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TOP 10 THANKSGIVING ILLUSTRATIONS
1. PRAISE GOD WITH YOUR 23,000 BREATHS PER DAY

Illustration: You take approximately 23,000 breaths every day, but when was the last time you thanked God for one of them? The process of inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide is a complicated respiratory task that requires physiological precision. We tend to thank God for the things that take our breath away. And that’s fine. But maybe we should thank him for every other breath too!

Mark Batterson, All In (Zondervan, 2013), page 119

Related Topics: Adoration; Exaltation of God; God, goodness of; God, greatness of; Gratitude; Ingatitude; Praise; Thanks; Thanksgiving; Thanksgiving Day; Worship

References:
Psalm 98:4; Psalm 100:1-3; Psalm 103:1-3; Psalm 103:22; Psalm 145:1-3; Psalm 146:1-2; Psalm 147:1; Psalm 148; Psalm 149:1-5; Psalm 150; Luke 17:11-19; Romans 1:21; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Revelation 15:3-4.

2. A WOMAN WHO ALWAYS PRAYED THE SAME PRAYER

Pastor H.B. Charles tells the following story about a woman he knew who showed up at church and prayed the same simple prayer. “O Lord, thank you Jesus,” she prayed week after week. The kids at church would start laughing every time she opened her mouth because they knew it would be the same prayer—“O Lord, thank you Jesus.”

Finally somebody asked her, “Why do you pray the same little prayer?” She said, “Well, I’m just combining the two prayers that I know. We live in a bad neighborhood and some nights there are bullets flying and I have to grab my daughter and hide on the floor, and in that desperate state all I know how to cry out is, ‘O Lord.’ But when I wake up in the morning and see that we’re okay I say, ‘Thank you Jesus.’ When I got to take my baby to the bus stop and she gets on that bus and I don’t know what’s going to happen to her while she’s away, I cry, ‘O Lord.’ And then when 3:00 P.M. comes and that bus arrives and my baby is safe, I say, ‘Thank you Jesus.’”

She said, “Those are the only two prayers I know and when I get to church God has been so good I just put my two prayers together, “O Lord, thank you Jesus.”


Related Topics: Dependence on God; Faith and prayer; Gratitude; Help, divine; Need; Praise; Prayer; Prayer, answered; Prayer, Believing; Prayer, Need For; Prayer, Persistence in; Thanks; Thanksgiving; Thanksgiving Day; Vulnerability

References:
Psalm 22:22; Psalm 34:1; Psalm 47:1; Psalm 71:8; Psalm 95:6-7; Psalm 100:1-4; Psalm 103:1-3; Psalm 145:1-2; Zephaniah 3:14; Matthew 21:9; Luke 17:11-19; Luke 19:37-40; Romans 1:21; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:9.

3. GRANDSON REFUSES TO EXPRESS HIS THANKS

We took our grandson (age 3 at the time) to Chuck E. Cheese’s for pizza and noisy rides. When the evening ended, his grandmother buckled him into his car seat and said, “Now be sure you say thank you to your Papa.”

Silence. No reaction. She said again, “Did you hear me? Be sure you say thank you to Papa.” Again, silence.

At first I ignored this backseat conversation. But then I changed my mind and said this. “You know, Papa enjoys doing nice things for grandchildren, especially when they say thank you.” More silence.

“Did you hear Papa?” I asked, now a tad irritated.

“Uh huh.”

But there was still no thank you. And now I was [very upset]. “Are you ignoring me?” The volume of my voice amped up. Then this response: “I’m thankful, Papa; I just don’t want to say it.”

Gordon MacDonald, “The Thankful Exchange,” Leadership Journal (Fall 2013)

Related Topics:
Adoration; Exaltation of God; Glorifying God; Gratitude; Ingatitude; Praise; Thanks; Thanksgiving; Thanksgiving Day; Worship

References:
Psalm 22:22; Psalm 34:1; Psalm 47:1; Psalm 71:8; Psalm 95:6-7; Psalm 100:1-4; Psalm 103:1-3; Psalm 145:1-2; Zephaniah 3:14; Matthew 21:9; Luke 17:11-19; Luke 19:37-40; Romans 1:21; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:9.

