

# Thanksgiving & Intimacy with God

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Our national day of Thanksgiving was two weeks ago but, according to the Bible, we are to be thankful to God every day, and I believe God would have me give this message now. The subject of this message is walking in thanksgiving as a way to have intimacy with God.

There are many who do not know about God because they have not read the Bible, nor have they considered His creation. Then there are those who have read the Bible, have observed His creation and therefore could know about God, but they don't believe that what the Bible says is true, and are therefore blinded by their sin of unbelief. But thankfully, there are also those who have read the Bible, believe what the Bible says, have open eyes to what God has made, and consequently know about God and who the Bible says He is. These we call believers in God because they know about God, and they believe. All of us are believers in God or we would probably not be here. Then there are those believers in God who have received Messiah Yeshua through the Holy Spirit, have declared Him Lord and have therefore experienced the new birth described in John 3:1-8 but, afterwards, would not say that they experience God's presence daily. In every Messianic and Christian congregation, there are some that believe in God, have received Yeshua into their hearts, have experienced the "new birth," but would not say that they experience walking with God moment by moment, other than by obeying His commandments. These are born-again believers, destined for eternal life, but not currently enjoying God's presence or the reality of His Kingdom on earth to the fullest extent as they could. They experience God from time to time, but confess that they do not know Him intimately as one knows a friend. Some of us here are in that category. I don't know who, but I am confident that what I have said is so. Some here experience God but are aware that there is something more, and have not yet found your way to it. But take heart, because there is a way to have a more intimate relationship with God, and it has to do with thanksgiving.

Today, I want to share with you an understanding that I think God gave me about how to have intimacy with Him. As a matter of fact, Yeshua has already revealed it to us. He has shown us the way to experience God intimately – to know the Father as He knew Him, through what we read in Matthew 26:27-28:

*"Also he took a cup of wine, made the b'rakhah, and gave it to them, saying, "All of you, drink from it! For this is my blood, which ratifies the New Covenant, my blood shed on behalf of many, so that they may have their sins forgiven." (CJB)*

In this Matthew account of that event, Yeshua blessed the *matzot* (the bread) and gave thanks. That is what the CJB translation means by saying that He "made the *b'rakhah*" before he drank the wine and led his disciples in doing likewise. The New King James version translates Matthew 26:27-28 as saying:

*Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (NKJ)*

This is the way the event was described in Mark 14 also, while in Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11, Yeshua gives thanks before partaking of the bread as well.

Until recently, I had not focused on the thanksgiving component of the Lord's Table ceremony, but only on the *baruchot* – the blessings. When I led the *Shulchan Adonai* from memory (without reading one of the Scriptures), I typically said “and then He blessed the bread” ... “and then He blessed the wine”..., and then I proceeded to say the traditional *baruchot* over both the bread and the wine, and did not pause to thank God personally in addition. I am now fully aware that it was not coincidental that Yeshua's thankfulness to His Father in heaven was mirrored in His invitation to His disciples to be intimate with Him – to figuratively take his very being into themselves through the bread (that represented His body), and the wine (that represented His blood), in an attitude of thanksgiving.

Let me show you another Scripture where thankfulness is linked to intimacy with God; it is Philippians 4:6:

*“Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.” (CJB)*

And two verses later Philippians 4:9:

*“Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and seen me doing; then the God who gives shalom will be with you.” (CJB)*

Not worrying about anything and having *shalom* in the face of difficulty requires faith, and having faith comes from hearing God's voice and knowing Him intimately through His voice. Romans 10:17 in the NKJ version reads:

*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (NKJ)*

Also, Psalms 95:2a in the CJB says:

*“Let's come into his presence with thanksgiving.” (CJB)*

This Scripture can be thought of in two ways. The way I previously thought of it was that when we come into His presence during prayer, let us do so with thanksgiving. That is a good way to look at it, but the Hebrew of this verse is open to being translated in another way as well; the Hebrew text says:

נְקַדְמָה פָּנָיו בְּתוֹדָה

*N'kadmah panayn b'todah*

Let's, for a minute, focus on the word "todah" (which means "thanks,") preceded by the vowel "bet-shvah," together pronounced b'todah. According to lexicons, the bet-shvah (pronounced b') can mean "in," "at," "with," or "by." Most versions (including the CJB) translate the bet and shvah preceding the word todah in Psalms 95:2 to mean "with," and so they translate the verse something like:

*"Let's come into his presence with thanksgiving." (CJB)*

(Emphasis on the word "with"). However, if you translate the bet-shvah to mean "by" which is also legitimate, you get the following:

*"Let's come into his presence "by" thanksgiving."*

And since one of the meanings of the English word "by" is "by way of" (or "through"), the Scripture can, in addition to its more common translation, mean:

*"Let's come into his presence "by way of" thanksgiving."*

or:

*"Let's come into his presence "through" thanksgiving."*

This is entirely different than the CJB and other modern translations, and suggests that if we want to achieve intimacy, or improve our intimacy with God, we should turn our attention to walking in continuous thanksgiving. Expressed another way, walking in continuous thanksgiving is a key ingredient (if not "the" key ingredient) in experiencing intimacy with God.

