

THANKFULNESS  
AND  
CONFESSION

*THE WAY TO  
AN OVERFLOWING HEART*

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# THANKFULNESS AND CONFESSION

The Scriptures are filled with wonderful words of the treasures that the Father in heaven has poured out abundantly on His children in His Son, Jesus Christ. Oh, how the Father has loved us in extending mercy and forgiveness toward us, before you or I had requested it, and even before we had sinned against Him. In Christ, the gift of forgiveness was waiting for your sin and mine. At the cost of Christ's blood, the Father cancelled our entire debt; He did not merely make an impossible debt manageable. He was openhearted, welcoming and even drawing people close to Himself. Christ *endured* the insults, misunderstandings, and

pain inflicted on Him by sinners, even carrying the burden of their sin to death on the cross. In His pain, He cried out for His tormentors' forgiveness. We see no distance, self-protection, or impatience in the Son as He suffered for sinners. He chose to embrace death for you and me.

“But God, who is *rich in mercy*, because of *His great love* with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the *exceeding riches* of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. . . . And be kind to one another, *tenderhearted, forgiving* one another, *just as* God in Christ also forgave you” (Eph. 2:4–7, 4:32 NKJV, italics mine).

In a phone conversation in March 2002, a friend excitedly explained how she had just read through Ephesians with a pen in her hand, noting what she saw the Father had given to her in Christ. She then took that list of forty-one blessings and prayed it back to the Father. She simply changed the phrases slightly to make each a prayer of thankfulness. She had read Ephesians many times before but said that it seemed as if she had never read it. The epistle had suddenly come alive in her heart. She was so excited that she had to go get her list and pray through part of it on the phone with me. It was obvious that her spirit had begun to soar.

Two weeks later, a letter arrived from another friend who has been a believer for about fifteen years. Something was different in his expression—a sense of freedom of heart that was not there before. A few days later, we spoke

by phone, and I casually asked him if anything had happened to him. He said that he had recently read through the first two chapters of Ephesians, noting what God had done for him. He had then prayed through those notes and chapters, thanking God for what He had done for him. As he thanked the Father for choosing him before he had done anything and for loving him when he was still an object of wrath, suddenly he realized that for all his years as a Christian he had believed the lie of the Enemy that he was not a good enough Christian for God to love. He said that he had done Bible studies on Ephesians and had missed it. He was obviously encouraged.

Since the New Testament is filled with blessings from the Father, you know many and may have even memorized a few. Do you know from Romans 8:1 that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are



in Christ Jesus?” Since learning that, you’ve never felt condemned, have you?

You probably know that in Christ *all* of our transgressions have been forgiven, and that in Christ, the Father has made us worthy and acceptable. So of course, knowing that, you have never thought that you were not a good enough Christian for God to love, have you?

Likewise, you have never had thoughts that the Father might reject you, have you? Since “perfect love casts out fear,” you never adjust your words out of fear of men and their potential offense, anger or rejection, do you?

*Why are we sometimes inconsistent with what we know?* Is it that the promises of God are unclear, weak, or insufficient? Let’s be honest and admit that the problem lies with us.

Is it that we are not strong enough or have not tried hard enough to trust? Is it that we

need to learn the Scriptures more thoroughly? *The answer to both is no. While learning the Scriptures is important, the solution to our problem is easier yet.*

The way forward is simple. It is to meditate on and rejoice in the glorious riches of our inheritance in Christ. As we revel in all Christ is for us, our weaknesses, trials, and afflictions become places of comfort, strength, pleasure, pure joy, and glory (2 Cor. 1:2–4, 12:9–10, James 1:2, Rom. 5:3).

The problem may be twofold. First, we may know a Scripture passage simply as a point of information, even while our heart refuses to embrace the *reality* of the passage. Secondly, it is not that we stop believing the facts of Christ's power and mercy toward us, but rather that we do not *actively remember* them. Why else would you feel condemned about your sin when you have memorized

Romans 8:1? A man in Christ believes a lie about the Father when he feels condemned for his sin. He believes another lie when he feels condemned for forgetting that he has no condemnation in Christ.

Jesus Christ Himself, in His person, is the truth. He is our holiness, righteousness, and redemption. He has made us perfect, worthy, and acceptable to the Father. In Hebrews 12 we read, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus*, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For *consider Him* who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest

you become weary and discouraged in your souls” (Heb. 12:1–3 NKJV, italics mine).

The Enemy of our souls has many schemes and lies to get you and me to look away from Jesus and to not consider Him. Let us “be strong *in the Lord* and *in the power of His might*. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:10–12 NKJV, italics mine). In Ephesians 1–3, we get a glimpse into the invisible realities of what is “in the Lord” and what is “the power of His might.” You may have read Ephesians repeatedly, done Bible studies on it, or even memorized parts or all of it, and still notice yourself having difficulty standing against the wiles of the devil.

