

Be refreshed

Reflections on thankfulness

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Inspire a faith that lasts



Introduction

Life as a mum, dad or carer can often be busy and overwhelming. But finding time to be thankful, even when things are tough and feel out of control, can help us to draw near to God and re-fix our eyes on him. We hope that you'll find joy and peace as we explore what the Bible says about being thankful. And maybe you can involve your family as well, using the added ideas for sharing your reflections with them too.

About the author



Victoria Beech is the creator of all the GodVenture products and ideas. She has 20 years of experience working with children and loves finding fun, creative ways to help children connect with God. Victoria writes regular faith at home articles for Premier Youth and Children's Work magazine and other publications and has written many books and resources. Find out more at www.godventure.co.uk.



The Kitchen Table Project is a growing movement of mums, dads and carers joining together to support each other, learn from each other and share ideas, so we call all succeed in inspiring faith in our homes. Sign up at kitchentable.org.uk/join to receive a monthly email of encouragement, inspiration and ideas and follow us on Facebook @ktpcampaign.

Thank God because he is good



Read

1 Chronicles 16:34-36



Reflect

The number one reason we have to thank God is because he is good. All good things come from him (James 1:17). No matter what situation we are in, God is constant and his goodness is always good, so we always have things to thank him for.

These verses are taken from a longer song of praise first sung to God at the time when David set up the priests to worship God with songs. Until that point, their job had been about looking after the tabernacle and sacrifices as detailed in the book of Leviticus. At this point, David brought the covenant box, the symbol of God's living presence with them, into Jerusalem and told the priests to "give honour, thanks and praise to the LORD" (v4). It's interesting that after the sacrifices were no longer brought, the songs of thanks and praise continued, right into our modern Christian culture. These verses even include a description of the instruments used, trumpets and cymbals among others. This thanksgiving wasn't a quiet affair! The trumpets may well have been shofars, or goats' horns, which are incredibly loud. Your thanks today might not use a horn, but feel free to use an instrument if you play one, or play a praise song you know well. Let it be loud!



Share this with your family

Let's thank God for who he is by thanking him for specific characteristics.

Let's imagine God is sitting with us. Take it in turns to say three characteristics we appreciate about each person, including God – how dependable, trustworthy and fun they are, how gentle, considerate and loving. One of the amazing things is that everything good we appreciate about our family is also something we can appreciate about God – everything good comes from him!

*Give thanks to the LORD,
because he is good. His faithful
love continues forever. Cry out,
"Save us, God our Saviour. Save
us. Bring us back from among
the nations. Then we will give
thanks to you, because your
name is holy. We will celebrate by
praising you." Give praise to the
LORD, the God of Israel, for ever
and ever.*

1 Chronicles 16:34-36 (NIRV)

Thank God for what he has done



Read

Luke 17:11-19



Reflect

This simple story reminds us to say thank you to God for what he has done.

Jesus sends the ten lepers to the priests as part of the Jewish law (see Leviticus 13), which says that lepers must be declared clean by the priests. However, it doesn't state that they must give thanks to God. Jesus' questions suggest he thinks saying thank you and praising God is important. Why do you think this is?

In this story, ten men are ill, and reading between the lines, it sounds like the one who said thank you was the only one who wasn't a Jew – he was a Samaritan. This shows how thankfulness, even thanking God, isn't something reserved for people who are part of organised religion. Thankfulness is often the easiest concept for people who find other aspects of our faith and worship difficult.

Many people who don't know God personally keep a thankfulness journal, listing at least three things they are thankful for each day. Could you do this? If you do it, you might also like to reflect after a week or two to see if it has changed you in any way.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men met him. They had a skin disease. They were standing close by. And they called out in a loud voice, "Jesus! Master! Have pity on us!"

Jesus saw them and said, "Go. Show yourselves to the priests." While they were on the way, they were healed.

When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back. He praised God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Weren't all ten healed? Where are the other nine? Didn't anyone else return and give praise to God except this outsider?" Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go. Your faith has healed you."

Luke 17:11-19 (NIRV)

Notice that the thankful leper used volume and also physical action to praise and thank God. What could you use?



