The Gratitude Protocol

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving.
Psalm 100:4

Psalm 100 contains three protocols for prayer. The first is the gratitude protocol. Our initial approach toward heaven must always be with thankfulness: “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving” (Ps. 100:4). The “gates” represent the doorway into God’s presence—the threshold to the throne of God. Man’s initial approach to God should be with gratitude. Psalm 100:4 goes further by saying, “Be thankful unto him, and bless his name.” We can take things for granted, or we can take things with gratitude, but we can’t take them both ways. Daily God heaps blessings upon us and bears our burdens (see Ps. 68:19). Gratitude is the pathway into God’s blessings as we acknowledge His favor. Psalm 103 directs us to “bless the LORD” and not forget His many benefits (Ps. 103:2). Gratitude is simply rehearsing all the advantages, favors, kindnesses, and mercies God has bestowed upon us. We must not get so busy adding up our troubles that we forget to count our blessings. Thanking God will move us from a mentality of defeat into a stance of faith. The psalmist said, “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD” (Ps. 116:17).

But what about those times when we are overwhelmed, exhausted, depleted, perplexed, and baffled? In our heart we do not feel grateful. In times like this, we should pray out loud, “Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus.” As we keep repeating this faith-based prayer, it will bless God’s heart and help us. Thanking God should be a deliberate, willful act in times when our emotions are lacking.

We should not fall for the notion that we should not say thank you unless we feel thankful. Our emotions are ever changing and unreliable. We should pay no attention to our feelings. Spiritual maturity does what is right because it is right. Eventually, our emotions will catch up with our verbalized thanksgiving. Gratitude is habit forming. We must daily enter into God’s gates with thanksgiving.
We should thank God not only when things are good but choose to thank Him because *He* is good, especially when our circumstances are bad. Most anybody can thank God when He gives us things, but Job praised the Lord when He took things from him. Job blessed the Lord in the worst of times and refused to think the worst about God (see Job 1:21). Job chose to bless the Lord in his misery, and so can we! Thanking God with no emotional backup is not hypocrisy. It demonstrates trust in God.

We should never begin our prayer time with a “grocery list” of requests. We should always consider our present position (we are forgiven, justified, adopted, and accepted) in light of our former condition (we were lost, estranged from God, and doomed). Then we should enter His gates with gratitude.

God gives and forgives, so we should give thanks! When God gives, we should thank Him. When God forgives, we should thank Him. Both God’s giving and forgiving call for thanksgiving. “Gratitude to God makes even a temporal blessing a taste of heaven,” said William Romaine.

We should not only thank God for forgiving the sins we’ve committed and confessed, but we should also thank Him for the sins we did not commit. We may have done badly, but we could have done much worse! What we have done is insignificant compared to what we might have done. We can express our appreciation for God’s restraining grace in our lives.

“He who forgets the language of gratitude can never be on speaking terms with happiness,” said Neil Strait. Our happiness in life is in direct proportion to our gratitude.

When I was in high school, a special speaker came to our church. I visited with him, and he recommended that I go on a “quarantine of thanksgiving” — go three days without asking God for anything. I thought this was a strange idea, so I asked him, “Are you telling me not to pray for three days?”

“No,” he said. “I am recommending that you spend the next three days thanking God and not asking for anything.”

I decided to give it a try. It seemed awkward at first, because most of my praying had consisted of asking God for things. Now I was forced to think about what I was praying. It required effort to isolate my blessings and benefits and thank God for them individually. But the longer I thanked God, the more I realized how fortunate I was.

Not only did I thank God for all His benefits to me, but I also started thanking God for my problems. The Bible says that we should be “giving thanks
always for all things unto God” (Eph. 5:20). This verse does not make any distinction between good things and bad things. It says to be constantly giving thanks “for all things.” First Thessalonians 5:18 states, “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” Not everything is good, but God is good all the time. So I thanked God for problems, difficulties, convictions over sin, and even temptations. I began to view these adversities as opportunities to trust the Lord.

After three days of intentional gratitude, I realized how blessed I was. I also began to grasp that when I spent time thanking God for my blessings and problems, I would never run out of material to thank Him for!

**Reflection**

1. We can take things for granted, or we can take things with gratitude, but we can’t take them both ways.
2. We should not get so busy adding up our troubles that we forget to count our blessings.
3. We should always consider our present position in light of our former condition.
4. Our happiness in life is in direct proportion to our gratitude.

**Application**

1. Count your blessings. Thank God for the mercies and benefits you have received from Him.
2. Tell the Lord thank you for forgiving the sins you have confessed. Then thank God for the sins you have not committed.
3. Dedicate yourself to a three-day quarantine of thanksgiving, or at least a season of gratitude—thanking God only.
4. Practice the gratitude protocol as you rise every morning. Better yet, thank God for a new day before you rise.

This chapter was taken from “Approaching God’s Throne – Biblical Protocols for Prayer” by Harold Vaughan