

John, I have no doubt but that you have covered this in your material on prayer. On the contrary, I have only recently been led to understand that my views of this particular topic were rather shallow. For example, some conceptions, now that I look back, were merely statistical. For example my previous remarks had been confined to statements such as: "I have noticed, in the many years I have been attending prayer meetings, that only about one in about every 10 of the requests made in the previous meetings have ever been brought up—with thanksgiving—at subsequent meetings; even when the request had been answered." I would often add to that, "It sort of reminds one of the 10 healed lepers and only one returning to 'thank' Jesus for healing him." I now suspect that my concern about the rarity of expressed thankfulness at prayer meetings were also way too much modeled on civility or being polite.

Thanksgiving is a significant part of Prayer

If the reader will allow me two examples, a useful understanding of thankfulness in prayer should begin to emerge. The first example (1): Imagine a casual acquaintance dropping by and when we go to the door to answer the doorbell, they hand us a nicely wrapped package which, when we open it, contains quite a delightful surprise; delightful, even though it has never once crossed our minds to want to have one. But now that it has been given to us, we become immediately excited about having it in our possession and also about the prospect of being able to use it. So, of course, we say to our acquaintance, "thank you, thank you!"

The 2nd example is one which, although it would probably function just as well if it'd been wholly an invention of the writer, did, in point of fact, actually happened to the writer. It occurred in my late pre-teens one time when I was out cross-country skiing with my parents in snow about 10 or 12 feet deep. We had stopped for a chance to catch our breath and enjoy some of the sublime winter scenery of the forest on the side of the mountain. I wandered off and wound up, crawling under a fir tree, pretending that the dip in the snow underneath it would allow me to have shelter should a storm arise. In doing this, I had wandered beyond my parent's hearing. So when I crawled under the tree and discovered—to my surprise and growing fear—that the snow was much softer there (I had gotten

off of my skis to do this). Before I had even come within striking distance of the tree's trunk, I sank down into the snow with barely my head sticking up. As I had nothing to grasp hold of from that position, I very quickly learned that any effort I made to get out seemed to just move the snow around so that I would sink even more deeply into it.

About this time my folks appeared, probably curious about what kind of trouble I had gotten into now, and my dad, with my mother holding on to him, was able to reach my hand and gradually they pulled me out. You may rest assured that my "thanks for helping me out of there," was heartfelt. What this example underlines is that we say, "thank you" when a person has done something and we have done nothing on our part—nothing at all—to bring about the change in the situation that led to a real "thank you" being appropriate.

In sum, the first example's function in leading off our discussion of thanksgiving in prayer was to underline the distinction between real thankfulness and mere politeness or civility. This gets us going in 'the right direction' for a discussion of the kind of thankfulness that the Scriptures encourages to exhibit when we pray.

The 2nd example teaches us that we are thanking God for something He has done. We are thanking God for something in which we had no causal hand in bringing it about—for something he has done without any help whatsoever from us.

The 3rd main point of this little essay can now be stated quite simply, without the need for an example.

When we continue to thank God from prayer meeting to prayer meeting, from private personal prayer to private personal prayer, from family prayer to family prayer, etc., etc., we become more and more conscious of *His* work in our lives thereby *increasing our faith* that our Father does, indeed, hear His believing children's prayers.

I must really confess that I just had not noticed until very recently that introducing real *thanksgiving* (example #1) into our prayer life is an *essential*

aspect of prayer for it increases our faith that He hears us (point #3) and that He can accomplish the things for which we petition Him even though we are painfully aware that we just cannot accomplish it ourselves (example #2). All of which even more encourages and motivates us to go to Our Father in prayer (petitioning, to be accurate.

The reader will, most likely, have noticed that up until now no Scripture references have been given for the propositions presented. To do so. I feared would almost be an affront to the reader because in reading virtually any of Paul's epistles when the apostle prays for a congregation or an individual frequently there is in that same prayer a giving thanks to God for His working. Further, he very often commends to the faithful to whom he is writing that *they* give thanks– and a few times, even going so far as to say that we should give thanks to God continuously. Our Savior, Lord, and Teacher is also recorded as having given thanks to His Father, for instance, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to little children...”

Indeed, I am almost embarrassed to give even the short list which follows because it just touches the surface of the many references to prayer and thanksgiving all in the same context.

Col. 1:3 & 4:2

1Thes 1:2

1Ti. 2:1

Phil. 4:6

And not to completely leave out the Old Testament:

Psalms 116: 17

[And finally, as suggested by Psalm 116 (13-14 & 18-19, I suspect that Thanksgiving in prayer where *we*, as the assembled congregation, are talking to

God is—or should be—one of the key pillars of congregational worship. To do so makes it—worship—all about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and not about ourselves as doers, but only as recipients (thanksgiving) or offering humble petitions (prayer) to have done that which we cannot do.

However, since congregational worship is not the focus of this little essay, I will not attempt to develop this point any further here. (Especially since, e.g., even in Psalm 116 one would have to sort out the role of the “thank offering” within the context of the “peace offering,” and in the New Testament the very close connection between “Thanksgiving” and “praise.”)]

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Having had it pointed out to me that frequently in Scripture when prayer is mentioned thanksgiving is also mentioned, I have concluded, after examining a number of these passages, that Scripture is encouraging us to have thanksgiving frequently coupled with our petitions, thus providing one very important ‘template’ for prayer.

My point in this little essay goes somewhat beyond this discovery and draws from it two uses, as the Puritans were wont to say at the conclusion of their sermons, for the *practical* Christian life, viz:

a) true thanksgiving from the heart [example #1], that is, from the center of who we are as a person, each time that we include it in our prayers *increases our faith that our Father in heaven really is listening to us when we pray* [point #3].

b) increases our confidence (especially in this age of skepticism that spirituality can accomplish anything in the real world except possibly in the mere psychology of the person praying) that God has the power and will to exercise that power to answer serious prayer when we petition him to do what we are unable to accomplish [example #2].