Share this with your family

When we're together at the end of the day, let's all say our three best things about today. When everyone who wants to has had a turn, let's go round again thanking God for our three best things.

Thank God as an act of worship



Read

Psalm 100:4-5



Reflect

This Psalm is often used as a way of starting a church service, and its title includes the words: A Psalm of Thanksgiving. Thanks can often be a way of shifting gear, of looking beyond our immediate circumstances and taking notice of what God is doing.

In the Bible, the book of Leviticus details a whole range of offerings the people were to bring, including the thanks offering. In Hebrew it's called a 'towardah korban'. The word 'korban' is used about all the offerings or sacrifices, and literally means to draw close or come near. It suggests that the offerings God requested were a way of the people coming close to him. As they brought their offerings to the Tent of Meeting, the place where God's presence rested, they came close to God. As we consider bringing thanks as part of our worship, it's a way of us coming close to God. No wonder it changes us!

Some Jewish commentaries suggest that of all the offerings, the thanks offering is the only one we will continue to do in heaven. It's sometimes described as a way of recognising miracles in our lives. I've often wondered about the burning bush, and if part of the miracle was Moses noticing it and coming near to find out more. Rabbi Eric Linder writes: "The

thanksgiving offering is a ritual which jolts us out of the [failing] of perceptual blindness, so that we see the burning bushes of our daily lives and recognise them for what we are."



Share this with your family

Let's create a poster with pictures and words describing daily 'miracles' in our lives. Then we'll spend a few minutes thanking God for each thing. We could add to our poster over two or three days or weeks and display it somewhere we can all see it so it continues to inspire our thankfulness.

*Enter his gates with
thanksgiving and his courts
with praise; give thanks to
him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and
his love endures for ever; his
faithfulness continues through
all generations.*

Psalm 100:4-5 (NIV)

Thank God instead of worrying



Read

Philippians 4:6-8



Reflect

This passage is great as it gives us a practical way of dealing worry. Worry is when we meditate on bad things which have, or could happen. It's the opposite of what's described here in verses eight and nine; Paul encourages us to focus and meditate on good things – things which are "noble, right and pure" (v8). Worry can lead to anxiety, where fear disempowers us and leads to all sorts of physical, emotional and spiritual problems driven by fear.

The antidote is hidden here in verse six – in everything, tell God what you need and give him thanks. Yes, thanks! Such an easy thing, yet it has the power to transform our lives. It's a way of taking our eyes off our circumstances or our fear, and onto God. Thanks is one way we can "keep our eyes fixed on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). Being thankful even without thanking God has massive positive effects on mental health. The huge growth in thankful journals is testament to this. Just go on Instagram and search for the hashtag #thankful to see how people are discovering the transformative power of thankfulness.

However, Philippians 4:7 tells us why thankfulness changes us. In the Contemporary English version it says: "Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel."

Don't worry about anything. No matter what happens, tell God about everything. Ask and pray, and give thanks to him. Then God's peace will watch over your hearts and your minds. He will do this because you belong to Christ Jesus. God's peace can never be completely understood.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, always think about what is true. Think about what is noble, right and pure. Think about what is lovely and worthy of respect. If anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about those kinds of things.

Philippians 4:6-8 (NIRV)

I know I would love to have God's peace control the way that I think and feel. Would you? Let's set our eyes towards this goal by cultivating a habit of thankfulness.



Share this with your family

Let's chat together about difficult situations which need more of God's peace. Is there a difficult situation with a friend or someone at school or work? Do any of us have a meeting or test coming up which we're a bit worried about? Do any of us have concerns about a friend or family member, or general concern about the future? Let's work together to find something to thank God for in each situation. Then tell God we would like his peace to control the way we think and/or feel about this situation. Lastly, let's bless each other with God's peace. We could do this in a physical way such as making the sign of the cross on your head or hand.

Thank God when you think of people



Read

Philippians 1:3-4



Reflect

Many people have a friend or a church missionary who they pray for. There's usually a list of things we can pray for them, including difficult situations in their work. However there's also often a list of things to thank God for, things which were difficult but have changed, good things that God has done. It's tempting to overlook the thanks, but this list is a great way to add to our list of things to thank God for – things which God has done for other people.

