

***WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD
COLOSSIANS 1:3-8***

A tremendous amount of effort has gone into acknowledging GBC's 40th anniversary. Hours and hours in planning, interviewing, designing logos, phone calling, ordering (food and shirts and...), setting up tables and chairs, mowing, marking parking, and more. Is it worth the effort? Is there value in remembering the past? Or have we wasted a large amount of resources in time and money?

In a completely different context, at the dedication of the World War II memorial, President Bush said,

They gave the best years of their lives to the greatest mission their country ever accepted. They faced the most extreme danger, which took some and spared others for reasons only known to God. And wherever they advanced or touched ground, they are remembered for their goodness and their decency....

On this Memorial Day weekend, the graves will be visited and decorated with flowers and flags.... America will not forget them....At this place, at this memorial, we acknowledge a debt of long standing to an entire generation of Americans — those who died, those who fought and worked and grieved and went on. They saved our country, and thereby saved the liberty of mankind. (May 29, 2004)

We likewise gather this morning, to remember the past and remember the sacrifices, and to remember in the work of believers in this church body, the faithfulness of God. We gather to remember work and ministry and success and failure this morning, and through it all we remember the work of our faithful God to use weak and imperfect people to accomplish divine and eternal purposes.

Whatever other thoughts you leave with this morning, we want you to leave with gratitude to God for His work of grace in you through this church body.

As we reflect on 40 years of ministry at GBC, not everything has been easy (though some/many things have been easy), but these 40 years have led us to great gratitude. Just like we might ask at Thanksgiving, today we want to ask and answer the question, “why are we thankful” or, “why should we give thanks?”

WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR HIS GREAT WORKS OF GRACE IN OUR CHURCH BODY.

These verses offer us an opportunity to give thanks to God for five works of His grace:

1. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **FAITH** (v. 4a)
2. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **LOVE** (v. 4b)
3. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **HOPE** (v. 5)
4. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **FRUIT** (v. 6)
5. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **MINISTRY** (vv. 7-8)

Why and how should we give thanks?

- ✓ We give thanks because gratitude is frequently commanded in Scripture (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:16-18; 2 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 13:5; Ps. 100:4; 105:1; 106:1).
- ✓ We give thanks because of the examples of Scripture. For instance, Paul not only exemplifies gratitude, but he might even be called “The Apostle of Gratitude.” E.g., Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4ff; Phil. 1:3ff; 1 Thess. 1:2-4. What he commands us to do, he does, even in hardship (Acts 16:25ff).
- ✓ We give thanks in all things and at all times because it’s always good to give thanks. The believer’s life should be marked by gratitude. There are few things more incongruous than ungrateful Christians. Gratitude is always possible and it gratitude is always a right response. Gratitude is especially appropriate on days like today, when we mark 40 years of God’s faithfulness to us.
- ✓ Notice also from Paul’s example in this text (v. 3), that the object of our gratitude is **God**. He is the source of all we have received, so He receives the praise and gratitude for all things. We aren’t just “generally” thankful with no one to receive our gratitude; we are grateful to have One who is responsible for all we have, is gracious in all we have, and able to receive our gratitude.
- ✓ For what should we give thanks? Paul identifies five works of God’s grace for which we thank Him:

1. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **FAITH** (v. 4a)

- The first reason for Paul’s gratitude is the **faith** of the Colossians.
 - ✓ Notice that Paul’s knowledge of the Colossians is not first-hand. He has only **heard of [their] faith**. Paul had heard a report about the Colossian church, probably through **Epaphras** (v. 7).
 - ✓ It is also notable that they are known for their faith. They believe **in Christ Jesus**, the only means of salvation. And they are faithful to that faith. They are persisting in believing in Christ (v. 2). Christ is the beginning of their faith and He is their anchor in the faith.
 - ✓ Paul is not thankful that their faith has saved them (as if they saved themselves); He is grateful for the faith that is in them, the faith by which they said, “I can’t save myself; Christ must save me.” To say he is thankful for their faith is to say that he is thankful for God’s grace that saved through faith.
- We give thanks for the gift and power of the gospel that produces faith in our church body:
 - ✓ We give thanks for the gospel that has saved us. Don’t you love to hear each other’s testimonies? I am thankful for member interviews where we hear the conversion stories of our members. Many tears have been shed (in joy) during those meetings! It’s a joy to hear those stories in baptism, home groups and conversations as we fellowship together.
 - ✓ We give thanks for God empowering and enabling us to believe.

