When I was a boy I loved to fly paper airplanes. They were easy to make and very cheap. As I got older I graduated to planes made of balsa wood and even some that had a propeller. I am going to launch some in the sanctuary right now. Let’s see how far the paper one will fly, now the balsa one, now the propeller one.

What enables these planes to fly? First they ride on air. If they were in a vacuum they would fall instantly to the ground. What makes them travel a distance? The power from my push. Normally there must be some kind of push or there must be an engine attached that keeps the plane flying.

I lived for a number of years near the Chiltern Hills in Bedfordshire. Because of the way the hills rose from the plain below it was an excellent place for sail planes. A plane with an engine would tow a sail plane, which has no engine, up into the sky. Then it would cast the sail plane free and now it could soar on the wind currents. These planes are also known as gliders.

I would lie on the ground watching several sailplanes glide on the wind current ascending higher and higher into the sky. The wind was powering them. They would ride the thermal current. As long as there was wind they could keep going forever but when the wind died down they would come to earth.

The wind lifted up these planes. Today I want to talk about another kind of life, a lift that will enable you to find joy in everything, yes in everything.

Here is our next passage in Philippians. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

Here is an astonishing text. Paul is writing this from a Roman prison. He begins by reminding us to rejoice always. But notice our rejoicing must be in the Lord. Without the Lord it becomes very difficult to rejoice in tragedy. Without God giving us strength it is easy to become full of despair.

Paul is also writing this as a witnessing tool. He wants our gentleness to be evident to all. Christianity at its heart is a relationship religion. Christianity is not about a list of dos and don’ts. It is about a passionate love affair that the Creator of the Universe has for His creatures. It was Jesus who said, “By this will everyone know that you are my disciples by how you love one another” (John 13:35).

The phrase “the Lord is near,” refers to the expectation that Jesus was returning to earth in their day. This made it all the more important that they live the gentle and loving life. But Paul continues with one of the most astounding passages in the Bible.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”

As we study this text I want to place alongside it another one from Paul, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Paul again reminds us that joy is not an option. We are to be joyful always and to make sure we did not misunderstand what he is saying he repeats “give thanks in all circumstances,” not in some circumstances but in all circumstances. And he reminds us that this is God’s will for us.

So how do we give thanks in all circumstances? How do we live the joyful life all the time? In the Philippians passage Paul says, “Do not be anxious about anything.” Now that is really tough. It is so absolute. However, what seems an impossibility becomes a possibility by what Paul says next, “but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

God is our father and not just any father but the best father a person can possibly want. He is the air under our wings. He is the lift that helps us soar above all the challenges of life. As we pray to him, talk to him, we tell him about our lives and make our needs known. Now God already knows our needs but he wants us to recognize them and distinguish between wants and needs. But there is an important condition we must fulfill when we talk to God. We talk to him with thanksgiving as we present our requests.

Scottish minister Alexander Whyte was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful. One Sunday morning the weather was so gloomy that one church member thought to himself, "Certainly the preacher won't think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this.” Much to his surprise, however, Whyte began by praying, "We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this."

A pastor preached on the need for Christians to be thankful in everything. He reiterated how that God has our best interest at heart and that all things do work together for the good.

He had just been blessed with free body work on his old car and it was looking brand new. Two days after he gave the sermon he hit a deer on a back road to his home. His car was dented and his heart
broke. How could he be thankful in all things? The next week he testified in church on God's goodness.

Let me be thankful: first, because I have never hit a deer before, second, because although it (the deer) dented my car it did not dent my head, third, because although my car had just been fixed, it is an old car and not a new one, fourth, because although I killed a deer, I did not kill my "dear" (my wife was riding with me), and last, because someone is eating good today.

It is God who gives us the power to be thankful in everything. Part of learning to be thankful all the time is to ponder some of the great stories in the Bible. We need to be reminded that because you are a Christian does not mean that God will prevent all injustice and tragedy from reaching you.

Look at this passage in the book of Hebrews. In chapter 11 the writer tells us of some of the great people of faith. He then tells us what we love to hear, how God rewarded and blessed those who trusted in Him. Hebrews 11:34

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again."

We read this list and shout our praises and thanks to God. But the writer does not end there. He has something further to say, something we don’t like to read or ponder. Beginning in the middle of verse 35.

"Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11:32-40).

Both groups were commended for their faith but the second group had a much harder time giving thanks because God did not come to their rescue. Yet they gave thanks because they knew that something better was coming.

When we pray to God with thanksgiving it means that we are completely submitted to the will of God. This is where we often struggle. If we are honest with ourselves this is where the real struggle is. We want to do our own thing. We want our own way. We think that we know best. But here is the infallible almighty God longing to give us what is the best for us regardless of how we might see it. Trusting in God is a growing experience. We are safe in him. We are secure in him. We are saved in him. So really what is there to worry about?

Trusting in God means three things:

1. We need to remember the love of God for us. That is why the cross is the center of our devotions. The cross is where we love to linger. The cross is our assurance of God’s love.

2. We must remember the wisdom of God. God is smarter than us, wiser than us, knows the end from the beginning, knows the future. If he is so smart isn’t he going to
give us what is best for us? Or do we think that we are smarter than God?

