

HOW TO SAY THANKS TO GOD

PSALM 116:12-14

What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation... And call upon the name of the LORD... I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people.

Famous pastor and Bible teacher, Matthew Henry, was once robbed on his way to a meeting. The next day he wrote of his experience in his diary...

"Let me be thankful. **First**, because I was never robbed before. **Second**, because although they took my wallet, they didn't take my life. **Third**, because although they took my all, it was not much. And **fourth**, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

Now, how's that for looking on the bright-side!

No matter how grim and gloomy our circumstances are today - if we look hard enough, we all have something for which we can be thankful! It's been said, "If we *pause to think*, we'll have *cause to thank*."

If you're having trouble finding a reason for which to be grateful, here are a few suggestions: "If you can't pay your bills, be thankful you're not one of your creditors... *You can be thankful only you and God have all the facts about yourself...* Even though you haven't gotten all you want, be thankful you haven't gotten what you deserve... *If you can't be thankful for what you've received, at least be thankful for*

what you've escaped... And lastly, be thankful for mini-blinds. If it weren't for them, it would be curtains for all of us."

Once a teacher asked her fourth grade students to name one thing for which they were thankful.

Most of the kids listed pets, and parents, and possessions - but one boy responded, "I'm thankful for my glasses, they keep me out of a lot trouble."

The teacher was perplexed. She asked the little guy, "*How do your glasses keep you out of trouble?*"

The little boy told her, "They keep the boys from beating me up - and the girls from kissing me." We all should have *an attitude of gratitude*.

And this is especially so for Americans.

If you've traveled abroad, you realize that what most Americans scrape off their plate after the meal, and send down the garbage disposal, would be considered by three-fifths of the world to be a feast fit for a king.

When President Coolidge issued his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation he said, "*We have been a most favored people. We ought to be a most thankful people.*" We live in a country that has been blessed by God. Americans have much for which to be thankful.

And if that's true for Americans... it is especially true for Christians! For of all the people in the world, none should be more thankful than those of us who follow Jesus - folks who have *tasted God's wonderful grace*.

In fact, the term "*gratitude*" is from the root "*grace*."

Gratitude is our response to amazing *grace*. As God has been *gracious* to us, we should be *grateful* to Him.

Think of all God has done for us... He spared not His only Son! He's given us life: *new and never-ending, full and free, holy and happy!* Add to that a complete pardon, a new birth, abounding love, a steadying peace, the presence of His Spirit, a supernatural strength, special callings and gifts, brothers and sisters in Christ - even a home in heaven! With all that God has done for us, the least we can do is be thankful.

Bible commentator, William Heslop, once wrote, "To save such a sinner as I, God shall never hear the end of it!" That should be our sentiment as well.

My mom believed in writing thank-you notes!

When we got a gift she expected us to write a thank-you. I hated it. I'd rather be outside playing football - or riding my bike. Most of the time, I'd already said thanks. I figured that was enough... *but not for mom!*

She believed you weren't really thankful unless you took the time and made the effort to express your gratitude in a tangible way!

If I asked you, "*Are you thankful for all God has done for you?*" I'm sure 99% of you would reply, "*Of course, I'm thankful! Who isn't thankful? God is good!*"

But are we thankful enough to express that thanks?

I heard the courageous, but tragic story of Edward Spencer. Ned was a Bible College student strolling along the shores of Lake Michigan, when he saw a boat full of passengers sinking in cold, choppy waters.

With no consideration for his own safety, Ned bravely dove into the icy water. He swam out into the lake and back to shore a total of 16 times, rescuing 17 people.

After everyone was safe Ned collapsed from exhaustion on the bank. He never fully recovered from his heroic ordeal. Complications set in that stunted his health, and kept Ned from pursuing full-time ministry.

But to make matters worse not one of the 17 people Ned Spencer plucked from Lake Michigan that day ever found him to say thanks. If you had tracked down each person I'm sure they'd all say they were grateful, *but no one bothered to express their gratitude to Ned!*

Hey, Jesus made a far greater sacrifice for us, than Ned did in rescuing those people from the lake.

Jesus rescued us from eternal damnation... *but have we taken the time and made the effort to say thanks?*

In Luke 17 Jesus entered a certain village and met ten lepers crying out for mercy. He healed all ten lepers, and as soon as He did they raced off to the priest to be pronounced clean and to begin a new life.

Only one man bothered to return and thank Jesus for the miracle. That's when Jesus asked, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"

Today, millions the world over, have been recipients of the grace and mercy of Jesus, but we can still hear Him ask, "Didn't I heal John and Jim - save Andy and Ashley - comfort Bob and Becky - but where are they?"