In the short testimonies above and following, there is a common thread of thankfulness to the Father for the riches He has hidden for us in His Son. Notice carefully the *focus* of the thankfulness. It is not on what we or others do or get to do; it is not on what others have done for us or for God; it is not on how we are to respond to what God has done; it is simply on what the Father has done for us in the Son. Notice also the simplicity and intensity of what flows from the heart. Thankfulness is not the only aspect of spiritual warfare, but Ephesians 5:18–21 and Colossians 3:15–17 reveal that should permeate *all* of spiritual warfare. So let's begin at the obvious. Let us often give thanks to the Father for what He has given us in His Son, thus stirring up our hearts, and so begin to be prepared to resist all the wiles of the devil.

For ten years, the Lord has given me good times of prayer several times weekly with

a friend who takes several medications for mental illness. The focus of these times in prayer has been thankfulness for the blessings we have in Christ. Through those years, he listened much to the Bible on tape, recordings of good Bible teaching, radio preaching, and Christian music. He read the Bible and good Christian books. He memorized key Bible verses. But in those times of prayer, he almost never prayed aloud. He seemed to waver between discouragement and depression, hardly ever smiling. Fear and anxiety overwhelmed him almost constantly. One day, he said that he was so discouraged that the only thing he could pray for was his food, and that only rarely.

At that point, nearly three years ago, I gave him a card listing four blessings he had in Christ and asked him to thank the Father daily for them. He began to do that faithfully,

out loud, when alone. We continued to pray together very often, he remaining silent. After about three months, he began to pray the items from his prayer card out loud. After about five months, his demeanor began to rise, and he started smiling. After ten months, he joyfully said one day that the winter blues had not hit him. After one year, he gave the card back and asked for a new one with more blessings on it. When he mentioned once that the rain was depressing him, I suggested that he begin thanking God for the rain. He did so, and the rain became a welcome friend. After a year and a half, he began thanking God for blessings that were not on his card. He also began praying for the needs of other people.

Part of his medication works to counteract voices that he hears. These voices had been a constant temptation to condemnation and to doubt the character of God. Recently, as he was

telling his story to a woman who is plagued by voices, he cheerfully told her that his voices had faded nearly away and that the continual nightmares of the old drug parties had ceased. He attributed the changes to praying his prayer card of thankfulness. Today, he is comfortable praying on the phone. He initiates conversations with other people, something impossible three years ago. He rarely feels condemned and quickly confesses believing that lie. Three years ago, he felt guilty and condemned for the sins of those around him and was insensitive to his own sins. Now he is joyful in confessing his own sins—which he usually notices without help. Three years ago, it would have been hard to find a more depressed person. Nothing changed in his circumstances for which the world could credit the encouragement and joy. Many around him have been surprised and encouraged at the change.



Just recently, the realization struck me that he has been a great blessing to me in this matter as well. During those many years of prayer with this dear brother, the Lord was working the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints deeper into my own heart. Eighteen months after this brother began his “prayer card,” I was diagnosed with cancer. The Father immediately flooded my soul with the riches hidden in Christ, making no room for discouragement. He filled my mind and heart with meditations and songs of these simple glories hidden for all saints in His Son. The ever-expanding prayer card flowed through my mind in the hospital stays, doctor visits, and thoughts of the future.

The intensity of his story continues to strike me more and more. Could not the blessing that this brother has found free other believers from the imaginary chains that

do not bind them? The prayer bookmark attached to the back cover is a refinement of some feeble attempts to communicate this blessing for whoever is interested. This brother was excited to see it. He mentioned that the last item of thanksgiving was especially encouraging; it was new to him. It is the one uncomfortable promise of the Father in the list. Feel free to improve this idea; add more uncomfortable promises as you like. If your experience has been like that of this brother, wavering between discouragement and depression, remember his perseverance and the Father's patience. Months passed as the Father slowly lifted him up. God the Father calls us all ever higher into the glories of the Son. As your vision of the Father and Son expand, you will stand ever firmer and taller in Christ; all the while, in your own mind, you will be disappearing into

smallness and reveling in God's perfect acceptance of you.

Please do not misunderstand and think that this bookmark contains promises to learn. The point is to thank the Father for His tender mercies to you. Thank Him often; do it out loud when you are alone. If you follow my dear brother's example, after some months you will likely find pleasant, and probably unexpected, changes in yourself. Prayer may become a joyful and natural expression for you. You may find yourself thanking the Father as you read Scripture, as the riches seem to flow out of the pages into your heart. You may find a growing freedom to pray aloud with others, and in a way that encourages them. The mercy and forgiveness you have received will begin to overflow to others. You may become the one who offers words of encouragement in conversation. You may even find yourself

eager to speak to others of your riches in Christ. The distance you now feel from others may slowly disappear as your walls of self-protection come down in the presence of the Openhearted One. But do not try to change or even try to notice the changes. Simply begin to notice the glorious riches that are *already* yours in Christ and thank the Father often for what you notice.

