

# Thanks Living

## Stu Epperson Jr. on Gratitude, Grace, Grief, and Giving Thanks in Everything

### Program Summary

In this Thursday edition of Mark & Friends, guest host Donna Leland welcomes fellow broadcaster and author Stu Epperson Jr. to talk about his Moody Publishers book, Thanks Living, and the biblical call to cultivate Christ-centered gratitude every day. Stu traces the book to an extended study of 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and explains that gratitude is not denial of grief, loss, disappointment, or pain. Rather, Christian thanksgiving is rooted in grace - what Jesus has done, who He is, and the hope believers have in Him. Donna presses into the difficult question of gratitude during suffering, and Stu points to people who have displayed deep thankfulness in the midst of cancer, disability, and hardship. He describes gratitude as a practical weapon against cynicism and despair because giving thanks is an intentional act of faith: recognizing that God is at work, staying connected to Jesus, and asking what can be received with gratitude even in a hard circumstance. The conversation also challenges listeners not to become so accustomed to God's goodness that they stop noticing it. Expressing thanks tangibly, remembering people who helped form our faith, and engaging others with the good news of Jesus can restore perspective. The result is more than an attitude of gratitude; it is 'Thanks Living' - a life increasingly shaped by grace, thanksgiving, hope, and witness.

### Key Takeaways

Biblical gratitude is rooted in grace and ultimately in what Jesus has done for us.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 calls believers to give thanks in everything, not to pretend that every circumstance itself is pleasant.

Gratitude does not deny grief, loss, disappointment, physical pain, or suffering.

Some of the deepest gratitude can emerge in painful seasons when God's grace becomes especially precious.

Thanksgiving is an action and a choice; I can decide to give thanks even when my emotions have not caught up.

Christ-centered gratitude grows as I stay connected to Jesus and remember that I need Him on good days as much as bad days.

Beginning and ending the day with 'Thank You, Jesus' can help make gratitude a practiced rhythm rather than an occasional feeling.

Difficult circumstances can become prompts for prayer, intercession, humility, and deeper dependence on God.

Remembering how God saved me and the people He used in my spiritual formation can renew gratitude that has become familiar.

Expressing thanks visibly and tangibly - through words, notes, calls, or letters - can encourage others and make gratitude contagious.

Comfort can dull gratitude when God's gifts become so normal that I focus mainly on what I still want.

Engaging people who do not know Jesus can restore perspective by reminding me of the eternal hope and grace I have received.

Christian gratitude becomes part of our witness when people see hope and thanksgiving that cannot be explained merely by favorable circumstances.

### Scripture References

1 Thessalonians 5:18, Romans 8:28, Philippians 4:4-7, Colossians 3:15-17, John 14:1-3, 1 Peter 3:15, Psalm 103:1-5, Ephesians 2:8-9, James 1:17, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

### Quote of the Day

"You can't complain and grumble and be grateful at the same time."

### Broadcast Notes

Donna Leland introduces Stu Epperson Jr. as founder of the Truth Network, host of Truth Talk, a fellow broadcaster, and author of the Moody Publishers book Thanks Living. Stu says the project began seven or eight years earlier while preparing for a men's Bible group called Wednesday in the Word. His study of 1 Thessalonians 5:18 began to 'study him,' and he developed what he calls the five A's of 5:18 as a memorable framework for gratitude. Stu argues that

