



BIBLEWAY MINISTRIES

MAKING A DIFFERENCE—THE BIBLE WAY



Christmas – Don't Wait to Celebrate

In the days of the prophet Isaiah, Israel faced some difficult times overshadowed by political and military threats from surrounding nations. Israel's King Ahaz found himself under pressure at the increasing emergence of Israel's enemies. As a result, he sent tribute to Assyria in hopes of creating a coalition.

The tense times created a sense of instability among the people of Israel, causing them to wonder if God was still there or if He had altogether abandoned them. During this melancholy time, God gave a message of encouragement to Isaiah which would remind the people of a coming Deliverer who would provide hope and redemption.

When Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah, he wrote, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:6 KJV) The child's description reminded Israel He would not only be their Redeemer; He would be God with us.

History offered no precedent for such an experience. According to Isaiah, the Messiah would bear four magnificent titles:

- He would be a **Wonderful Counselor**: He would be the Source of perfect wisdom. During Jesus' lifetime, His counsel exceeded that of even King Solomon and will stand through the ages of time!
- He would be a **Mighty God**: Jesus was and is not just a man but also fully God. His power and might are beyond our comprehension. The earth stands at attention before His greatness, which is like none other.

- He would be an **Everlasting Father**: He is our Heavenly Father who, like a good shepherd, provides for us so we have no need of want.
- He would be a **Prince of Peace**: When we let Him, He produces true and lasting peace. His peace is not just the absence of conflict but a deep sense of well-being and harmony with God.

In a scary world filled with constant turmoil and pain, the last two holidays of the year, Thanksgiving and Christmas, may seem like just another day. But Isaiah's message reminds us what it means to have God with us.

Some look toward Christmas Day to enjoy gifts from family and friends; but we look at each day as our Christmas realizing, in the Messiah crucified and risen again, we have the greatest Gift ever given! If you understand the power of this message, there's no need to wait for the rest of the country to celebrate on December 25 because you are experiencing a Merry Christmas today!

- Dr. L.W. Edwards



The Gift of Gratitude

Long before the days of email, SMS, messaging apps and social media, people used to communicate by — believe it or not — writing letters. By hand. We've come a long way since then. The advent of computers has transformed the way we communicate. Now with a few keystrokes, we can type a message and send it across the world. When we do get mail, it's mainly bills, advertising or charitable donation requests. Boring, isn't it? Mail just isn't as personal as it used to be.

Which is why first-century members at the church in Ephesus treated the arrival of the Apostle Paul's letter like the rare gift it was. Their suspense and wonderment crescendoed to a climax as they gathered together to unseal the parchment and pore over every word.

They found a priceless gift tucked away in the first few paragraphs. Their beloved friend and spiritual mentor had written, *"I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."* (Ephesians 1:16) If you're wondering what to get your friends and family for Christmas this year, take some notes from Paul's playbook. He skipped the stores and gave the gift of gratitude.

The Habit of Gratitude

From childhood, we have learned to express gratitude after receiving something from someone else (e.g. – a gift, compliment or favor). Paul flipped traditional wisdom on its head and gave thanks before others could do anything for him. He was sincerely grateful for them, and they were encouraged by his kind words.

And we can do the same thing. Here's how. . . . [UCLA Health](#) offers the following tips to show our gratitude for others (I'll include their biblical counterparts as well):

1. Be specific about why you are thankful for someone else. *"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."* (1 Thessalonians 2:13, emphasis added) Rather than merely saying "Thanks" after your kids complete their chores, try saying something like this: "Thank you for doing your chores with a good attitude each week. I appreciate the way you are becoming a reliable helper."

2. Tell others you appreciate them. Don't keep your gratitude a secret or leave the words unspoken. *"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers."* (1 Thessalonians 1:2) I remember one pastor who regularly thanked me for my service at church. His words always brought me encouragement.

Gratitude - Good for Your Health?

By the way, did you know there are health benefits of expressing our gratitude for others? Scientific research reveals the following advantages:

- Lower depression
- Reduced anxiety
- Improved heart health
- Stress relief
- Healthier sleep

Apparently, the Christians at Ephesus were not the only ones who benefited from Paul's gift of gratitude. Paul's own health improved as a result.

During the holiday season, it isn't uncommon to experience the side effects of our busyness: depression, anxiety, over-the-top stress levels, lack of sleep and even heart trouble. Giving thanks for others reverses these harmful ailments.

I know it's easy to talk about practicing intentional gratitude for others — until we're confronted with life's challenges: Job insecurity. Health challenges. Financial pressures. Family conflict. Car trouble. A ruined Christmas dinner. Those times when it is most difficult for us to consider others on account of our own distress are when we most need to share the gift of gratitude. The cashier at the store needs to hear you appreciate her patience and professionalism with the long line of shoppers ahead of you just as much as you need to rush home to complete your gift wrapping. It's in these moments the gift of gratitude delivers the strongest encouragement.

If you want to give the perfect gift someone will appreciate long after the holidays, try giving the gift of gratitude. Be specific about why you're thankful for them and vocal in expressing your appreciation. You'll encourage them and — who knows? — you might just improve your own health as well.

- Cam Edwards

