

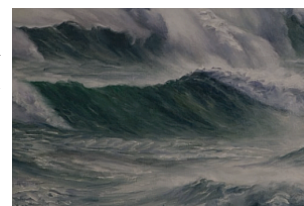
## I. Introduction

Good morning! Today we are going to talk about nurturing a thankful heart so that we can develop an attitude of gratitude. Most people say “thank you” when someone does something nice to help them. And, in the church, we regularly give thanks for God’s blessings, especially when we receive a clear answer to prayer. But do we give thanks when times are hard and things don’t go our way?

In **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, Paul wrote, “**give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**” God’s will is that we give thanks in all circumstance. When we are in pain or suffering, when we have no money, when we have just had a terrible argument with a family member, what shall we do? Give thanks. Of course, we are not happy about suffering. But if we know the Lord is with us and we trust in Him to use our tears to bring new blessings, then we can learn to give thanks in every circumstance.

**Hebrews 11:1** says, “**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**” It is easy to give thanks after God answers our prayers. But we demonstrate our faith when we give thanks before we see the answers. Trusting in God’s love and believing His promises while we are being buffeted by the storms of life takes faith. Yet, if we choose to believe God’s promises we can have courage in the storm. Our faith grows when we give thanks before we are delivered from trouble. God’s promises, not our circumstances, are our reality. One precious promise for Christians who are in the storm is **Romans 8:28**, “**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**” If we focus on loving God and believing His promises, we can learn to have peace and give thanks always.

Last week, we left Paul and those sailing with him in the middle of a terrible storm. This was a big storm with winds like a typhoon. This week, we will see how they survive the storm and reach land. Notice how Paul gives thanks while they are still in the storm.



Let’s read Acts 27:27-44.

## II. Scripture Reading (Acts 27:27-44, NIV 1984)

27 On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. 28 They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. 29 Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. 30 In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. 31 Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." 32 So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.

33 Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food--you haven't eaten anything. 34 Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." 35 After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. 36 They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. 37 Altogether there were 276 of us on board. 38 When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

39 When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. 40 Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. 41 But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

42 The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. 43 But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. 44 The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

### III. Teaching

Everyone reached land safely, but where? It turns out that they had landed on the island of Malta at a place that afterwards was named Saint Paul's Bay. It looks like a beautiful place in this tourist photo, but in the storm it would have looked much different. It is remarkable that all 276 people from the ship reached land safely, even though many could not swim. The water was shallow, but the crashing waves of the storm could easily have drowned some of them.

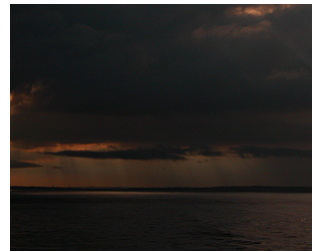


Why did they all survive? It was not because of wisdom; they had been foolishly left Crete despite Paul's warning. It was not because of strength; they had gone without food for days and were exhausted from fighting the storm. It was not because of courage: the crew of the ship tried to take the lifeboat and abandon the others. It was not because of skillful sailing; they had no control in the storm and when they approached land, they ran aground.

Everyone reached land safely for one reason, because God gave them grace. They did not deserve God's favor; they were a rough and sinful lot. But Paul had prayed for them and God had answered with a promise. Last week, we read that promise; Paul told them that they would be safe, because (**Acts 27:23-24**). **“Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’”**

As I mentioned last week, although it is my own interpretation, I expect to see these people in heaven. God graciously gave Paul the lives of everyone on the ship in answer to Paul's prayers. We are not told exactly what Paul prayed, but I cannot imagine that Paul prayed only for physical safety. Paul would have prayed for the salvation of every soul and he would have used his days on the ship to tell everyone about Jesus. Paul would not remain silent when he had so many people to preach to who could not get away. They couldn't get mad and throw Paul overboard either, because, as a prisoner, he was always guarded by Roman soldiers.

Paul was a preacher and preachers are funny people. I think a lot of preachers would gladly endure a two week storm at sea for the chance to preach every day to 275 people in a time of crisis. Of course, in that kind of situation, a lot of the preaching would be with actions, not just words. But people are more likely to listen to the gospel when they are caught in a storm. As their time on the ship was coming to an end, they knew that land was nearby. When morning came, they would attempt to run the ship aground and make for the shore.



