Logan Reynolds
First Belton
November 22, 2026

Series: The Life You Really Want
Title: When We Forget the Giver
Text(s): Romans 1:18-25, 1:28-32, 2:1, 3:23-24
Big Idea: When we fail to recognize God as the source of everything good, we begin looking to His gifts for what only He can give.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever prayed for something that really mattered to you, something that just consumed your thoughts, and now you rarely think about it?

Maybe it was a job that you now complain about. Maybe you prayed for the house you now wish were bigger. Maybe you prayed for kids who now test your patience. Maybe you prayed for an opportunity, a relationship, or a season of life that you now treat as ordinary.

We all share this in common. The very things we once considered an answer to prayer can often become the things we take for granted. And sometimes we even begin resenting the responsibilities that come with the blessings we once desperately wanted.

So, how is it possible that the very things we once thanked God for can become the things we now complain about? And what if our problem with gratitude is about more than forgetting to say thank you or to be grateful?

In Romans 1, Paul is going to show us that one of the earliest signs of humanity's rebellion against God was something we might never have expected: **a failure to give thanks.**

So, pick up with me in Romans 1, beginning in v. 18. *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the foundation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."*

A couple of things that I want you to see. First…

1. AN UNGRATEFUL HEART FORGETS WHO GOD IS

Paul begins in v. 18 with the revelation of God's righteousness and wrath. Pretty serious language! And Paul isn't describing a people who lack information; he is describing a people who have all the information but live in ignorance of the truth they have been given.

Paul tells us that God has made himself known.
Theologians call this "General Revelation." God has made himself known through all of creation. The beauty, complexity, and order of creation all testify to Him as the Creator. And because God has revealed himself in this way, all of creation is held accountable for responding to God based on this knowledge.

The appropriate response should be worship, honor, and gratitude. But that is not always what happens, is it?

No, generally, humanity refuses to honor God or give Him thanks.
V. 21 says that though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to him…

Notice Paul doesn't just say they committed terrible acts. He first identified their refusal to acknowledge God. They did not honor Him. They did not thank Him. In other words, they enjoyed life in God's creation while refusing to acknowledge the giver of all things.

We may think about it like this: They wanted the benefits of God's goodness without acknowledging their dependence upon God for those benefits.

I don't know about you, but it seems like Paul was just addressing some group of people, and now it seems like he is getting a bit closer to our neighborhood.

How many times have we enjoyed the blessings of life without stopping to recognize the One who gives them? How many times have we enjoyed our abilities, resources, relationships, or opportunities in life without acknowledging the One who gave them to us?

See, what happens is, somewhere along the way, we begin treating gifts from God as things we have earned rather than gifts we have received.

In this way, **ingratitude can reveal a deeper spiritual problem.** We can tend to look past the ingratitude in our lives and chalk it up to either a minor sin or something we overlook altogether. But Paul is suggesting here that ingratitude can reveal something much more serious than we might think. It can reveal that we have stopped acknowledging God and, without even realizing it, forget Him.

The problem with an ungrateful heart isn't simply that we forget to say thank you; it's that we begin forgetting the One to whom our thanks belong.

But Paul shows us that when we forget God, something else tends to happen: We don't stop worshiping, we just begin worshipping something else.

2. AN UNGRATEFUL HEART BEGINS TO WORSHIP THE GIFTS INSTEAD OF THE GIVER

In v. 23, Paul says that humanity exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling created things. Then in v. 25 Paul writes, *"because they exchanged the truth about*

God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

The word "exchanged" is especially important here. Humanity didn't just stop worshipping; they exchanged the truth for a lie and started worshipping things created rather than the Creator.

In this sense, **it is helpful to be reminded that everyone worships something.**
We were created to worship. And idolatry isn't always just bowing before a carved idol as we might think. At its heart, idolatry is giving something created the devotion, trust, or allegiance that belongs to God alone. And that means idolatry can take many different forms that look very respectable.

For example: Our careers. Our finances. Our kids. Our reputation. Our comfort. Our success. Our spouses. Our retirement. Our influence. Our authority.

All of these things can be good gifts. But they become idols when we look to them for the identity, security, satisfaction, or ultimate meaning that only God can provide.

