

“The power of Thanksgiving” Philipians 4:4-9 (11/23/25)

This week, we once again enter the season of Thanksgiving. The holiday is coming up, and many of us are likely preparing our homes, kitchens, and schedules for family gatherings. When you think of Thanksgiving, what comes to mind? Maybe some happy memories, foods, or traditions bring warmth to our hearts.

Since I grew up in Korea, I did not celebrate Thanksgiving in the traditional American way. I only knew about Thanksgiving from movies and television—families sitting around a table, sharing turkey, telling stories, and expressing love. I felt something warm, something beautiful when I saw Thanksgiving on TV.

After living in the United States, I now understand how significant this Thanksgiving truly is. And in many ways, I feel a kind of holy envy. How blessed it is that an entire nation pauses once a year to give thanks. How remarkable that thanksgiving—expressing our appreciation to God—is built into the culture.

As we prepare for this Thanksgiving, I invite us to look beyond the traditions and food, and to consider the deeper, biblical meaning of thanksgiving—not only as a holiday but as a spiritual practice. Today, we will see thanksgiving in the Old Testament, thanksgiving in the New Testament, and the reason God has given us this act of thanksgiving. Through Philipians 4:4–7, we will know about the power of thanksgiving.

In the Old Testament, thanksgiving was not a polite expression or a momentary feeling. Thanksgiving was a sacred act offered to God. One of the clearest expressions of this was the Thanksgiving Offering. The people brought it to the sanctuary when God had delivered them from danger, healed them, provided for them, or shown mercy in a time of distress.

This Thanksgiving was directed toward God. It was an offering lifted in

worship. People would bring an animal without blemish along with various kinds of bread, and part of the offering was burned on the altar. Another part was given to the priest, and the rest was eaten in a communal meal. This meal became a testimony to God's goodness.

In the Old Testament, thanksgiving was fundamentally an act of worship—a way of publicly declaring God's faithfulness.

In the New Testament, thanksgiving continues to be central in the life of God's people. Jesus Himself lived a life full of thanksgiving. Before feeding the multitudes, He gave thanks. Before raising Lazarus, He gave thanks. At the Last Supper, He took the bread and gave thanks.

Thanksgiving shaped Jesus' relationship with God. His prayers were soaked in thanksgiving.

Likewise, the apostle Paul constantly calls believers to thanksgiving:

“Give thanks in all circumstances,”

“Overflow with thanksgiving,”

“With thanksgiving present your requests to God.”

Thanksgiving in the New Testament is more than a ritual. It is a sign of a redeemed life. It is the expression of someone who knows what God has done, who recognizes God's grace, and who lives with confidence in God's provision.

New Testament thanksgiving is both a posture of the heart and an act directed toward God—a continual offering of praise.

Then, why does God give us the Thanksgiving action? Why does the Bible encourage people to live with Thanksgiving?

God gave us thanksgiving because thanksgiving has power. Thanksgiving does spiritual work within us. Thanksgiving aligns our hearts with God.

Thanksgiving opens our eyes to God’s goodness. Philippians 4:4–7 reveals four powerful spiritual functions of thanksgiving:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Let us consider these four functions one by one.

First, Thanksgiving Brings Us Joy. Paul begins with a command: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” But how do we rejoice always—especially when life is not easy? The key is thanksgiving.

When we offer thanksgiving to God, our hearts turn away from scarcity and look toward God’s provision. Thanksgiving reminds us of what God has already done. Thanksgiving reorients our hearts toward blessings we have forgotten.

Many assume joy leads to thanksgiving. But biblically, it is often the opposite: thanksgiving leads to joy.

When we intentionally offer thanks to God—naming God’s blessings, remembering God’s grace—joy naturally follows. Thanksgiving awakens joy within us.

Second, Thanksgiving Makes It Clear That We Are Disciples of Christ. Paul says, “Let your gentleness be known to everyone.” A life of thanksgiving produces gentleness, humility, and grace.

People notice when someone lives with thanksgiving. A thankful Christian reflects the character of Christ. When we live with thanksgiving—thanking God in

prayer, thanking God in our daily lives, thanking God in our struggles—others see a faith that is real.

In a world filled with complaints and negativity, a person of thanksgiving shines with a different kind of light. Thanksgiving becomes our testimony. It reveals that our trust is anchored in God, not in circumstances. Thanksgiving marks us as disciples.

Third, Thanksgiving Breaks the Power of Anxiety. Paul continues, “Do not worry about anything.” This feels impossible on our own. But then Paul explains how: “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

Thanksgiving is essential because thanksgiving combats anxiety. When we offer thanksgiving to God, we are remembering God’s faithfulness in the past. Thanksgiving declares, “God has helped me before—God will help me again.” Thanksgiving lifts our eyes from our fears and directs them toward God’s power and promises.

Fear says, “What if I don’t have enough?”

Thanksgiving says, “God has always provided.”

Fear says, “What if things fall apart?”

Thanksgiving says, “God has carried me this far.”

It is nearly impossible to be full of anxiety while expressing thanksgiving to God. One pushes out the other. Thanksgiving breaks the chains of worry.

Fourth, Thanksgiving Guards Our Hearts and Minds. Paul concludes, “And the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” God’s peace stands like a soldier over our hearts. But this guarding peace is activated

through thanksgiving.

When we present our concerns to God with thanksgiving, we open the door for God's peace to enter. Thanksgiving protects us from bitterness, from despair, from hopelessness. Thanksgiving keeps our hearts soft and our minds steady.

A life of thanksgiving becomes a shield—defending us from the emotional and spiritual attacks that so easily overwhelm us.

As we gather for this year's Thanksgiving holiday—around tables filled with food, surrounded by family and friends—I want to encourage us to set aside a holy moment. Before the meal begins, or sometime during the day, take a few minutes and share: “What is one thing God has done this year that you want to offer thanksgiving for?” Let that moment be a spiritual act—not just a tradition.

Because when we give thanks to God, we are remembering God's goodness, strengthening our faith, and opening our hearts to God's peace. Thanksgiving is not simply a holiday—it is worship.

My prayer is that our Thanksgiving Day will be filled with God's love, your homes filled with joy, and your tables filled with thanksgiving to God. Amen.