

# 7

# A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING



*When have you been overwhelmed  
by gratitude?*

**QUESTION #1**

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **117**

## THE POINT

*Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My greatest emotional pain comes when I know one of my children is suffering. One of our daughters was diagnosed with an incurable disease when she was a child. My wife and I were devastated as we made plans for her immediate treatment.

On the morning we were to take her to the hospital, I was up early, praying. In my pain, my words seemed almost meaningless. Then, while struggling to pray, for some reason I simply said, “Thank You.” Those words were an extreme contrast to the circumstances we faced. For thirty minutes I knelt in the dark and whispered, “Thank You.” In light of our daughter’s diagnosis, it seemed strange to pray a prayer of thanksgiving, but I kept praying.

Later that morning at the hospital, after a series of tests, the doctor informed us they had found no sign of the disease—and he had no explanation why. Had the original diagnosis been incorrect? Had our daughter been healed? We don’t know, but thirty years have now passed with no sign of the disease.

I learned God is worthy of our gratitude even before we know His plans!

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***Psalm 138:1-2***

**<sup>1</sup> I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; <sup>2</sup> I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.**

Offering a word of thanks to God is a fairly universal reaction to good news. Even non-believers sometimes will do that. Most people have expressed prayers of gratitude at some point. In one survey, eighty-eight percent of those interviewed said they often offer prayers of thanks.<sup>1</sup> When good things happen, we're drawn to thank God because we know He's responsible for our blessings.

When Jesus gave us the Model Prayer, He began by teaching us to honor God. He called us to praise God for His holiness. "Hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9b). In like manner, David lifted thanks to God for His name. "I will bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name" (Ps. 138:2). While praise and thanksgiving are closely related, there is a difference. Praise focuses on who God is, and thanksgiving focuses on what God has done. We have so much to thank God for, but David focused on two attributes of God for which he was especially thankful.

- ▶ **God's constant love.** The Hebrew word for love, *hesed*, refers to more than emotion or sentiment. God's love toward His people has revealed itself in acts of loving kindness and gestures of mercy. The psalmist could thank God for His love because he had tangible evidence of it in his life.

In those moments when we struggle to pray or have difficulty getting started in a conversation with God, the simplest prayer of thanks can get us started—and we can always thank God for His love. Simply pausing to whisper the prayer, "Lord, thank You for loving me," can bring us into an awareness of God's presence. In his psalm, David described the love of God as constant, and therefore undiminished by either our faithlessness or our failures.

***How has God displayed love and truth in your life recently?***

**QUESTION #2**

- ▶ **God's truth.** God has not left us in the dark. He has revealed Himself to us. God has taught us the truth of who He is, who we are (sinners), and who we can be in Christ. A simple and practical way to express our thanks to God for His truth is to read Scripture as a part of our daily routine. As we read and see the truth in His Word, we offer thanks.

A dear Christian lady who resided in assisted living expressed it this way: "I get my Bible and read until I can't read anymore. Then I open my hymnal and I sing until I can't sing anymore. Then I pray until I can't pray anymore. Then I just sit in this chair and let God love me."

## ***Psalm 138:3-6***

**<sup>3</sup> On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased. <sup>4</sup> All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth, <sup>5</sup> and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.**

We've all experienced periods of being tired, especially if we try to "burn the candle at both ends." But a friend of mine knew fatigue on a whole different level. After returning from a South American mission trip, he learned he had contracted the Zika virus. His strength was sapped. It took him weeks to fully recover, and he said the worst part of the illness was the constant fatigue and exhaustion he felt.

David also experienced a season of life when his strength was gone. It appears to have been more than just a physical fatigue; his complaint seems to have stemmed from a spiritual or emotional weariness. It happened to David, and it can happen to us. Regardless of the cause, spiritual and emotional discouragements can leave even the strongest believers drained of strength.

***How does physical or emotional fatigue affect us spiritually?***

### **QUESTION #3**

# GIVING THANKS

*Use the space below to describe one of the images and how you might be thankful in that situation.*



"Even though our efforts to thank God in prayer are weak...every time we do so, we find we are in harmony with His plans and purposes for our lives."<sup>12</sup>

— O. HALLESBY

All of us will need God's renewal at some point. Even the most spiritually mature Christians can feel burnout and fatigue when the work seems never ending and feels unrewarding. Charles Spurgeon is widely regarded as one of the most effective preachers in history. His influence was unequalled during his lifetime, yet he battled with depression. It often kept him out of the pulpit and in need of rest.<sup>3</sup>

