

“Living A Life Of Gratitude”

Psalm 18

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

In his book – “*In The Eye Of The Storm*” author Max Lucado describes the following scene:

An old man walks down a Florida beach. The sun sets like an orange ball on the horizon. The waves slap the sand. The smell of salt water stings the air. The beach is vacant. No sun to entice the sunbathers. Not enough light for the fisherman. So, aside from a few joggers and strollers, this gentleman is alone.

He carries a bucket in his bony hand. A bucket of shrimp. It's not for him. It's not for the fish. It's for the sea gulls. He walks to an isolated pier cast in gold by the setting sun. He steps to the end of the pier. The time has come for the weekly ritual.

He stands and waits. Soon the sky becomes a mass of dancing dots. The evening silence gives way to the screeching of birds. They fill the sky and then cover the moorings. They are on a pilgrimage to meet the old man.

For a half hour or so, the bushy-browed, shoulder-bent gentleman will stand on the pier, surrounded by the birds of the sea, until the bucket is empty.

But even after the food is gone, his feathered friends still linger. They linger as if they're attracted to more than just food. They perch on his hat. They walk on the pier. And they all share a moment together.

Can you see the scene... OKAY now I want you to file that scene away for awhile...we'll open it up again at the end of my message....

Soon we will be celebrating Thanksgiving Day... Many will be busy cooking turkeys, making stuffing, baking pumpkin pies.... and watching football games. And that is fun stuff -- it is important; to get together with family and loved ones... But LISTEN - that is not what thanksgiving is really about – (food, football and fun)... NO – it's about giving thanks to the Lord God Almighty.

AND – thanksgiving is not just an American holiday – NO – thanksgiving is an occasion that God's people have been celebrating for thousands of years...

As we celebrate Thanksgiving this year let's not allow the family, the food, the fun and the football – to crowd out the Lord.... He is the reason for this season too!

God has been good to us/you.. We have many reasons to be thankful.. And today as we consider our Thankfulness to God I want us to answer two very simple and basic questions; Why should we give thanks to God? and how do we give thanks to God? Our

text will be David's song of praise found in **Psalm 18**.

Why Should You Be Thankful To God?

Turn in your Bibles to the **Psalm 18**. NOW – if you have spent anytime in the Old Testament you know that David had a lot of enemies.... He spent many years in hiding.... And one of his greatest enemies was King Saul.

David wrote **Psalm 18**, after God had delivered him from his enemies, especially from the hands of Saul. LISTEN - Because of who God was and what he had done for him, David breaks out in a song of praise - And as David praises God, He gives several reasons in these first 3 verses, as to why you should be thankful to God.

PSALM 18:1-3

You Should Be Thankful to God Because: God Wants A Personal Relationship with You..

Did you notice how many times David uses the word "my" in these 3 verses. I counted 9 times.... UNDERSTAND - what David is emphasizing here is his personal relationship with God... And he is thankful for that...

LISTEN - to David, God was not some far off deity with a long white beard up in the clouds somewhere... A God, that he had to please, but who didn't really know... On the contrary, David had a personal relationship to God... And the only reason David had this relationship, was because God in His grace - had given him the opportunity to know Him.

QUESTION - are you thankful for the personal relationship that you can have with God? Are you thankful that the One True God, the Creator of the Universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords ... are you thankful that God reached down from His heavenly throne and has given you an opportunity to have a personal relationship with Him?

LISTEN - your God is not a God who is far off, but He desires to walk with you, take care of you, and He has given His spirit to live in you...

ONE REASON – you should be thankful to God is that He desires a personal relationship with you...

A second reason is Because God Is Your Strength

David's first words in this Psalm are --- "I LOVE YOU, O LORD, MY STRENGTH" David was a mighty warrior – He had fought lions, giants and armies, He commanded a great army – YET – David knew that God was his strength...

Which is a lesson all of God's people have to learn. LISTEN - the power, the results, the victories, UNDERSTAND - all rest, in God's power alone, not in ours.

Throughout the bible, we see God teaching His people to depend on Him, we see God trying to get His people to realize that they must rest on His strength alone... We see God trying to get His people to understand that "IT IS NOT BY OUR MIGHT, OR BY OUR POWER, BUT HIS SPIRIT THAT MOUNTAINS MOVE, SEAS PART AND DIFFICULTIES CRUMBLE...

And LISTEN – life goes so much better when we live by His strength not our own... Why? Because His strength is able to do far more than we would ever ask or even dream of – infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts or hopes.... (get it?)

Are you thankful that God is your strength, are you thankful that everything does not depend on you, and on your ability...

