

Paul tells us that prayers should not just be a long list of requests.

[Slide 1] God is not Father Christmas waiting to fulfil our every want or desire. No. Paul tells us that our prayers ought to contain a mix of thanksgiving with our requests. For example, his letters to the Philippians, to Timothy, and to the Colossians include the following advice: [Slide 2]

in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6, NIV)

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people (1 Timothy 2:1, NIV)

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Colossians 4:2, NIV)

A while ago, I became concerned that if we look at the weekly bulletin, our prayers may just become a big wish list. So now the prayer points on the back of our bulletin each week include suggestions of things that we can praise and thank God for. Yet I still think it needs some tweaking, and the rest of today's sermon will explain why.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains it slightly differently to those other letters. He says, [Slide 3]

And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:20, NIV)

Here Paul doesn't just say to add some thanksgiving to our prayers, in the way we add spices to flavour a meal. No, he calls us to thank God for EVERYTHING. That means everything!

He is saying, 'let's not just thank God for the sunshine, the rain and the trees before launching into our wish list.' He is saying that

for each item on our wish list, let's actually find something to be thankful for about that item or situation.

Many of you have probably heard the following story before. But I believe it's worth repeating.

It was in the middle of their prayer time, in the middle of a POW camp, during World War II. Corrie Ten Boom was suddenly horrified. [Slide 4] Her sister, Betsie, had the gall to thank God for the fleas. Those very same blood-sucking insects that were in their dorm, in their clothes, in their bed and that continued to bite them in their sleep.

Corrie was thinking, 'sure we can thank God for sunshine, rain, and a bed to sleep in – even if it is rather uncomfortable and full of fleas. But how can someone seriously thank God for those annoying fleas?'

Well as it turned out, it was a blessing. Because their dormitory was infested with those blood-sucking creatures, the German prison guards stayed away. This meant that Corrie and Betsie could now hold bible studies in their dorm without any fear of guards interrupting them. How good is that? Thank God for the fleas.

Let me give another illustration. Mary related to me a time when she had received prayer for healing. Now Mary wasn't instantly healed at that point. However the man who prayed for her sensed God was saying that Mary should [Slide 5] thank God for the healing. This seemed a bit strange, because Mary was still in considerable pain. Why should she thank God for something he hadn't actually done? Nevertheless, and still somewhat sceptical, Mary thanked God for the healing. ... but nothing changed.

Later she was reminded to again thank God for the healing. So she did, but the situation still didn't seem to improve. A few days later, she was reminded a third time to thank God for the healing. So, somewhat begrudgingly, Mary expressed her gratitude through partly clenched teeth, and the pain instantly disappeared. She had been healed. Thank God for the healing.

Our Gospel readings the past few weeks have been from John chapter 6. This chapter begins with Jesus holding a schoolboy's tiny lunch box in comparison to the large crowd of thousands of hungry faces before him. It didn't seem like enough, [Slide 6] but Jesus gave thanks to his heavenly Father anyway.

And you might recall, that it was after they gave thanks that the two disciples who had just walked to Emmaus suddenly realised that the resurrected Jesus was there with them (Luke 24:30).

Now you've probably heard the old sayings like, [Slide 7] thank God for dirty dishes, because it means you've had food to eat. Thank God for a bed to make, because it means you've had somewhere to sleep. Thank God for a messed up home, because you have somewhere to live. While these are great reminders, these sayings can also sound somewhat trivial, corny and cliché.

Today I want to put a greater challenge before us all. I'm interested to know if, like Betsie, we could actually [Slide 8] thank our heavenly Father for the adversity we are currently experiencing in our life. Could we thank him for the aches and pain we experience on cold mornings? Could we thank our heavenly Father for the problems we are experiencing at the moment? And for something a bit more concrete, could we actually thank our Heavenly Father for the drought?

Let's take a moment to think about this. What are some things that we could thank our heavenly Father for because of times of

drought? I'm not just talking about thanking God for our family or health in times of drought. What is it the drought does that we can actually be thankful for? [Slide 9]

- Thanks for the generosity of the community
- Thanks for the generosity of the nation
- Thanks for the way the community and nation pulls together, and the way this helps to build community (otherwise farmers in WA may never cross the great dividing Nullarbor, or famers in Tasmania may never bridge the Bass Strait to meet or connect with farmers in NSW).
- Thanks for our Heavenly Father's promise to provide for us.
- Thanks for the tangible reminder that we are reliant on him to provide for our needs. That we can't do it all on our own.
- Thanks that we can know that it will not last forever. It will rain again.

In the feeding of the crowd of thousands, Jesus teaches us to give thanks, even if it doesn't seem like enough. Mary's story teaches us to give thanks for things that have not yet happened. And Betsie teaches us to give thanks even for the adversity in our life.

Paul tells us to do all this in the name of Jesus Christ. For he is the one who loves you and cares about you so much, that he was willing to come to this earth and die in the place of you and me. Jesus Christ is also the one who was raised to life again three days later. It is through him that we have hope for a better tomorrow. As the Psalmist says, [Slide 10]

Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning. (Psalm 30:5, NLT)

Or in a paraphrased version:

The nights of crying your eyes out will give way to days of laughter.(Psalm 30:5, MSG)