

GIVE THANKS— ANYWAY!



Life is hard. Give thanks.

By the fall of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln had faced enormous challenges and loss.

- ▶ A war had divided the country.
- ▶ In July alone, the battle at Gettysburg resulted in over 51,000 casualties, including over 7,000 deaths.
- ▶ Riots were raging in New York City over emancipation and draft laws.
- ▶ His son, Willie, had died the year before.

With immense challenges facing him, the President did what might seem unusual today: he called for a day of thanksgiving. Despite everything that was happening, Lincoln wanted to praise and thank his Creator for a year “filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies ... gracious gifts of the Most High God.”¹

Even though the war raged on, Lincoln repeated this the following year with a second proclamation for a day of thanksgiving.

Abraham Lincoln was not the first commander-in-chief to call for thanksgiving in the thick of war. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, did the same thing. The biblical account of what the people faced—and how they faced it—contains great truth for us today.



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SPECIAL FOCUS

GIVE THANKS—
ANYWAY!



What's your favorite way to express thanks?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLgivethanks

We can give thanks in every situation.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Some days it's tough to read or watch the news.

- ▶ Terrorist bomb kills 20 and injures dozens in market square.
- ▶ Corporation lays off thousands of workers, announcing all production will go offshore.
- ▶ Multi-car crash shuts down interstate for six hours.

Because of these realities, it can be difficult to connect with the apostle Paul's command for us to "Give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:18).

Give thanks *in all circumstances*? Is that even possible when so many things go wrong, both around the world and in our own lives? Thankfully, the answer is yes—and the Scriptures show us how.

During the reign of King Jehoshaphat in Judah, God's people once again faced difficult times. Yet they found a way to remain thankful. And so can we.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

2 Chronicles 20:10-12

¹⁰ “But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. ¹¹ See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. ¹² Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

Unlike famous biblical personalities such as David and Moses, Jehoshaphat isn't a household name in modern times. Yet he was undoubtedly an interesting figure in history. He was a king, for one thing. More importantly, he sought God's favor in everything he set out to do (see 2 Chron. 17:3-4).

- ▶ He sought to return the nation to the worship of Yahweh (see 1 Kings 22:46; 2 Chron. 17:6;19:3).
- ▶ He sent the Levites and priests throughout the towns of Judah, teaching the people from “the Book of the Law of the LORD” (17:7-9).
- ▶ He made sweeping judicial reforms, charging the judges to be just and impartial in their rulings, keeping in mind they were “not judging for mere mortals but for the LORD” (19:4-11).

Despite these positive steps, Jehoshaphat still faced attacks from his enemies. In fact, Jehoshaphat's neighbors—the nations surrounding Judah—were combining their forces, preparing to attack and destroy God's people. When Jehoshaphat found out about their plans, he called the nation to prayer.

In his prayer, Jehoshaphat “reminded” the Lord of their history: how He had driven out their enemies in the past and given the land to Israel. He mentioned the promises God had made to the people, and their promises to God. Then he ended with a simple statement: “We do not know what to do.”

What are some situations that make you feel powerless?

QUESTION #2

No one likes to hear leaders utter such discouraging words, but Jehoshaphat didn't stop there. He added one more phrase: "our eyes are on you."

At times, we all reach a place where we recognize we're facing something bigger than ourselves—that we don't know what to do. In those moments, we can say: "God, I don't have the power to fix this, and I don't know what to do. But I look to you." No matter what happens, we can be thankful—not because everything will work, but simply because we can look to God.

2 Chronicles 20:14-17

¹⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly. ¹⁵ He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. ¹⁶ Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. ¹⁷ You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.' "

God gives us encouragement when we need it—and sometimes it comes from unexpected places. Right in the middle of the crowd praying with Jehoshaphat was a man named Jahaziel. God used him to both challenge and encourage His people: "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's."

What can we learn from these verses as we face our own battles?

QUESTION #3

OUT OF CONTROL

Jehoshaphat felt “powerless” in the presence of his enemies. In what types of settings or situations do you often feel a loss of control? Circle all that apply.