A 3rd reason to thank God is because... God is Your Rock

I like that picture, standing on a rock above my enemies, with them trying to get me -- but with me always out of THEIR reach. LISTEN - Nothing can get you as long you are standing on your Rock... Do you believe that? I do, Paul said in **Romans chapter 8**,

"I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NEITHER ANGELS NOR DEMONS, NEITHER THE PRESENT NOR THE FUTURE, NOR ANY POWERS, NEITHER HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL OF CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD."

UNDERSTAND as long as we choose to stand on our Rock, on Jesus -- our enemy and even our circumstances, are not able to reach us and cause us any real harm.... Are you thankful that God is your Rock...

A 4th reason to be thankful to God is because... God Is Your Fortress...

NOW - most of us have seen Westerns where the people run into a fort to seek protection. When we are in a fort we are surrounded by barriers, strong walls, or other fortifications that keep the enemy out. Fortress' protect you and stand between you and your enemy. In another song of David, **Psalms 125** he writes; "**AS THE MOUNTAINS SURROUND JERUSALEM, SO THE LORD SURROUNDS HIS PEOPLE BOTH NOW AND FOREVERMORE.**"

LISTEN - Our God is all powerful and He is a barrier between us and the world/ a barrier that cannot be broken.

QUESTION - are you thankful that you have a Fort, that you have a place where you can seek shelter and refuge in? Are you thankful that you have a God who will surround you in order to protect you? Are you thankful that God is your Fortress?

NOW BEFORE we move on let me make a brief, but very important point. A rock or a fort offers us no safety or protection unless we are standing on it or we are within it's walls... And LISTEN - we choose, whether or not we are.

And tragically some of God's people are getting beat up spiritually and emotionally, Why? Because they have refused to stand on the Rock and they have chosen to remain outside His walls of protection.

God is your strength, your rock and your fortress....

A 5th reason to be thankful to God is because...

God Is Your Deliverer

Many times God delivered David, He delivered him from Goliath, from Saul, from a lion, from The Philistines, from Abner, even from his own son...

Yes, many times David cried out to God for deliverance, and God heard those cries and delivered him. David writes in **verse 18** of our text, **"HE RESCUED ME FROM MY POWERFUL ENEMY, FROM MY FOES, WHO WERE TOO STRONG FOR ME."** LISTEN - God was David's deliverer - And God is also our deliverer... If you are here today and you are a Christian you have experienced first hand like David, the joy of God's deliverance. You too faced a powerful foe -- sin -- whose wage was death.... A foe that was too strong for you... You were powerless to do anything to save yourself from this enemy... AND THIS IS WHERE God stepped in, AS THE WORD OF GOD SAYS **"YOU SEE AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME, WHEN WE WERE STILL POWERLESS, CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY...GOD DEMONSTRATED HIS OWN LOVE FOR US IN THIS; WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US."** And LISTEN - God's deliverance of His people doesn't stop with this initial deliverance, NO - His deliverance continues throughout our walk with him. Checkout **verses 4-17** of our text.

David is describing just how desperate his situation was as his enemies engulfed him - - it looked hopeless.....have you ever felt hopeless as your enemies surrounded you? You're not the first and you're certainly not the last.

Parents let me ask you a question, how does it make you feel when someone messes with your child, when they hurt or seek to harm them... Does it upset you? Does it cause your blood to boil and the hairs on your neck to stand up? Are you tempted to grab the individual and say to them "HOW DARE YOU MESS WITH MY KID."

LISTEN - this is exactly the picture David paints in the scripture we are about to read.....David pictures God: In His temple in heaven and all of a sudden God hears the

cries of one of His children... Someone is messing with one of the Kings kids... And God gets angry...

Listen to how David describes God's anger. **[read 6a-8]** And God is going to just sit up in heaven fuming, No, God is going to take action.... **[read 9-11]** Do you see the picture David has painted? God parting the heavens, rolling back the clouds... mounting a cherubim and soaring on the wings of the wind... Making His way to deliver His children.... **Let's read on [12-16]** God has shouted with a thunder from heaven, He has scattered the enemies with bolts of lightening.... Remember how David describes what his enemies were doing to him he said, **"THE WAVES OF DEATH SWIRLED AROUND ME. THE SNARES OF DEATH ENCIRCLED ME."**

It is a picture of David drowning under the assaults of his enemies. (SOMETIMES THE TROUBLES OF THIS LIFE CAN SWIRL AROUND US IN MUCH THE SAME WAY). NOW - Did you catch what David said in **verse 16, "AT THE REBUKE OF THE LORD, AT THE BLAST OF BREATHE FROM HIS NOSTRILS -- THE VALLEYS OF THE SEA WERE EXPOSED AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH LAID BARE"**

That's sooo awesome – Almighty God with just a rebuke and a breathe, dries up the waters that were drowning David...(HE RENDERS THEM POWERLESS). And then as we read in **VERSE 17, "GOD REACHED DOWN FROM ON HIGH AND TOOK HOLD OF DAVID AND PULLED HIM UP."**

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT I REALLY GET PUMPED ABOUT THAT PICTURE OF GOD AS MY DELIVER.