One way I sense God speaking with me is through seeing people's names on lorries or seeing cars which are the same make and colour as they have. I use this to remind me to pray for them. I've introduced my children to this, and it means that often when we're out in the car we pray for people who we might otherwise not be thinking of or praying for. A challenge we can all take is when we are reminded of someone, in whatever way, to thank God for them.



Share this with your family

Does anyone find they are reminded of people by seeing people who look similar, or have similar cars? Why not try this when you're out and about today? Or you could ask God to start bringing people to your mind and pray for them, starting with thanks.

*Every time I think of you, I
thank my God. And whenever
I mention you in my prayers,
it makes me happy.*

Philippians 1:3-4 (CEV)

Thank God for his eternal love



Read

Colossians 2:6-7



Reflect

Rooted, built up, strengthened and overflowing! That sounds like a good way to live, doesn't it? These verses say that if we are to continue to live with Jesus as our Lord, this is what we need to be. It's a wonderful picture about growing and maturing. We can be rooted like some kind of tree or plant – perhaps "a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaves do not wither" (Psalm 1:3). We could be built up like a building, perhaps like "living stones, being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). We could be strengthened "with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Ephesians 3:16).

And overflowing with thankfulness! This final phrase is like a feast – a generous outworking of the life of Jesus in us. Overflowing with thanks isn't just saying thank you when you're given something, or before meals or as part of a prayer meeting. Overflowing suggests a more extravagant lifestyle, one which is constantly looking to give away the life we have found in Jesus. And if we are continually rooted, built up and strengthened by Jesus himself, we're not going to run out of resources for thankfulness.

It can seem like a big ask until we remember the abundant goodness of God, as Psalm 118:1 reminds us: "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever." His goodness is complete and eternal, giving us endless reasons to thank and praise him.

What might overflowing thankfulness look like? If you met someone described as "overflowing with thankfulness" what might you expect them to be like?



Share this with your family

Let's have fun making something overflow in a tough spot, big tray or trug or the bath! Read Psalm 118:1 together and chat about what we think it could look like to be overflowing in thankfulness. Then make a plan of something we can do to express this kind of thankfulness. It might be making something to give to someone to thank them for something, or attempting to write a list of 'ten thousand reasons' to thank God.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)

Thank God when eating



Read

Luke 24:30-31

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Luke 24:30-31 (NIV)



Reflect

It's a common tradition for Christians to thank God for food as they begin eating. For Jews, the tradition includes specific prayers; for example before eating bread, an Orthodox Jew may well say this prayer:

"We bless You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."

It's a wonderful declaration of the source of all our food, bringing a recognition of God's ultimate sovereignty into the micro-level of our daily lives.

When we look through the gospels, we see Jesus giving thanks multiple times when breaking bread, which may well have been a traditional prayer like the one above. He does it when feeding the 5,000: "Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish" (John 6:11). Just before this Jesus has been likening himself to the manna which God sent from heaven to feed the Israelites in the desert.

He broke bread during his last Passover with his friends: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take it, this is my body'" (Mark 14:22). Here Jesus is building on

his teaching about manna, continuing to connect his body with bread. This is now part of our communion tradition.

For two of Jesus' disciples, his most significant 'giving thanks' was in their home in Emmaus after he died and came back to life. Just prior to the verses from Luke 24:30-32, Jesus has been walking with the disciples, explaining the Scriptures during which time their "hearts burned within them" (v32). But it's when he gives thanks and breaks the bread at the table that their eyes are opened to seeing who he really is. When we give God thanks for our food, we are joining a long tradition of thanks, recognising both God's provision for us and his presence with us.



Share this with your family

What ways of saying thank you do we already do? Let's chat together about whether it helps us to be thankful to God and recognise that he is the ultimate source of our food. We could invent a new way of giving God thanks – a song or chant, a new prayer or perhaps lighting a candle and saying silent thanks for 10 seconds. Let's try something new and find something which works for our family in the season we're currently in.



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