

### Media and Graphics Notes

<b>Sermon Starter Video?</b>	Yes.
<b>Sermon Notes?</b>	Yes, there is a scripture at the beginning and reflection questions at the end.
<b>Other Notes</b>	

## Key Questions

### **What is this sermon about?**

This sermon is about giving thanks in all circumstances because God is with us.

### **Why is this sermon important?**

It is important because it can be easy to think we only give thanks when circumstances are favorable or ones that we prefer.

### **What is the context of this sermon?**

This sermon is essentially one of the chapters of Steve Harper's book, "Five Marks of a Methodist." I used the iBooks edition as the basis for this sermon, which can be found online at [https://itun.es/us/\\_NnO3.l](https://itun.es/us/_NnO3.l)

### **What are the next action steps?**

Wake up each day eager to live another day, doing so in the belief that God is good, present, active, and sufficient.

### **What is the good news (bottom line)?**

The good news is that we give thanks to God, not because of our circumstances, but because God is with us in our circumstances.



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## Metadata

### Topic(s)

1. Change Lives
2. Share

This content is adapted from *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper.

11th Sunday after Pentecost  
Five Marks of a Methodist - A Methodist Gives Thanks  
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado  
Text Online at <http://bit.ly/28SdHh4>

July 31, 2016  
2 Corinthians 9:15  
Preaching Target Word Count: 1,843  
Audio Online at <http://bit.ly/2anMsLn>

## Sermon Books of the Bible

1.

## Tags

sermon, worship, church, Methodist, UnitedMethodist, UnitedMethodistChurch, FirstUnitedMethodistChurch, Eldorado, Kansas, GreatPlains, AnnualConference, GreatPlainsAnnualConference, thanks, thanksgiving, gratitude.

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Closing Prayer

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## 2 Corinthians 9:15, CEB

Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!

### Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the People of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

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## Introduction

### Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

### Series Review

Buildings last because they sit on a firm foundation. Without a good foundation, buildings may exist for a while but they can't stand for long. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, understood that this is also true for our life of faith.

In 1742, he wrote *The Character of a Methodist*, which describe the "distinguishing marks" of a Methodist person. His original document remains a gift to us today. This sermon and series are adapted from the book *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper.

## Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

### Take Notes - Bulletin

I invite you to take notes during the message today. You can find a place in your bulletin or if you have a mobile device you can open the Bible App and use the Events feature to take notes

### God Speaking

Listen for God's word for you – something that helps you live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Whenever you hear it, write it down.

### Tool for Spiritual Growth

Then, take it with you so that you can grow in your faith outside of worship by reflecting on what you heard today, praying for others connected with our community and reading scripture

### Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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## Give Thanks

“Wesley’s third mark is that disciples, or Methodists, give thanks. While we might think of these marks as “simple,” it does not mean that they are easy. In fact, some expressions of the marks are impossible to do on our own. None of the marks are achievable apart from the grace of God.

This may be particularly true with this mark, because Wesley describes it with Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:18:

### **Key Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:18**

“Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

Did you hear that?

These are serious words.

Give thanks in every situation.

### **Personal Example: Forgetting the Keys on Vacation**

I can think of a lot of situations in my life for which I am not in the mood to give thanks. In June, we took a family vacation to Woodland Park, Colorado. My parents have a small cabin there in town and I always went there growing up. It is pretty great to take my kids there now.

We have everything loaded up in the car and are headed down the road. We make our way to I-135 and are headed north. We didn’t fill up before we left El Dorado, so pull over to get some fuel in Hesston. As we are getting back in the car, Nicole asks me, “Did you get the keys?”

No, did you?

Panic, disappointment, a drive back to El Dorado.

It is hard to give thanks in every situation

### **Thanks in Every Situation is Hard**

You see, it isn’t that giving thanks is something we resist. But Paul said we are to do it “in every situation” Wesley said the same thing, and he strengthened the point by writing,

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*“From him therefore he cheerfully receives all, saying, ‘Good is the will of the Lord.’”*

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I believe these words are true, but on any given day, I question it – sometimes profoundly. How are we to give thanks “in every situation” when some situations seem to come not from the will of God but from the pit of hell? There is no way to sidestep this

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18, CEB.

reaction in the life of discipleship, because it happens to all of us sooner or later, directly or indirectly. We have good reason to ask Wesley, “John, what are you saying?”

