

GIVE TO GOD

Our God, Yahweh, is a caring, loving, merciful, wise, and generous Father. He loves to care for us and constantly encourages dependency upon Him. He repeatedly urges us to pray for His help in all that we do and promises to give generously without any disapproval, blame, discredit, or disgrace. However, He warns us to maintain a dignified attitude of reverence and humility in regards to Him and never to embrace the foolish notion we are deserving of or entitled to certain privileges. **He owes us nothing; we owe Him everything!**

The proper, mature state of mind is “Yahweh, what can I do for you today?” and not “Yahweh, what can You do for me today?” Holding a mindset free of all notions of entitlement from God or any person is a sound and safe platform from which to live an abundant life. Entitlement mindedness is unsound and dangerous ensuring the emotional pain that anger, greed, and ingratitude bring plus cultivating feelings of violation, disrespect, injustice, and envy. Such a mindset makes your life miserable and ill affects those around you.

The exchange of goods and services for money develops a relationship of indebtedness. Due to the lack of ability or integrity, the one party fails to fulfill his or her obligation; hence, we are tempted to act out in an ungodly way because we experience the force of righteous entitlement.

Romans 12:1

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Human development should bring a person from self-centeredness and complete dependency on others to selflessness plus the ability to care effectively for self and others. Many people arrive at this level only after they have their own children who demand such maturity from their parents. Many others never arrive at this level, and their children end up the target of resentment because they interfere with their parents’ self-centered lifestyle. Parents who maintain the immature entitlement mindset are incompetent guardians that will victimize their children and cause lifelong emotional and maturity wounds.

Spiritual maturity parallels human development. We get started as Christians usually because we come to the realization of the need we have for the loving help of God with little awareness or desire to serve Him. We need and want Him to serve us. With maturity, we become less self-focused and more God-minded, and we switch our desires to glorify and please Him. Yes, we

continue to ask God for help in everything because we need it and, even more importantly, we understand our dependency on Him is honoring and pleasing to Him.

As young believers, we stop doing things (sins) that are harmful to us and start doing helpful things. We follow the “do lists” and avoid the “don’t do” list of the Scriptures because it is the most beneficial for us. Self-preservation and fear of consequences weigh heavily on our decision-making. With maturity, self-interest dwindles, and obeying God’s Word becomes an acceptable way of worshipping Him.

Hebrews 13:15 and 16 - Through him [Jesus] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Psalm 104:1-ff This is praise that acknowledges God’s glory in His works of creation and providence and the dependence all living creatures have upon God. The psalmist contrasts the happiness of those who praise Him with the awful end of the wicked.

Psalm 105:1-45 This is praise that acknowledges Israel’s history from the calling of Abraham to their settlement in Canaan and reminds us that their obedience was the end of all God’s gracious dealings.

Psalm 106:1-48 This psalm gives a detailed confession of the sins of Israel in all periods of their history and praises God for His mercy.

Whenever we praise Yahweh (speak well of Him), He is pleased. Likewise, when we offer the sacrifice of praise to God – the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name, He is blessed and honored.

Malachi 3:7-12; Proverbs 3:5-11; Philippians 4:18 The extraordinary promises connected with tithes and offerings certainly give plenty of self-preservation reasons to obey. However, the most compelling reason to give (even if there were no other reasons) is the honor it brings to Yahweh. Tithing is one easy way to worship God.

The motivations to witness to others about our glorious God are numerous and powerful, but again the greatest reason of all is to bring glory to the one Who deserves all glory. Remember what happens in the throne room of Yahweh.

Revelation 4:8-11

The four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, to him who lives forever and ever,

the twenty-four elders will fall down before him who sits on the throne, and will worship him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

"worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

Matthew 5:13-16; 1Peter 2:9-12; Ephesians 3:21 – Witness to others by your lifestyle and your words. Tell the world of the glorious God we serve and His plan for man's salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Be an ambassador for Him!

Word Doers #7

James 1:22 Prove yourselves doers of the word...

Thankfulness

By Mary Ann Yaconis

1 Chronicles 23:30 They are to stand every morning to thank and to praise the Lord, and likewise at evening,

Psalms 30:12 That *my* soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

When Yahweh delivered Israel from the bondage of their slavery in Egypt, it did not take long for them to forget the blessings that He had just shown them in mighty and miraculous ways. The Egyptians were subjected to the plagues, but the Israelites were magnificently saved from them. As we read the Scripture records of Israel shortly after crossing the Red Sea, they began worshipping a golden calf. We cannot help but be dismayed at Israel's lack of thankfulness for blessings of the very near past. Ingratitude is never good. Yet, thankfulness can be quickly forgotten although consequences of being unthankful may be very grave.

Worship of Yahweh is documented in the Bible as foundational to our relationship with Yahweh. Old Testament worship in part consisted of a thank offering that was to be given along with the other sacrifices. The thank offering was considered to be an integral, voluntary part of worship and praise to Yahweh.

