

Thanksgiving

by Gareth Evans

The sermon emphasizes the importance of thankfulness in our lives, highlighting its benefits and evidences of a spirit-filled life.

Duration: 31:03

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-21

Topics: "Thanksgiving"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the question of how to reconcile the idea of a God who exists for our blessing with the reality of suffering and loss. He uses the example of five young missionaries who gave up prestigious careers to serve God in Ecuador, only to be killed shortly after arriving on the mission field. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being wise in how we live our lives and making the most of our time. He also discusses the concept of being filled with the Spirit and the various interpretations of what that means. Ultimately, the speaker encourages a spirit of thankfulness, even in the midst of suffering, and reminds listeners that suffering can be a part of the process of becoming the people God wants us to be.

Transcript

On Thursday this week, there was a tragic accident in the city. On the highway going through the city, a car accident in which a lady died. Her name was Mary Yardley.

I don't know if many of you knew her. But when such an accident as that happens, there are more than one victim. Of course, the family, her husband, Zayl, and they have three children, Monty, Ava, and Casey.

Maybe they mean nothing to most of you, but there are others who are affected by that, and Wendy of our own congregation, Wendy Hall, was a dear friend of Mary. And so she too is grieving this morning. I think it's important for us as a family of God to realise that things like this that happen in our city are not outside of us, they're part of us.

And it's an opportunity for us to show to Wendy our love, washing her feet, and also I would challenge you to be praying for Zayl and for his family this week. Tragedies like this may be in the newspapers, but they should impact all hearts of God's people. The moment church grows by following tragedies like this up, that is what they do, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

And the people of God, we need to be people of compassion, reaching out to people like Zayl, who does not know the Lord, has no interest in God. Maybe it's an opportunity for the children of God to be manifested at a time like this, and minister not just to Wendy in our own congregation, but to the families that are hurt. How does one say thank you for a situation like that? Of course, as the people of God, we can say thank you that we're not as those who perish without hope.

But also we can say thank you because we know a God of compassion, who cares for people like Mary's family and Wendy, and cares for them through the loving actions and hearts and prayers of God's people. So I bring that to you as a matter of prayer. Also, I want to remind you again to remember the Muslim work through this 40 days or 30 days fasting during Ramadan, particularly those Muslims who live in Canada.

How thankful we should be we do not live in Afghanistan this morning, or Iraq, or in those countries where the Sharia law is enforced, but we have a freedom in Christ to worship and to gather together. Thankful people we should be. That should not negate in us the responsibility to be praying for these men and women who come to our country, Canada, on this Thanksgiving Day to remember them in our prayers that the risen Christ will make himself known to them.

Amen? Important that we should do that. I have a personal gripe. I'm sure we all have gripes of some kind of fences, little monkeys that jump on my shoulder often.

I don't allow them to tug my hair. But I really have a gripe about those motorists who I allow to pull into the traffic lane when I'm waiting at traffic lights, or I allow them to come in and they drive out without any acknowledgement of the good deed I've done. Doesn't that gripe you? Hands up those of you who feel griped by that sort of thing.

Hands up those of you who drive out and never say thank you to the person who let you out. I was not brought up in a Christian home, but I lost my mother when I was quite young. But my father was a man who taught me a great deal about ethics and about courtesy.

I went to a boys' grammar school where we were driven to understand courtesy. We had a touch of heart to every person we met in the street, that kind of thing. I never would dream of sitting in a seat in a bus if there was a lady standing.

And I still do that now. If I'm in a seat in a bus and a lady comes in and she's standing by me, I still tend to get up. I remember once doing so.

Society changes and I really probably did not understand the feminist agenda. One day I got up for a lady in a bus. I offered her my seat and she snapped at me.

You don't have to stand up for me because I'm a woman. So I said back to her, I didn't stand up for you because you're a woman. I stood up for you because I'm a gentleman.

I was taught that courtesy is free. It is so easy to practice. It has great rewards.

Even when I became a schoolmaster and I was head of department, I still talked to other teachers and called them sir. Maybe that was a bit too much, but maybe that's part of the reason why I feel so young. I'm not old enough.

I keep saying sir to people who are younger than me even. But I was taught to be courteous. And surely it's one of those things.

I let him out and he didn't even bother to acknowledge me. I remember the first weeks we were in Canada. We'd have telephone calls from people wanting to find out if my daughter's home.

They met them in school. Hello, is Corrine there? And I'd say, is Corrine there what? The old schoolmaster bit me coming out, I guess. Nobody in Wales would dare to ask a person, is Corrine there, without saying the magic word, please.