- ✓ We give thanks for the privilege of taking the gospel to others (and how God is transforming our weakness in that area); it has been such a joy to see both corporate and private evangelistic efforts expand, and your excitement about sharing the gospel.
- ✓ We give thanks for the privilege of seeing the gospel change unbelievers in counseling. Our counseling ministry is one of our more significant evangelistic tools; it's thrilling to see that happen.

"Giving ourselves without giving God looks loving to the world. But it is not. We are a poor substitute for God. We are not the nobler because we die for them, if our hearts have no longing that our death lead them to God." [Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 165.]

- ✓ We give thanks that you don't want to give yourself without also giving the gospel. We give thanks that you want to be bold with the gospel, as even a conversation I had Friday afternoon exemplified.
- ✓ We give thanks that our reputation is of being a gospel defending church. We don't merely believe and live and teach the truth, but we stand for the truth (and others know it). Cf. 1 Tim. 3:15.
- ✓ We give thanks for the grief we share over those who are living and dying without the gospel. While it hurts that our loved ones don't know Christ, at the same time, it should produce joy in us that we care and are grieved when unbelievers don't know Christ.
- ✓ We give thanks for the faith (salvation) that has been implanted in you by Christ, because we have nothing without that faith, but with that faith we have everything. That faith is what unifies us...

2. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of LOVE (v. 4b)

- The Colossians also had a reputation of being a church filled with *love*.
 - ✓ It is notable that this love is *for all the saints*. He doesn't mean by that, "we love only those who are 'saintly' (lovable)." He means "we love all those who have been declared righteous in Christ and who are progressively being transformed (even if they don't always look that way)." The believer loves *everyone* in the body of Christ. And that was the reputation of the Colossians.
 - ✓ This is and always has been the mark of the church — **Jn. 13:34-35**. When believers love others that the world would consider unlovely and unlovable, that is a testimony to the gospel of Christ.
 - ✓ When church members love one another well, it reveals they have been loved by God (**1 Jn. 4:19**).
 - ✓ "A true child of God will love fellow believers." [MacArthur] This love may not be mushy sentimentalism, but it will be a commitment to graciously serve and care for each other and to preserve our relationships with one another.

- We give thanks for the love of Christ that is evident in our church body.
 - ✓ We give thanks that we love one another. I consistently hear (especially from new members), “I walked in these doors and I was greeted and cared for warmly and immediately sensed, “I’m home.” That is not true with everyone (we want to love still more, [1 Thess. 4:9-10](#)), but we are thankful that is a very common refrain. It’s the mark of what the church should be.
 - ✓ Sometimes this doesn’t seem like a loving place to everyone because we sin against each other (just like in our own homes). We say things that are untimely, ungracious, even mean-spirited. This is what is suggested by the saying, “To live above, with the saints I love, O, wouldn’t that be glory. But to live below, with the saints I know, that’s another story.”
 - ✓ When that happens in this church body the consistent response is confession and forgiveness.
 - We are thankful that when sin happens, it is confessed.
 - We are thankful that when sin is confessed, it is forgiven.
 - I know *many* stories like this, but for confidentiality reasons, can’t tell them. I can tell this: my favorite elder meeting happened 18 months ago (??). At the end of the meeting, two of your elders went to two other elders and sought forgiveness for things that were said in the meeting that they believed were spoken unkindly and ungraciously. To my recollection, neither person that was “sinned against” took it as sin, but both granted forgiveness and the men all left the building that evening in harmony and joy with one another. Brothers, I give thanks for these men who love you and Christ and each other well enough to make sure they are in loving fellowship with one another.
 - ✓ We give thanks for love that graciously exhorts others when sin is seen. One day a dear friend came to me and said, “I heard you talking a few days ago to ___ at the copier and I think it caused her harm; it appeared that you weren’t careful with your words and they damaged. Can you go to her?” I said I would, and I did, and it was clear that *I had* harmed; when I confessed, she forgave and our fellowship was restored. I’m thankful for that brother who loved me enough to confront me.
 - ✓ We give thanks for love that prefers another ([Rom. 12:10](#)). Most of us have opinions about just about everything: music, preaching styles, temperature in the sanctuary, clothing, food at fellowship meals, color and style of chairs, schooling choices, and a host of other things. You love each other well by deferring. Rarely have these preferences created division.
 - ✓ We give thanks for love exemplified in homes. Isn’t it a joy to know that when your children or grandchildren go to the homes of others in our congregation, they will see love exemplified and practiced in a way that honors the Lord? (Imperfect, yes, but still honoring to the Lord.) I’m grateful to have raised my children in a place where they have had dozens of models of what a godly marriage and home looks like.
 - ✓ We give thanks to God for this love because this love originates with Him. It is another evidence of His work in our lives both individually and corporately.