Unfortunately, John doesn’t provide a fully satisfying response. But of course, no one ever has or can. We know that Wesley was not a pie-in-the-sky or Pollyanna-like person. He was not a naive Christian, and not very interested in being sentimental. So, we consider that a Methodist gives thanks, realistically and shaped by several key elements.

## **We give thanks in response to God’s grace.**

First, Wesley notes that *gratitude* is the Christian’s response to God.

Gratitude is the response to grace.

Anne Lamott gets it right in her book, *Help, Thanks, and Wow*, when she shows how saying “thanks” is always our first response when we recognize that God has helped us. Her conviction is smilier to Paul’s exhortation and Wesley’s third mark of discipleship.

### **Wesley’s Practice of Prayer**

Wesley practiced this characteristic each Saturday in his own prayer life. Sunday through Friday, Wesley’s prayers were focused on the two great commandments to love God and love neighbor and the spirit of surrender connected with them. On Saturdays, he recognized that he was living his life in the presence of God’s grace in both big and small ways. He would look back over the week, consider the way that God had been at work in his life and say thank you.

Wesley prayed this cycle week after week for more than sixty years. In Wesley’s life it is easy to see how words of prayer would eventually become a life of prayer and one of gratitude.

#### **Transition**

We give thanks in response to God’s grace.

## **We give thanks because God is love.**

Second, when we consider Wesley’s entire life and ministry, we find that gratitude is grounded in the nature of God, not in the circumstances that were taking place in his life at any given time. Without trying to solve the problem of evil or justify the reasons for suffering, Wesley sought to establish the foundation for goodness in the nature of God, who is Love.

### **Evil violates God’s Will**

Wesley would see very form of evil as a violation of God’s will.

Neither germs nor grenades reveal the world God intends.

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We may never know why things happen as they do, but we do know that God isn't the author of evil.

We may find ourselves caught in the net of mystery when it comes to understanding the days of our lives, but we can always know that God isn't taking any delight in the bad things that happen to us or to anyone else.

## **Love Seeks Us Out**

Wesley's understood God and the foundation of his ministry to be love. You remember the story of God looking for Adam and Eve when they were hiding. God called them out of hiding and provided what they needed to cover the same of their sin. That is what God does. That is what love does, and it is the basis for thanksgiving.

### ***Transition***

We give thanks because God is love.

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## **We give thanks because God is always with us.**

The way of love is the basis for Wesley's recognition that no matter what happens to us, we aren't alone. God is at work to deliver us from evil, which is exactly what we say every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. It is also what Wesley himself later experienced when he faced death. In the earlier part of life, his greatest fear had been the fear of death. But when he came to the hours of death, his last words were, "The best of all is, God is with us!" He died giving thanks.

## **Give Thanks for God's Presence**

So we as disciples give thanks – not for what is happening to us but for the fact that nothing can happen to us apart from the presence of God with us. We don't receive all people and circumstances because everything is good; we receive because God is present in everything, ready and willing to come to our assistance. This is thanksgiving that combines faith with realism.

### ***Transition***

We give thanks because God is always with us.

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## **Conclusion**

We can describe this philosophical and generally, but most of us experience it in concrete ways.

You know people who lead off conversations with negative attitudes or feelings. You know people who approach life more as a problem than a joy to be lived. If they do it time and again, we no longer look forward to being around them.

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But then there are folks who wake up each day eager to live another day, doing so in the belief that God is good, present, active, and sufficient.

They aren't naive optimists; in fact, some of them live with personal debilitations, economic hardships, and family stresses that go beyond anything we are facing.

But we look forward to seeing them or hearing from them because we know they will be living *into* life, not away from it.

## Good News

The good news is that we give thanks to God, not because of our circumstances, but because God is with us in our circumstances.

## Call to Action - Practice Giving Thanks

So, we are going to take a few minutes to practice giving thanks using questions similar to those that John Wesley asked himself every Saturday evening.

As you consider the last 7 days...

- Have I made time to thank God?
- What general blessings have I received?
- What specific acts of God's goodness have I experienced?
- How might I become more aware of God's goodness in my life?

We are going to take 2 minutes to give you time to write down these questions and some of your answers to them.

Go...

[Wait 2 minutes]

## Invitation

You might consider this practice in the days ahead because a disciple gives thanks.

## Closing Prayer