And here's my question for us, are we among the nine? *No where to be found!* Or are you and I among the few who've taken the time to say thanks?

On the bus one day, a man gave up his seat to a woman. His act of courtesy so shocked the lady, *she fainted*. She wasn't use to such gracious men.

When the lady was revived, she thanked the man for his kindness. Her gratitude so shocked him, *he fainted*.

Neither the man, nor the woman, were use to gracious and grateful people, and were shocked by their expressions... I wonder if God would be shocked, if today, we stopped complaining about our spouse, our job, our kids, our neighbors - and simply took some time, and made an effort to say "*thanks*" to God for all the blessings He's lavished upon us?

In Psalm 116, the psalmist tells us how to say thanks to God! Verse 12 asks, "**What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?**" In other words, what does God prefer in the way of a "*thank-you?*"

Does God want a thank-you note? Or a card? Or some flowers? How do you show the Almighty God that you're thankful for all His benefits?

If I'm going to put some time and effort into expressing my thanks, then surely I'll want to express my gratitude in a way that will please the Lord!

This morning's text supplies us three ways to say thanks to God... **First, "take up the cup of salvation."**

Second, "call upon the name of the LORD."

Third, "pay (your) vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people." Let's take a closer look at Psalm 116, and learn *how to say thanks to God!*

To me, verse 13 offers a truly strange means for expressing thanks. The psalmist answers, **"I will take up the cup of salvation."** But recall the question, **"What shall I render (or give) to God for all His benefits?"**

Here he tells us *"to give"* by instructing us *"to take."*

I give to God by taking? It really does sound strange until I think it through... *For what can I really give to God that He doesn't already possess?* God is the one person on the Earth who really does need nothing!

There are folks on my Christmas list who are difficult to buy for because they already have everything I can afford to give them. And this is true with God.

In Acts 17:24-25 Paul said to the Athenians, **"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything..."** The one, true God is in need of nada. He possesses all things.

Psalm 50 says God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Our scrawny sacrifices don't impress Him.

I was at a Christmas party once when someone suggested we go around the room and share what we intended to give God that year for Christmas.

Most of us talked about giving God more time, or money, or energy... Then came my friend's turn...

He shocked the group by announcing he had nothing to give God. When someone asked him why, he said, "**Because God already owns everything I've got!**"

Realize, true gratitude begins with a frustration. God has given us so much, yet there's nothing we can give to Him... *All we can do is take what He's given, and allow it to accomplish its intended purpose in our lives!*

We thank God for His blessings, when we enjoy them to the fullest. If you want to say thanks to God, take up *the goblet of grace, the mug of mercy*... put it to your lips... and take a long deep drink!

The cup of salvation *brims with blessing!* It's *heavy with heaven!* David was speaking of this cup in the Shepherd's psalm, Psalm 23, "**My cup runs over, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**"

Savor every single drop of God's blessing.

If you want to say thanks to God, you do so by taking advantage of His many and marvelous gifts.

Think of it... God journeyed from the heights of heaven to the depths of earth - from the crib to the cross - from a cold, dark tomb to a throne in heaven *just to bring us blessings untold* - the least we can do is open our hearts and receive His goodness toward us.

Try to compensate God for His gifts, and you only devalue them. If we could earn God's blessings, it would cheapen the price God paid to acquire them.

As the poet put it, "The best return for one like me, so wretched to the core - is from God's gifts to draw a plea, and ask Him still for more." If you want to thank God for His grace; then ask Him for more!

Turn up the cup of salvation, and keep on drinking!

My grandma was a southern gourmet.

Grandma Adams could whip up a scrumptious meal in the blink of an eye: *black-eye peas, cornbread, hot buttered grits, collard greens, okra, biscuits and gravy, fried chicken... and all the extras.*

If you're not a native Southerner that might not impress you - but trust me, if could've sampled some of my grandma's cooking, you'd be an admirer.

She was amazing, when a visitor came to her house, no matter the time of day, she would start dinner and invite you to her table. Before you knew it she had served up a banquet fit for a king... *and she'd take nothing for it!* If you tried to pay her, she'd be insulted.

The only way to say thanks was to clean your plate!

My grandma's reward for cooking was the joy of seeing someone scarf up her vittles and come roaring back for more! The greatest insult was to nibble a bit; then push your plate aside - as if you didn't like it...

That's the way it is with God's blessing... When we clean our plate, and ask for more - we say thanks.

But when we don't have time to eat, or fill up on other stuff - we break God's heart. We insult God when we consume junk food - and feed on the garbage this world offers - and don't bring our appetites to *His table*.