Christ-centered gratitude is especially needed in a culture accustomed to complaint despite extraordinary material blessings. He grounds thanksgiving not primarily in possessions but in grace and the work of Jesus. Donna then raises grief, loss, disappointment, and physical pain, asking how gratitude can coexist with suffering without denying it. Stu recalls a former college professor with stage-four cancer who was grateful for how God had used his life and was homesick for heaven. He also points to Joni Eareckson Tada as an example of joy and gratitude amid long-term disability. Stu says gratitude in difficult circumstances recognizes supernatural grace that is not dependent on circumstances. He then explains elements of his 1 Thessalonians 5:18 framework: 'in everything' describes the amount or breadth, 'give thanks' is the action, God's will is the aim, and access is through Jesus. He encourages beginning and ending each day with 'Thank You, Jesus,' making lists of blessings, and even asking God what can be thanked for in a difficult situation. A troubling phone call that morning became an example: rather than simply reacting, Stu thanked God for the circumstance because it moved him to pray and intercede for a hurting person. The conversation turns to remembering grace. Stu urges listeners to recall who introduced them to Scripture, church, Christian radio, or the gospel and to express gratitude tangibly - perhaps even writing an old Sunday school teacher. Donna observes that longtime believers can become so accustomed to God's goodness that they stop noticing it. Stu responds by pointing to the temporary nature of this life, the hope of heaven, and the perspective gained by engaging people who do not know Jesus. Gratitude then becomes part of Christian witness: people may notice a believer who remains thankful after financial hardship, grief, illness, or loss and ask where that hope comes from. The program closes with the conviction that genuine gratitude flows from the heart of the gospel and can become a contagious way of life.

## Practical Applications

Begin tomorrow morning with two words before checking messages or news: 'Thank You.' Then name three specific gifts from God.

End the day with 'Thank You, Jesus,' recalling one evidence of His grace from the day.

When I catch myself complaining, pause and name something true for which I can give thanks without denying the difficulty.

During grief or pain, refuse forced cheerfulness; instead thank God for His presence, grace, promises, or people who are walking with me.

Ask, 'Lord, show me what I can be thankful for here,' in one difficult circumstance.

Make a short list of people God used to shape my faith and contact at least one of them with a specific thank-you.

Write a thank-you note to a teacher, pastor, friend, family member, broadcaster, or mentor who pointed me toward Jesus.

Use a difficult interaction as a prompt to pray for the other person's pain rather than merely rehearsing my frustration.

Notice one ordinary blessing I have stopped seeing because it has become normal.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 slowly and ask how 'in everything' changes my response to today's circumstances.

Share with someone one reason Jesus gives me hope that circumstances alone cannot provide.

Practice gratitude out loud around family or coworkers so thanksgiving becomes visible and contagious.

## Today's Challenge

For the next seven days, practice 'Thanks Living' at the beginning, middle, and end of each day. Morning: say, 'Thank You, Jesus,' and name three specific gifts. During the day: when something frustrating or painful happens, ask, 'Lord, show me what I can be thankful for here.' Evening: write down one person God has used in your life and, before the week ends, express your gratitude directly to at least one of those people.

## Closing Prayer

Father, thank You. Thank You for Your grace, for Jesus, for salvation, and for the hope that does not depend on my circumstances. Teach me to give thanks in everything without pretending that grief, pain, disappointment, and loss do not hurt. When life is difficult, help me recognize Your presence and ask what You are doing in and through the circumstance. Keep complaint and cynicism from becoming the language of my heart. Make gratitude an intentional act of faith. Remind me of the people You have used to teach me, encourage me, bring me to church, open Your Word to me, or point me toward Jesus. Give me the humility to thank them while I still have the opportunity. Forgive me for becoming so accustomed to Your goodness that I notice mainly what I still want. Open my eyes again to ordinary blessings, eternal hope, and the wonder of Your grace. Let my gratitude become visible to people around me and give me opportunities to explain the hope I have in Jesus. May thanksgiving move from something I occasionally say to the way I live. Make my life a life of Thanks Living. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## About Today's Speaker

Stu Epperson Jr. is the founder of the Truth Network and host of Truth Talk, with radio outlets and affiliates across the United States. He is also the author of Thanks Living, published by Moody Publishers, a book centered on the biblical call to give thanks in everything. Drawing from broadcasting, Bible teaching, personal experience, and years of reflecting on 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Stu encourages believers to move beyond seasonal thanksgiving toward a daily, Christ-centered life of gratitude rooted in grace.

