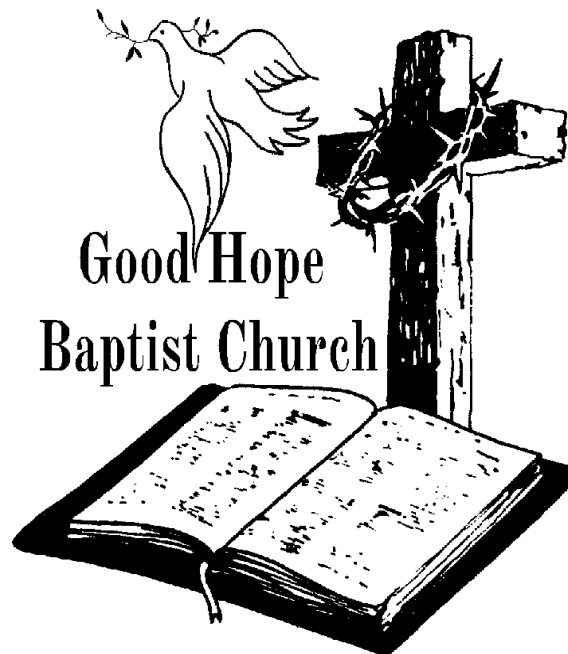


# A Thanks-Living Message

Philippians 4:4-9



Living Together In The Love Of God

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**FOCAL Read Together** Philippians 4:4-9 (HCSB)

**4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable — if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise — dwell on these things. 9 Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.**

The day we call “Thanksgiving” is just around the corner. On that day we'll gather together with our families, eat entirely too much food, watch television, and maybe take a nap. But will we thank the Lord Who has given so much to us? Many families won't. Many professing Christians will not even thank the Lord for the food they eat before they eat it.

In 1621 our forefathers, a group of Christians that we today call “Pilgrims”, celebrated the first “Thanksgiving” feast. These were people who gave up everything in order to come to America so they could worship the lord our God freely. One hundred and two people took a harsh, sixty-six day journey on a small ship called the Mayflower. After the first year of settlement there were only *fifty three* Pilgrims left in Plymouth Colony. They could have looked at their circumstances and – filled

with bitterness – looked for the first ship back to England. They didn't do that. Instead, **they thanked God**. Inviting the native Indians that helped them survive the year, they held a *three day festival* where they ate, prayed, and thanked God for His bounty. The Governor of Plymouth Colony **William Bradford** wrote:

**"Being thus arived in a good harbor and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees & blessed ye God of heaven, who had brought them over ye vast & furious ocean, and delivered them from all ye periles & miseries therof, againe to set their feete on ye firme and stable earth, their proper elemente. ... What could not sustaine them but ye spirite of God & his grace? May not & ought not the children of these fathers rightly say : Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this willdernes; but they cried unto ye Lord, and he heard their voyce, and looked on their adversitie..."**

Harsh as the previous year was, these precious Christians *thanked God* for His provision. If Christians were more thankful, then those who do not know Christ as Savior would be less skeptical!

**1** If you are called by God into His family, you are called to be thankful. The thankless heart is the godless heart! The Bible says:

**FOCAL** **Philippians 4:4** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

We are to **"Rejoice in the Lord always – at all times"**. We who are Christians have reason to rejoice and to be thankful.

**a** I am thankful that as a Christian I will not go to hell – ever! How do I know this? Because the Bible says:

**Romans 5:6-8** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person — though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!**

Before I knew Jesus Christ I was in a helpless state. I was a sinner – lost and adrift from God – with no way of saving myself. But the Bible says **"Christ died for the ungodly"**. He died for me, loving me, long before I ever loved Him. **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!"** Oh Beloved, don't think that you will ever get into God's pure Heaven without Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

**1 Peter 3:18** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm.**

No one will ever get into Heaven on their own merit. The

self righteous person thinks that he or she is better than others. Wrong! We only enter Heaven when we come to God by faith, surrendering our lives to the embrace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Illustrate** A little boy went to his grandmother's house, and there she introduced him to a new game. Not Nintendo, not an electronic game, but a very old game called “Monopoly”. If you've never played “Monopoly” then you must have grown up on Mars! Grandma taught her grandson how to play. At first, she won every game, and he lost all his money. When the child lost his property and money he told Grandma, **“I'm going to get good, and one day I'm going to beat you!”** It wasn't too many more days before that happened, and the young boy winning started to gloat and tease his grandmother. She told him, **“Honey, there's one more thing I need to show you about the game”**. With that, she picked up all the hotels, all the property, all the money, and *put it back in the box*. She told her grandson, **“Honey, no matter what you do or how well you play, sooner or later it all goes back in the box”**.