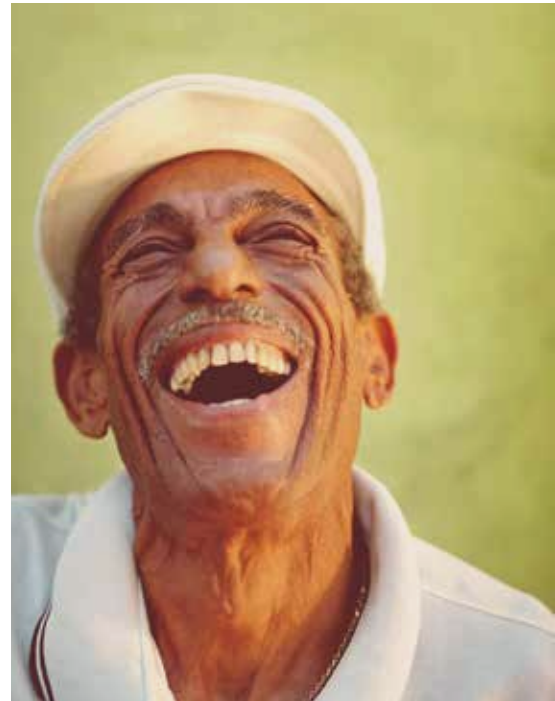
Discouragement can leave any of us weakened and feeling as if our strength is gone. And while it's vitally important to seek medical attention for a person who is dealing with clinical depression, prayer always plays a role in rekindling our spiritual fire.

When God renews our strength and vigor, we should thank Him in prayer. He provides and we should respond with gratitude. Furthermore, when God is exalted through both His work and our thanks, others will take note. "All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth."

God is great and far beyond His creation, yet "he regards the lowly." He responds to us out of His great love and compassion. God will not forget our needs. As we seek Him in prayer, God renews our strength and passion—and we can trust Him with every need in our lives.

## ***Psalm 138:7-8***

***<sup>7</sup> Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. <sup>8</sup> The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.***



King David understood political and personal insecurity. He was a warrior king who had enemies both inside and outside the borders of Israel. David walked “in the midst of trouble.” We might even say constant danger was his normal experience. The danger he faced was intense and unpredictable, yet David trusted God. For David, God’s protection was a matter of life or death.

So why, given the threat levels against him, could King David be so confident of God’s protection? We find the answer in his sense of knowing God’s purpose for his life. “The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me.” Since that was true, it stood to reason God would protect him from his known enemies, as well as the shadowy threats that might lurk in his fears.

In verses 7-8, we hear David express his trust that God would finish His work. King David could pray with such faith because he knew he was part of God’s larger plan. David could thank God for preserving his life even though he lived in a dangerous time.

We might think we aren’t important in God’s plan like King David. That is simply not true. We serve the same God; the only question is do we trust God in the same way David did? We can still trust God to carry out His plans—both small and great—through His people. We can live with faith, believing God will protect us from danger. When we live with such faith, it is a tribute to God’s protection rather than our own sense of well-being.

Trust in God is the basis of all prayer. When we pray with thankfulness, it is an expression of faith that God will fulfill His purposes for us.

***How does a thankful spirit give you courage as you face challenges in life?***

**QUESTION #4**

***What steps can our group take to further develop a pattern of praising and thanking God?***

**QUESTION #5**

## LIVE IT OUT

The celebration of Thanksgiving Day can mean different things to different people, but the heart of giving thanks is tied to faith and prayer. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Be thankful.** Every day this week tell God something you are thankful for.
- ▶ **Write out your thanks.** Make a list—a long list!—of all the reasons you have to be thankful. Pray through the entire list and thank God for the different ways He has blessed and touched your life.
- ▶ **Thank someone.** Write a handwritten note to someone for whom you're thankful for and tell that person why you thank God for him or her. Include a prayer of thanksgiving.

If we want to have a fully developed prayer life, we have to learn to regularly offer thanks to God in prayer. And as we've been reminded, God is worthy of our gratitude even before we know His plans.

My thoughts



1. [www.beliefnet.com/faiths/faith-tools/meditation/2004/12/u-s-news-beliefnet-prayer-survey-results.aspx](http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/faith-tools/meditation/2004/12/u-s-news-beliefnet-prayer-survey-results.aspx).  
2. O. Hallesby, *Prayer*, (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1931),139.  
3. Darrel W. Amundsen, "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," *Christianity Today: Christian History*, Issue 29, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-29/anguish-and-agonies-of-charles-spurgeon.html>.