3. We must remember the power of God. God is able to provide, always, what is best for us. God created the universe. He can create anything for us that is for our good.

As well as looking at the cross I spend time with Joseph. Here is a man who suffered so cruelly. He is sold by his brothers in slavery. That alone would make most people give up. But Joseph decides to be the best slave possible and one that is joyful and happy all the time. Soon his master notices that there is something different about this slave. No sullen attitude with Joseph. Potiphar soon promotes him to head slave.

Joseph decides that being a slave is not so bad. Just when he has been put in charge of everything in his master’s house Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce him. Joseph runs and for his loyalty to God he is thrown into prison. Talk about injustice. You could be forgiven if you became bitter when your family sold you as a slave. But how would you feel when your loyalty to God is rewarded with prison? Joseph determines to give thanks in all things, under all circumstance. Like the sailplane God lifts Him up. Joseph let’s God lift Him up. He is the model prisoner. Soon the warden notices something different about Joseph. His spirit, his attitude is so positive that He give Joseph complete charge over the prison.

He doesn’t have his freedom but he does have recognition and some privileges. Then he meets up with Pharaoh’s baker and butler who have been thrown into prison. They dream troubling dreams. Joseph interprets them. He tells the butler to remember him when he is reinstated as butler. But the butler forgets the kindness of Joseph. Two more years go by but Joseph remains cheerful, giving thanks in all circumstances.

Pharaoh dreams a troubling dream. Joseph interprets it and is made the prime minister of Egypt. Yes, Joseph is a great source of strength for me.

But then I also meditate on James and Peter. In the early church the Jewish leaders are livid with the apostles for constantly telling the people that Jesus is not dead. Herod wanting to curry favor with the leaders imprisons James and then executes him.

When he finds out how much this impressed the leaders he arrests Peter also intending to execute him as well. But God sends his angel to get Peter out of prison.

Two apostles, two men of God. One God does not lift a finger to help. The other, God employs his mighty power to rescue him. Sometimes I am James. It does not mean that God did not love James any less. It just means that God does not always intervene to prevent injustice and miscarriages of justice. Yet, I am to give thanks at these times too.

And when we learn to live this way see what happens to us. Paul says, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Peace is what everyone longs for. When we learn to give thanks always God fills us with his peace so that our hearts, emotions, are satisfied and at rest. When we learn to give thanks peace rests in our minds, our thoughts.

You are at peace in both your feelings, no anxiety, anger, frustration, and in your mind, no questioning God, no complaining.

Now I want to share with you an ongoing story that I have shared before. Those of you who have heard it before may want to tune out but it is a story worth
retelling. We keep going back to the same stories in the Bible so why not go back to the great stories of our time. I doubt there is anyone in the sanctuary today who has experience the tragedy, the loss, the grief, that this family has.

Rick Hoyt was born with his umbilical cord wrapped around his neck. By the time the doctors could remove it his brain had been deprived of oxygen so that he became a paraplegic and a spastic. He could not move any part of his body or speak. “He'll be a vegetable the rest of his life,” Dick says doctors told him and his wife, Judy, when Rick was nine months old. “Put him in an institution.”

But his parents loved him. They noticed the way his eyes would follow them around the room, the only part of his body he could move.

When Rick was 11 they took him to the engineering department at Tufts University and asked if there was anything to help the boy communicate. “No way,” Dick says he was told. “There's nothing going on in his brain.”

“Tell him a joke,” Dick, his father, countered. They did. Rick laughed. Turns out a lot was going on in his brain.

They rigged a special computer that he could move with his cheek and he learned to communicate.

After a high school classmate was paralyzed in an accident and the school organized a charity run for him, Rick pecked out, “Dad, I want to do that.”

Yeah, right. How was Dick, a self-described “porker” who never ran more than a mile at a time, going to push his son five miles? Still, he tried. “Then it was me who was handicapped,” Dick says. “I was sore for two weeks.”

That day changed Rick's life. “Dad,” he typed, “when we were running, it felt like I wasn't disabled anymore!” And that sentence changed Dick's life. He became obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could. He got into such hard-belly shape that he and Rick were ready to try the 1979 Boston Marathon.

“No way,” Dick was told by a race official. The Hoyts weren't quite a single runner, and they weren't quite a wheelchair competitor. For a few years Dick and Rick just joined the massive field and ran anyway, then they found a way to get into the race officially: In 1983 they ran another marathon so fast they made the qualifying time for Boston the following year.

Then somebody said, “Hey, Dick, why not a triathlon? How's a guy who never learned to swim and hadn't ridden a bike since he was six going to haul his 110-pound kid through a triathlon? Still, Dick tried.

They ran the Boston Marathon again this year. Dick at age 69 and Rick at age 47. It was their one thousandth race. Among those one thousand races have been 234 Triathlons (6 Ironman distances, 7 Half Ironmans), 67 Marathons which include 27 Boston Marathons.

Rick was once asked, if he could give his father one thing, what would it be? Rick responded, "The thing I'd most like is for my dad to sit in the chair and I would push him for once."

Now watch the video, even if you have seen it before, and be inspired to give thanks always, all the time.