It all goes back in the box. All the hard earned money you make goes back in the box, into a house, a car, or a bank. All the food you eat is eventually flushed into a box, and leftovers are placed in a box and hauled away. All your property will one day belong to another, and at the end of this life your very body will go into a box and be buried in the ground. What matters most to me – and should matter to you – is that Jesus Christ has promised me that my soul will not be tossed into the box of hell, but when I leave this place I will forever be with Him

Who gave Himself for me.

**b** **I am thankful because it is not *possessions* but *Who possesses me* that matters most. If you are a Christian you belong to Jesus – and God is our portion and our inheritance.** The Apostle Paul had lost everything in order to follow Jesus. He lost his status. He lost his prestige as a member of the Jewish Ruling Council. His family turned on him. He lost his property. He lost everything. Yet Paul said:

**CONTEXT** **Philippians 3:8-9** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **... I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ — the righteousness from God based on faith.**

The greatest possession you have is your soul, not the temporal things of this life. That which defines your soul should be the most important thing in your life.

If your possessions define you, then what does it say about you when you lose those possessions? If the admiration of others defines you, then what does it say about you when you lose their admiration? Your life is too important to build it on fleeting things.

**Illustrate** I just finished reading an article about a 10 year old child who hung herself to death after being

bullied at school. Students teased the child about her clothing and shoes. When I was a child there were bullies in school, and *never* did you hear of anyone killing themselves because of bullying. I wore *white socks* and *patched jeans* to school because this was what momma and daddy could afford. Bullies would call me “white sock queer”, and mock the boy who didn't keep up with the *accepted fashion*.

Let me ask you, why is it that *no one committed suicide – or went on rampages killing students – because of bullying then, but do these things now?* It's because we value our possessions greater than our souls, and have taught our children the same things.

**Though North Carolina along with other states have passed anti-bullying laws, such efforts will do little to fix the problem.** Would that the mother and the Pastor of this little girl had sat down with the child and explained that it is not possessions and is not the admiration of our peers that defines our souls. It is our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that gives us value. We are **kings and priests before God because of the Lord Jesus.**

**2** The thankful heart is always at peace, always gracious heart, whereas the thankless heart wars within, turning to bitterness and fault finding. The Christian is commanded to be gracious. The Bible says:

**FOCAL** Philippians 4:4-5 <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your**

**graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.**

God has given us very much in Christ. Because of His Grace we are saved. The Graced are called to be gracious.

The Apostle Peter was a bold, brash fisherman. One day he asked the Lord:

**Matthew 18:21** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **“Lord, how many times could my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”**

Jesus said **“No, but seventy times seven”**. Jesus was not telling Peter that there was a limit to forgiveness, but that forgiveness must be given *without limit*. **Dr. Adrian Rogers** said in his book *What Every Christian Ought To Know*:

**“Have you ever committed a sin, asked God to forgive you, and you did? Now let me ask you another question. After you asked God to forgive you for that sin, did you commit the same sin or one like it again – even after God forgave you? And have you ever repeated that sin as many as ten times and come to God and said, “It's me again; I did it again? Does He continue to forgive us? ... He does absolutely. Seventy times seven He will forgive you”**.

Right after Jesus told Peter that we are to *always be gracious and forgiving* He told Peter a little illustration:

**Matthew 18:23-35** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **... the kingdom of heaven can**

be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began to settle accounts, one who owed 10,000 talents was brought before him. 25 Since he had no way to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. 26 “At this, the slave fell face down before him and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything!’ 27 Then the master of that slave had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan. 28 “But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him 100 denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, ‘Pay what you owe!’ 29 “At this, his fellow slave fell down and began begging him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ 30 But he wasn’t willing. On the contrary, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed. 31 When the other slaves saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. 32 “Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And his master got angry and handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. 35 So My heavenly Father will also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart.”

As we who are Christians have received grace we are commanded to be gracious. “**The Lord is near**” our Scripture says. If are not gracious the **Master may hand**

**us over to the torturers.** Who are the torturers? I've heard pastors say that they thought this was an illustration of being cast into hell – but I don't think so. Our Lord Jesus said:

**John 10:28** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **I give them {those who believe on Him} eternal life, and they will never perish — ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand.**

No one can snatch me out of Jesus' hand – not even me! The “torturers” is not a reference to hellfire in the afterlife, but it is a reference to bringing hell into your own life while you are on this earth. Listen to me:

Jesus Christ did not die and rise again so you could gain Heaven after you die. He died and rose again so that you can experience Heaven *now before you die*. If you will not forgive and will not be gracious the Lord turns you over to the “torturers”.