And then when I'd say, no, she's not here. They'd always say, thank you. And one of my major shocks in coming to Canada was how infrequently people said please and thank you.

It's free, it's cheap, it's easy. And yet I remember the shock. For years I used to get up in the morning and I used to say, oh, good Lord morning.

Now I choose to say, good morning, Lord. It's an attitude change that I choose to do. And being thankful is an attitude that we can choose to have.

And I think as a people of God, we have a great deal to be thankful for. In my morning devotions, each morning I start with the first word on my lips is thank you. I thank you, Father, for my wife.

Thank you for my children, my sons-in-law, my grandchildren. I want to thank you. And most of my devotion time is spent in thanking.

It just happens to be that is the way I pray. I thank the Father for his great love that through the plan of salvation that made me his child. I thank him that I'm a child of God.

I thank Jesus that he died upon the cross that I might have my sins forgiven at peace with God. I thank the Holy Spirit for coming into my life and making Jesus real to me and leading me and guiding me and comforting me, making all the attributes of the Trinity real to me. I even take time out regularly to, and I do take time out, I say, Father, I'm going to take time out to just thank your angels for safeguarding me, keeping me.

I believe in angels who look after the people of God. Do you believe in angels? Oh, a few of you. Angels are ministers in spirit sent to minister to the children of God.

And I've learned, and maybe I learned because my father taught me it, my earthly father, but maybe because I choose also to be a thankful person. But I want to present to you this morning three reasons for thankfulness. There are many, but I just want to present three to you this morning.

Would you turn with me, please, to Ephesians chapter five? As a Christian man, I want to be a man in whom the life of Jesus is revealed. I want to be a man who displays the reality of Jesus in my life. I want to see the fruit of the Spirit in my life.

I want to be a spirit-filled Christian. I want to be a man led by the Spirit of God. In Ephesians chapter five, we read these words, verse 15, Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise.

Make the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

I understand the Greek tense here is a continuance. Continue to be filled. Keep on filling up with the Spirit.

Now, we have much debate in the church about what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Our Pentecostal brethren say that you're filled with Spirit and you evidence it with speaking in tongues. Others, I know well, D.L. Moody, for example, a good Baptist pastor, spoke about the day of his experience of being filled with Spirit and what the evidence was in his life.

George Muller, of great orphanage fame, talks about the evidence in his life. Keith Price, known to some of you locally, and particularly those from the brethren tradition, spoke about what happened to him, filled with his life. But I ask myself, what are the evidence? If I claim to be a spirit-filled Christian, what should people see in me? What should people see in me if I claim to be a spirit-filled Christian? I believe the next three verses are three evidences of being filled with Spirit.

Verse 19. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. I believe the first evidence of a spirit-filled life is a worshipping attitude.

The Holy Spirit has come to dwell in the believer, in the man or woman of God, in order to make Christ real to you. That's where he's come. Jesus said he will not glorify himself, he will glorify me.

So if he fills me, if he lives in me, then my life should be one that wants to bring glory to Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit wants to do that. That's his goal.

Don't tell me you're spirit-filled if you're not a worshipper. I didn't say that you can't sing. I didn't say that maybe you're tone-deaf with music.

Singing may be an aspect of worship, but worship is an attitude of heart. I walk the beach, I like climbing hills, climbing mountains, and I love to just sing his praise. I love to worship.

I don't have to be in church Sunday morning to be a worshipper. The first evidence of a spirit-filled life is a worshipping attitude. The next verse says this.

Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father. The second evidence of a spirit-filled life is a thankful attitude. Don't tell me you're a spirit-filled Christian if you're not thankful, if you're ungrateful, if you're a grumbler.

I know Christians, every time you meet them all they can do is grumble. Don't tell me you're spirit-filled if you're walking in the spirit of God, if you're a grumbler. The evidence of a spirit-filled life is being thankful in all things.

Can I be thankful in all things? Is it possible to be thankful in all things? Yes, it is. It may be difficult, but there's always something there to be thankful for. We grieve with Wendy and a friend's death, but we must also turn our eyes to see the glorious hope that we have in Christ.

As I had left the pastorate in 1990, left the paid pulpit, if you like, and became a missionary, my pension, I was a schoolteacher for many years and then I became a pastor. So my pension was mixed up. So I took it out and I invested it in what I thought was a safe investment, advised by a Christian, and many of you had the same story, and 9-11 happened and my investment went very sour.

And I remember being at home that day when I got the email telling me that I no longer had a pension. It was quite a large sum of money. I sat in my chair, and Anne was still in bed, and I thought, oh my God.