4. TIM KELLER ON UNANSWERED PRAYER

Tim Keller, reflecting on the passage, “Don’t be anxious but make requests to God with thanksgiving”, writes that, “We would expect Paul to say first you make your requests to
God and then, you thank him for the answers. But that is not what Paul says.” Keller then
illustrates his point with a story from his early twenties:

“I prayed for an entire year about a girl I was dating and wanted to marry, but she wanted
out of the relationship. All year I prayed, “Lord, don’t let her break up with me.” Of course,
in hindsight, it was the wrong girl. I actually did what I could to help God with the prayer,
because one summer, near the end of the relationship, I got in a location that made it easier
to see her. I was saying, “Lord, I am making this as easy as possible for you. I have asked you
for this, and I have even taken the geographical distance away.” But as I look back, God was
saying, “Son, when a child of mine makes a request, I always give that person what he or she
would have asked for if they knew everything I know” [emphasis PreachingToday.com].


Related Topics:
Disappointment; Faith and prayer; God, omniscience of; God, sovereignty of; Omnipotence;
Prayer in God's Will; Prayer, answers to; Prayer, Unanswered; Thanks; Thanksgiving;
Thanksgiving Day; Worry

References:
Job 38; Job 40:1-6; Job 42:1-6; Isaiah 40:13-14; Matthew 7:7-11; Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24;
Luke 11:9-13; John 14:13-14; John 15:7; Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 2:7;
Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; James 1:5-6.

5. MAN BORN WITHOUT LIMBS DECLARES GOD’S GOODNESS

In 1982, Nick Vujicic was born with tetra-amelia syndrome, a rare genetic disorder. Nick has no
arms or legs, although he has two small feet attached to his torso. Growing up, Nick struggled
emotionally and physically to accept his condition. But today as a follower of Christ, Nick has
what he calls “a ridiculously good life.” Nick writes:

“When I'm asked how I can claim a ridiculously good life when I have no arms or legs, [people]
assume I'm suffering from what I lack. They inspect my body and wonder how I could possibly
give my life to God, who allowed me to be born without limbs. Others have attempted to
soothe me by saying that God has all the answers and then when I'm in heaven I will find out
his intentions. Instead, I choose to live by what the Bible says, which is that God is the answer
today, yesterday, and always.

When people read about my life or witness me living it, they are prone to congratulate me for
being victorious over my disabilities. I tell them that my victory came in surrender. It comes
every day when I acknowledge that I can't do this on my own, so I say to God, "I give it to you!"
Once I yielded, the Lord took my pain and turned it into something good . . . . He gave my life
meaning when no one and nothing else could provide it. [And] if God can take someone like
me, someone without arms and legs, and use me as his hands and feet, he can use anybody.
It's not about ability. The only thing God needs from you is a willing heart.

Nick Vujicic, Limitless (Waterbrook, 2013), pp. 147-148

Related Topics:
Ability; Attitude; Challenges; God, sovereignty of; Gratitude; Overcoming; Promises; Purpose;
Self-sufficiency; Significance; Surrender; Talents; Thankfulness; Thanks; Thanksgiving Day

References:
Psalm 92:4-5; Psalm 139:13-16; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 12:22-24; 2 Corinthians 3:4-5;
2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 1:21; Philippians 4:11-13;
Colossians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 4:11.

6. CONTENTMENT IS THE SECRET TO 80-YEAR MARRIAGE

Since John Betar and Ann Shawah said “I do” back on November 25th, 1932, they have
weathered many storms, but they still greet each morning with eagerness and gratitude.
They lived through the Great Depression, World War II, the terrorist attacks of 9-11, and two
powerful hurricanes. As of November 2012 John was 101, Ann was 97, and they were still
living in their home. They had five children, 14 grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren.