Since our loving Father has commanded us to give Him heartfelt thanks always in all situations, thanksgiving is simply a submitting in honesty to the spiritual realities as He has created them. Part of that reality, which came slowly to my dear brother, is confession of sin. Confession is simply agreeing with God. We confess Christ as well as our sins. As we gaze upon Christ and His riches, confession becomes a joyous looking to His cleansing power. As He grows in brightness before

our eyes, we see less of ourselves and become more sensitive to our own sins.

Our sins suppress His glory. Let us be quick and honest in confession. Do you use words like mistake, error, weakness, struggle, not God's best, or imperfection? If so, do you apply them to actions or thoughts that God has called sin, evil, or wickedness? In the book of 1 Samuel, King Saul used excusing words to cover his disobedience. Notice the uncomfortably revealing words that God gave Saul through Samuel: "So Samuel said: 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For *rebellion* is as the sin of *witchcraft*, and *stubbornness* is as *iniquity* and *idolatry*. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (1 Sam. 15:22–23 NKJV, italics mine).

God says that stubbornness is iniquity and idolatry. Do you call it that? Do I? Christ said that He did not come for the righteous but for the wicked. Let's not cover our sins with excuses when the Father has *already* covered them with the blood of His dear Son. That blood provides an infinite ocean of forgiveness. You cannot use words that minimize and excuse your sin without also isolating your heart from the glory of the riches of Christ and from other people. It gets ugly when you realize that this also hides the light of Christ from a condemned world. But when you speak of the evils of your own sin in the light of the riches of Christ, you give two testimonies to the holiness of God and His great love for sinners.

You will need to resist with all God's power the wiles of the devil (sometimes masquerading as Christian teaching) who will tempt you

to use soft and evasive words for your sin. I feel this pressure intensely and often. Reveling in the riches of Christ will slowly draw you to the desired end. For the brother above, it happened this way. He was so confused that he did not realize that he needed to confess as sin his discouragement and depression. Yet the Father was tender with him. But why not take the less painful way? The longer we coddle our sins, the more discipline we need from our loving Father. He is committed to molding us into the image of His dear Son to His glory and as a testimony to this world.

*Dear heavenly Father, thank you for loving us while we were objects of wrath and for making us alive in your dear Son. Thank you for washing us clean in His blood and freeing us from the fear of death. Thank you for making your Son poor so that we through His poverty might become rich. Move our hearts*

*to embrace the cross as your Son embraced it for us. Make us to decrease that your Son may increase. Break us for the blessing of others as you broke your Son for our blessing. Convict us deeply when we excuse and hide our sin. Thank you for flooding our hearts with joy in your Son. In Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.*

As our hearts begin to overflow with the riches of the glory of our inheritance in Christ, should we not expect our relationships with one another in the kingdom to increasingly reflect the following passage? “But be filled with the Spirit, *speaking to one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and *making melody in your hearts* to the Lord, *giving thanks always* for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *submitting to one another* in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:18–21 NKJV, italics mine). Oh, what a glorious vision this is of joyous and



openhearted fellowship in the Father and the Son with one another! Are you willing? Am I willing? Let's choose this together.

Following are the first two chapters of Ephesians. You may want to underline the blessings you have in Christ and thank the Father for them.

# EPHESIANS 1 AND 2

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is

the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power

and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us

alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the

world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.


For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.





Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the

apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.



# RECOMMENDED READING

Below is a list of good books and booklets for a higher vision of thankfulness and confession, as well as for thriving in the Christian life. Those marked with this logo  are available at [ccmbooks.org](http://ccmbooks.org).

- |                                                                                                                         |                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|  <i>How to Be Free from Bitterness</i> | Jim Wilson                          |
| <i>Agape Leadership</i>                                                                                                 | Robert Peterson & Alexander Strauch |
| <i>The Autobiography of George Muller</i>                                                                               | George Muller                       |
|  <i>Being Christian</i>              | Jim Wilson                          |
|  <i>The Calvary Road</i>             | Roy Hession                         |
| <i>Classic Christianity</i>                                                                                             | Bob George                          |
|  <i>Continuous Revival</i>           | Norman Grubb                        |

<i>The Cure</i>	John Lynch, Bruce McNicol & Bill Thrall
<i>Dorie: The Girl Nobody Loved</i>	Dorie Van Stone
<i>Evidence Not Seen</i>	Darlene Deibler Rose
<i>God's Way of Peace</i>	Horatius Bonar
<i>Good News for Those Trying Harder</i>	Alan Kraft
 <i>Grace Upon Grace</i>	Jim Wilson
<i>The Great Good Thing</i>	Andrew Klavan
<i>The Hiding Place</i>	Corrie Ten Boom
<i>I Dared to Call Him Father</i>	Bilquis Sheikh
<i>Mere Christianity</i>	C.S. Lewis
 <i>Revolutionary Love</i>	Festo Kivengere
 <i>The Spirit is Moving</i>	Festo Kivengere
<i>Thankfulness: Even When It Hurts</i>	Susan Lutz
<i>Three Free Sins</i>	Steve Brown
<i>The Value of Trials</i>	Mrs. Judson Elliott
 <i>Victory in Christ</i>	Charles Trumbull
<i>We Would See Jesus</i>	Roy Hession

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