Here's a quote, "This is the height of all madness. This is the lowest depth of all sin. God spares not His own Son, and we stand with our hands folded on our chests." You say thanks to God by grabbing every single blessing He bestows. Don't waste God's grace!

Turn up the cup of salvation and savor every drop.

Here's a second way to say thanks to God. Notice again verse 13. We're told to "call upon the name of the LORD." When a trouble strikes or a need arises, we say thanks to God by calling on Him for help.

Again this sounds like a selfish way to express our thanks... You'd think we'd *do for God*, rather than ask God to *do for us* - but again what can we really do for God that He can't do a better job of Himself!...

When a dad involves his toddler in a project he's not doing it because he needs the kid's help. If anything, his child is going to slow him down and get in his way.

Dad gets his toddler *"to help"* because he enjoys the child's company, or wants to use the task to teach a skill. And this is why God involves us in His work...

God doesn't need you and me. When we serve God, we're not doing God a favor, He's doing us a favor.

We say thanks to God, not by *"helping"* Him, but by asking for His help!... When my kids were younger, and got into trouble they don't search the Yellow Pages for the nearest PhD. They didn't canvass the university for an expert in the field. They didn't even dial 9-1-1.

When they had a problem they called *D-A-D*.

They ran to dad, and expected me to take over the situation, and salvage a solution. *And I wouldn't have had it any other way!* Nothing flatters a father more than when a child turns instinctively to him for help...

And the same is true with God!... If you really want to say thanks to God make Him your *first retreat* in times of trouble, not your *last resort!*

Let me give another illustration. What if you find an auto mechanic who does good work? He's fair, honest, efficient. How do say thanks to that mechanic?

Send him a thank-you note? A pick-me-up-bouquet?

No way. Try that with a macho mechanic and he might just punch you in the nose. What that mechanic wants most is your return business!

The next time your car breaks down, if you look up another mechanic, he'll assume you weren't satisfied with his service. But if he's the first person you call with your car that mechanic knows you appreciate his work!

When you're sick what's your first reaction? *Take an aspirin? Call a doctor?... Or do you pray? Do you run to God for His intervention?*

When you're lonely, what's your first response? *Call a friend? Take in a movie? Visit a bar?... Or do open your Bible and renew your fellowship with God?*

When business dips, what's your first remedy? *Increase marketing? Downsize the labor force? Hire a consultant?... Or do you trust God for His blessing?*

And when you're tired and weary, where do you seek rest? *Watch TV and veg out? Go on a vacation?... Or ask for God's peace?... The psalmist tells us you say thanks to God by **calling on the name of the Lord.***

For many years, while my kids worked their way through school, I proofread their English composition papers. First, it was Natalie - then Nick - then Mack...

The kids figured out it was nice to have an author in the family who could review their papers before they turned them in. They would email me the paper at 10 the night before the assignment was due the next day.

And I'd usually mumble something like, "What do these kids expect me to do, drop what I'm doing, and help them out at a moment's notice?" But that's not how I really felt. I was glad

they wanted my help. In fact, I would've been insulted if they ever stopped.

The only time reviewing their paper bothered me was when we got it back with a grade of "C."

I'd get angry at the teacher. *How did I get a "C"?*

But when my kids ran to me for help I felt loved, and trusted, and appreciated. I'm glad they wanted my input... *and this is how God feels when we call on Him!*

Did you hear about the couple who got married at a travel agency?... As it turns out, she was looking for a *get-away*, and he was *her last resort!*

Is the Lord your *last resort*, or your *first retreat*? You say thanks to God by "*calling on the name of the Lord!*"

And the third way the psalmist tells us that we can say thanks to God, is to "*pay your vows to the LORD in the presence of all His people.*"

The writer of Psalm 116 was so thankful to God he'd take his lamb - *the pick of the litter* - and parade his sacrifice through the streets of Jerusalem.

Without regard to the opinions of other people, simply overwhelmed with love and enthusiasm for God, the psalmist would go to the Temple and offer his sacrifice openly and publicly before the community.

And if we're truly thankful to God, *we'll also go public with our praise!* Jesus told us when we pray to go into our closet,

and close the door. Prayer is a private act, but when praise God we should roll down the windows!

Whisper your prayers, but shout your praise so all can hear. Psalm 107:2 says it clearly, “**Let the redeemed of the LORD say so...**”

We live in a day when every blasphemous, godless evil imaginable gets drug out in the light of day, and paraded across the TV screens. People flaunt their sacrilege - spew their irreverence - there's no shame...

It's about time we who are grateful to God grew just as bold and vocal! Let's stop acting as if we're ashamed of God! Let's go into the marketplace and let the world know our success is due to God's blessing!