When she was still a teenager, Ann’s father had arranged for her to wed a local man in
Bridgeport, Connecticut. But her heart already belonged to another—John Betar. She and
John eloped in Harrelson, New York because, as Ann said, “We didn't have any money to go
any farther.” People told them it would never last. That was more than 80 years ago. The
couple is still happily married.

They each offered some simple guidelines for building a lasting marriage. John said, “Get
along. Compromise. Live within your means and be content. And let your wife be the boss.”
But Ann countered, “We don't have bosses.”

Both John and Ann, who are members of St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church in
Bridgeport, Connecticut, acknowledge God as the source of their blessings. Ann said, “How
can you not feel God's right with you and blessing you?” John reemphasized the importance
of living with contentment. He said, “We just live with contentment and we don't live beyond our
means.”

Dave Bohn; sources: Lauren Sher, “Couple celebrates 80th wedding anniversary, shares secrets to lasting marriage,” abcnews (11-20-12); Meg
Barone, “Fairfield couple gives thanks for 80 years of life together,” Fairfield Citizen (11-21-12)

Related Topics:
Contentment; Discontent; Gratitude; Greed; Marriage; Satisfaction; Spouses; Submission;
Thankfulness; Thanks; Thanksgiving Day; Vows
7. THREE IMAGES FOR GRATITUDE: SOIL, LUBRICANT, AND GLUE

In her book The Gift of Thanks, Margaret Visser uses three concrete images to convey the power of gratitude—gratitude as soil, lubricant, and glue. She writes:

[Soil] refers to the disposition of the person to be grateful, and his freedom to choose not to be. He is able to “cultivate” in himself a grateful disposition .... An ungrateful disposition, by contrast, is hard and dry, not easily moved by kindness, unwilling to be kind in return .... In European languages people often talk of poor soil as “ungrateful.”

Gratitude is [also] a social “lubricant” .... It makes things move smoothly; after all, giving and giving back are movements back and forth .... When there is no gratitude, there is no meaningful movement; [relationships] become rocky, painful, coldly indifferent, unpleasant, and finally break off altogether. The social “machinery” grinds to a halt.

[Finally] … gratitude is “glue.” The image points again to the social cohesion that gratitude supplies. Modern society is experienced as fragmented, in danger of flying apart … Gratitude is “a kind of plastic filler,” “an all-purpose moral cement,” a sort of magic paste that is amazingly malleable, squeezing itself into the cracks and then solidifying and strengthening the social structure.

Margaret Visser, The Gift of Thanks (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), pp. 327-328

Related Topics:
Abundant life; Blessings; Contentment; Friendship; Gratitude; Grumbling; Ingratitude; Marriage; Murmuring; Relationships; Resentment; Thanksgiving; Thanksgiving Day; Unity

References:
Genesis 2:18-25; Psalm 23:1; Psalm 37:25; Psalm 71:18; Psalm 84:11; Psalm 131:2; Proverbs 19:23; Ecclesiastes 4:8; Matthew 6:24-33; Matthew 19:1-9; Luke 1:53-55; Luke 3:14; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 5:22-33; Philippians 4:10-12; Philippians 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:6-8; Hebrews 13:5.

8. HENRI NOUWEN ON BEING GRATEFUL FOR EVERYTHING

To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives—the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections—that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only truly grateful people when we can say “thank you” to all that has brought us to the present moment. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for. Let’s not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God.


Related Topics:
Abundant life; Blessings; Goodness of God; Gratitude; Holidays; Ingratitude; Pain; Perspective; Remembrance; Suffering; Testing; Tests; Thankfulness; Thanksgiving; Thanksgiving Day; Trials; Valleys

References:
1 Chronicles 16:8; 1 Chronicles 16:34; 1 Chronicles 29:13; Nehemiah 12; Psalm 7:17; Psalm 28:7; Psalm 30; Psalm 35:18; Psalm 42; Psalm 69:30; Psalm 75:1; Psalm 95; Psalm 100; Psalm 105; Psalm 106; Psalm 107; Psalm 118; Psalm 136; Psalm 147; Jeremiah 31:7-14; Romans 1:21; Ephesians 5:4; Ephesians 5:9-11; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; 1 Timothy 4:4; Hebrews 12:28; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7.