You will toss and turn in sleepless nights. Your **stomach will build ulcers while the bile of your bitter soul overflows** into physical misery. You'll not be happy, but will introduce misery into your own life. **Stress will hound you, you die alone and unloved**, leaving this life an embittered and shrunken spirit. You continually are tortured with what you should have said, what he should have said, and your anger finds no release. **These are the “torturers”.**

This is why our text states:

**FOCAL** **Philippians 4:5-7** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **Let your**

graciousness be known to everyone. **The Lord is near.**  
**6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

God has placed before each and every one of us a choice: We can thank God for everything – even the bad stuff – and trust that He is in control, or else *we* can hold on to a non-gracious attitude. His peace is available to all, if we would be do what He says. Then and only then **will the peace of God guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**. Otherwise, we torment ourselves – and the Lord lets us do it.

We are, in that case, our own worst enemy!

**3** **The thankful heart has to be maintained by keeping your focus on the Lord.** Our main text tells us:

**FOCAL** **Philippians 4:8-9** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable — if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise — dwell on these things. 9 Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.**

There's an old saying, "May you think good thoughts". What this text is telling us is *don't be small minded – think GOD thoughts*.

**a** **Keep your focus on GOD and not on yourself.** The Bible says that

**Proverbs 16:18** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **Pride [goeth] before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.**

**Illustrate** Try this sometime. Put a 2 x 4 piece of wood on the floor and try walking across it, staying on the 4 inch side. I can do it every time. Now take that 2 x 4 and stretch it between two chairs. I don't care how stable it is, most people will fall off. Why? Because we're *not* focusing on the 2 x 4 surface, we're focusing on *ourselves and on the fact that we might fall*. Who can walk on that narrow a surface, even if it was stretched between two buildings ten floors from the ground? *Only those who have learned to focus on the board and not on themselves*.

Pride - an overemphasis on ourselves - will cause us to fall. Dear friends, none of us deserve anything but eternal damnation, and but the Grace of God that is all we'll get. Thank God for what you have.

**Illustrate** The Masai tribe in West Africa have an unusual way of saying "thank you." Translators tell us that when the Masai express thanks, they bow, put their forehead on the ground and say, "**My head is in the dirt.**" When members of another African tribe want to express thanks, they sit for a long time in front of the hut of the person who did the favor and literally say, "**I sit on the ground before you.**" Those Africans understand

well what Thanksgiving is and why it is different for us: at its core, thanksgiving is an act of humility." (Joel Gregory)

**b** **Look at your current situation in the light of God's Word and under the leadership of God's Will.**  
The Bible says:

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 (KJV) 18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.**

**Illustrate** During the reign of Napoleon in France a man simply known as "Charnet" was thrown into prison. What was his crime? He spoke against Napoleon – and you don't do that to a King. Cast into a dungeon and left to die Charnet became embittered. Day by day he lost a little more of his faith in God. One day, angry at what he thought was an unjust imprisonment, Charnet scratched on the wall of his cell, "**All things come by chance**".

There was one spot in the cell where a *single ray of sunlight* came through every day. One morning, to Charnet's surprise, a tiny, green blade was breaking through the hard prison floor. Here was life! Charnet watched and watered this tiny blade day after day, nurtured it with his tiny ration of water. That green blade became his friend. It became his teacher in a sense, and finally one day bloomed into a beautiful purple and white flower. When he saw the beauty of that flower Charnet scratched off the earlier words, "**All things come by chance**", and wrote on that same wall "**He who made all things is God**".

The guards had been watching Charnet for some time, and watched him as he went into despair, faithlessness, and now as he returned to faith in God. The guards shared the story with their wives and friends, and eventually this insignificant story – tiny as that little plant – reached the ears of the Emperor's wife Josephine. She was so moved by the story that she went to Napoleon and demanded Charnet's release from prison. Charnet left prison with that little flower, root intact, and planted it in a flower pot to ever remind him that

No matter what the situation, no matter how grim things may seem. God still watches over His children. He still cares for you and me!