- We give thanks for a love that is non-discriminatory. If we love each other only because of our similarities and if we care for each other in the same way we would if we were unsaved, then we are not loving with Christ's love. We know that the gospel binds us together when there is no earthly, natural reason for us to be attracted to each other, but we love each other anyway. That's the kind of love that regularly exhibits itself at GBC.

3. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **HOPE** (v. 5)

- Our *hope* is what is awaiting us in *Heaven*.
 - ✓ It is the presence of God and the reward of our salvation (Jn. 14:1-6).
 - ✓ It is protected and secure — *laid up in Heaven*. It cannot be lost (1 Pt. 1:4-5)
 - ✓ It is the completion of our salvation. It is not a wish or desire. It is an objective reality — we are confident that God will finish what has been started in us through Christ (Phil. 1:6).
 - ✓ We have hope that our current sin does not preclude glorification and Heaven.
 - ✓ We have hope that our current fellowship with one another will be magnified 10,000x (or more).
 - ✓ We have hope for reunion with those who have gone ahead of us.
 - ✓ We have hope that this life isn't "our best life now."
- We give thanks for the testimony of those who have suffered well and died well. They died well because of their confidence in Christ. (You need to watch Rita and David Langston's testimony.)
 - ✓ We give thanks for those who are investing their retirements well, serving the church body, not wanting to waste their retirements. "What else would I do with my time? Play golf?"
 - ✓ We give thanks for those who are investing their pre-retirement years well, also serving, not wanting to waste their lives. Because you realize what you have in the future you are wanting to invest your lives now so that others will share in what you have both now and later (in Heaven).
 - ✓ We give thanks for those who possess financial resources but are not possessed by financial resources — so they share well with the body of Christ. Dozens and dozens of benevolence needs have been met (cars repaired, bills paid, groceries purchased, school clothes purchased, electrical bills paid, prescriptions purchased, car insurance paid,...). Many years ago a single mom arrived at church on her bicycle, in the rain. Man standing next to me asked how far she rode (6 miles). "Get her car repaired and send me the bill and don't tell her who paid it." That is a typical story. I have dozens of versions of that same story. Why do people do these things? Because of hope in Glory.
 - ✓ We give thanks that the truth of where we are going is shaping the way we live now. We don't need to be anxious about health or finances or jobs because we have a hope laid up for us. God is keeping us, and that security is transforming the way we live now.

4. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of **FRUIT** (v. 6)

- In the Colossian church, the gospel came and was *constantly bearing fruit and increasing...*
 - ✓ The purpose of the gospel is to bear fruit. The gospel is not given only to save us from God's wrath. It is given to save us from sin's power. It is given to change us, so that we live like we are Christ's.
 - ✓ This is the **constant** work of the gospel in our lives. The gospel is always producing fruit in us, because the Spirit of God is always alive and at work in us through His living and active Word.
 - ✓ This is what Paul speaks of in **Romans 6:5-7**.
 - ✓ If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, this is what the message of Jesus is. He is more than a great teacher. He is more than a great example. He is more than a great man. He is the eternal God-Man who died to absorb God's infinite anger against your sin and to free you from your bondage to sin. There is nothing you can do to please God; without Jesus, everything you do is sin. But with Christ, you are freed from sin's shackles and you *can* please God. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, I urge and exhort and appeal to you to trust in Him as your Savior today.

- Christ died to sanctify us (1 Pt. 5:10), so we give thanks for sanctification in the church body.
 - ✓ Sanctification means that what is happening spiritually inside the believer is being manifested externally; there is a congruence between faith and life. We are living what we believe.
 - ✓ We give thanks for sanctification that is evidencing genuine fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22-23**):
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *love* (which we've already talked about).
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *joy* — not giddiness, but contentment with and rest in God.
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *peace* — before I came to GBC, one consistent prayer was for our church to be peaceable; since here, the consistent prayer has been unity. That has been the reality of what we have — not an absence of disagreements, but a presence of peace that is the fruit of reconciliation.
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *patience* — this is patience with people, being willing to endure when sanctification is taking longer than we want.
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *kindness* — the consistent feedback we receive from our conference is about the gracious kindness of all of you who are caring for our attendees. You endure long days with joy and kindness.
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *goodness* — not the fruit of being Texan ("good ol' boy"), but the fruit of the goodness of Christ — putting on Christ's righteousness and goodness — obedience.
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *faithfulness* — persistence in cultivating obedience to Christ.
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *gentleness* — strength directed in right ways (**1 Thess. 2:7, 12**).
 - We give thanks for the fruit of *self-control* — restraint and boldness at the right times.
 - And we give thanks for sanctification that is producing these kinds of disciples in our church.