To continue our exploration of the importance of being thankful to God, let's now look at this in the opposite way – the way of not being thankful. Romans 1:20b-22 says of those who knew God but were not thankful to Him:

*".. Therefore, they have no excuse; because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened. Claiming to be wise, they have become fools!" (CJB)*

Indeed, the thankfulness to which Scripture calls us is not only to thank God for the things that we perceive to be blessings, but to be thankful for all things:

*Ephesians 5:18-20: "Don't get drunk with wine, because it makes you lose control. Instead, keep on being filled with the Spirit – sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to each other; sing to the Lord and make music in your heart to him; always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah." (CJB)*

### 1 Thessalonians 5:18

In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua. (CJB)

Always giving “*thanks for everything*” is the key. “*Everything*” means for life itself. It is the way of life prescribed in the Bible – being continually mindful that without God’s graciousness, we would not have life, nor purpose on earth. I came to this understanding early in my born-again life; it made a huge difference in my intimate relationship with God, and I have never looked back.

Interestingly, I had a fore-taste of it in my mid-teen years when I had my first summer job working in a country hospital, at a time when God was not a conscious part of my life. There, on a daily basis, I saw sickness and death and suffering, and I remember so clearly how I compared my own life and health to the plight of the patients there, and how I experienced a deep sense of thankfulness. But at the time, God was not part of my conscious world, and so my thankfulness was FOR things, but not TO anyone. I also remember feeling ill at ease with my thankfulness, because it was not lost on me that my enjoyment of well-being was only possible because of the comparison with the misfortune of others. Nevertheless, that emotional high generated by thankfulness and tempered by guilt, followed me through my teen years and early adulthood, and I am sure that it accounted for my continuous positive attitude toward life, and my satisfaction with whatever circumstance I found myself. It was only after I met God in my middle adult years that I transferred being thankful FOR THINGS to being thankful TO SOMEONE, and that someone was God. And as soon as I made that transfer to God, the guilt I spoke of previously left me because my thankfulness was no longer based on any worldly comparison.

I shared with you on an earlier occasion (when I gave my testimony of coming to faith), that soon after I met God and subsequently met Yeshua, the Scripture verse Genesis 5:24 “*Hanokh (Enoch) walked with God,*” (CJB) deeply impressed me, and I sought that same kind of relationship with God – a relationship in which I could sense God’s presence continually. I am convinced that the combination of desiring it with all my heart, combined with my walk of continuous thanksgiving to God, is what has resulted in God granting me the intimacy for which I asked. Now while it is true that I cannot transfer my relationship with God to others, I can give you the achievable elements of how I acquired it and how you can acquire it. As I have said, it consists of two things, (1) desiring it with all your heart, and (2) walking with a continuous attitude of thankfulness to God for all things in your life. I am convinced that if you do those two things and don’t throw a wrench into it with unrepentant sin (notice I said “unrepentant” sin), that God will give you the desire of your heart to walk with Him in intimacy because Scripture promises it. Psalms 37:4-5 reads:

*“Then you will delight yourself in ADONAI, and he will give you your heart's desire. Commit your way to ADONAI; trust in him, and he will act.” (CJB)*

Since thanksgiving is so crucial to our intimacy with God, I want to spend these next few minutes reading Scriptures about thanksgiving, and then we’ll open this up for a short period of testimonies of thanksgiving and discussion. So let’s begin.

*Psalms 92:2-3(1b-2) “It is good to give thanks to ADONAI and sing praises to your name, 'Elyon, to tell in the morning about your grace and at night about your faithfulness,” (CJB)*

*Psalms 97:12: “Rejoice in ADONAI, you righteous; and give thanks on recalling his holiness.” (CJB)*

*Psalms 100:1-5: “A psalm of thanksgiving: Shout for joy to ADONAI, all the earth! Serve ADONAI with gladness. Enter his presence with joyful songs. Be aware that ADONAI is God; it is he who made us; and we are his, his people, the flock in his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, enter his courtyards with praise; give thanks to him, and bless his name. For ADONAI is good, his grace continues forever, and his faithfulness lasts through all generations.” (CJB)*

*Psalms 105:1: “Give thanks to ADONAI! Call on his name! Make his deeds known among the peoples.” (CJB)*

*Ephesians 5:20: “.. always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah.” (CJB)*

*Colossians 3:16-17: “Let the Word of the Messiah, in all its richness, live in you, as you teach and counsel each other in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude to God in your hearts. That is, everything you do or say, do in the name of the Lord Yeshua, giving thanks through him to God the Father.” (CJB)*

Let's now finish by reading Psalms 136 responsively. I will read the first part of each verse, and let us together say: “for his grace continues forever.”

*“Give thanks to ADONAI, for he is good, for his grace continues forever.  
Give thanks to the God of gods, for his grace continues forever.  
Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who alone has done great wonders, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who skillfully made the heavens, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who spread out the earth on the water, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who made the great lights, for his grace continues forever;  
the sun to rule the day, for his grace continues forever;  
the moon and stars to rule the night, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who struck down Egypt's firstborn, for his grace continues forever;  
and brought Isra'el out from among them, for his grace continues forever;  
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who split apart the Sea of Suf, for his grace continues forever;  
and made Isra'el cross right through it, for his grace continues forever;  
but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Sea of Suf, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who led his people through the desert, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who struck down great kings, for his grace continues forever;  
yes, he slaughtered powerful kings, for his grace continues forever;  
Sichon king of the Emori, for his grace continues forever;*

*and 'Og king of Bashan, for his grace continues forever;  
then he gave their land as a heritage, for his grace continues forever;  
to be possessed by Isra'el his servant, for his grace continues forever;  
who remembers us whenever we are brought low, for his grace continues forever;  
and rescues us from our enemies, for his grace continues forever;  
who provides food for every living creature, for his grace continues forever.  
Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his grace continues forever. (CJB)*

And let us say, "Amen!"