## About Today's Host

Donna Leland is a longtime member of the Great News Media radio family and regularly serves as guest host of the Thursday edition of Mark & Friends. With a warm, conversational interviewing style, Donna welcomes authors, ministry leaders, teachers, and guests whose stories and resources can encourage listeners in their walk with Jesus. Her Thursday conversations are an important part of the Mark & Friends weekly lineup and Great News Media's mission to educate, edify, and evangelize.

## Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Welcome to Mark & Friends. I'm your host Donna Leland, and today we're going to get ready for Thanksgiving. We've got Stu Epperson Jr. He is the founder of the Truth Network and also a fellow broadcaster I'm excited to talk with.

He is the host of Truth Talk and also he has many outlets and affiliates across the United States. He's recently come out with a book through Moody Publishers. This is just another opportunity for us to dig into Thanksgiving, embracing the power of gratitude every day.

Thank you so much, Stu, for joining us on Mark & Friends. Hey, it's an honor to be on with you, Donna, and I'm used to sitting in your chair interviewing authors, but the Lord just put this book on my heart and so I had to share it with everybody. Just a thrill to be able to speak with you and hang out today.

Motivation, you know, what was it that really encouraged you to start thinking about helping people understand this whole idea of gratitude? Well, it was a Thanksgiving season about maybe seven or eight years ago, and I started studying for a men's group I lead called Wednesday in the Word. A bunch of guys would get together at a restaurant and go through the Bible together, and as I'm studying, I just kind of locked into this verse. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 is like so many great verses in the Bible that we quote.

We see them on greeting cards, you know, we see them on those nice little displays, pieces of art, just rich, but so often we just kind of go through it, kind of go through the motions and don't really savor. You know, like, you know, eating a meal, we just kind of stuff it in our mouth to get by to get the next thing instead of really savoring each bite. And so I was studying it, it started really studying me, and that's what the Word of God does.

This whole book is about one verse, and so the Lord gave me the five A's of 5:18, which is basically just, you know, a simple way in alliteration to remember these five critical points. And this started like seven or eight years ago, and during that time the Lord said, put this in a book and bless some other folks with it. So that's how it came out, and there's some circumstances in my life that kind of forced it to the surface, where the Lord just kind of opened the floodgates of my heart, you know, toward the end of that process, that kind of, when it became, actually took form as a book, which I hope really is a blessing to everybody.

It's so needed in our world today. Gratitude, it is so lacking. Now you mentioned that you think Christ-centered gratitude may be one of the most needed spiritual responses in our time today.

Yeah, you can't complain and grumble and be grateful at the same time. And we have a culture that effectively, the poorest person hearing me right now is probably wealthier than the wealthiest person in the third world. God has blessed us so much.

If you take a shower tonight, if you sleep in a bed tonight, if you get one hot meal a day, you're like in the top 80 percentile of all people. Millions are going to go without. So we have so much more to be thankful for than to complain about.

But I really wanted to give people the reason, the motivation, the heart behind gratitude, and that comes from this big thing called grace and what Jesus Christ has done. So all things in the book point to Christ and His work, and that's kind of where we're trying to take everyone. Because if you think about it, without Him, without His amazing giving, we can't give thanks.

We have nothing to be thankful for ultimately, and we have nothing to look forward to in eternity. But with Him, in all that He has done, in all that He is, we are so blessed. This is something that should really be a dominating force in our life.

Let's talk about something that seems to get in the way of this wonderful gratitude that the Lord would have us. For me, it's the grief. It's the loss.

It's the disappointment. It's the physical pain. When I'm in that, it's so hard to say, thank you, Lord, for what you have given me.

So what you're not saying is that gratitude would deny any pain. But tell us how to process that and walk through it. Well, I'll tell you in the form of one of my college professors, Adonna.

He was sitting on the phone with me on an interview with me. I was behind the mic, and this was, goodness, maybe a couple of decades ago. He had stage four cancer, and he was about to die.

