

Thank You, Lord

(Thanksgiving 2020)

THANKSGIVING. We just celebrated Thanksgiving in what was one of the hardest years in America: 2020. As we've gone through this tumultuous year it's been easy to look at all the loss, obstacles, hurts, and radical lifestyle changes that we've all endured and to count our curses rather than blessings.

QUESTIONS. Then late November rolls around and let me ask:

- Did we carry on with the typical Thanksgiving traditions of turkey, etc., with less than the usual enthusiasm?
- Even in “normal” years, did we attend this holiday with a true heart and spirit of giving thanks, or did we just gather together and eat?

Giving Thanks is one of the most powerful—and unused tools that God has given us.

HEALTH BENEFITS. According to ecommunity.com gratitude and the expression of thanks has the follow health benefits:

- Activates “the reward center” of the brain reducing anxiety and depression.
- Increases the value we place on other people.
- Increases likelihood of compassion and forgiveness.
- Increases likelihood of eating better and exercise.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY did a study on the giving of thanks where 411 participants were divided into 2 groups. Group 1 were asked to write a few sentences per week about what they had to be grateful for whereas Group 2 focused on what aggravated them. Here were the amazing results:

- After 10 weeks the thankful group experienced an increase in optimism and had a more positive outlook on life.
- The same group also had less medical problems resulting in decreased visits to their physicians.
- People who focused on what aggravated them experienced increase stress, anxiety, anger, fear, were more pessimistic about life, and visited their physicians more.
- It was discovered that when the thankful group specifically directed their thanks to a person, their “happiness” score greatly increased AND
- ***Thanking a specific person had the GREATEST positive impact upon mental health...more than ANY other intervention including counseling, therapy, etc.***
- Giving thanks, one time, to a specific person provided a mental and emotional boost that lasted for a whole month!

- Keeping a gratitude journal, sending a thank you note, or mentally counting our blessings had some effectiveness, but far less than personally approaching someone and thanking them.

The lessons in the Harvard experiment are obvious, *but what if we—as Christians—have a renewal in our hearts of taking the time to thank God?*

- God is a Person—the original One!
- We have more reasons to thank Him than we do all the people in our lives combined.
- God responds to thanks on a greater level than anyone on the planet.

WASHINGTON. Listen to the proclamation of our first President, George Washington, acknowledging the importance of Thanksgiving and to Whom our thanks should be directed:

“Whereas, it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; Whereas, both the houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness! Now therefore, I do recommend next, to be devoted by the people of the states to the service of that great and glorious being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country.” — George Washington, 1779

SACRIFICE. Keep in mind General Washington had just sacrificed years of his life fighting a war for our independence that had serious ups and downs! There was more than 1 occasion when it seemed like there would be no USA as the tide of the war went back and forth. Not only was Washington fighting the British, but men were deserting, conditions were horrible, and he fought with Congress constantly to fund his troops. He watched tens of thousands of his own men perish or be wounded for life fighting for our country.

THANKS TO GOD. There’s little doubt that, after it was all over, plenty of people thanked Washington for his leadership, tenacity, and sacrifice...yet look what this noble man states: all thanks go to God.

ACT OF LEADERSHIP. In my personal opinion, I believe this proclamation was one of the greatest acts of leadership President Washington ever did for our country because he inspired everyone to be grateful to God. We just read how giving thanks has personal health benefits and, just as importantly, increases the value we place on others. Now imagine an entire country falling to its knees and giving passionate praise and worship to the One True God!

It's no wonder America was so greatly blessed afterward!!!

LESS VALUE ON OTHERS. Here in 2020 Americans are placing less value on others than at any time in my lifespan. People are cutting connections with family and friends they've known since childhood over politics and social issues. I personally know several parents, for example, who've been cut off by their own children who are calling them racists, bigots, and Nazi's. **IT'S FAR EASIER TO CUT SOMEONE OFF WHEN WE'VE DEVALUED AND DEHUMANIZED THEM.**

Perhaps it's time for us to be more thankful, starting with the Church.

PERHAPS IT'S TIME TO DIRECT THAT THANKS WHERE IT BELONGS IN THIS ORDER: GOD FIRST AND FOREMOST, THEN HUMANKIND SECOND.

SNAP-ON TOOLS. Once per week, the Snap-On tool truck stops at our farm and my co-worker Mike walks through his truck and buys something. He jealousy guards any tools he buys from there with good reason—they're expensive! Yet he swears the money is worth it because the quality is so good. He keeps all his Snap-On tools locked in his vehicle and won't lend them to anyone, and I don't blame him.

The tool of gratitude is far more powerful and valuable than an entire set of Snap-Ons.

Now I ask:

- are we using this expensive tool or just letting it sit around?
- are we leaving this tool out in the open where it can be stolen?

"How can it be stolen?" you may ask, because gratitude is spiritual and not physical.

2020 OVER SOON! How about when we say things like we can't wait for 2020 to be over and hope that 2021 will be better? Give us better circumstances, outcomes, and events that will build us up rather than tear us down?

