

Thankful for Grace

Ephesians 2:8

February 1, 2026

Today's message is about thankfulness, and how we go about showing how thankful we are to the Lord our God. We have been given such a great gift...the gift of salvation. How do we get this gift? By the grace of God, through faith in His son, Jesus Christ. If you have that salvation in your heart, you know how it makes you feel! The heart fills with thankfulness, and we find ourselves wanting to respond. So how do we do it? Well praise God, because his word tells us exactly what sort of thank you gifts he wants from his children. Let's take a few minutes to see what scripture has to say on the subject.

Now you may have noticed, today's scripture is a short one! The words may be few, but the message is powerful. These words come to us through Moses, during his second address to the people before they cross the Jordan into the promised land. Moses isn't going to be around much longer, so he wants to do his best to make sure the people have God's commands fresh in their minds.

The Old Testament shows us over and over again the blessings that come from obeying God's will, and the consequences that come from ignoring him. We all remember the story of the Golden Calf, and the rebellion of the people the first time God told them to go up into the land. Moses remembers too...he isn't going to be allowed to enter the promised land because he disobeyed God at the waters of Meribah, basically because he was mad at the people for their complaining and disobedience. Moses wants the best for everyone, so he's laying out how to please God as simply and as plainly as he can.

His approach is pretty direct. He starts out by reminding the people of all the bad times that happened when they went astray, and then gets right to it. "And now Israel, what does your God require of you? He requires only that..." Now if I'm paraphrasing, it sounds a little like "look guys, it's not complicated, this is literally all you need to do and you will be fine!" He's practically begging them to listen. Very "Dad" vibes if you

ask me. This passage is meant to be instructional, and easy to remember. He wants them to succeed!

On to the first requirement..."fear the Lord your God". Now, that doesn't mean be afraid of him haha!! This one gets misread all the time. God is not out to hurt you or take revenge on you when you mess up. Translating from the Greek it's more a reverent fear or awe. It means you know God isn't someone to mess with. In practical terms, when we discuss the things of God, when we go to him in prayer, when we study his word, don't take it lightly. When it comes to the almighty creator, we need to treat him with the deep sense of respect he deserves.

Next, "live in a way that pleases him". No need to overcomplicate this one. Hebrews 8:10 says "I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts". We all know when we're doing something that displeases the Lord. Maybe not right away, but we all know that feeling. The holy spirit saying "hey this probably isn't going to make God very happy". Think of it this way. We've all had a partner or a spouse at some point in our lives. You KNOW when something you're doing or about to do is gonna tick them off. We've all claimed ignorance, but we know. Follow that feeling...whether you're out in public or completely alone, if you know it's something that won't make God happy, don't do it!

The other side of the coin rings just as true...if you see a beggar on the street, if you see someone who needs a helping hand, if you have an opportunity to comfort a stranger...do what you know makes God happy. Go right ahead and love that neighbor. Trust me, you'll be blessed. These are the moments that bring joy and peace into our lives.

Number three and four go right together..."love him and serve him with all your heart and soul". We all know how to love...think about that same partner or spouse. Think about how you treated them in those moments when you were most in love. You couldn't stay away from them...you couldn't do enough for them...all you wanted was to be in their presence, even if just for a little while longer. Demonstrating that

love pretty much always rolled right into serving, or doing things for, the object of your love. The cost or personal sacrifice involved never mattered, their happiness was the only thing you cared about. This is the way God loves you...all you have to do is love him back!

Now the concept of love pretty much covers everything we talked about up to this point. The last one is no different, but it highlights the reason behind it. Moses finishes up his instructions with “And you must always obey the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today **for your own good**”.

Remember how we talked about the endless examples of cause and effect in the Bible? Behavior and consequences, both good and bad. So many of these consequences are natural ones...if you stick your foot under a car tire, there’s a good chance it’ll get run over! If you eat old food, you’re probably gonna get sick! I could go on forever, but think of everything your parents ever told you. They weren’t giving you rules to make your life hard or kill your good time, they were trying to help you! God’s commands aren’t asinine little trip wires...God’s commands are there to help you get life right! He’s not looking for ways to punish you, or kick you out of the kingdom...like we said before, God is not out to hurt you. His word is the instruction manual for life, he gave it to us to help us on our journey, we would all do well to follow it.

I want to make one last point...everything we talked about today is all about how we respond to God’s gift of salvation. It’s how we say thank you for the gift. It is **not** how we earn the gift in the first place.

Friends, no amount of good living can save your soul. It might feel good, and the world may actually be a better place because of your good deeds. Like it or not, our works will never be good enough to earn grace. In fact, if we COULD earn salvation by works, it would cease to be grace in the first place! Ephesians 2:8 reminds us “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast”. In the words

of Jesus “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

We must never forget the order of operations here...our reverence, our actions, our love, our service, our obedience...all of these are a response to God’s gift of salvation. They are our love letter to the risen Lord. They are the result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit...not the cause. If you know in your heart that Jesus is already Lord of your life, I pray these words of Moses help you to express that thankfulness you feel for your salvation in a more concrete way. May they help you navigate kingdom living, and bring you deeper into the presence of our amazing, incredible God.

Now if you haven’t received the gift of salvation quite yet...if you have not accepted God’s grace through faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ...forget everything we just talked about, and put first things first. Surrender your life to Jesus this very moment, then worry about the rest. Trust me when I say, you’re not going to know what to do with all the love, joy and thankfulness overflowing in your heart in that moment. That will be the day you can look back at this passage and begin writing your love letter to God with your life. That will be the day you truly know what it means to be thankful for grace. Amen.