He had been to all the godly people in his life to pray for him, for healing, and he was trusting God for a miracle. But he was actually at a stage in his life, he was older, where he was just so grateful for how God had used him. He was so grateful for students like me that he had impacted.

He was so grateful for what he wrote and what he taught in all those years of serving Christ. He was really homesick for heaven. Caller after caller called in to talk to him to try to talk him out of it.

Hey, come on, Dr. Smith, you can't be excited about dying. Come on, man, you got to have a little more faith to be healed. Almost like this guy's nuts to have gratitude and to look forward to dying like he is and to heaven.

But it was just so humbling. I put this story in the book just to kind of really highlight the fact that some of those painful and some of the most difficult circumstances, and some of the most grateful people I know are the ones going through that stuff. They're just full of gratitude.

Joni Eareckson Tada taught us. You know, for 60 years, she's been rolling around in this rolling pulpit, sharing the gospel and trusting God, and she just has the joy of the Lord all over her. And she's in there too, and she was gracious to write an endorsement for the book.

And I just see something there. There's a power there that recognizes the supernatural grace of God that's not dependent on the circumstances. No matter how bad the storm gets, there is the Savior on the water, holding his hand out, offering us grace, and putting in our heart gratitude for his presence and for what he wants to do in and through the circumstance to bring about his glory.

So Christ Jesus for you. Thanks to God the Father. Thanks to God the Father.

We're talking with Stu Epperson, Jr. today on Mark & Friends about gratitude, and we're thinking about being grateful for the fact that the Holy Spirit is in us. And that is, I think, what motivates us as people who want to live a grateful life. But, Stu, how does gratitude become a practical weapon against cynicism and despair? Yeah, well, that goes kind of back to the five A's, because we're told to, in everything, give thanks.

That's the amount. We're told to give thanks. That's action.

So it's recognizing that nothing happened, nothing comes into my life that hasn't first come through Christ, and all things are working together for the good. So, in everything, it's pretty exhaustive, it's pretty broad, but it's just basically recognizing God's in control. And then it's recognizing that it's an action.

I've got to decide to give thanks. I've got to decide, no matter how bad my day's going, how bad the dish in front of me looks, I've got to decide to say a prayer of thanksgiving for that food, right? So it's a choice. It's a volitional choice.

And then it's part of God's will. This is God's will. That's the aim.

And then here's, I think, the key one, is the access through Jesus Christ. So the practical way to have gratitude in all things is, effectively, to stay connected to Christ, to walk with Him. It's a walk of faith.

The just shall live by faith. So as I walk in union with Christ, recognizing I am who I am because of what He has done for me and what He has done in my place, recognizing that I need Him just as much on my good days as I need Him on my bad days. And just starting each day with the two words, thank you.

Thank you, Jesus. And closing each day with those words. And then, you know, making a list of things that you're thankful for.

And thanking God for the difficult situation. I got a difficult phone call this morning, and there was some bad language coming through my phone from this person. And I thought, you know what? Thank you, Lord, for that call, because now I'm praying like I've never prayed before for that person.

And I'm interceding for them. I wasn't praying before that phone call, okay? Just to be transparent. But God used that circumstance to point me, to humble me, to seek Him, and to pray and intercede for someone who's in a lot of pain.

So it's seeing thanks through the lens of God working, God's at work, and really trusting Him, and just asking Him, asking Him, hey, Lord, show me what I can be thankful for here, you know? So it's really a part of the walk of faith. And I'm just telling you, you know, we talk about an attitude of gratitude, but your question really goes deeper to what's at the heart, you know? What is at the heart? Do I realize what He has saved me from? Do I realize that I should be in prison? I should be in hell if it weren't for the grace of Almighty God. So lean into that and start thanking God.