9. THANKING GOD IN THE MIDST OF ALS

In the fall of 2000, former megachurch pastor Ed Dobson was diagnosed with ALS (or Lou Gehrig’s disease), a degenerative disease with no known cause or cure. In 2012 Dobson shared his ongoing struggle to give thanks while living with an incurable condition. He writes:

There are many things for which I am not grateful. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longer button the buttons on my shirt. I can no longe
Lord, thank you for waking me up this morning. Lord, thank you that I can turn over in my bed. Lord, thank you that I can still get out of bed. Lord, thank you that I can walk to the bathroom ... Lord, thank you that I can still brush my teeth ... Lord, thank you that I can still eat breakfast. Lord, thank you that I can still dress myself. Lord, thank you that I can still drive my car. Lord, thank you that I can still walk. Lord, thank you that I can still talk.

And the list goes on and on. I have learned in my journey with ALS to focus on what I can do, not on what I can't do. I have learned to be grateful for the small things in my life and for the many things I can still do.

Ed Dobson, Seeing through the Fog (David C Cook, 2012), pp. 69-70

Related Topics:
Attitudes; God, goodness of; Gratitude; Opportunities; Perspective; Praise; Prayer, Power of; Suffering; Tests; Thankfulness; Thanksgiving; Thanksgiving Day, Trials; Trust

References:
Psalm 50:14; Psalm 50:23; Psalm 92:1; Psalm 100; Psalm 103:1-3; Psalm 107:1; Psalm 118:24; Psalm 136:1; Lamentations 3:23; Matthew 7:11; Luke 17:11-19; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:11-13; Colossians 2:7; Colossians 3:15; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 12:28; Hebrews 13:15; James 1:17.

10. AMERICAN PILGRIMS WERE HEROIC ‘AND’ FLAWED

Wheaton College Professor Robert Tracy McKenzie explores the heroism and weaknesses of the first American Pilgrims:

There is much to admire about the "company of plain Englishmen" who disembarked from the Mayflower almost four centuries ago. They were men and women [who] exhibited enormous courage in the face of unspeakable hardship and loss. They loved their children, they loved the body of Christ, and they abandoned everything that was familiar to them to serve both .... They have [given] us an invaluable Christian example of belief, action, and endurance.

But human frailty is part of the Pilgrims' story as well. They argued among themselves. They were frequently duped both by strangers and purported friends. They were ethnocentric and sometimes self-righteous. They struggled with their finances .... They were frightened by wolves. They got lost in the woods .... A key leader got caught by an Indian deer trap and dangled helplessly upside down .... In years to come, they would have a hard time keeping a pastor ... and many of their number would move away in search of larger farms, prompting William Bradford to speak of the Plymouth church as "an ancient mother grown old and forsaken of her children."

Their flaws may shock us, but it wouldn't have shocked the Pilgrims. They seemed to glory in how God could use them despite their weakness and sinfulness. One of their key leaders (Robert Cushman) said, "Our voyage ... hath been as full of crosses as ourselves have been of crookedness, but God can do much." Another leader (Edward Winslow) said, "How few, weak, and raw were we at our first beginning, and yet God preserved us." William Bradford gloried in their weaknesses, but his object in doing so is clear: "that their children may see with what difficulties their fathers wrestled in going through these things in their first beginnings; and how God brought them along, notwithstanding all their weaknesses and infirmities."


Related Topics:
Brokenness; Fall of Humanity; Fallen nature; Original Sin; Sin; Sin, Original; Sinful nature; Thanksgiving Day; Vulnerability; Weakness

References:
Psalm 51:3-5; Isaiah 53:6; Matthew 5:3; Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 18:9-14; Romans 3:9-13; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:20-21; Romans 7:9-25; 2 Corinthians 4:7-10; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:15; James 5:16; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 John 1:8; 1 John 1:10S.

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