

GIVE THANKS TO GOD

Ephesians 5:1-20

Key Verse 5:20

“Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Around seven years ago, I and Missionary Esther stood here to say “good-bye;” then we went to Uganda as silver missionaries. Six years and eight months quickly passed, and we are here. We praise God and give thanks to him for his amazing grace and mercy on us. We thank you for love and prayer and supports in various ways. When we came back, we have found that many things have changed; young infants in mother’s arm at that time have now become big boys and girls. Boys became young men and some reached the age of marriage. Many have become grandparents. God changed the atmosphere of our worship service to be more student-centered and young leaders have taken charge of important roles. Praise God!

In Uganda, they don’t celebrate Thanksgiving Day as we do. When we sit around and share thanksgiving topics, many of them say, “thank God for the gift of life.” I was amazed by their view of life as a gift of God. They thank God for all God’s provisions and pray for that. Indeed, unless God provides rain, sunshine, oxygen and morning dew in the dry season, all living things including human beings will perish soon or later. Thank God for all these provisions free of charge. Personally I come to know that there is power in thanksgiving. There is a word in Eastern Africa saying, “Mambo Sawa Sawa,” which means, “things are already getting better,” when we thank God. We thank God for all that God has done in and through us in 2016. Amen.

Ephesians 1:10b says, **“...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”** This is the theme of the book of Ephesians. In Ephesians chapter 5, Paul presents Christian life styles which contrast those of this world. Through Christian life style God wanted his people to realize the theme of Ephesians. A life that exhibits thanksgiving and peace is desired by us all. Let’s learn from St. Paul what lifestyle we should pursue so that we may give thanks to God always and in everything.

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I. “Be imitators of God” (1-2)

Look at verse 1. **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children....”** When I read this verse, I am awestricken knowing that I am an unholy sinner. Then how can I be an imitator of God who is the most holy and righteous? Regardless what I am, the word says, **“Be imitators of God.”** To you also, the word says, **“Be imitators of God.”** 1 Corinthians 4: 16 says, **“Therefore I urge you to imitate me.”** This tells us how much St. Paul strived to imitate the Lord Jesus and be like him.

To **“be imitators”** means to learn from someone else in order to master something or some skill. Once I saw a few little Ugandan girls learning roller skating at an apartment compound area. They followed after their teacher exactly what their teacher was acting. Some fell down forward and some backward time and again. Some hit their butts hard on the ground and cried with tears for pain. Yet they did not give up and kept imitating their teacher. In a few weeks, I saw them roller skating with helmets, with smiles on their faces and going full speed. They were so beautiful and happy. Likewise, without imitation, we forever remain mediocre or worse. Verse 1 says, **“Be imitators of God.”** Jesus said to his disciples, **“Follow me.”** It mean to imitate Jesus. The Bible teaches its readers to imitate Jesus and eventually to become little Jesus.

To imitate is not easy. But Imitation and repetition are important steps of learning. Late Dr. Samuel Lee imitated his English teacher until his neck and jaw were sore to make a proper organic base to speak American English. After some time, he asked Mother Barry what his English speaking sounded like. I heard she said to him, “Well, there are all kinds of English.” In his entire life, he imitated Jesus: his faith, shepherd heart, prayer life, disciple training, Bible teaching and Jesus’ world mission command. As a result, he could leave behind classic Bible study materials. Many UBF staff shepherds have been imitating his lifestyle. As we see today, there are many outstanding layman Bible speakers and servants of God all over the world. He also left eight spiritual legacies for us to imitate.

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Who or what, then, should we imitate? Let's read verse 1. **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.”** It is one thing to imitate other people to learn some skill or technique. But Paul says that children of God must be imitators of God. To be imitators of God is more than just coming to church. To imitate God is to learn his word diligently and his heart and mind and grow to be like God. To imitate God is to grow in the fullness of God. We can really imitate God when we are sure that we are dearly loved children of God. In John's gospel, the writer John never misses to say that he was the loved one of the Lord Jesus. This was his blessed assurance. David is known as a man after God's own heart. This is the shepherd heart of God. With this he became a ruler and shepherd for God's people. I was born in a mountain village of South Korea. Accordingly, my heart was as small as that of a sparrow and I was fearful. My vision was no more than beyond my nose. But through Bible study, I learn awesome God who is God Almighty Creator and who is faithful and who loves the world he created, not missing even one. That's why God has sent many missionaries thousand of miles away from home to the ends of the earth to preach the gospel. Now I pray for my six grandchildren that God may raise them all to be missionaries and send them out to the ends of the earth. Yet I did not get their parent's consent. But I know our Father God loves the world mission most. Amen. Then how can we be imitators of God?