Psalms 118:1 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Yahweh desires that He is honored as God by our being acutely aware of the provision He has for each and every one and by our being thankful. Thankfulness is well known by Christians as vital to their relationship to Yahweh.

Positive psychology has been interested in studying gratitude for the past 15 years. Psychological research has weighed in on the very helpful benefits of thankfulness or gratitude. The results revealed that people who are consistently more grateful than others have some very positive physical, psychological, social, and spiritual traits.

People who are more grateful are prone to have stronger immune systems, are less bothered by aches and pains, have lower blood pressure, exercise more and take better care of their health, and tend to sleep longer and feel more refreshed when waking up. They also report having higher levels of positive emotions; are more alert and joyful; and feel more pleasure, optimism, and happiness. Socially,

those who are more thankful are more helpful, generous, and compassionate, more forgiving, and more outgoing. Conversely, they feel less lonely and isolated.

Gratitude is a social emotion due to its ability to improve and strengthen relationships. When people feel grateful, they recognize that others have validated their needs and supported them in a personal, helpful way that took thought and action. In appreciating others' assistance in our lives, our sense of humility and meekness is broadened.

Dr. Emmons and others' research further shows that there are four important reasons why gratitude transforms us.

1. Gratitude allows us to celebrate the present. Humans need newness and change where emotions are concerned. Newness does wear off. For instance, a new car, a new job, or new friends eventually are not as exciting as time goes on. When we find consistent value in things, we are less likely to take them for granted. Dr. Emmons states, "I think gratitude allows us to participate more in life. We notice the positives more, and that magnifies the pleasures you get from life. Instead of adapting to goodness, we celebrate goodness. We spend so much time watching things – movies, computer screens, sports – but with gratitude we become greater participants in our lives as opposed to spectators (Emmons, Goodness website)."
2. Gratitude blocks toxic, negative emotions. Envy, resentment, and regret are negative emotions that bring about negativity and loss of joy. A study by Alex Wood in the *Journal of Research in Personality*, 2008, shows that gratitude can reduce the frequency and duration of episodes of depression. We are unable to think two thoughts at the same time. When we are grateful, we are not envious. When we are grateful, we are not resentful. Other research studies concur that those who are more grateful have low levels of envy and resentment.
3. Grateful people are more stress resistant. If people have a disposition of gratitude, they are more resistant to the effects of trauma, adversity, and suffering. They also recover more quickly from stressors. Gratitude helps guard against post-traumatic stress and anxiety.
4. Grateful people have a higher sense of self-worth. We gain a godly sense of self-worth when we feel loved and cared for. With gratitude, we recognize that there is a beneficiary who is looking out for us – someone who is helping to provide for our well-being. Gratitude helps us notice the network of people that have contributed to our lives. Selfishness and gratitude cannot exist together.

Gratitude goes against our human nature of serving ourselves. It guards against being discontent. With gratitude, we are more content with what we have and stop being envious and lustful.

Gratitude also guards against the pervasive current worldview that we deserve everything. When grateful, we understand how indebted we are to others for everything we have.

There is a difference between people who are grateful in episodes and who are consistently grateful people. It takes conscious effort to be thankful. Research reports that people who are more grateful are also more religious and spiritual. In reading this research, I determined that what the statistics were

capturing are two different groups of more grateful people. One group are those who are outgoing, happy, positive people who do not acknowledge God as benefactor, and the other group are people who acknowledge God as benefactor on a consistent basis. This research that was conducted showed that those who were more spiritual and religious and acknowledged God as benefactor had more meaning in life, were more generous, and had a more pervasive feeling of elevation or gratitude. Having God as benefactor identified those who were in fact more grateful of the grateful group. This was the first time in psychological research that results showed that God as a variable made a difference in studying positive emotions.

All the research shows many and varied positive benefits to people. However, since the beginning, Scriptures have taught that being thankful to Yahweh is worship and praise and it...

1. keeps individuals in humility and indebtedness to one another,
2. builds godly value to our lives,
3. keeps us consistently thinking soberly according to the Word,
4. assists us to stop being lustful and self-focused,
5. helps us to serve one another in love,
6. gives us the resiliency to stand against the evil day, day after day,
7. and it gives us staying power to remain faithful unto the end.

How do we cultivate thankfulness in our lives? Actually it is quite simple.

1. Write in a journal five things you are thankful to Yahweh for. Do this every day for 30 days. You will transform your way of thinking.
2. Meditate on Scriptures about praise, worship, and thanksgiving.
3. Be mindful day by day moment by moment of the blessings of Yahweh. Broaden your awareness of others and their contributions to your life.
4. Look up at the sky, the stars, the mountains, throw your head back, and tell Yahweh how thankful you are for His love, kindnesses, gifts, air, water, food, and His Son. Smile; feel the goodness of thankfulness and how invigorating it is to go out and serve another with love.