QUESTION - Are you thankful that your God gets angry when the enemy messes with you – Are you thankful that God mounts His cherubim to come to your rescue, and that He is so powerful that He simply reaches down and pulls you up out of the surging waves, when you call to Him.. Blowing away your enemy and circumstances with JUST A breathe.

And - Are you thankful that God came down, 2,000 years ago, not on a cherubim but in a manger – are you thankful that God in the person of the son - delivered you from the power of sin? LISTEN – Christ deliverance allows you to say the following words found in **1 Cor 15 (msg); "Death swallowed by triumphant Life! Who got the last word, oh death? Oh death, who's afraid of you now?"** It was sin that made death so **frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, it's destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life all three – sin, guilt, death are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!"**

David uses several more descriptive words in **verse 3** to describe and praise God, and all of these convey the thought of safety, protection and deliverance.... David says, **"GOD IS MY ROCK IN WHOM I TAKE REFUGE, MY SHIELD AND THE HORN OF MY SALVATION. HE IS MY STRONGHOLD, MY REFUGE AND**

MY SAVIOR”.

Wow! God is Awesome -- And He is our/your/my God!

NOW – we could go on all day and all through the night and list reasons why we should be thankful to God (David lists a bunch more throughout this Psalm)...

Take a close look at the good things in your life: your home, children, family, friends, answered prayers, health, country, church, joy, peace, they are all from God. I THINK YOU WOULD AGREE WE HAVE PLENTY OF REASONS TO THANK GOD..WHICH BRINGS US TO OUR NEXT POINT...

How Can You Say Thank You To God

It is very important for us to discuss this because -- many times Christians do not show God that much gratitude.... And know this – “gratitude unexpressed is really ingratitude....”

They had no hope, they were outcasts, no one wanted them around, no one would even get near them , so they traveled around, living on scraps of food, sleeping in caves and under trees. Their life was heading no where, they had few if any reason to go on. Luke records their story in; **LUKE 17:11,19** Only one came back to thank him.... Only one came back and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and submitted his life to Jesus... The others took their cleansing and ran. Maybe they thought, "that sure was nice of Jesus and sometime when it is convenient I am going to send Him a card or give Him a call and say thank you"... But that sometime never came.

Only 10% said thank you.... QUESTION – do you think the percentages have changed all that much today. **Are more like the 1? Or the 9?**

I know that sometimes in my life I act more like those ungrateful 9. I let God down and slap Him in the face with ingratitude) -- and when I eventually come to my senses it just tears me up to know what I have done to God....

LISTEN – I am confident that everyone here intends for Jesus to see them at His feet thanking and praising Him... 2,000 years ago, 9 didn't say thanks – IN RESPONSE to them - this morning I want to give you 9 practical ways that you can say thank you... 9 practical ways that will put you at the feet of Jesus in thanks and praise...

You Say Thank You To God

1) WHEN YOU ARE MORE LIKE CHRIST THAN YOU ARE LIKE THE WORLD.

2) WHEN YOU SPEND TIME WITH HIM, WHEN YOU CRAVE HIS WORD WITH ALL OF YOUR HEART, MIND, SOUL AND STRENGTH. NOT JUST ONE HOUR A WEEK, BUT EACH AND EVERYDAY. IS WHEN THE WORDS OF **PSALM 42:1,2** EXPRESS HOW YOU REALLY FEEL...“**As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. WHEN can I**

go and meet with God?"

3) WHEN YOU PRAISE AND WORSHIP HIM PUBLICLY. THE PSALMIST WRITES, "I WILL PRAISE YOU FOREVER FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE; IN YOUR NAME I WILL HOPE, FOR YOUR NAME IS GOOD. I WILL PRAISE YOU IN THE PRESENCE OF THE SAINTS.." -- Psalm 52:6

YOU DID THAT TODAY - LISTEN – GOD LOVES TO HEAR HIS PEOPLE SING PRAISES... AND HOW WELL YOU SING IS NOT THE ISSUE – WHY YOU SING IS...

4) WHEN YOU FORGIVE - "FORGIVE AS THE LORD FORGAVE YOU" (FULLY, COMPLETELY, NOT REQUIRING THEY EARN/DESRVE) LISTEN – GOD REALLY GETS PUMPED WHEN YOU DO THAT...