First, “live a life of love.” Let's read verse 2. **“... and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”** We imitate God when we live a life of love. The phrase, **“live a life of love,”** is very beautiful. It inspires us to overcome our selfishness and our differences with others to live a life of love. People often think of love as a feeling or being loved endlessly, but according to the Bible, love is expressed as a lifestyle. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 say, **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”** All of these things about love are not so much about how we feel as much as they are about how we live. In the RSV it says, **“Walk in love.”** There are so many good examples of those who lived a life of love: Rev. Yang Won Sohn who adopted the person who killed his beloved two sons; Corrie Ten Boom who forgave the Nazis for killing her family members and brought the message of

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Christ's love and forgiveness to countless people after World War II; Mother Teresa who loved the poorest of the poor and sickest of the sick in India though she was not an Indian. **"Live a life of love"** sounds good but it does not sound easy. How can we do so? It is impossible with human effort, but we can when our hearts are touched by God's love. Look at verse 2 again. **"...and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."** Jesus called his disciples friends when they obeyed his commands and he died for his friends. May God bless each of us to live the most beautiful life – a life of love through learning Christ's sacrifice for our sins.

Then how much should we live a life of love? 1 John 3:16 says, **"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."** We learn from Jesus that there is no limit to live a life of love because Jesus loved us to the point of death and we ought to do the same for our brothers. During the international Bible conference, we heard what God is doing in faraway countries through his servants. A missionary's life is not glamorous; instead it is a life of love embracing all kinds of sheep. Some of them have no stable financial resources. Many struggle to overcome language barriers, cultural barriers and loneliness. Some struggle with their health. Some are under supervision because of Bible teaching in Moslem and communist countries. Some worry about their children's education. Why, then, do they remain in the mission field? One woman missionary answered; "Because we love them as our Lord Jesus Christ loved us as and sacrificed to God." She is still there, living a life of love and God has blessed her ministry. We are amazed by their persistence in their mission fields carrying the cross of mission. It is because they want to live a life of love as Christ has loved them. We thank God for our precious coworkers living a life of love in world mission fields. We are obliged to remember them in our prayers. Let us remember sick missionaries name by name and pray for them.

Let's read verses 3-4. **"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."** We must not have even a hint of these things in our lives and among our Christian community. It is because our Father God is pure and he

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sees us. Let's read verse 5 together: **"For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."** Anyone who falls into greed loses his spiritual discernment and becomes an idolater; he will have no inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ.

Instead we must be ready to give thanks to God in any situation. The life of love is characterized by thanksgiving to God and to one's neighbor. A famous British preacher, Sir Charles Spurgeon, said, "God gives candle light to those who are thankful for a kerosene lamp. To those who are thankful for candle light, God gives electrical light. To those who are thankful for electrical light, God gives sunlight. To those who are thankful for sunlight, God gives eternal light in the kingdom of God where there is no need of light because there is the glory of God always. One woman missionary in Uganda used to prepare a handful of popcorn, or a peanut butter-jelly sandwich, or a couple of candies, or a cup of cold water for her one-to-one Bible students. They received it with two hands, some with British style kneeling. They expressed their thankful hearts for a small act of love. The famous late Rev. Han always said," Only thank God for his grace." From his thanksgiving life, many saw the peace of heaven and see Jesus in his face.

Second, "Live as children of light" (8-14). To be imitators of God we live as children of light. Let's read verse 8a. **"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."** Paul says that in the past, we were not only in darkness but also we were darkness itself. Wherever we went, we also brought darkness with us. One person who came to our worship service for the first time said that everybody looked so bright. She also heard people laughing a lot during the message. She wondered, "What's so funny?" On the other hand, a shepherdess noticed a person looked so dark and gloomy. It was a comment on one's spiritual condition reflected from within. However, after she welcomed Jesus into her heart, she was no longer dark. What a wonderful change in Jesus! All Christians are light in the Lord. Instead of bringing darkness, we bring Jesus' light wherever we go. Jesus' light brings forgiveness, love and hope. Jesus' light gives meaning to our lives. We become apostles of light in the Lord Jesus. Praise Jesus! Amen.