As good as gratitude is, its opposite, ingratitude, is really very distasteful. People who show ingratitude towards others are very unpleasant to be around. Yahweh wants us to be thankful people. We are not to be grateful in an episode here or there, but instead we are to maintain a lifestyle of thankfulness to Him for His magnificent blessings. Pervasive thankfulness is the beat of a heart that will receive the seed of the Word and remain faithful to the Word.

The first few chapters of Romans record the depravity of man without God. It is understandable to *not* know God and therefore *not* be thankful to Him. Nevertheless, Romans 1:22 reminds us that those who *KNEW* God did not honor Him as God and did not give Him thanks. In order to live a faithful life with God and His Son Jesus Christ, it is important that moment by moment, thought by thought, we are thankful to Yahweh for His abundant blessings.

Resources

Emmons, R. A., McCullough, M. E. (Eds.) (2004). *The psychology of gratitude*. Oxford England: Oxford University Press.

Emmons, R. A. (2007). *Thanks!: How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Emmons, R. A., & Crumpler, C. A. (1999). Religion and spirituality? The roles of sanctification and the concept of God. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 9, 17-24.

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 377-389.

Yaconis, M. A. (2010). *The functions of God-minded gratitude versus interpersonal gratitude in spiritual and psychological systems*, Doctoral Dissertation, Loyola University Maryland.

Word Doers #8

James 1:22 Prove yourselves doers of the word...

Class Summary

One – run – horse running in circle with something on its back – You are on the horse riding bareback with your hands up in the air - Surrender and take control

Two – zoo – monkeys in a cage throwing something out (the object you are remembering). They are throwing broken Barbie doll pieces at you - human nature is sinful (broken)

Three – tree – the bent over tree held down by something – the nicely wrapped gift which when you open pops out Grace Finnegan - gift of grace

Four – door – something wedged in revolving door – the wedge is the mercy seat with blood on it - blood of Christ

Five – hive – bees flying out of the hive carrying something – thousands of bees are carrying two men, each with a big “A” on his chest - it is the two Adams

Six – sick – hypodermic needle with something squirting out – An angel with a mallet is pounding a piece of meat - flesh versus spirit

Seven – heaven – behind the golden gates is the object – two children fighting with each other, yelling, “I am in charge!” - control and rebellion

Eight – gate – a railroad crossing gate pounding down on something – It is a big bag of money with the word “ransom” on it – we are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ

Nine – wine – pouring from the wine bottle – From the bottle comes blood; flowing on top is the judge’s gavel - justified by the blood of Christ

Ten – den – den of lions coming out carrying something – out of their mouths come hundreds of butterflies - be transformed by the renewing of your mind

Eleven - football eleven - You're going out for a long pass, when instead of by the ball, you are knocked to the ground by the object you are remembering. A confessional box hits you – vigorous honesty

Twelve - shelve – You are trying to get stuff off a shelf, and suddenly things start tumbling down on you. What falls on you is the object, and that is a three-pronged fork representing the old nature with 1) control, 2) rebellion, and 3) denial

Thirteen - hurting - You feel a sharp pain and notice blood coming out of your side in this huge wound. The object you are remembering causes the wound. Out of the wound comes SASA – Stop, Ask, Speak the Word, and Act

Fourteen - sorting – You are sorting laundry, when underneath your clothing, you see something unexpected, the object. You find a brain and written on it the words “mental imagery”

Fifteen - lifting – You are at the gym and doing squat lifts. Something is holding the bar down, the object you are remembering. Chuck E. Cheese is standing over you with a sign that says “Speak Good Words.”

Sixteen - licking – You are eating an ice cream cone, but the ice cream cone has been replaced with the object. Connie Cortright comes out casting all your care on Him

Seventeen – leavening – You are kneading bread dough and notice bubbles coming up that are really the object you want to remember. It is you in a casket getting up and talking to God as you get out of it pulling the dough off. - Die to self and live for God

Eighteen - waiting – You are waiting for the bus, and it pulls up, the doors open, but you cannot get in because your way is blocked by the object. A waiter with a towel over his arm wanting to serve you - Die to self and serve others

Nineteen - shining – You are in the woods with your flashlight at night. Your flashlight is shining on the object. You kneel on the ground, bend over, and look closely to see hundreds of little people with their hands raised in the air singing praises to Yahweh - Give glory to God

Twenty - horn of plenty – You are standing before this horn of plenty, and it's so full things are coming out. The first thing out is the object. Money pours out – it is your tithes and offerings

Twenty-one - dueling gun – You are firing a dueling gun at your opponent, and instead of a bullet, the object comes out of the gun. The object is a megaphone with words shouting out that glorifies God. Be an ambassador for Him.