonishment.*** Jesus used example after example of *astonished thankfulness* in His *parables.* Like the astonishment of the *poor* who are *invited* to a *banquet.* (Mt 22:1–14) Or the astonished *workers* who get a *full day's pay* for an *hour's work!* (Mt 20:1–16) Or the astonished *prodigal son* who's *welcomed home* with a *robe,* a *ring,* and a *party!* (Lk 15:11–32) And Jesus compares *heaven's rejoicing* to a *shepherd* throwing a *party* after *seeking* and *finding* his *lost sheep.*

> When he *finds* it, he *joyfully* puts it on his *shoulders* and … calls his friends and neighbors together and says, '*Rejoice* with me' … in the same way there will be more *rejoicing* in *heaven* over one *sinner* who *repents* than over ninety-nine [*self*] *righteous* persons who do not [see a] *need* to *repent*. – Luke 15:5-7 NIV

But *imagine* if, when the *shepherd* got *home,* the *sheep* called out from his *shoulders,* "Look who *I found*!" That's *almost* as *absurd* as *us* saying *we* found *Jesus.* **He's our *Lifeguard* and, at *best,* we finally stopped *thrashing* and *fighting against* Him so He could *save* us.** As Jesus said to *Simon* the *stunned Pharisee,* regarding the *prostitute* at Jesus' *feet:*

> "The one to whom *little* is *forgiven, loves little*." – Luke 7:47 NAB

And the *one* who *loves little,* doesn't see *much* to be *thankful* for. It *isn't* that Jesus *tolerates sin.* **He just *wants* us Pharisees to *admit* our *hypocrisy, embrace humility,* and *join* the *party.*** And:

> Give *thanks* to the Lord of *lords!* For His mercy *endures forever* – Psalm 136:3 NKJ

How *often* do you *get* on your *knees* and *thank* God for *all* that He's *done* for *you?* Because:

> Three *times* a day [*Daniel*] [of the *lion's den fame*] got *down* on *his knees* and prayed, giving *thanks* to his God – Daniel 6:10 NIV

Even though *he* was *exiled* and *trapped* in a *murderous pagan nation!* But, he *knew* that:

> It is *good* to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises – Psalm 92:1 NKJ

An *alcoholic* in *recovery* doesn't stop *being* an *alcoholic.* They simply stop *drinking.* Which requires a daily decision. So to with *us* recovering *Pharisees* in *our* ongoing *struggle* with the *sin within.*

So, maybe *tonight,* **you might *try* getting on *your knees* and *giving* God *thanks* for *every good* thing you can *think* of, that you don't *usually thank* Him *for,*** and *join* the *party!*

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.