

I Am Very Grateful

1 Chronicles 29:10-14

Intro

In a 2015 commencement speech at Dillard University, movie star Denzel Washington urged graduates to put God first and thank Him constantly:

“Put God first in everything you do ... Everything that I have is by the grace of God, understand that. It's a gift ... I didn't always stick with him, but He stuck with me ... While you're [on your knees], say thank you. Thank you for grace, thank you for mercy, thank you for understanding, thank you for wisdom, thank you for parents, thank you for love, thank you for kindness, thank you for humility, thank you for peace, thank you for prosperity. Say thank you in advance for what is already yours.”

(Source: Michael W. Chapman, Denzel Washington to College Grads: 'Put God First,' CSNNEWS.Com May 11, 2015)

Wow! That's quite something coming from a famous movie star. Denzell is right. We need to put God first and thank Him constantly.

Today I want to share with you a way you can put God first and thank Him constantly. It starts with first realizing that everything you own, everything you are comes from God. Without God there would be nothing in your life. The Bible says in 1 Chronicles 29:14, “*Everything has come from you and everything belongs to you.*” If you did not have God in your life, if God had not even created you, you would have nothing. So it all starts with God.

So when we start saying, “What can we be thankful for?” we really have to thank God for everything.

There are four big things I want to thank God for. If you get these four down, you've got the top priority items.

1. I Am Very Grateful To God For The Grace He's Shown To Me.

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8 “*You have been saved by grace through faith. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God.*” What is grace? Grace is everything God does for you even though you don't deserve it – it's a huge big favour. Grace is God giving you what you need, not what you deserve. The Bible says that everything you have comes by grace. Everything God does in you and through you and for you and to you and by you is by grace. You don't earn it, you don't deserve it, and you don't work for it. It's just a free gift.

In Psalms 103, there's a big list of just some of the things God does in our lives by grace. He says, “*I will not forget the glorious things God does for me. He forgives all my sins. He heals me. He ransoms me from hell. He surrounds me with love. He fills my life with good things. He is merciful and tender to those who don't deserve it. He is slow to get angry. He never bears a grudge. He has not punished us as we deserve for our sins.*” Are those things to be thankful for? I'd say so.

Aren't you glad that God doesn't give you what you deserve? Aren't you glad instead that God gives you what you need? If you don't understand grace, and if your heart doesn't explode with gratitude when you understand the grace of God, you have no idea of what bad shape you were in before you met Christ.

Let me summarize it in one word – **hopeless**. You had no meaning, no purpose in your life, guilt, fear, bitterness, worry, regrets. You had nothing you could do to get rid of them. You had no hope for the future. You were headed for hell not heaven. There was nothing you could do about it. You would never be good enough to earn your salvation. But God came along in His wonderful love and said,

“I’m just going to show you grace.” So this thanksgiving, I am thankful to God for the grace that He has shown me.

2. I Am Very Grateful To God For The Plan He Has For Me.

Life is not an accident. You and I were made for a reason. We were made for a purpose. God has a plan for your life. Your parents may not have planned you but God did. No baby is ever born by accident. There are illegitimate parents but there are no illegitimate babies. If you’re alive and you’re breathing and your heart and pulse are going, that means God has a plan for your life.

Now God’s plan is a good plan. It’s not a plan we have to worry about, that we have to be afraid of, be anxious about. It’s a good plan. God says this in Jeremiah 29:11 *“I have good plans for you”, says the Lord, “I don’t plan to hurt you. I plan to give you hope and a good future.”* Is that something you can thank God for?

God’s plan is so good and so great that He even takes our mistakes, our failures and the things that other people do to hurt us and weaves them in and brings good out of it all. God’s plan for your life is not all happy, all comfortable. God’s plan includes some pain in your life. And God’s plan includes some disappointments. And God’s plan certainly involves some discipline. If you were never disciplined, you would never have any character. God’s plan in your life involves some unanswered prayers. Yet He does it all for good. It’s for a future.

He has shown me grace and He’s given me a plan, a plan that when the more I discover it, the more I get in the center of it and the more my life unfolds and then my true potential comes out. He says, ‘I have good plans for you.’ I’m grateful for the plans He has for me.

3. I Am Very Grateful For The Home He’s Preparing For Me In Heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:1 *“We know that our body will be destroyed. But when that happens God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands. Instead it will be a home in heaven that will last forever.”*

John 14:1-3 Jesus said, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

Human beings were made to last forever. Every human being that’s ever been created, God made them, not for just the time here on earth. God makes human beings to last forever. One day your body is going to die, but that’s not going to be the end of you. One day your body will decay and fall apart and cease to exist. But that’s not going to be the end of you.

The Bible says you were created in God’s image and that means you have a soul. You will spend eternity one of two places – heaven or hell, depending on whether you received Christ and trusted His grace or not. Heaven and hell are real places. They’re not some figment of somebody’s imagination. They’re not some symbolism. They are real places. Jesus talked more about heaven and hell than He did about a lot of things. And I guess He knows more about it than you or me.

As Christians we don’t have to be afraid of the future. Believers, of all people, are the most confident about death because we know where we’re going. You’re not ready to live until you’re ready to die. Are you ready to die? Are you ready to meet your maker?

Only a fool would go all through life totally unprepared for something you know is inevitably going to happen. You know you're going to die. The latest statistic tells us that in Canada the mortality rate is 100%. Everybody in this room is terminal. Every human being is terminal. It's just a matter of time. But we don't have to be afraid of that. We can actually be thankful to God because He's shown us His grace. And while we're on earth He has a plan for us and when we leave this earth, if we've trusted Christ and His grace, He's going to take us to heaven. And I'm grateful for that. A home in heaven!

