

IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: A STAND-ALONE LESSON
TITLE: MEET MY FRIEND THANKSGIVING
SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 5:20
DATE: NOV. 23, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Today we are offering a stand-alone lesson on the theme of thanksgiving. It is perhaps easy for us to think of things we are thankful for in light of the approaching holidays. This week, as people gather with family and friends to celebrate on Thursday, we are often faced with regular reminders. Sometimes it seems we are almost *forced* to say something we are thankful for.

Yet a thankful perspective isn't something we should strive for only one week out of the year. In fact, we are commanded in our text today to be thankful *always*. Try to imagine a person who is thankful always—doesn't that feel refreshing?!

In our lesson today, we'll see in part how a person can become thankful and what thankfulness really looks like.

Text

Ephesians 5:20

[20] ...giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Explanation

Context

You may have noticed that Ephesians 5:20 doesn't begin a new sentence but continues one already in progress. In fact, the sentence that includes verse 20 begins in verse 18 and runs through verse 21. Paul is known for his long sentences in Ephesians. For example, Ephesians 1:3–14 is actually one long sentence in Greek. Likewise, Ephesians 2:1–7 consists of only two sentences in Greek.

For context involving Ephesians 5:20, let's read verses 18–21:

[18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, [20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [21] submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In these verses, Paul gives two biblical commands. First, believers are commanded not to get drunk, and second, they are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. To be drunk is to be under the influence or control of an intoxicating substance. Instead of being drunk with wine, Christians must be influenced and controlled by the Spirit.

Following these two commands, Paul provides a series of participles that likely describe the *effects* of being filled with the Spirit:

- Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
- Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart
- Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
- Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ

Behaviors that demonstrate a Spirit-filled life include addressing one another, singing and making melody, giving thanks, and submitting.

For the purposes of this lesson, we are focusing on the Spirit-filled behavior of giving thanks. It is worth noting that this behavior is best demonstrated when we are filled with God's Spirit. In fact, we can even say that one is not able to give thanks to the degree that Paul commands apart from being filled with the Spirit.

Giving Thanks Always

As we proceed with our lesson, we'll take verse 20 phrase by phrase. We begin with "giving thanks always."

Thankfulness is something we can *express*—that is, we give it. Perhaps we have all at some point felt gratitude toward someone but hesitated to actually express it. We all know that thankfulness isn't something to hold in or keep to

yourself. We should be willing to give it away freely. Let others know what you are thankful for.

Thankfulness can be expressed in a variety of ways—you can say it, write it, sing it, or show it through gestures. You can also express it through feasting or gift-giving.

The attitude of giving thanks can be both disciplined and sincere. There may be times when thankfulness overflows from us. In these instances, expressing thanksgiving comes naturally without much effort. Yet other times, we may have to consciously redirect or shift our thinking in situations and choose to be thankful when it isn't our first reaction. While it can be a deliberate choice, it doesn't have to be done begrudgingly.

In this phrase, we are also told to be giving thanks *always*. This lets us know that no matter the situation or timing, it is possible to have a thankful perspective. As Christians, we should strive for the general perspective that God is providing everything we need. We are always under His care, and therefore we can always be thankful.

Admittedly, we can easily go days or weeks without ever giving thanks. Perhaps a practical application of this lesson is to develop the habit of thanking God at each meal or beginning our prayers with thanksgiving.

Enemies of thankfulness include jealousy and envy. These attitudes cause us to forget the blessings we already have and to focus instead on what others possess. Likewise, grumbling and complaining hinder gratitude because they focus on the negative rather than the positive.

Understandably, one might object that it seems unrealistic to be thankful always. Who really maintains an attitude of gratitude all the time? Yet this, in part, is Paul's point—and why context is so important. Being thankful always is unrealistic for the person who is not filled with God's Spirit. No one has it within themselves to give thanks continually. This mindset requires spiritual help from God's Spirit. It is supernaturally empowered.

For Everything

We see our need for the Spirit's help even more when we realize that we are to give thanks *for everything*.

Part of the reason we can give thanks always is because we can give thanks for everything. We can be thankful for the necessities that are often taken for granted—daily food, health, shelter, clothing. We can be thankful for loving and influential relationships, whether with family or friends. We can truly be thankful for these things and more simply because we know we don't always deserve them. We are always living under God's provision, and He gives us the air we breathe. By His common grace, we have life itself.

Several other Scriptures communicate a similar idea:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 — “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
- 1 Timothy 4:4–5 — “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”

Even within life's difficulties, there remains reason to be thankful. This doesn't mean we must be thankful for the hurt those difficulties cause. Scripture isn't telling us to be thankful that we get sick, lose loved ones, or face hardship. Rather, we can be thankful *in* the midst of hardships. We can thank God for His help, comfort, provision, promises, and for the assurance that He works all things together for good and that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:28, 37–39).

At the same time, it can be helpful to press in a little more about being thankful for everything, particularly in hard seasons. Earlier we mentioned that the Bible doesn't tell us to be specifically thankful *for* the difficult things. As Christians, we can understand that many of the difficult things we face in life are truly hard, and a proper response is grief and lament. At the same time, Christians can also embrace the perspective that even our hardest days and most trying circumstances can be something God uses to produce character in us or even unique opportunities to share the gospel. And for these indirect results, we can be thankful.

- Romans 5:3–5 teaches us that “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”
- James 1:2–4 says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

- 2 Corinthians 4:7–18 reminds us: “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

To God in the Name of Jesus Christ

Christians understand that God is sovereign over all things. Ultimately, we give thanks to God because we have surrendered our lives to Him and trust Him in all things. If we were to follow the trail of all the things we could be thankful for, we would be led to God as the source. James 1:17 acknowledges, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

We can be thankful not only for what God has already done but also for what He promises to do. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us that He is the one who meets our needs. We don’t have to worry about food, drink, or clothing. God provides for the lilies of the field, and we can trust that He will provide for us. Jesus tells us, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

What does it mean to give thanks to God *in the name of Jesus*? We are wise to recognize at least two things. First, it means we acknowledge that our access to God comes through Jesus. We do not come to God by our own merits but because Jesus’ blood has given us direct access. We approach God not by our own authority, but by Christ’s.

Second, coming in Jesus’ name recognizes that God has given us the greatest blessing in Jesus. We can recognize that if God gave us Jesus, then we ultimately have everything we need and can trust Him to provide all else. Paul already said in Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” Romans 8:31–32 is also helpful: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?”

Discussion Questions

- ☒ What is something you are thankful for today?
- ☒ How often do you think you express gratitude—daily, every other day, weekly, or less often?
- ☒ Has anyone recently expressed thankfulness to you in a way that was especially meaningful?
- ☒ How often do you think you have to express thankfulness as a disciplined choice?
- ☒ Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you were thankful in the midst of a hard season or circumstance?
- ☒ In your mind, what makes showing gratitude difficult at times?
- ☒ Have you ever experienced how choosing to be thankful impacted your anxiety or stress?

Conclusions/ Applications

CREATE A HABIT OF GRATITUDE

To close our lesson, here are some brief and practical suggestions to help you choose thankfulness:

1. Make a list each day of five things you are thankful for.
2. Keep a gratitude jar. When you think of something you're thankful for, write it down on a small piece of paper and place it in the jar. Pull one out from time to time as a reminder.
3. Commit to writing a thank-you note to someone once a week.
4. In your family, tell your spouse "thank you" for at least one thing each day.
5. Remind your kids to say "thank you" and "please."