

## **The Power of Thankfulness**

*Presented by Mary Lowman*

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### **Day One**

We will no doubt enjoy the traditions that usually accompany this Thanksgiving holiday—great food, time with family and friends, watching football games—but will we give any thought at all to being thankful?

Did you ever realize that there is great power in thankfulness? Interestingly, there has been a great deal of research into the science of gratitude, and much time and money has been spent to find out what difference it makes in the life of a person who is intentionally thankful. And these studies have discovered that a thankful person is twenty-five percent happier than a non-thankful person!

When I read about these studies, I thought: Why didn't they ask me? I could have told them that. Or better still: Why didn't they just go to the Word of God? Time and again it tells us about the power of thankfulness.

In the Old Testament the people of Israel were instructed to bring thank offerings, sacrifices that were presented to God, to give thanks for his goodness.

*"Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High" (Psalm 50:14).*

Now, a sacrifice meant they had to bring something they owned to the altar of God and offer it as a thank offering. Why do you think God instituted the thank offering? Because the people of Israel—like us—were very prone to grumble and complain and they needed to be reminded that they should be thankful people.

The power of thankfulness is the power to change our attitude, to change our thought patterns, to change our focus—and that changes us. You see, thankfulness cannot coexist with griping and complaining. You just can't complain and give thanks at the same time. So, thankfulness drives out the negative thinking and causes us to be focused on the blessings of our lives.

But like the people of Israel, we need lots of reminders to be thankful people. So, I'm going to remind us all that if we truly are thankful people, not only will we be happier, but more importantly, we'll be pleasing to the Lord. For today, would you give a thank offering right now? Just say—out loud if possible—one thing you are thankful for.

### **Day Two**

Would you like to have some power? I can tell you how to have more power in your life, because there is power in being thankful! And all of us can learn to be thankful. In writing to the new believers in Colosse, Paul said:

*“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:6-7).*

Thankfulness is powerful because it transforms our thinking, it keeps us from complaining, and it makes us joyful. Thankfulness unleashes God’s power in our lives; it is the foundation of joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength. Without joy we are weak. What wipes out our joy? Complaining, feeling sorry for ourselves, focusing on the negative aspects of our lives. But thankfulness replaces all these negatives and restores our joy, which makes us strong and powerful.

Paul said we should overflow with thankfulness. And to the Ephesians he wrote:

*“Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20).*

When you and I are thankful for everything, we affirm the sovereignty of God in our lives. When you can be thankful for everything—the good and the bad—it means that you believe God is in control, even when bad things happen to you. That kind of thankfulness—giving thanks for everything—is so powerful. It means that the enemy of your soul cannot defeat you, no matter what happens, because you are going to give a sacrifice of thanksgiving even in the tough places.

In addition, when you are thankful, you affirm that you know and believe that God cares for you. Did you know that one of the greatest challenges to your faith is to believe that God doesn’t care? Satan wants you to believe that God doesn’t really care about you because then you will lose your joy and be defeated. Being thankful affirms that you believe God cares for you, which he does.

### Day Three

Being thankful is not our natural condition. We have to choose to be thankful and we have to remember to be thankful and we have to work at being thankful.

Many times, I have gone to Africa to conduct meetings there, and every year as I returned home, I was reminded of how much I have and how easy my life is compared to my friends in Africa. I would tell myself that I would never complain about anything again, but you know, after a few weeks if I wasn’t careful, I would fall back into my bad habits of complaining. If I want to be a truly thankful person—and I do—then I have to put disciplines in my life that will cause me to give thanks for everything and in everything.

Here’s one suggestion that helps me to be a thankful person: Turn every complaint into a praise. When you start to complain about something, even if that complaint has already escaped your lips and you’ve just heard yourself utter those negative words, go back and replace them with words of thanksgiving. For example,

- You complained about the weather—it’s raining again, and you’ve had three days of rain, and you’re tired of the rain.
- As soon as you hear those words of complaint, replace them with thankful words: You know, this rain is good. I’m thinking of some places in Africa that are in a three-year drought. They would love to have this rain. Thank you, Lord, for this rain.

Whether your complaint is just a thought in your mind or words you’ve expressed out loud, you need to replace those complaining words with words of thanksgiving. Of course, it’s better if you can catch yourself before you think or say those negative words, but even if you have already said them, I encourage you to teach yourself to replace them with thankfulness.

You see, the power of thanksgiving is something we have to teach ourselves; it's a gift we give ourselves, and we do this by becoming aware of every non-thankful thing we think and say and forcing ourselves to replace them with thankfulness. And the more you do that, the more it becomes a good habit which you just naturally do.

## Day Four

This Thanksgiving holiday is a good time to remind us that we are to overflow with thanksgiving, as we read in Colossians 2.

There is great power available to us when we are truly thankful people. But how do we make thankfulness a way of life for us? Here are some practical ways to learn to practice thanksgiving.

1. Do the thankful alphabet. Start with A and go through Z, naming something starting with each letter for which you are thankful. You can have some fun with this; it's a great game to play in the car with your kids and you'll be teaching them to practice thankfulness.
2. Make every Tuesday a Thankful Tuesday or each Thursday a Thankful Thursday. You can share this with your family or your co-workers and have some fun with it, but it will teach the joy of practicing thankfulness.
3. Sing songs of thanksgiving. This week we'll all probably sing some of those traditional Thanksgiving hymns at our churches, like "We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing" and "Come, ye thankful people, come." But how about all the other weeks of the year? You could sing "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart." How about "Count Your Blessings"? The Bible says to sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. Go for it.
4. Begin every prayer time with thanksgiving. Probably the most famous Psalm—Psalm 100—tells us to enter the gates of the Lord with thanksgiving and enter his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. Whenever you enter into the presence of God, always enter with thanksgiving. Make the first words out of your mouth words of thankfulness.

I have found that this changes my prayer time. If I begin with all my needs and requests, I am self-focused. If I begin with thanksgiving—reciting some of the many things I have to be thankful for—I am God-focused. What a difference that makes in my time spent with God, and that in turn makes a difference in my day. I begin to truly overflow with thankfulness.

## Day Five

I hope you had a thankful day yesterday. Actually, I hope you have a thankful day every day. You know why? Because thankfulness is powerful!

I've been encouraging you to practice overflowing with thanksgiving, and yesterday I gave you four helpful hints on how to do that. But did you ever think about the power that is released when you become a thankful person? Let me tell you some of the great things that will happen:

- People will like you much better. Thankful people are nice to be around. Your relationships will improve. You'll have more friends.
- Your energy level will go up. It's true, because when you're thankful, you unleash a lot of good energy that is often wasted on complaining and negativism. You will do more work in less time. And that's going to make you a better employee, which will make your boss happy! I won't go so far as to say you'll get a raise, but then again—who knows?

- Your stress will go down. I'm not making this up, folks. When you are being thankful, you are thinking about the good things in your life, and that keeps you from focusing on the negative things. It's like a release valve on a pressure cooker—you will see your stress go down.
- Your face will be prettier—or more handsome, whichever you prefer! Think about it: when you are thankful, you're not worried or fretting, and those things cause lines in our faces and age us! You'll look younger!
- Your posture will improve. When you're thankful, you stand up straighter. When you're negative, your shoulders tend to stoop and your back curves.

There's power in thankfulness. You have much to gain. But way above and beyond all of these, here's the most important reason to be thankful:

- You will honor and glorify Jesus Christ as he deserves. When you overflow with thankfulness, you tell the world what Jesus has done for you, and you are a good ambassador for him. Not to mention, it pleases him to see your thankful heart.

Let's start a campaign to overflow with thankfulness. What a way to live.