How can we do so? Let's read verses 8b-10. **"Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)**

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and find out what pleases the Lord.” In Jesus, we are light. There is no room for darkness. We should not be angels in church and devils at home. Instead we must consistently live out our new identities as children of light and bear good fruit. This requires finding out what pleases the Lord. So, children of light must study the Bible, pray and then put God’s word into practice. Matthew 5:16 says, **“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deed and praise your Father in heaven.”** Our 15 HBF members visited Uganda this year to practice what they have learned from Jesus. The youngest member was brother Moses Magardician. He performed his mission by imitating older members. On the way home, he carried a heavy text book back to Chicago with joy. It helped me to move. Look at verse 11. **“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.”** Children of light stay away from the fruitless deeds of darkness. Look at verse 12 and let’s read it together, **“For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”** They should not even talk about what is done in darkness because those deeds are so shameful. Darkness pervades the world but children of light drive it out by shining Jesus’ light. Children of light also expose the fruitlessness of darkness so that people may see it and turn away from it and have a new start in Jesus. Let’s live as children of light!

II. “Give thanks to God the Father always” (15-20). Let’s read verses 15-16 together. **“Be very careful, then how you live – not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”** We know the meaning of, **“Be very careful.”** It is God’s imperative for his dear children. It says, **“Be very careful how you live.”** In particular we need wisdom to make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Outwardly, and to the eyes of unbelievers the days look nice because there are plenty of good things to enjoy and for pleasure. But when we look at the world with the eyes of the Bible, the days are evil; and our growing children are exposed to it and are at risk to be influenced. But we don’t have to be discouraged or to be fearful because we can pray diligently for them and we can teach them the word of God. Therefore, we must make the most of every opportunity to serve God’s purpose for the Lord and his gospel. In fact, every opportunity is an opportunity to glorify God. St. Paul was the person who made the most of every opportunity. Once he was on trial before a Roman governor Felix and his wife Drusilla. But he did not defend the case for his release. Instead he defended the gospel of Jesus fearlessly and he discoursed

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to the governor about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come. Early in the morning, coworkers come to Chicago UBF center and pray for world mission and our beloved children and God's flock living in evil days. Let us pray more fervently till our Lord Jesus returns with glory and power.

Look at verse 17. **“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”** Fools live according to their sinful nature but truly wise people understand what God’s will is because God’s will is the best all the time. Look at verse 18, and let’s read it together: **“Do not get drunk on wine, which lead to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”** God does not want us to get drunk and become party animals. We know wine is a potent weapon of the devil which has ruined numberless lives: their health, careers, and families. There are worldwide wine related crimes every day. Despite this, wine business is booming. Then what is God’s will for us? We must be filled with his Holy Spirit. What is the result when we are filled with the Holy Spirit? Let’s read verses 19 and 20 together: **“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord. Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** In Uganda I saw many singing and smiling babies in their mom’s arms. Likewise, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit we speak and sing to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. God’s will for us is to sing and make music to him in our hearts that expresses our thanks to him. We have many reasons to sing songs of thanks to God. We can sing songs of thanks to God meditating his deep love and saving grace through his Son Jesus. Look at verse 19b **“...sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”** When you go to Uganda, from early morning you will hear all kinds of bird singing soprano, alto and base...sounds like rolling silver bells. They praise God for beautiful creation and good morning and good habitats. When the land goes into dry season, it is indeed dry and dusty; Missionary Esther and her Bible student sing hymns relating to rain drops: “Mercy drops round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.” Then in a few weeks we hear cool sounds of showers. When we make music in our hearts, we can continue to sing while eating and even in bed and at work because It goes on in our hearts. Let’s make music from early morning to evening in our hearts to the Lord. According to world report, Nigerians have the highest happiness index though they are poor and loaded with troubles. It is because Christians are thankful to God for everything. May God change the history of grumbling to that of praising and thanksgiving to God. When we

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thanks to God, we give credit to God for his sovereignty. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “...**give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**” Many years ago, during the Korean civil war, one pastor’s two sons were shot to death for being Christians and witnessing to Jesus. Nobody wanted to conduct the funeral service for them because they could not find a word to comfort their parents. So their father, Rev. Sohn, did. He presented nine thanksgiving topics at the service; I just want to introduce three of them: first that God allowed his household two martyrdoms in one day, second, they became glorious citizens in heaven, third, he could understand God’s deep love and God gave him faith to overcome his *sorrow*..... he praised God.” May God fill our hearts with beautiful songs of thanksgiving to God always and in everything. Let’s read verses 19 and 20 together.