And what is scary is, if we are not careful, we can become more devoted to God's gifts than to God himself. The problem isn't the gift; the problem is when the gift begins to take God's place in our hearts. And what is really difficult about this is that most often, we don't even know we are doing it!

In this way, **misplaced worship leads to misplaced living.** In v. 24 and 28, Paul says that because of this idolatry and ungratefulness, God gave humanity over to the consequences of their rebellion. And the result is a wide range of unrighteous behaviors. Look at v. 29. *"They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless."*

Notice Paul isn't singling out a category of sin – he lists ALL of it! And these aren't just sins of people out there; these are the sins of all of us.

In v. 32 Paul writes, *"Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."*

This is what happens when we forget God and start living as though He doesn't exist in our lives… It begins to show up in our character and behavior. Maybe it doesn't happen overnight, but subtly, though we proclaim that we know Him, we begin to live as people who never knew God in the first place.

Look, that is tough stuff. It is hard to look at our deficiencies and deal with them. But to live close to God, we must deal with our sin.

AND, at the same time, we must run away from the temptation to look at that list and start thinking about everyone else who needs to hear this as well. Because sometimes we can comfort ourselves by looking at other people's mistakes and comparing ourselves to them. But notice how Paul challenges that a bit.

After Paul describes the unrighteousness of humanity, he then says in Romans 2:1, *"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the same things."*

Again, this is a dramatic turn because it is so much easier to recognize someone else's sin than deal with our own. But…

3. A GRATEFUL HEART BEGINS WITH RECOGNIZING OUR OWN NEED FOR GOD'S GRACE

We can so easily read Romans 1 and begin to think about the sins of the world around us. We see greed. We see sexual immorality. We see dishonesty. We see violence. We see rebellion against God. And we rightly recognize that these things are contrary to God's design.

But what I love about Paul is that he doesn't allow us to be spectators. He turns to the person who condemns others and begins to expose their own guilt.

Sadly, I have found that people can take Romans 1 and use it as a weapon against everyone else's sin, but Romans 2 forces us to realize that Paul is talking about ALL our sin.

Every one of us is capable of exchanging God's glory for lesser things. Maybe you have never bowed down to a physical idol in your living room. But have you ever allowed money to become more important than obedience to God? Have you ever valued your reputation more than telling the truth? Have you ever cared more about your comfort than loving your neighbor? Have you ever allowed your personal preferences to become more important than the unity of the church? Have you ever been so consumed with what you don't have that you have failed to thank God for what you do have?

We could go on and on…

But this is why this topic is so important when we are thinking about the life we really want. Because Paul isn't just exposing the sins of the surrounding culture; he is exposing the condition of the human heart. And that includes ours.

What this demonstrates is just how much we need God's grace to live the life we really want because our natural tendency is not to live life close to Him but to drift. I have always been challenged by the line in the hymn, *Come, Thou Fount*, that says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."

This is the human struggle on this side of heaven; even though we know the truth, we tend to allow ourselves to naturally drift away from the God we love.

Which is why the answer can't be, "We just need to be more grateful." The answer is we need to more accurately realize this truth and better appreciate God's grace.

CONCLUSION

If Romans 1-2 stood on their own, we are all in trouble. But because of Romans 3, we have hope. Paul says in Romans 3:23-24, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

This is SO good. The life we really want isn't about being better or being more grateful. It is about recognizing that we are all sinners and need God's forgiveness. It's about recognizing that on our own we are without hope. But thanks be to God that He has offered us a way back to Him through Jesus: We can live close to God because God came near to us through Jesus.

This morning, the life you really want begins with a simple prayer – "God, I recognize that though I know you, I don't always live like I do. Though I love you, I don't always tell you. Though I am grateful, I don't always say thank you. Please forgive me and bring me back close to you."

If you are not a Christian in the room, then your next step is as simple as recognizing that you were created by God to live in a relationship with Him, and that your sin has broken that relationship. But God, in His grace and mercy, has sent Jesus to this earth to die in your place so that God can forgive your sin and offer you a restored relationship with Him. You simply need to ask God to forgive you of your sin, believe that Jesus came and died in your place and rose again, all so that you might have a restored relationship with Him and experience an abundant life.

If you would like to talk this out with someone, our team at Connection Central would love to help you with this decision during our final song or right after the service. They will be waiting for you in the hallway just outside these middle doors on the first floor.

Let's pray.