Praise and thanksgiving need to go public!

I've never known much about cars. While other boys had their heads under the hood tinkering with an engine I was off somewhere dribbling a basketball. I know where to insert the key, and how to push the gas pedal, but that's the extent of my mechanical prowess.

When it comes to automobiles I'm ignorant.

But understand a vital point... *Even though I might be ignorant, that doesn't mean I like to admit it.*

Engines and grease are macho. A man should know his way around an engine block. No self-respecting man wants to be known as mechanically illiterate.

I'll never forget the day I was exposed and humiliated. Right after Kath and I got married we made a trip to Northlake Mall.

We were about to leave, when the car wouldn't start... so I popped the hood.

Now don't misunderstand, I wasn't going to fix anything. I'd just heard that's the first thing you do when you've got engine problems... But then a horrible thing happened. Two guys walked over to help me...

I couldn't let them know how inept I was, so I started fiddling around, pretending I knew what I was doing.

I didn't think it could get worse, but it did!

My wife gets out of the car, and right in front of these guys, she takes the screwdriver from me, and plays *Mrs. Goodwrench*. In broad daylight, she proceeds to fix the car! I was humiliated. My wife knew more about cars than I did, and two other men had seen evidence.

I should've been thankful.

In fact, later that night I thanked Kathy *privately*. But *publicly* - at that moment - I was so embarrassed.

And this is the problem some people have in their relationship with God... Privately, they'll thank God, *but publicly they would rather everyone think they were able to do it themselves*. Humans don't like broadcasting to others their ineptitude and dependence. *Why is that? Why is it so hard to admit our weaknesses?*

None of us are truly independent and self-sufficient people. There's no such thing as *a self-made man*, or *a self-made woman*. We're in debt the moment we enter the world. On the day you were born you already owed another person nine months room and board.

Psalm 100:3 tells us we all owe God. "It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves." We depend on God for the air we breathe and for our next breath!

Why is it so hard to be honest about our dependence on God, and go public with our praise? I'll tell you the problem... it is pride! "Pride slays thanksgiving..."

A proud person hates to say thanks. If he does it shatters the illusion he's in control. Gratitude is the admission I have a need I can't meet.

And we've all got those needs - so who's fooling who? It's so freeing to drop the facade and be grateful!

The tribes of East Africa have unusual ways to say thank-you. The Masai tribe of Kenya will bow their heads to the ground, and say, "My head is in the dirt."

Members from another tribe sit on the ground for a long time before the hut of the person to whom they're thankful. They say, "I sit on the ground before you."

These Africans understand a truth that makes gratitude so difficult for us. They realize that true thanksgiving is first and foremost an act of humility.

The psalmist contends we're not really grateful to God unless we're willing to lay aside our pride, and go public with your praise. True thanksgiving won't be intimidated by the sneers, or slights, or scowls of other people. It will still rise up, even when looked down on.

Robert Walpole was Britain's first prime minister, but his administration fell because he was betrayed by former friends who voted him out of office.

Walpole sat in the House of Commons the day its members cast the vote to bring down his government.

One by one his opponents stepped up to cast their votes. As each man passed, Walpole made comments to the reporters around him... "That fellow, I saved from the gallows... And that one, I saved from starvation... I promoted his son to an office in my government." On and on he went with similar stories.

Each parliament member who voted against Walpole that day had a reason to be thankful to him, but rather than express their gratitude, they buckled under to the political pressures that were being applied. Those Parliament members lacked the *courage* to say thanks!

When it comes to our relationship with God, don't ever let it be said that we buckled under to political pressures - and that we cowered away from giving our great God the credit. It takes *guts* to show *gratitude*!

Don't just praise God in the safety of your church, or in the quiet of your home. Be courageous, and go public with your thanksgiving and praise.

Let me close with a story of a man who found the barn where Satan kept his seeds. These were seeds of discouragement, doubt, fear, lust, greed, and guilt. It frightened him to hear Satan boast of how his seeds would take root and grow in most any type of soil.

The man questioned him, “Are you sure they’ll grow in any soil?” Satan backtracked. He reluctantly admitted, “*Well, there is one place where I can never get them to grow... in the heart of a grateful person.*”

Oh, how we need to be thankful people!

And how do we say thanks to God for all His benefits toward us? The Psalmist speaks of three ways...

“Take up the cup of salvation...” Enjoy every single blessing the blood of Jesus has purchased for you...

“Call upon the name of the LORD...” In times of trouble run to your Heavenly Father for help...

“(And) pay your vows to the LORD in the presence of all His people...” Go public with your praise...

And do it all in Jesus’ name. Amen!