I just felt a cold shiver going down my spine. And within two minutes, at the most, I felt the peace of God come upon me. I have not grieved that loss of pension from that moment on.

I thank God, that Jesus is Jehovah Shalom, my peace. Even in the loss of my pension, I could say thank you that Jehovah Jireh is my provider. The government is not my provider with his pensions.

Jehovah Jireh is my provider, and I'm utterly amazed when we look back. I received a check last week from your treasurer. I'm so grateful, and I appreciate it very much.

You know, that's the first check I've received in 16, 17 years. For 16, 17 years, God has been faithful to provide. And I'm so thankful.

There are lots of things that happen that seem to be so negative to us, but we can be thankful to all things. The third evidence of being filled with spirit is verse 21, being subject to one another in the love of Christ, a submitted attitude. So I suggest to you that I believe that three of the evidences of a spirit-filled life is a worshipping attitude, a thankful attitude, and a submitted servant attitude.

Now because they are attitudes, I can choose to exercise them. And I believe if you are seeking to be filled with the spirit, one of the ways to do so is to choose to operate in these three attitudes. Choosing to be a worshipper, choosing to be thankful, choosing to be a servant are prerequisites, I also believe, for the fullness of spirit of which they also are the evidences.

I pray that the people of Departure Bay Church will be a people who are chosen, who are committed to be worshippers, committed to be thankful, committed to be servants, so that God might be pleased to pour his spirit out upon this church. Amen? One aspect of thankfulness. I told a story in an adult Sunday school this morning.

I have a friend called Yorrie Richards, and Yorrie's got quite a story, quite a testimony, and I won't go into that part of it, but one day Yorrie was riding his motorbike in Nottingham, England, where he lives and works, you know strep seal throat sweets? Do you know strep seal throat? Yorrie's the man who makes those, pulls the lever on the machine, in Britain. He'd been passed over for promotion in his work, and he was angry with God. He's riding his motorbike home, and he's saying, God, I've been so faithful to you all these years, and that man gets his promotion job instead of me, and I thought I should have got the job, and I worked so hard.

It seems to me sometimes that the devil's servants get better rewards than your servants do. He's angry with God. And the Lord spoke to Yorrie while he was riding his motorbike, and said basically this, Yorrie, the devil and I are in different businesses.

He's in the business of making slaves. I'm in the business of making disciples. And Yorrie pulled his motorbike onto the grass verge on the side of the road, threw it down, threw himself on his face, and said, thank you, Lord.

I want to be a disciple. Make me a disciple. Sometimes being made a disciple means going through valleys and dark places and hurtful places.

Jesus was perfected by suffering. Sometimes we, the people of God, if we seek to be what God wants us to be, sometimes we go through suffering. Can you say thankful? Can you say thank you in the midst of your suffering? If our eyes is on the prize of the home in the skies, if our eyes are on Jesus, if we truly

want to be men of God, then we need to say thank you in the valleys as well because it's part of the process.

I remember the anguish of the hours I spent in studying physics before I went in for my degree. I didn't enjoy one of those minutes, but I'm thankful to God now for every one of them. We need to become a thankful people in all things.

Second reason I want to give you for thankfulness is that it bears much rich fruit. I say to Anne, every meal she cooks for me, I say, thank you, love. Enjoy that.

Thank you. I'm always saying thank you because it's part of who I am. Thank you.

So my wife is always pleased to make me more meals like that. There's always an ulterior motive. My wife is always happy to do that.

Her favourite verse is found in Philippians. You know this verse. I'm just going to read the context.

Philippians chapter 4. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice. Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.

The Lord is near. This is her verse. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. We were in Mexico City. I took nine people to Mexico City with me on a missions outreach back in 1989 when I was pastoring.

Took them there for two years. The second year we were there we went to Guadalajara. Guadalajara is a city about four hours bus ride north of Mexico City.

We worked in an orphanage there. And we, in Mexico, Mexico is noted for its silver and gold and for leather. You can buy lots of leather goods in Mexico.

Belts and cases. We bought a beautiful black leather bag. Yay big.

Very lovely bag. And we bought lots of trinkets. Paper mache, dolls, and lots of other trinkets.

And so on the bus journey back to Mexico City, I brought the bag into the bus with us. It was filled with all these trinkets and things to go back to Canada. Put it in the rack.

All the other suitcases went underneath. When we get to Mexico City, northern terminus, Mexico City is the biggest city in the world. Got four major bus termini.

