

Jeanne Calment of France was the oldest person in the world when she died in 1997. She was 122 years old. The oldest man ever whose age has been verified is Jiroemon Kimura of Japan, who was 116 years old. As of 29 December 2018, the oldest known living person is Kane Tanaka of Japan, who is 115 years old.

When I see stories of people living such long lives, I wonder what causes these people to have such longevity? Part of it is wrapped up in their genes or our DNA, but if we boiled down all the characteristics these people possessed, thankfulness and forgiveness would be at the top of the list. And medical reports and studies support this proposition.

Author of several books on aging, Eugene Bianchi said, "One of the common factors of those who are thriving in their senior years is their ability to live with gratitude." He said that they are able to receive the small and large gifts as blessings that evoke thankfulness. And while there are losses and disappointments, even tragedy, each of these seniors seemed to have the ability to learn from them, rather than being destroyed by them.

Bianchi cites one man in his 90's who admits that his wife's frail health makes this the most difficult season of his life. Yet, this man expresses thankfulness at simply having the gift of already having lived a long life. He says, "I am swimming in a sea of gratefulness."

Other studies talk about forgiveness where doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists say that people who forgive are healthier than people who do not forgive.

Researchers have also found evidence stating that if someone has a heart of thanksgiving, it adds longevity and depth to their life.

What these reports are saying is that forgiveness and thankfulness are good for us, which is something that God, through His word, has been saying all along. And so, as we approach the end of the year, let's be a thankful and forgiving people.

Colossians 3:12 says, “¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord^[a] has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

Paul reminds us that As we are God’s chosen ones, we must forgive each other. Forgiveness is one of the healthiest things we can do. But in order to give forgiveness, we first have to be recipients of God’s forgiveness.

Jesus forgave us even though we don’t deserve it. In fact, He forgave us even though it was our sins that put Him on the cross in the first place. Through His death on the cross, Jesus canceled out the guilty verdict against us, which is what makes this gift of forgiveness so huge.

Moreover, God doesn’t give us this forgiveness to expend it just upon ourselves. Rather, the Lord wants us to take this gift of forgiveness in order to grow us into the image of Jesus, who forgave all of us. What does this mean? It means that forgiveness must be received and then expended.

Like God’s forgiveness of our sins, Our forgiveness of others for the wrongs they have done has nothing to do with ours or their deservedness. We must forgive whether they deserve it or not. If we don’t, then this sin of unforgiveness will be felt in our marriages and relationships. It will affect our hearts, our health, and our children. If we tolerate unforgiveness, we’ll develop a negative culture that will affect not only this generation, but the generations to come.

We have to stop unforgiveness from destroying our lives, and then the lives of those who love us. Again, it’s not whether they deserve forgiveness. It’s got to do with our health, that is, our physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

On October 3, 2006, a gunman came into an Amish village in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He was a milk truck driver who lived just down the road from the Amish community. About two years prior, his daughter was born prematurely and died. He was angry with God, and this anger worked on his emotions to the point

where he rounded up ten Amish school girls and shot them, killing five. He then shot himself.

Now two of the girls who died were sisters. Can you imagine how you would feel if these were your children and grandchildren?

But the Amish people love God and want to apply God's word to their lives. They knew that if they do not forgive then they will not receive forgiveness. So, on that very evening, the grandfather of those two sisters went to the man's house and offered forgiveness to his wife and children.

The authorities sent trauma units into the Amish community to help them recover, but by the time they got there, the families of those girls were already past the forgiveness stage and were now trying to figure out how they could get food to this man's widow and children to see them through the difficult days ahead.

They knew the outcome if they held back forgiveness, and that would be bitterness and resentment. If they didn't know, then all they had to do is to look at what happened to this man and their children as a result.

They realized that holding onto unforgiveness wouldn't restore or heal anything. They knew the message this would send to their children for generations to come, not to mention the unraveling of their whole culture and way of life.

And so by offering forgiveness probably saved the future of their culture and protected their children from the effects of unforgiveness. And it was from this remarkable display that the world stood in awe and amazement of the wonderful power of God's grace.

Forgiveness is powerful. As a human being we're going to struggle with our emotions; but our forgiveness is not determined by our emotions, otherwise we may never get around to feeling like forgiving. We've got to be free from unforgiveness' devastating effects before it destroys our lives and our families.

Paul also talks about thankfulness as God's chosen people,

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. **And be thankful...** and **with gratitude** in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him.

Thanksgiving is an essential part of our lives and the lives of those around us. The reason is because there are going to be events that take place that we can't control, but the giving of thanks and being thankful will help us and others get through them.

However, we live in an ungrateful world, and an ungrateful age. Mostly what we hear today is one complaint after another as people fail to get what they think they deserve. Our society is becoming more and more bitter, which is one of the major causes for a lot of psychological and medical problems we are facing.

But even more than that, have you ever noticed how ungrateful people ruin your day? And thinking about that, I wonder if our hearts are like that when God tries to speak into our lives? You see, out of all the people in this world, Christians should be the most thankful and grateful.

“Let the word of Christ^[b] dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God..” (Colossians 3:16)

What is being said is that God's Word will have its way in our lives when we add thanksgiving to our prayers. And this brings me to a principle of thanksgiving “Thanksgiving should be on the Front Side of everything we do.”

Our “Thank You” is usually on the back side, or after a blessing. And this is true when it comes to God's blessings. But actually, what this whole principle is saying is that we should be thanking God in the good times as well as the bad times, and “Thank You” should be before, or on the front side.

Maybe think about it like this. The Thanksgiving holiday comes before Christmas, not afterwards. Thanksgiving comes before Christmas.

Understanding and applying this will revolutionize our lives and our prayers.

When our lives come from a heart of thanksgiving, God will turn a tragedy into a triumph, a mistake into a miracle, and something less into something more.

Thanksgiving opens the windows of heaven, because God delights when a spirit of thanksgiving pervades the church and the life of His people. I think it changes us from being mediocre into something miraculous.

In conclusion, As we are God's chosen people, we have to be a forgiving and thankful people. As we are forgiven people from God, we have to extend forgiveness to others, and to give thanks in all circumstances.