Not every church bears good fruit. If our church is producing good fruit, we must be thankful that the Spirit of God has produced this sanctifying work in our church body.

- ✓ Where does this kind of sanctification come from? It comes from the embrace of the Word of God. It comes from accepting it for what it is (1 Thess. 1:13). This sanctification comes from letting the Spirit fill us by His Word and letting that Word control us (Col. 3:16).
- ✓ There is no where I'd rather preach than to this church because you love the Scriptures and you want to have the Scriptures, and you want the Scriptures to have you (2 Pt. 3:18).

5. We Give Thanks to God for His Gift of MINISTRY (vv. 7-8)

- **Epaphras** (v. 7) was exemplary in his service. The Colossians rightly learned from him.
 - ✓ He was a **bond-servant** — a *slave* of Christ and enslaved in all his life to Christ.
 - ✓ He was **beloved** by Paul and the Colossians and enslaved to Christ with Paul and the Colossians.
 - ✓ He was a **faithful servant** — both to Christ and to the church in Colossae. He joyfully served others because he was enslaved to Christ. Christ compelled his service, and he served with joy. How? “Christ has taken our nature into heaven, to represent *us*; and he has left us on earth, with his nature, to represent *Him*.” (John Newton) He has saved us; it is our joy to serve Him.
- We give thanks to God for the ministry He has produced through us.
 - ✓ {In noting these ministries, we are not exalting each other, but the God who worked through us. We agree with Jonathan Edwards — “God will employ, not only holy and glorious angels, but feeble, frail, sinful worms of the dust in this work [of ministry], who need redemption themselves.” The story of Grace Bible Church is what Christ can do through worms that are enslaved to Him — worms who only want Him to get the glory for what is done.}
 - ✓ We give thanks for 30 years of AWANA (for about 10 years taping the circle down on the sanctuary floor every Tuesday night) — for teachers and for students and for the Word memorized.
 - ✓ We give thanks for two dozen years (or more) of VBS.
 - ✓ We give thanks for a dozen years of BCDC training — hundreds of people equipped to disciple
 - ✓ We give thanks for countless Bible studies and men’s and women’s retreats.
 - ✓ We give thanks for thousands of hours training children and adults in Sunday School.
 - ✓ We give thanks for untold numbers of discipleship training relationships.
 - ✓ We give thanks for elders who love Christ, shepherd with humble joy, and pray effectively and persistently (2000-3000 hours in corporate prayer for the church body?)
 - ✓ We give thanks for missionaries sent (like David Gibson, who left again on Friday, and the Weertmans, and all our other partners around the globe).

- ✓ We give thanks for missions trips that have been taken to: Costa Rica (several times), PNG, Cambodia, Mexico (10 times), Uganda, Russia (several times), Lebanon, Israel.
 - ✓ We give thanks for resources that have been generously given to missions. It has never been hard to raise funds for missions because of your commitment to take the gospel around the globe.
 - ✓ We give thanks for books that have been purchased and donated to equip others.
 - ✓ We give thanks for pastors that have been encouraged through you (your pastors and other pastors). You have been generous to care for us and caring for and encouraging us to care for other pastors (free BCDC registration), etc.
 - ✓ We give thanks for meals provided, houses cleaned, people moved, hospital visits made (I've given up trying to be the first one to the hospital — I know I won't be able to beat several of you!), phone calls made, texts sent, and cards written. And you have done that without complaint.
 - ✓ We give thanks for labor provided: serving AWANA meals, cleaning the church, making repairs, being the "church angel," mowing the property, serving at conferences
- The work of ministry is sometimes unnoticed, often hard, and almost always costly. We give thanks that for 40 years, God has equipped Grace Bible Church members to do the work of the ministry joyfully, sacrificially, and as examples of faithfulness.
 - ✓ This is a testimony that you consider yourselves slaves of Christ.
 - ✓ This is a testimony to the work of Christ in you, since this is not naturally, but supernaturally worked.

CONCLUSION: We have been reminded of the command to give thanks and we have seen the example of one who gave thanks. The one thing we must do now is actually give thanks.

BENEDICTION:

Now go into the world in peace.

Have courage.

Hold onto what is good.

Honor all men.

Strengthen the faint-hearted.

Support the weak.

Help the suffering.

Share the gospel.

Love and serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.