

## The Necessity of Thanksgiving Select Verses

Is saying thanks or giving thanks, necessary?

If it is necessary—when do people say “thank you” the most? When are they the most thankful?

*When they are either coming out of suffering or when they are enduring it.*

Thanksgiving Day was born in and further nurtured during times of great adversity and struggle.

This seems counterintuitive, for you might think that ingratitude would be the result of adversity and challenge, while times of prosperity would spawn gratitude.

Folks, *prosperity breeds ingratitude.*

The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism knew this.

Question 28 asks what it benefits us to know that God creates and sustains all things. The answer is it gives patience in adversity and gratitude in prosperity. This is what should happen.

In Deuteronomy 8:17, Moses looks ahead to times of material prosperity for Israel, then sternly warns, through the Holy Spirit, not to forget God.

Let’s look at three other culprits of ingratitude.

### Entitlement

Another culprit that helps prosperity breed ingratitude is our entitlement culture. Entitlement can be defined as *the belief that one is deserving of certain privileges.* The belief itself may be true or false.

People might believe that they have a certain right when they do in fact *possess an actual right*, or people can believe that they have a certain right when no such right exists.

At points of emotional pressure, my sinful response to God’s providence can expose an insidious entitlement mentality in which I think I am *owed*. Why should I give thanks for what I am owed?

We see this entitlement mentality raise its ugly head in *common grace*.

*Common grace* encompasses all the earthly temporal blessings that God gives to His creatures regardless of whether they are Christians. It is referred to as “common” because it applies to both the elect and non-elect. “Common” does not mean humdrum or ordinary. Yet the irony is that we tend to view it as

humdrum or ordinary anyway. The gifts of common grace are those things that permeate our lives every day. These can seem to us *a birthright* for which we are entitled. And when God withholds or removes some of those common graces in our lives, or when we see God pour out those blessings on others in greater measure than on us, we can easily develop a sense of offended justice. “It’s not fair!”

Thus, a sinful sense of entitlement is rooted in the flawed belief that while special grace is indeed grace, God should distribute common grace more liberally or more equitably, thus rendering it not grace at all, but a right of which we are entitled.

There are no rights in the kingdom of God. Everything you have is by God’s grace alone. You and I deserve nothing. Entitlement is not exactly a breeding ground for gratitude.

### Envy

A second culprit that helps prosperity breed ingratitude is envy. What is envy?

*Envy is a passion that causes a person to feel uneasy or unhappy at another person’s possessions, making us dislike that person.* Envy is the logical conclusion to an entitlement mentality. You could argue that entitlement and envy are one-in-the same.

Envy may surface in our lives when we see God giving gifts of common grace either to unbelievers or to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We take out our measuring sticks as we compare our lot in life to others.

Though we may be unaware of it, when it comes to common grace, we often calculate a threshold level of suffering or deprivation, a line on the stick, if you will, below which God should not bring us, and when He does, the proud and entitled heart cries out in bitter protest. Why are we protesting? *Because God's provision is not measuring up to my line, and now I am suffering.* Thanks for nothing. God would never allow too much suffering and deprivation in my life, in the life of His beloved child, would He?

Further, envy is the parent of malice, hatred, falsehood, and slander. These sins are envy's "family." So common is envy that Solomon declares in Ecclesiastes 4:4: *I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.*

When you are envious, you are secretly complaining against the Lord. You look at the blessings God has bestowed on someone else, and you declare, "I should have that, not him," or "I deserve that, not her." What you lack may be a need God has decreed. God is wiser than you and me. He knows what is best for us. He knows what will harm or destroy us, what will help and build us.

Trusting God's providence in your life while going to Him in prayer with your needs can protect your heart from envy. James 4:1-3

Since entitlement and envy are rooted in a prideful heart that sees grace no longer as grace but as one's due, setting out to dethrone an entitlement mentality and squashing envy is a daunting task.

How, then, can we grow in the grace of humility and weaken entitlement's grip on our hearts?

-Cultivate gratitude. Ephesians 5:20. Instead of looking upon others' possessions with sinful desire, a grateful heart rejoices in another's blessings with thankfulness to God, our provider.

-Cultivate love. Because love and envy are opposites, growth in Christian love dissolves envy. The grace of loving our neighbor energizes our delight in their favor, rather than being miserable by their blessedness. Romans 12:15 tells us that love rejoices with those who rejoice. Ask God by His Spirit to grow that sincere and spiritual love that is so central to the gospel. Pray for His power to replace envy with charity.

### **To Whom**

The last culprit that helps prosperity breed ingratitude is, "Who is the provider?" Dr. Robert Emmons, who studied gratitude, came to the realization that gratitude raises a singular and significant question:

When we say thank you, to whom are we grateful?

If we trace this "to whom" line of questioning back, we find a singular answer at the end of every thread--God. To whom are we grateful? We are grateful in an ultimate sense to God. Why? Because He the provider of all that we have. That what we mean by God's providence.

Unfortunately, we would rather be ungrateful. Paul says in Romans 1:21, that we know God from all the evidence He has left of Himself, but we don't want to "honor him or give thanks to him."

Then the downward spiral begins. A culture of ingratitude careens ever downward into decline.

We in the church should not be counted among those who see the fourth Thursday in November as nothing more than a day of football and over-indulgence. We should be thankful that the generations who came before us set one day aside to consider all that we have and realize that all that we have has been given to us.