5) WHEN YOU ARE SERVED "FOR EVEN THE SON OF GOD DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE AND HE GAVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY." LISTEN - YOUR EXPRESSION OF SERVICE SAYS TO GOD , "YES LORD THE CHURCH YOU GAVE YOUR LIFE/BLOOD FOR, IS IMPORTANT TO ME TOO...AND I WILL DO MY BEST TO BRING HONOR TO YOUR BRIDE..YOU, LOVE THE CHURCH LORD AND SO DO I."

6) WHEN YOU SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY
Isaiah 12:4 says this **"Thank the Lord. Praise His name. Tell the world about His wondrous love and how mighty He is."**

Now, you know what a testimony is (you seen court cases on TV). A testimony is not what the lawyers do. A testimony is what the witness does. LISTEN – when you give your testimony - you're not trying to pressure for a decision. You're just saying, "This is what I saw. This is what happened to me. This is what happened in my life."

UNDERSTAND - Nobody can give your testimony except you. You are the authority on your life. AND - if you don't give your testimony about how God has worked in your life, it's never going to be told. In all of history if you don't tell your story, it won't be told. God says that one of the ways we give thanks to Him is by telling our story, by giving thanks back to God by telling how God has worked in our own lives.

When I was in Pakistan I was told the following story that really moved my heart: A missionary was serving as a doctor in a medical mission in India for many years in India. In the region where he was there was progressive blindness. People were born with healthy vision, but there was something in that area that caused people to lose their sight as they matured."

But this missionary had developed a process which would arrest progressive blindness. So people came to him, he performed his operation, and they would leave

realizing that they would have become blind, but now they were going to be able to see for the rest of their lives.

He said that they never said, "Thank you," because that phrase was not in their dialect. Instead, they spoke a word that meant, "I will tell your name." Wherever they went, they would tell the name of the missionary who had cured their blindness."

God has done some awesome things for YOU... And one way you say thank you is to tell others about what He has done for you... "to tell His name" wherever you go...

7) WHEN WE REACH OUT TO THE HURTING, WHEN YOU GAVE A DRINK TO THE THIRSTY AND FOOD TO THE HUNGRY, AN EAR TO THE BROKENHEARTED. JESUS SAID; "I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHATEVER YOU DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BROTHERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.."

8) YOU SAY THANK YOU TO GOD WHEN YOU GIVE HIM YOUR BEST.... HE GAVE HIS BEST... HE GAVE HIS SON/LIFE... YOU NEED TO GIVE GOD THE BEST OF YOUR Time, Talents, and Tithes.... NOW TODAY IS A DAY WE HAVE BEEN FOCUSING ON ALL YEAR...AND IN JUST A FEW MINUTES THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET GIVEN THEIR MIRACLE OFFERING WILL HAVE A CHANCE TO DO SO.....

9) WHEN YOU DENY YOURSELF – WHEN YOU PICK UP YOUR CROSS DAILY AND FOLLOW JESUS.

THESE ARE 9 PRACTICAL WAYS THAT YOU CAN/AND SHOULD - SAY THANK YOU TO GOD...

NOW – if you would, GO AHEAD and re-open that file of the old man on the pier in Florida feeding the sea gulls...

His name was Eddie Rickenbacker. And every Friday night until his death in 1973, he would walk with a large bucket of shrimp, slightly stooped over to an old broken down pier on the eastern seacoast of Florida...

Something happened in October 1942 – that prompted this man for the next 30 years to make this trip to feed seagulls...every Friday night (1500+ Fridays in a row)

You see, back in 1942, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was sent on a mission to deliver a message to General Douglas MacArthur. With a handpicked crew in a B-17 known as the "Flying Fortress," he set off across the South Pacific. Somewhere the crew became lost, the fuel ran out, and their plane went down.

All eight crew members escaped into the life rafts. They battled the weather, the

weather, the sharks and the sun. BUT most of all they battled the hunger. After eight days, their rations were gone. They ran out of options. It would take a miracle for them to survive. **And the miracle occurred.**

After an afternoon devotional service, that was closed with a prayer for deliverance and a hymn of praise – the men tried to get some rest. As Rickenbacker was dozing with his hat over his eyes, something landed on his head. He would later say, “I knew that it was a sea gull. I don’t know how I knew, I just knew. Everyone else knew too. No one said a word, but peering out from under my hat brim without moving my head, I could see the expression on their faces. They were staring at that gull. The gull meant food...if I could catch it.”

And he did. The flesh was eaten. The intestines were used as fish bait and the crew survived.

QUESTION - What was a sea gull doing hundreds of miles away from land? Only God knows... But for whatever reason – he was there...

AND – because he was there – AND because Captain Eddie never forgot for 30 years - every Friday evening, about sunset...on a lonely stretch along the eastern Florida seacoast...you could see an old man walking...white-haired, bushy-eye browed, slightly bent. His bucket filled with shrimp and his heart full of thanks, to remember that one who, on a day long past, gave itself without a struggle – so he could live...