I would say that "hope" like that is the tool of thanks sitting around gathering dust.

I WOULD SAY THAT PUTTING OUR FAITH IN A NEW YEAR IS EQUIVALENT TO ALLOWING THAT TOOL TO BE STOLEN FROM US!

- We don't have to wait for a new year.
- We don't have to wait for Covid to end.
- We don't have to wait for the election to be settled and for our chosen candidate to be the one who gets in.
- We don't have to wait for other people to stop hating and being divisive.
- We don't have to wait for the economy to get better.

We can give thanks right now and the affects are both immediate and long term!

NEHEMIAH. Look at how God's people responded to finishing Nehemiah's wall:

Nehemiah 12:27-30 (ESV)

²⁷ And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

²⁸ And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites;

²⁹ also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem.

³⁰ And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

GRASS ROOTS. This event was truly grass roots: it was the people who sought out the priests—not the other way around—to lead a nationwide worship celebration to thank God! After they finally got everyone together, and I mean everyone, here's what happened:

Nehemiah 12:42-43 (ESV)

⁴² ...And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader.

⁴³ And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

SUPERNATURAL RESPONSE. Look at verse 43: when the people gave thanks to God, the Lord "made them" rejoice which doesn't imply force, but that He added a supernatural empowerment to their joy! So much that their rejoicing affected everyone and was heard for miles.

BOLDER & REPENTANT. I'll paraphrase chapter 13, but the giving of thanks also emboldened Nehemiah and the common people who then confronted the politicians of their day—face to face—about their corruption. Many people also repented and turned back to God, and the fruit of great generosity all took place...all sprouting from giving thanks to God.

Psalm 69:30-32 (ESV)

³⁰ I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.

³¹ This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.

³² When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive.

Verse 30 is paramount and deserves special attention: David says that thanking God **MAGNIFIES** Him. Magnify translates to “make larger, nourish, promote.”

COMPLAIN? Hold on: isn't that what we complain about the most?

- That God isn't as “big” in our lives as we want Him to be?
- We wish we could “see His hand” in our lives more than we do?
- We say that He seems so distant and far away?

- So what promotes God in our personal lives?
- What makes God bigger in our marriages and relationship?
- What nourishes His presence within us?

THANKING HIM

- We don't need to go to a big conference and have the keynote preacher lay hands on us so to be renewed.
- We don't need to speak in tongues for an hour every day to enlarge Him.
- We don't need to go on an extended fast to finally feel close to Him.

We just need to consistently take the time to thank Him! Look at verse 31 of David's Psalm: thanking God is more pleasing to Him than sacrificing animals! Or working yourself silly in ministry. Or giving away all your money or goods.

Verse 32: the humble see the giving of thanks and their hearts are revived!

Psalm 95:1-8 (ESV)

¹ Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

³ For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶ Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

⁷ For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if

you hear his voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

GOD’S VOICE. Some say that they can’t hear God’s voice and *Psalm 95 shows us that thanking Him opens our spiritual ears to hear His voice!*

Verse 8 shows that complaining and dwelling on what aggravates us does the opposite.

- How much we truly love God is equivalent to how often we thank Him.
- How much we appreciate another person is equivalent to how grateful we are towards them.
- How much we value or devalue our relationship with Christ hangs on how often we meditate on the good our Shepherd has done and continues to do.

Whether God or man, we don’t value someone we don’t thank.

We will hear the voice of God—and that of man—better when we’re grateful towards them.

Philippians 4:4-9 (ESV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

IT’S A LIFESTYLE. We love to quote verses 4, 7, and 8 by themselves but now let’s take them all together with the surrounding verses, especially verse 9: we must **PRACTICE** giving thanks!

- Rejoicing (verse 4), Reasonableness (verse 5), not being anxious (verse 6), God’s peace and a protected heart (verse 7), comes with a lifestyle of thanksgiving.

How does one develop the inspiration to give thanks in the first place?

The same way we’re inspired to complain: it’s all about what we choose to meditate on.

CHEW UPON THIS.... If we chew on things like Covid, the election, conflicts, someone else's faults, etc., it inspires a heart and spirit that want to complain and the result will be anxiety, fear, depression, and pessimism.

MEDITATE ON GOOD. If we chew on things like Jesus' great work on the Cross, His resurrection, His soon return, and the things He's doing for us right now the result is all the good things listed in Phil 4:4-9.

PUT IN MOUTH IS CHOICE. Meditate means chew on. Let's be honest: every food or drink we place in our mouths to eat and drink is a choice. It takes a conscience act to pick up that food or beverage and put it in our bodies. Coca Cola isn't forcing my hand!

THE SAME THING APPLIES TO WHAT WE PUT INTO OUR HEARTS TO CHEW ON.

Let it be thanks! What's the will of God for our lives? Here it is:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-19 (ESV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always,

¹⁷ pray without ceasing,

¹⁸ **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit.

Ironically: Paul only plays the "will of God" card when it comes to giving thanks and doing so increases the fire of the Holy Spirit.