## WHEN WE SAY FATHER

BY STEVE ROGERS

There are many different ideas about what God is like. The ancient Greeks' version of God—Zeus—was often petulant and moody and known to zap those who were his objects of wrath or frustration with a well-aimed lightning bolt. Buddhists don't believe that there is such a thing as a personal god. Hinduism's god, Brahma—whom they worship, as creator of everything—has no form and is, essentially, "the universe and everything in it." To Muslims, Allah is omniscient and all-powerful. He is also inscrutable and inaccessible; it is not possible to know him personally.



Contrast all of that with Jehovah, the God of the Bible. On one hand, He is a God to be revered and feared: “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20).

Yet, to a believer, God is not only the Almighty God-of-the-angel-armies, He is our Father. In contrast to other world religions, our God is Someone with whom we can have an intimate, personal relationship.

The Model Prayer Jesus gave His disciples contains incredible insights into that relationship God wants us to have with Him. The key that unlocks all of these insights is found in the first two words: “Our Father.” God not only wants us to *think* of Him as Father, He wants us to *address* Him as Father.

Although God sees each sparrow that falls, our relationship with Him is on a much more intimate basis because since God is our Father, that makes us His children. As such, we are objects of His sustaining love and tender mercies.

Even though God’s children number in the billions, He knows and calls each of us by name. Stop and think how incredible that is: The Lord and Creator of the universe knows whom we are—what makes us tick, what we like to eat, and what our struggles are.

An eight-year-old girl, attempting to quote the Lord's Prayer, said it like this: "Our Father, who art in heaven, how does He know my name?" As God's children, we have the privilege to address Him as Father. And when we do, some wonderful things happen:

**When we say, "Father," we express God's nature.** A father is not someone God is like. Father is who God is. Human fatherhood is patterned after divine Fatherhood, and our earthly fathers give us insight into God's nature. However, unlike earthly fathers who come with frailties, our heavenly Father is all wise and all caring. Aren't you glad your Father in heaven will never be considered an "absentee father"—that He will always be there whenever you need Him?

And since God is our Father, the converse is also true: We are His children, adopted into His family. This passage from Galatians beautifully explains our new relationship with Him: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, . . . so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal. 4:4-7).

**When we say, "Father," we experience God's nurture.** At dinnertime, the children of a loving father don't worry about whether there will be food on the table. They know their father works hard every day to be able to buy enough groceries to feed the family. In the same way, we don't have to worry about whether God will take care of our basic needs; He has promised to do so. In Matthew 6, the same chapter where Jesus gave us the Model Prayer that begins "Our Father," He shares this admonition: "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on" (v. 25). Jesus gives the assurance that "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (v. 32).

Take comfort in the fact that God calls Himself *Jehovah-Jireh*, the Lord our Provider. He's your Father; He *will* take care of you.

We have the family likeness to wear, the family loyalty to share, and the family name to bear.

—ADRIAN ROGERS

**When we say, “Father,” we exalt God’s name.** In the Lord’s Prayer, immediately after we are invited to address God as Father, we are exhorted to pray, “Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9, KJV). Even though we enjoy an intimate relationship that can only occur between a child and a father, we should never use God’s name lightly or in a trite or flippant manner. Instead, the Scriptures encourage us to honor and reverence it, placing it high above all other names: “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” (Ps. 29:2).

Each of the names God uses to describe Himself reveals something about His character. In the Old Testament, God is referred to as *El Shaddai*, the Mighty God, and *El Elyon*, the Most High God. However, in the New Testament, we find a new name for God: *Abba*. This is the word Jesus used on the cross when He cried out in agony to His Father: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36). *Abba*—a word that expresses the intimate relationship between a father and a child—is the same word we can use to address our heavenly Father: “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15).

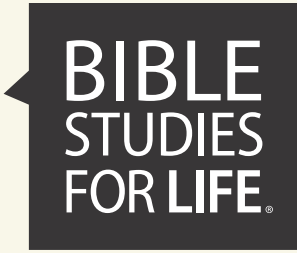
As children of the King, we not only exalt His name with our lips, we exalt His name with the very lives we live. As members of God’s family, His name now becomes part of our own: “child of God.” I love how my earthly father, Adrian Rogers, expressed this wonderful relationship: “We have the family likeness to wear, the family loyalty to share, and the family name to bear.”

So take your concerns and your needs to God in prayer. There is no request too big or too small for Him. *El Shaddai*—the Mighty God—is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). But don’t forget to call Him Father. When we say, “Father,” we express His nature, we experience His nurture, and we exalt His name.

Your Father is waiting (and wanting) to hear from you. He’s just a prayer away. You know what to say.

