

As you get older, the number of believers you know and have known will grow. Your experiences with them will be varied. Your thoughts about them should be modeled on the practice of the apostle Paul. Nine of the 13 inspired letters bearing his name were written to churches. For seven churches he expressly gave thanks to God, even for two he had never visited. His expression of thanks in 1 Thessalonians is more thorough than all the rest and offers insight into what should characterize an attitude of thankfulness. Five qualities stand out.

**I. *Thankfulness should be a primary response.***

1. Six out of the 7 letters to churches with thanksgiving begin immediately with that thanks after the opening greeting. Though a culturally common practice to begin letters with thanks, the placement and development of his thanksgiving shows that it was a primary response for Paul toward other believers. Even the exceptions (Galatians and 2 Corinthians) show that Paul does not merely follow a literary protocol.
2. A theological basis for the primacy of thanksgiving can be inferred from Romans 1:21 which places praise and thanksgiving as a type of threshold, which when crossed leads to futile thinking and darkened hearts. Make it a habit to find something to thank God for in every believer for whom you pray.

**II. *Thankfulness is directed to God.***

1. Paul specifically gives thanks to the God who is Father (1:1), who loves and has chosen them (1:4), in whom they have put their faith (1:8), who is living and true (1:9).
2. Thanking the one true God puts our focus on God and what He is doing and directs our focus away from unproductive thoughts.
3. Be careful to direct thanks to God and not reduce “thankfulness” to mere happiness or an empty phrase.

**III. *Thankfulness can and should be exercised together with others.***

1. In this context Paul appears to include Silas and Timothy in the statement, “we give thanks.” They were all part of the missionary team in Thessalonica. Silas is another name for Silvanus. He was a prophet, respected man in the Jerusalem church, Roman citizen, and companion of Paul on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. Timothy was probably a convert from the 1<sup>st</sup> missionary efforts, who also was recruited by Paul on the 2<sup>nd</sup> trip.
2. Praying together gives more people opportunity to give thanks together and bring glory to God. Cf. 2 Corinthians 1:11; 4:15; 9:12.
3. Thanking God when we pray fights the temptation to focus solely on needs, or negative things. It encourages right thinking about God and what He is doing.

**IV. *Thankfulness should extend for most “all” believers.***

1. Paul, Silas and Timothy thanked God for all the Thessalonians, although they were not a perfect church (3:10; 4:3–8).
2. The same inclusive thankfulness extended to other churches (Romans 1:8; Philippians 1:3–4). Jesus Christ by His Spirit indwells all true believers and is working out His will. Look for what He is doing.
3. But Paul did not offer thanks for the believers in Galatia, but begins that letter with his astonishment that they were so quickly deserting the one who had called them and were turning aside to a false gospel. The foundation for general thanksgiving was being undermined. Give thanks for other believers thoughtfully, giving consideration to their true spiritual state.

**V. *Thankfulness should be a consistent part of our prayer.***

1. Paul’s consistency in prayer and thanksgiving extended beyond the Thessalonians to other churches as well. Cf. Philippians 1:3–4; Colossians 1:3.
2. Paul is pictured as praying frequently and regularly, and always giving thanks when he did. The word “continually” could describe a persistent cough, which pictures thanksgiving in prayer, not as non-stop, but as consistently present. Giving thanks never left his prayers.
3. The regularity of prayer and the consistency of giving thanks is more than a challenging example, it is an obligation which Paul had (2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13) and a command which has been given. Cf. Ephesians 5:19-20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 2:6–7; 3:15, 17; 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:1.

Thanksgiving is part of our reasonable worship to God, the sacrifice of praise with our lips. Pray for and give thanks to God for those close to you: husbands, wives, parents, children, those ministering around you. Let giving thanks characterize your speech (Ephesians 5:4–5) and your thoughts (Philippians 4:6–7), marking you as a child of God and doing what is needed to receive the peace of God. Praise God as He deserves, and give thanks as you pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Questions for reflection and discussion:*

- Do you idly use phrases of “thanks” without meaning it? What would help to stop and truly give thanks?
- What can you thank God for in those closest to you? (Do it!)
- Consider those around you in church. For what can you thank God about each person?
- Are there believers with whom you have struggles? Look for God’s working in their lives and give thanks to Him for that.