What is heaven like? Four words:

1/ Reunited. In heaven we're going to be reunited with loved ones who are believers. We're going to see those again who have known the Lord, who have trusted Christ. We're going to be able to fellowship and love each other there, reunited with those loved ones.

2/ Rewarded. The Bible says in heaven we will be rewarded for our faith, rewarded for our service, rewarded for our trust in Christ, rewarded for our faithfulness in praying and serving and giving and sharing. And there will be eternal rewards. The Bible is very clear about that.

3/ Reassigned. In heaven, we will all be reassigned new tasks to do, new things to do with our lives that keep us occupied. They'll be things that you like to do, not some bad tasks like some bad job here on earth. God understands you and He knows how you're wired. You will be reassigned things to do that are fulfilling in heaven. Contrary to popular opinion, when you get to heaven, you're not going to sit on a cloud and play a harp. I can't think of anything more boring. If you think the world is beautiful – and it's an imperfect place – how much more is heaven going to be beautiful. It's going to blow your mind. Your senses will be fully aware because there won't be any sin there to hold them back and harm them. You will be reassigned work to do.

4/ Released. The Bible says that in heaven we will all be released from pain, from fear, from depression, from sorrow, from conflict, from tears, from stress. The Bible says there will be no tears in heaven. There will be no sorrow. There'll be great joy.

Who is heaven made for? The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 1:3-6 *“God has reserved for His children the priceless gift of eternal life. It's kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God in His mighty power will make sure you get there safely to receive it because you're trusting Him so be truly glad.”*

Does everybody go to heaven? – Absolutely not. If God let murderers and rapists and genocidal dictators and evil people into heaven it would be hell. So heaven is only for His children. How do you get to be His child? By asking in faith to become a part of His family, by trusting in His Son, Jesus Christ, by repenting of your sin and asking for forgiveness. Once you give your life to Christ it's His responsibility to keep the commitment that you made.

I am very grateful to God for the grace He's shown me. I am very grateful to God for the plan He has for me. And I am very grateful to God for the home He's preparing for me. But there's one thing that really overwhelms me. My heart is deeply moved when I think about this last point.

4. I Am Very Grateful To God For The Changes He's Making In Me.

I am so glad that I am not the same person I used to be. God is helping to make changes in my life that I could never do on my own. I'm so grateful for that.

God looks at us and says, “I see that lump of clay. I could do something with that.” God saw your potential when nobody else saw it. And when maybe everybody else is writing you off and saying,

that you're worthless! God says, "No. I see the diamond in you and I made you and I value you. I'm going to start making some changes in you." The moment you became a believer He started that personal improvement program. He's chipping away at your life, changing you and making you different.

God does love you just the way you are. You just come to Him with the good, the bad, and the ugly. He loves you far too much to let you stay that way. So He starts making changes in your life and in my life. Philippians 2:13 "*God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him.*"

He not only gives you the desire to do the right thing, He gives you the power. God never asks you to do something He doesn't give you the power to do. I think the problem is that the longer we're Christians, the more we forget what a good deal we've got. We actually forget what it's like to live without hope, to live without help, to live without God's power and presence and peace and protection in our lives.

We are in the life changing business. That's the Good News Church's business. When you boil it all down, it's not buildings, it's not programs, it's not music, and it's not resources. We are in the life changing business. Jesus has the power to change you that nobody else can do.

Jesus changes wife beaters into loving husbands. Jesus is the power to take addicts in the street and turn them into responsible citizens. I've seen lives turned around. I've seen selfish, arrogant, pompous people become loving, humble, unselfish servants of God. Only God can make those kinds of changes in our lives. I've seen people who were consumed with worry, consumed with fear, consumed with bitterness, consumed with guilt and low self esteem and depression, seen them blossom in the power of God. Its God's transforming power!

"I am a changed life. I'm not perfect. I don't have it all together. But now my feet are in the right direction. Thank God I'm not what I used to be."

Conclusion

This Thanksgiving look for somebody who you can share your faith with, somebody you can invite to church where you can communicate and say, "I am a Christian." That's giving thanks to God when you do that. It's saying, "I am thankful for what God has done in my life."

This power of thanksgiving is amazing. There's miracle-working energy in the power of praise and thanksgiving. There's a great story in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas had been out talking about the Lord and they were thrown in prison at Philippi. They're in this dark, gloomy dungeon of a jail and in the middle of the night they decided to start thanking God in their circumstance. They start singing and praising God and then God does a miracle. He sends an earthquake and it is so powerful that it rattles all the jail doors loose. It's the original Jailhouse Rock!

The jailer was scared and yells, "I'm going to kill myself because all the prisoners are loose now and I'm going to pay for this." Paul says, "No, we're all here, don't harm yourself." So the jailer takes Paul and Silas to his home and they pray and they bind up their wounds with bandages and Paul tells them about Christ and that night the jailer and his whole family accepts the Lord and they are all baptized that night. The prison doors were unlocked when they began to praise and thank God.

What prison are you in this morning? An emotional prison? A financial prison? A relational prison? Are you locked up with guilt? Are you locked up with worry? Are you locked up with discouragement and disappointment? Are you locked up in a habit that you can't break loose from? Are you in conflict? Whatever it is, start praising and thanking God. And watch the prison doors open wide. I am very grateful!