I preached a sermon many years ago to a small Church on the outskirts of Valdosta, Georgia. They were looking for a pastor, and I was looking where the Lord wanted me to serve. I preached from the question Jesus asked:

**Luke 17:17 (KJV) ... Were there not ten cleansed? but where [are] the nine?**

The story behind the question is this. There were ten lepers who, hearing that Jesus was coming their way, went out to meet Him. When they saw Jesus far off they began to ...

**Luke 17:13 (KJV) .... lift up [their] voices, and say, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.**

These men were not whispering their requests. They

were SHOUTING and BEGGING. They dropped their pride and were saying, "**JESUS, MASTER, LORD GOD, HAVE MERCY ON US!**" These men didn't care who they offended. They wanted help, so they cried out. The Bible says:

**Luke 17:14** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **And when {Jesus} saw [them], he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.**

Now I want you to notice this. Jesus did not heal them, and then send them to the priests. Oh no! He said "**Go show yourselves to the priests**". Translation, "**If I am Master as you say, do what I say and you will be saved!**" The Bible says "**As they went, THEY WERE CLEANSED**". They put aside pride. They acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord and THEN did what He said. THEN they were healed.

But only one man returned to Jesus, and this man was a **Samaritan**, one of the hated peoples among the Jews. The Bible says that the Samaritan ...

**Luke 17:15** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **.... when he saw that he was healed, turned back {to Jesus}, and with a loud voice glorified God,**

Ten men with a loud voice demanded healing, but only one man with a loud voice thanked God and the Lord Jesus Christ. In response to that the Lord Jesus said

**Luke 17:17-19** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **.... Were there not ten cleansed? but where [are] the nine? 18 There are not found that**

**returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19 And {Jesus} said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.**

Why did Jesus say to this Samaritan "**Thy faith hath made thee whole**"? Weren't the other nine lepers equally saved? No, they weren't. The other nine were made whole *physically*, but *spiritually* they were still separate from God. The outside can be healed, but if the inside is rotted and thankless, then no salvation has occurred.

You are only "Whole" when bitterness is gone, and gratitude has healed the "Hole" in your heart!

Even Psychologists tell us that sincere gratitude - thanksgiving - is the healthiest of all human emotions.

**C** **The birds sing even on cloudy days. Train yourselves to sing and to worship the Lord Who saved you when you're walking through the "graveyards of life".** The Bible says that we are to be ....

**Ephesians 5:19-21** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; (20) Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

When I wake up and I feel bad, I try to sing because I know that the song of my lips will soon lift up my heart.

Dear ones, spend time daily worshiping the Lord. Prayerfully seek His guidance in the Bible, and ask Him what you can do this very day to bless others. The Apostles learned the great truth that:

**Acts 20:35** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> ... It is **more blessed to give than to receive**.

When you give worship, God lifts up your heart. When you give love, God lifts up your soul. **Find something good to do for another, and do it.**

That's what Jesus did. He saw that we needed salvation, so He stepped outside of His comfort zone and gave everything He had to bring us to God.

May God touch your hearts with His Word.

**FOCAL Read Together** **Philippians 4:4-9** <sup>(HCSB)</sup>

**4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable — if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise — dwell on these things. 9 Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.**

**1** If you are called by God into His family, you are called to be thankful. The thankless heart is the \_\_\_\_\_ heart! (Philippians 4:4)

**a** I am thankful that as a Christian \_\_\_\_\_

(Romans 5:6-8; 1 Peter 3:18)

**b** I am thankful because it is not *possessions* but \_\_\_\_\_

(Philippians 3:8-9)

If your possessions define you, then what does it say about you when you lose those possessions? If the admiration of others defines you, then what does it say

about you when you lose their admiration? Your life is too important to build it on fleeting things.

**2** The thankful heart is always at peace, always gracious heart, whereas the thankless heart \_\_\_\_\_

(Philippians 4:4-5; Matthew 18:21; Matthew 18:23-35; John 10:28; Philippians 4:5-7)

**3** The thankful heart has to be maintained by \_\_\_\_\_

(Philippians 4:8-9; Proverbs 16:18)

**a** Keep your focus on GOD and not on \_\_\_\_\_

**b** Look at your current situation in the light of \_\_\_\_\_

(1 Thessalonians 5:18; Luke 17:17; Luke 17:13; Luke 17:14; Luke 17:15; Luke 17:17-19)

**c** The birds sing even on cloudy days. Train yourselves to sing and to worship the Lord Who saved you when you're walking through the "graveyards of life". (Ephesians 5:19-21; Acts 20:35)