FINANCES

RELATIONSHIPS

ILLNESS

TRAVEL

CONFLICT

POLITICS

CHURCH

RETIREMENT

PERSONAL HEALTH

FASHION

PARENTING

EDUCATION

*Choose one of the categories you marked above.
What do you have to be thankful for in this area?*

Why should we be thankful in a broken world? Because the battle is not ours; the battle belongs to God. If you belong to Christ, you are a child of God; consequently, any attack against you is an attack against Him.

We can't solve every problem, nor do we always know what to do. But we can take three steps based on Jahaziel's words:

- 1. Put away fear and discouragement (v. 15).** Ever felt like you're being attacked from different directions? In those moments, we should do as the people of Judah did: set aside our fear, trust, and wait for God to act.
- 2. Position yourselves and stand still (v. 17).** In verse 18, we see God's people take a stand on their knees! They would not be moved from their trust in God and they "fell down in worship before the LORD."
- 3. Watch God at work (v. 17).** When we flee, we miss opportunities to watch God work. Sometimes we have to stand firm, lay aside the fear and the discouragement, and stand in our faith until we see what God will do.

God may answer quickly or we may have to stand firm for a season. Either way, He is with us. His presence is ample reason to be thankful even in our difficulties.



What are your favorite ways to express praise and thanks to God?

QUESTION #4

2 Chronicles 20:20-22,29-30

²⁰ Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”

²¹ After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: “Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.” ²² As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. ... ²⁹ The fear of God came on all the surrounding kingdoms when they heard how the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. ³⁰ And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.

On the morning of the battle, the prayers of the people turned to praise and thanksgiving. And when did they offer thanks? Before the battle even began! Jehoshaphat assembled a choir and placed them in front of the army. This had a two-pronged effect:

- 1.** The soldiers under Jehoshaphat heard the praise to God going before them. Praise preceded them into battle to remind them the battle belonged to God.
- 2.** The enemy heard praise to the One who stood with Judah.

Earlier, I mentioned 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Paul was as confident as Jehoshaphat in thanking God and trusting Him. What gave these men such confidence? Faith in God and experience with Him.

When we act on our faith in Christ and thank Him—regardless of what we may see at that moment—we experience His presence, power, and peace. That experience only strengthens us for the next time we face a battle. The “secret” to a thankful life is trust in Christ.

How does being a thankful person advance your witness for Christ?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live a life of thanksgiving this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Praise.** Set aside time each day to praise God for the blessings in your life. Praise will lead to a greater level of thankfulness in your heart.
- ▶ **List.** It's easy to create a list of the good things for which we're thankful; instead, make a list of things that are difficult to be thankful for. Beside each item, write reasons why you can be thankful.
- ▶ **Share.** Be vocal in expressing your thanks to others throughout this week. When appropriate, share how your thankfulness is connected to your trust in God.