This was the northern one. When we got out in the Mexican northern terminus, I get out to make sure all the cases come out. I'm checking them all.

And Anne says to me, oh I forgot the bag. It's still on the bus. So I went back in the bus and there was no bag.

It had gone. So I looked around. Nobody had seen it.

So Francisco, my Mexican friend and I went to the police while Anne stays with the group. And we went to the police and the first thing the police did was laugh. Sir, this is Mexico City.

You lose a bag, you have no hope of getting it. We go back to the girls and Anne has gotten together with the group of girls and guys and she is praying concerning this bag. She asks them, let's pray.

And they stand in the middle of the Mexican bus station praying. And she decides that we're going to thank God for this bag. Lord, we don't know where it is but we're going to thank you that you know exactly where it is.

And right now Lord, we're asking that whoever's got it that you will use it somehow to bring them to know you. And we're going to thank you for this situation. But as she's praying, she suddenly realises that in the bag are our passports and all the money for the team.

A lot of money. And she dare not tell these young Christians about this but she sidles up to me and she says, I just remember the passports. And she's just a little anxious for nothing.

I'm anxious. We immediately call the British consulate in Mexico City and inform them that I've lost my passport. We're due to fly back two days later.

The woman says, we'll come into the office and we'll give you a duplicate British passport because Lord's coming to Canada. I was flying on a British passport. We'll give you a duplicate to get back to Canada.

So the next day we went in at 9 o'clock in the morning. Francisco, myself, and she gives us a form and I fill in the form and then she says, excuse me, she said, are you Reverend Evans? I said yes. Oh, she said, a woman telephoned this morning.

She's found your passport in Toluca. Now Toluca is 70 miles south. Southwest, actually, of Mexico City.

She's found your passport in Toluca. She's coming in tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock with your passport. I said, oh, wonderful.

So the next morning we go in to meet this lady to thank her for bringing my passport. And the woman goes back. She called in a half an hour ago.

She's left this one. She comes back. She brings our bag.

And I opened the bag and everything, including the many hundreds of dollars, was inside. With a little note on top that said, Dear Reverend Evans, please pray for me. Marguerite.

Doctor something, Marguerite. Now I don't know but what might well have happened that somebody, somebody certainly stole the bag. Somebody took the bag.

And maybe left it. In Mexico, Catholicism is a religion of superstition. They opened the bag, saw my passport, Reverend Gareth Evans.

Oh, it's a priest. Whatever the reason was, we got our bag, money, and everything back. And I was able to go to the other team members and say, look what happens when you're thankful in all things.

I can tell you many, many stories. There was a man, a chaplain in the British forces who practiced this with his congregation and wrote many books. If I can remember the names of them.

Years ago. Anne, do you remember the name of the book? Prison to Praise by Carruthers. Talking about what happens when the people of God are thankful even in the most dire of circumstances.

When I consider the love that drew salvation's plan, the grace that brought it down to man, the mighty gulf that God did span, I say thank you. When I consider that he lifted my feet from miry clay, set them on a rock to stay, brought me to dwell with him all way, I say thank you. When I consider I belong to the family of God and washed in the fountain cleansed by his blood.

When I consider the multiplied blessings that God pours upon me, my only response can be thank you. We are so wealthy in this country. We are so blessed as the children of God in this country.

We are so blessed to live in a country of peace. So blessed. We have so much to say thank you for.

However, my third reason for saying thanks is I must be very careful I do not develop a utilitarian gospel. Let me explain what I mean. I can say thank you to God for so many things he has blessed me with.

So much so I can come to the place of believing that God exists for the sole purpose of blessing me. And when I look at that I am challenged because when I look at churches and I listen to so many Christians and you really wipe away the extraneous things you find that that is their theology. We started, you know, when we witnessed them come to Jesus and he will take all your sins away.

Come to Jesus, you will have happiness. Come to Jesus, he will give you a victory over drugs. Come to Jesus, he will do this for you.

He will do this for you. He will do this for you. He will bless you.

And we have always come to the conclusion that that is why God exists to bless us. The religion of Canada is secular humanism. Secular humanism is a belief system where it puts man at the centre.

And all things are designed to exist for the blessing and benefit of man. And the Canadian government, the Canadian constitution, the Canadian leadership and our provincial leadership exists whether they are conservative, liberal, NDP, whatever, really so that they can do the best things for the best of us. Now we all might argue that we feel that they waste their money here and waste their money there but the real reason we have a government is that they might do the best thing for us.

And man is at the centre. That's called humanism. Secular humanism.

And we have adopted secular humanism in the church. We have Christian humanism. I go to church to feel good.

