

Thanks.

A coworker who took an unwanted task thinks he's done thankless work. A family member grumbles about feeling unappreciated. So many situations can be improved by saying *thanks*. So why doesn't gratitude flow more easily from our lips—and our hearts?

Thanking might seem unnecessary; we may not see a tangible result. Expressing gratitude can require slowing down, being more thoughtful. It requires humility, acknowledging that we need someone's help. And then there's that word so often sitting by *thanks*: giving. We *give* thanks—or sometimes offer them. A gift requires sacrifice. A gift has a cost: time, effort, value, pride.

But maybe our biggest problem with gratitude is our timing. Sometimes we hold off on “thanks” because we see gratitude as the end point. It's what we say when something is completed, when an issue is resolved. We toss out a quick thanks as we leave the cash register or acknowledge our partner when a project is wrapped. Do we do the same with God?

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. John 6:11 The feeding of the five thousand

*Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.”
John 11:41* Jesus prepares to raise Lazarus

*After taking the cup, he gave thanks... and he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it.
Luke 22:17, 19* The last supper

Listen to Jesus as he gives thanks *before*: before he breaks bread; before he performs a miracle. These stories would all read differently if Jesus thanked his Father later on. To Jesus, gratitude isn't the conclusion of a transaction. Giving thanks is trust. It's part of an ongoing dialogue in relationship.

*Rejoice always, pray continually, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

What if this verse isn't a reminder that we “have to” thank God even when things don't seem good—but an encouragement that we can thank God for what he hasn't done yet? What if our unfiltered prayers of thanks and trust bring us closer to Jesus and make us more like him?

Take a few moments and invite God to fill your heart with gratitude: for who he is, and for what he's done in the past, present, and future. When you're stuck for words, *thanks* is a great place to start. Try praying the words below to Jesus:

I appreciate you more than I've shown you. Thanks for listening—always. Thanks for being you. Thanks for being there. Thanks for what you've already done, and thanks for whatever you're going to do next.

In this space, you are invited to write an old-fashioned thank-you note to Jesus. (Who doesn't love to receive one of those?) You may clip it to the wall open, so that others may read; or folded so that it remains private. You may sign your name, or leave it unsigned. Leave this space with gratitude in your heart, and keep the conversation going.