STEVE ROGERS is the president and co-founder of the Adrian Rogers Pastor Training Institute, headquartered in North Palm Beach, Florida. Steve is a well-known author, songwriter, and speaker. Steve and his wife, Cindi, have one daughter, Adrienne Renae, who is married to Brian, and a grandson, Townes.





## IT'S ALL ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP.

How can we measure discipleship? LifeWay's research reveals eight factors consistently present in the lives of believers who are growing spiritually. Since it's all about discipleship, we engage in all eight of these areas throughout the year. *Bible Studies for Life* follows an intentional plan for your discipleship, so you can be sure you are nurturing your growth in Christ.

	FALL 2018	WINTER 2018–19	SPRING 2019	SUMMER 2019
<b>BIBLE ENGAGEMENT</b>			He Said What? Hard Sayings of Jesus	
<b>OBEYING GOD AND DENYING SELF</b>				Pressure: Reacting Well in the Face of Pressure
<b>SERVING GOD AND OTHERS</b>				Risk: The Reality of Following God
<b>SHARING CHRIST</b>		The Full Picture of Christmas		
<b>EXERCISING FAITH</b>			More than the Mundane: Finding Meaning on the Journey	
<b>SEEKING GOD</b>	How to Pray			
<b>BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS</b>	Welcome Home: Connecting and Engaging People in Your Church			
<b>UNASHAMED AND TRANSPARENT</b>		Engaging Culture in an Ever-Changing World		

# COMING NEXT QUARTER

## ***The Full Picture of Christmas***

SUGGESTED FOR  
THE WEEK OF

December 2	Session 1	<b><i>Isaiah's Prophecy</i></b> .....	<i>Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5</i>
December 9	Session 2	<b><i>Joseph's Obedience</i></b> .....	<i>Matthew 1:18-25</i>
December 16	Session 3	<b><i>Mary's Trust</i></b> .....	<i>Luke 1:26-38</i>
December 23	Session 4	<b><i>The Angels' Announcement</i></b> .....	<i>Luke 2:1-14</i>
December 30	Session 5	<b><i>Simeon's Proclamation</i></b> .....	<i>Luke 2:25-35</i>
January 6	Session 6	<b><i>The Wise Men's Worship</i></b> .....	<i>Matthew 2:1-11</i>

## ***Engaging Culture in an Ever-Changing World***

January 13	Session 1	<b><i>When Races Collide</i></b> .....	<i>Ephesians 2:11-22</i>
January 20	Session 2	<b><i>When Life Is Expendable</i></b> .....	<i>Exodus 1:16-17,22-2:9</i>
January 27	Session 3	<b><i>When Circumstances Overwhelm</i></b> .....	<i>Psalms 42:1-3,6-8; 43:3-5</i>
February 3	Session 4	<b><i>When Substances Take Over</i></b> .....	<i>Ephesians 5:15-21</i>
February 10	Session 5	<b><i>When Marriage Is Questioned</i></b> .....	<i>Genesis 2:18-25</i>
February 17	Session 6	<b><i>When Materialism Consumes</i></b> .....	<i>1 John 2:12-17; 3:16-18</i>
February 24	Session 7	<b><i>When False Religions Deceive</i></b> .....	<i>1 John 2:18-29</i>

# Want to go deeper in your study?

Because you are discovering how to make guests feel even more welcome in your church through the *Welcome Home* study, we recommend Dr. Thom Rainer's latest book, *Becoming a Welcoming Church*. Dr. Rainer's research will help any church become more hospitable to its guests.

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## ***Welcome Home***

Inviting others into the family of Christ, and leading those people to grow in their walk with Him and in participation with His body, are foundational to what the church is all about. This study looks at several principles from Scripture that move the church family to be a group that clearly and authentically communicates, “We’re glad you’re here.”

**Michael Kelley** is the Director of Groups Ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources.



## ***How to Pray***

Twelve men walked closely with Jesus during His earthly ministry. Of all the things they saw Him do—teaching, preaching, performing miracles, and so forth—they only asked to learn one thing from Him: “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus gave us a pattern to follow—a Model Prayer—that moves prayer from some rote, religious practice to a deeper fellowship with our loving Father who works on our behalf.

**Kie Bowman** is the senior pastor of the multi-site Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

## ***Coming Next Quarter***

**The Full Picture of Christmas** looks at the birth of Christ from the perspective of different people in Scripture. The study is written by Cliff Lea, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Leesburg, Florida.

**Engaging Culture in an Ever-Changing World** examines several areas of life where the world seeks to redefine truth, ethics, and morality. Grant Ethridge, senior pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Hampton Roads, Virginia, leads us to examine these issues in light of God’s unchanging truth.