I have needs and so I love them. God can meet my needs. And when I have needs, I cry to God for him to meet my needs.

And we seem to have developed, certainly in the West, a church theology because we are so comfortable in the normal surroundings of the daily things that we have as Canadians in this country. We have developed a theology that God exists to bless us. Instead of understanding that we were created to bless him.

He created us for his good purpose, not for ours. But we start complaining whenever anything happens in our life that we measure up as being not for our benefit. But we fail to understand that God sometimes

takes away so that he might receive honour.

How do we reconcile ourselves with the thought that five young men can go to Ecuador as missionaries, give up wonderful careers in the prestigious colleges of the United States, then within a matter of months of arriving on the mission field having dedicated the rest of their lives to serve God, God should deign to allow them to be killed in the banks of the Karari River? How do you reconcile that with a God who exists for our blessing? Some of you know the story I'm talking about. You read the book Through Gates of Splendour. Nat Saint and Elliot was the name who wrote this statement.

He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Jim Elliot. Those five young men died and all of America grieved their death and those who did not know God including large percentages of those who went to church said, how on earth can God let this happen? Yet ten years later, God used that incident to break down the walls that had trapped the Oukar Indians for centuries.

And the Oukar Indians today are a vibrant Christian people who are reaching out to all the neighbours because they have brought glory to God through the death of five young martyrs. Five young martyrs. But our mentality says, oh God exists to bless us.

And we cannot see beyond what we feel is good for us. God exists that we exist so that we might bring honour and glory and thanksgiving to him. Worthy oh worthy are you Lord Do you know that song? Worthy to be thanked and praised and worshipped and adored Do you know it? Worthy oh worthy are you Lord Worthy to be thanked and praised and worshipped and adored Singing Hallelujah Lamb upon the throne We worship and adore you You've made your purpose known Hallelujah Glory to the King You're more than a conqueror You're Lord of everything Even if you do not bless me with one I oughta You're still worthy Even if the path you choose for me leads to the dungeon leads to the death and the banks of the Karari River You're still worthy I will still thank you for dying on the cross for me even though the choice of my following you has taken me into valleys of great despair Instead of fame and popularity in this world I will still thank you because you're worthy you're worthy Sometimes in the daily grind of this life I find it hard to thank you because things are tough things are hard pain follows me sickness follows me I find it so hard to say thank you but when I look at the cross my only response can be worthy worthy thank you You'll have heard of the Moravians It was through the Moravians that John Wesley became a Christian He watched their lives Do you know what the motto of the Moravians is?

Well let me just tell you the story first and how it came about There was an English man who owned an island in the Caribbean He was a tea planter tea plantation and he had a thousand or so slaves Caribbean black slaves and he was a very angry man with God and he declared publicly that no missionary would ever come to his island His slaves were not allowed to worship they were not allowed to sing hymns they were not allowed to do anything to praise God This is back in the 17th century Two young Moravian boys in their early 20s heard of this slave trader so they went to the slave markets in Europe and sold themselves to this tea man to this trader this slave owner With the money they got from the sale of themselves they bought passage to that island Their family came to see them off in Hamburg, Germany All the family there all the Moravian family there seen these two young men in their early 20s as they got on the ship to sail to the Caribbean to give themselves to a lifetime of slavery so that among those thousand or so black men they would be a Christian testimony They knew there was no escape they knew this was a lifetime they were selling themselves to They were not looking for ease and fame and popularity and God's blessing While they're on the boat and the boat is beginning to pull away from the shore in Hamburg the parents are there on the shore crying their relatives are waving the two young men stand the

deck and they link arms and the last words that were heard from them became the motto of the Moravian church May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering They understood what it is to give thanks and worship to the one who alone is worthy of thanks and worship They were not thanking him for what blessings they were getting they were selling themselves into slavery yet they could still say May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering Thank you Jesus for being my lamb Thank you father for the love that made me your child Thank you father Thank you father even though the struggles of this life are so tough and the pain is so much and the misunderstanding and all the conflict Thank you for those that I'm your child I've been reconciled to you I suggest to you that's the most important reason that we should be a thankful people We have much to be thankful for We have so many blessings in this land of Canada We have so many things that should cause us to be thankful Yet when we compare ourselves with many Christians around the world we have so much and we wonder how they can be thankful They do not get rewards for their thankfulness Yet the bottom line is they like we can say thank you to the lamb that was slain and to the father who loves us so much May my testimony my motto may your motto be also May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering in my life too in your life and in this church Amen Amen God bless you

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