Let's take a closer look at **Acts 27:33-36**, **“Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. ‘For the last fourteen days,’ he said, ‘you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food--you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.’ After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.”**

By appearances, they were still in great danger, but God's promises are sure and certain, so Paul knew they would be safe. After reassuring them, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and they all ate. Does this remind you of something? It sounds like communion, doesn't it? There is no mention of wine, but it is likely that they had wine also. It was the common drink of the time. They had not yet been saved from the danger of the sea. But Paul gives thanks, because he believes the promises of God. And, I think Paul was also giving thanks for the salvation of these souls through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Paul's actions show an attitude of gratitude. He did not complain about the long, dark, days of the storm. He gave thanks. What is our attitude toward the trials of life? Do we murmur and complain when

things are difficult or uncomfortable? Or, do we give thanks? A thankful heart gives us the ability to rejoice even during times of trial.

How do we develop a thankful heart? By counting our blessings and giving thanks for each one. At first this may seem to be a difficult discipline, but it can grow to be a habit, and then become a great source of joy. Our primary inspiration in developing an attitude of gratitude is the example of Jesus. Take a look at **Luke 22:19-20**, “**And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’**” Jesus knew that He would soon be arrested, beaten, mocked, and crucified. What attitude did He have? He gave thanks. Because He knew that His suffering would provide for a great salvation for all who trusted in Him.

Our Lord Jesus is the most important example of a thankful heart. The lives of Peter, Paul, John, Stephen, and others in Scripture can also inspire us to give thanks. We can also receive insight and encouragement from many other brothers and sisters. Here are two examples:

Priscilla Maurice was a 19<sup>th</sup> century British author. She had a strong desire to go overseas as a missionary, but God gave her a mission of caring for the sick near home instead. Priscilla is not widely known - out of humility, she published her writings anonymously. But I like what she says about developing a thankful heart.

*“Begin by thanking Him for some little thing, and then go on, day by day, adding to your subjects of praise; thus you will find their numbers grow wonderfully; and, in the same proportion, will your subjects of murmuring and complaining diminish, until you see in everything some cause for thanksgiving.”*

Matthew Henry, who is famous for his commentary on the Bible, was a man who knew how to give thanks in every situation. Once, on a night when he had been robbed, he prayed:

*“I thank Thee first because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse they did not take my life; third, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.”*

A thankful heart finds something to give thanks for and saves us from sorrow and complaining. When we are down and unhappy, we tend to want to blame our bad mood on our circumstances or on someone near us. But the real source of our unhappiness is our wrong attitude and our lack of thankfulness for the blessings we have. Many people make lists of their complaints, but if you make lists of your blessings instead, you will find joy.

It is sad that thankful hearts are rare, even among those who have received great blessings from God. Let's learn from the story of the ten lepers?

**Luke 17:12-18**, “**As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’ When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’”**

I know that on many occasions I have failed to choose an attitude of gratitude. Too often, I have been like the nine lepers who were healed, but who did not return to say thank you. But I want to change and develop a thankful heart more and more. Will you all join with me in making the effort to be more thankful? Let's repent of our ingratitude and learn to give thanks in all circumstances. Certainly when we have received a blessing we should be thankful. But even when the blessing has not yet appeared, we should rejoice and give thanks for the wonders of God's love and the great promises He has given us.

Most of all, we should give thanks for the great salvation Jesus has provided for us through His death on the cross and resurrection. I pray that each and every one of us will trust in Jesus and receive the forgiveness of sins and the free gift of eternal life that He offers to all who believe.

#### IV. Conclusion

I cannot think of any better way to end today's message than with a song. Let's sing, "Count Your Blessings, and then I will pray.

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!  
Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?  
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?  
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,  
And you will keep singing as the days go by.

When you look at others with their lands and gold,  
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;  
Count your many blessings. Wealth can never buy  
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

So, amid the conflict whether great or small,  
Do not be disheartened, God is over all;  
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,  
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

#### V. Prayer