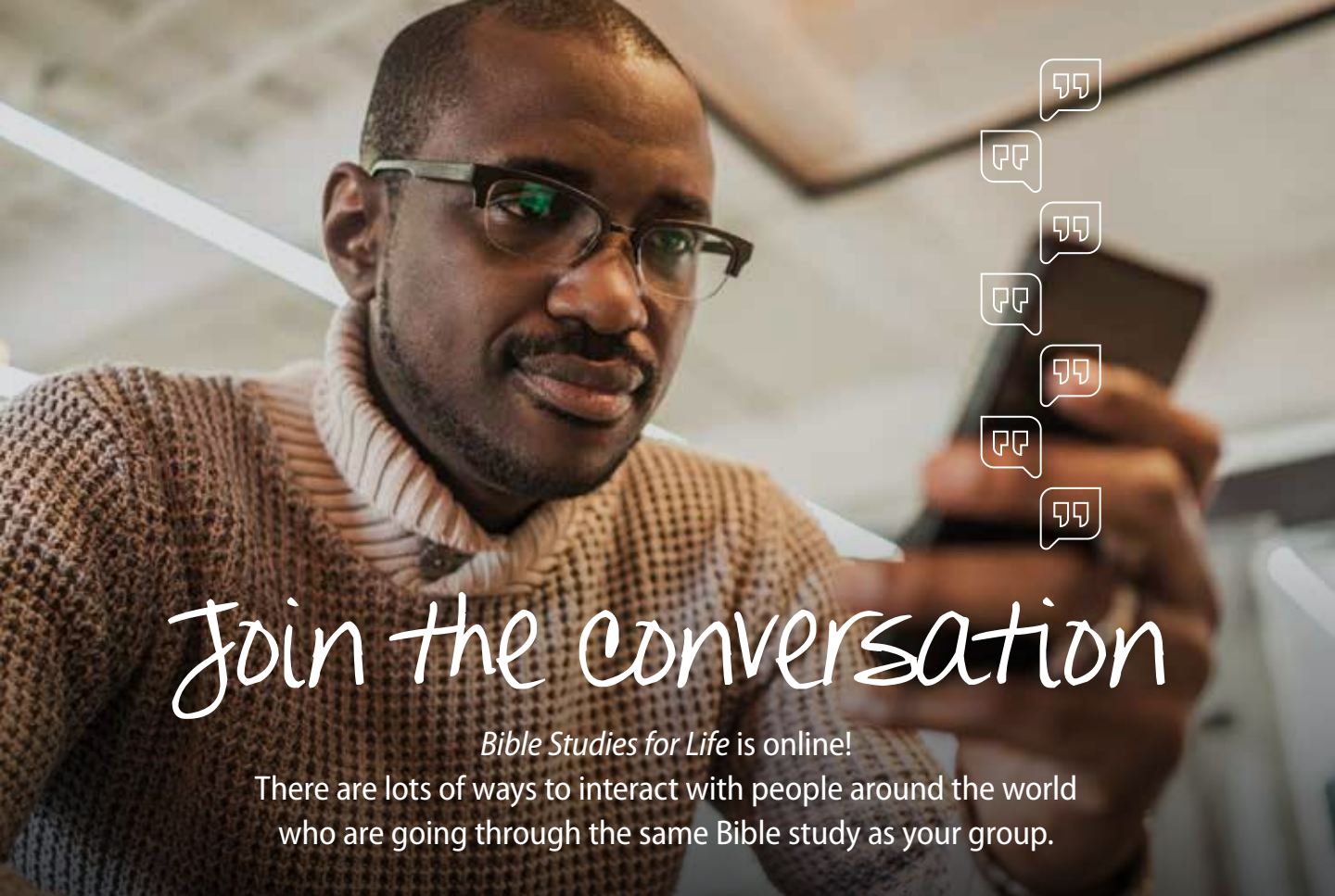
"Give thanks in all circumstances." That's a radical concept, to be sure. But it's also a wonderful way to live—and it can only be accomplished by trusting everything to Christ.

My thoughts



1. <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/thanks.htm>

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLgivethanks**



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COMING IN WINTER

Spoken: The Rhythm of God's Word

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

December 4	Session 1	<i>God's Word Delights</i>	<i>Psalm 119:1-8</i>
December 11	Session 2	<i>God's Word Fills My Heart</i>	<i>Psalm 119:9-16</i>
December 18	Session 3	<i>God's Word Gives Courage</i>	<i>Psalm 119:17-24</i>
December 25	Session 4	<i>God's Living Word Saves</i>	<i>Psalm 119:41; Luke 1:30-35</i>
January 1	Session 5	<i>God's Word Is Always Relevant</i>	<i>Psalm 119:89-96</i>
January 8	Session 6	<i>God's Word Is Truth</i>	<i>Psalm 119:153-160</i>

Created for a Purpose

January 15		<i>Created for a Purpose</i>	<i>Jeremiah 1:4-10</i>
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Thrive: Living in Real Joy

January 22	Session 1	<i>Praying with Joy</i>	<i>Philippians 1:3-11</i>
January 29	Session 2	<i>Sharing with Joy</i>	<i>Philippians 1:12-21</i>
February 5	Session 3	<i>Following with Joy</i>	<i>Philippians 2:1-11</i>
February 12	Session 4	<i>Growing with Joy</i>	<i>Philippians 3:12-21</i>
February 19	Session 5	<i>Practicing Joy</i>	<i>Philippians 4:4-9</i>
February 26	Session 6	<i>Giving with Joy</i>	<i>Philippians 4:10-20</i>