What have you done for me, Lord? How have you saved me? Who have you brought into my life to point me to you? You know, what radio station did I just happen upon to hear about the wonderful grace of Jesus that really made a difference in my life? Who was that person that picked me up for church when I didn't want to go, when I was younger? Who was that faithful Sunday school teacher? Write a thank you letter to your second grade Sunday school teacher, because that's really where, if you were in Sunday school at that age, that's really where you learned a lot of bedrock truth and key scriptures, like 1 Thessalonians 5:18, that you still have with you today. So it's taking time to express thanks, you know, visibly, you know, physically, tangibly, that really, you know, sets off a wave of that, and it's contagious, and it is infectious to other people. I think as believers, too, you know, it's been, what, 40-some years since I came to know the Lord.

So my memories of life without Jesus, they are so vague. I know I wasn't happy. I know I had no power over sin, but, you know, I've just gotten so comfortable just, you know, having the Lord in my life, supplying my needs, and it's just so normal.

And I think our kids, like, as well, we try to create an environment for them that was very different than what I grew up in. So they had a lot of stuff, and a lot of attention, and time, and the gospel. They knew the good news.

I did not hear the good news until I was 18. So, you know, I just think we grow so accustomed to the goodness of God, and gratitude, I don't know, it just goes out the window, and we start thinking, well, things we still want, because He's such a generous and good God. How do we stop that if we can? Wow, well, that's a great question.

I tell you, something that has really, and I talk about this later on in the book, this encouraged me and helped me a lot, is realizing that this whole thing we're in is temporary. We've got a home in heaven, and we are preparing for that, and God is preparing a place for us, you know, John 14. And so, when you start to thank the Lord regularly, and exercise, and practice gratitude in everything, giving thanks for what's going on, you also start to see a world around you differently.

And when you actively engage lost people who don't know Christ, you know, it says in 1 Peter 3:15, it says, be ready always to give an answer for the hope that is in you. Look, people should see our gratitude for what God has done for us, and they say, why is that person thankful? That person's been through the financial ringer. They have gone through this, they've lost that, this, they've lost that, they're barely making it, they're barely squeaking by, they just lost a family member to cancer, but they're thankful.

How can that be? Well, the world is dying, the world is hungry, and the enemy is trying to lure us to sleep, to kind of sit back, and to be comfortable, and to be passive, and to be apathetic, when God has called us to engage. And so, what happens when you start to engage lost folks with the good news of Christ, your friends, your neighbors, just having conversations, that really helps immensely your perspective, because what that does is that puts you in a, all of a sudden, you're in a war, and all of a sudden, you see your fellow Christians, not as obstacles, or as annoyances. We start to see everyone as an opportunity to share the good news with.

We start to see fellow believers as those who are fellow saints, who are saved by the same grace that saved me, and we are on a team to reach this world with the good news of Christ, a world that has no reason to be grateful. You know, someone's going to give a TED Talk today in some big corporation, Donna, and they're going to make a lot of money. They're going to get a check for 50 grand for walking into a huge company, and somewhere in that TED Talk, they're going to say, they're not going to, they may not even believe in God, but somewhere in that TED Talk, they're going to say, you should be grateful.

You should have a gratitude journal. You should start every day with a gratitude walk, and just spit out things you're thankful for, and this is what's crazy. Neuroscientists will confirm this.

Psychiatrists, PhDs in psychology will confirm this, that it actually helps the brain. It actually helps it create an anti-aging in your body when you have gratitude, and these are secular scientists. They've confirmed what the good book has told us all along, and they don't even have a reason, ultimate reason to be thankful, so that's why we're still here, to share with them the reason that there is a God who loves them, who sent his only son to die for them, that they can be forgiven.

They can be healed. They can be set free, and they can be truly grateful with a gratitude that goes from their heart into the very root of their being, and that changes everything. Humanity You did not wait for me to cry out to you, but you let me hear your voice calling me You seek and save the Lord We're grateful for you, dear listener, for being a part of this Mark & Friends with Stu Epperson Jr. and his thanks living.

Coming up tomorrow, we'll be hearing once again the Bible study on Great News Media. We'll see you there.