

Choosing Gratitude

Colossians 3:15-17

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On Thursday we celebrated Thanksgiving and I would like to continue that theme this morning.

I have titled my message **Choosing Gratitude** because gratitude and thankfulness are a choice. We choose to be grateful people. We choose to be thankful in life.

Not only is gratitude part of our spiritual growth, it also has a lot of natural benefits in our lives.

Clinical trials indicate it can lower blood pressure, improve immune function, add to a healthy heart, create less depressed moods, less fatigue, and you sleep better. Gratitude creates more disease-fighting cells in our bodies, stress hormones are 23 percent lower in grateful people. It can actually reduce the effects of aging to the brain. (You want to look younger and feel younger start saying thank you more)

Studies also show grateful adolescence and teenagers compared to their less grateful counterparts, are happier; more optimistic; have better social support, are more satisfied with their school, family, and friends, and give more emotional support to others. They're also physically healthier and report fewer physical symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches. They are more satisfied with their lives, are more engaged in their schoolwork and hobbies, have higher grades, and are less envious, depressed, and materialistic.

The key to a happy and lasting marriage might be as simple as regularly expressing gratitude. Researchers from the University of Georgia say they found that the "most consistent significant predictor" of happy marriages was whether one's spouse expressed gratitude. "Feeling appreciated and believing that your spouse values you directly influences how you feel about your marriage, how committed you are to it, and your belief that it will last," So saying thank you is a "practical way couples can help strengthen their marriage."

No wonder God has a lot to say about being grateful and thankful. It is for our own good as well as the good of others.

My text this morning is **Colossians 3:15-17**

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

God has called us to be thankful people. He wants our worship to come out of a place of gratitude in our hearts. He wants whatever we do in word or deed to be oozing with thankfulness and gratitude.

It is to be one of the evidences of our Christian faith. If you are a Christian, God wants you to learn how to be thankful in every situation. He wants gratefulness to be your little light that shines. It is your testimony that you serve a good God.

So how can we train ourselves to be more grateful?

We don't want to be like the guy in this story: A man writing at the post office desk was approached by an older fellow who had a post card in his hand. The old man said, "Sir, could you please address this post card for me?" The man gladly did so, and he agreed to write a short message on the post card, and he even signed it for the man, too. Finally, the man doing the writing said to the older man, "Now, is there anything else I can do for you?" The old fellow thought about it for a minute, and he said, "Yes, at the end could you just put, 'P.S. Please excuse the sloppy handwriting.'" - He was not very grateful

Here are a few things I think we can do to become more grateful in our speech and our actions.

1. Focus on what you do have, instead of what you don't have.

This is huge. We tend to be pretty materialistic in our hearts.

A hundred years ago, people described themselves as having 72 wants and 16 necessities in their lives.

Today people describe 484 wants and 92 necessities.

It's hard to be grateful with that type of thinking.

Begin to focus on what you do have. Count your blessings. Thank God for the little things in your everyday life.

There is a lot wrong with our country but there is much more that is right. You might be struggling right now to meet your needs but consider all the things you do have.

When our focus shifts to what we do have, we become grateful people.

2. Focus on God's presence with you, instead of your present circumstances.

We all go through trying times, difficult seasons, and tough circumstances. During these times we have to choose whether we become overwhelmed, bitter and angry or whether we rest in his abiding presence.

He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He walks with us through every trail and deep valley. I am grateful he is with me today and tomorrow. I am not walking alone!

If we focus on his presence everyday it changes our perspective and encourages our spirit. When I know he is with me and he is for me I can give thanks in all circumstances.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

If you train your spirit to be grateful, you will be able to give thanks in whatever happens to you. Notice it says **in all** circumstances, not **for all** circumstances. We don't necessarily give thanks for the bad but we find a way to give thanks in the bad.

A famous English Bible scholar named Matthew Henry was once attacked by thieves and robbed of his purse. He wrote these words in his diary: "Let me be thankful. First, I was never robbed before. Second, although they took my purse, they didn't take my life. Third, although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, let me be thankful because it was I who was robbed and not I who did the robbing."

3. Focus on how you can serve others, instead of how you think they should serve you.

Unmet expectations are a big reason we complain and have trouble being a grateful person. When my focus is on me and my needs and my wants and my goals and my agenda, it is hard to be grateful in life. Because people constantly let us down.

When you start serving others something changes in your heart. Selfishness gives way to gratitude. You become happier and more fulfilled.

From the Greek word for "servant" (**therapon**) we get our English word "therapy".

The best therapy is in helping someone rather than thinking, "Why didn't someone notice me, thank me, reach out to me?" **When we focus on others it is therapy for our souls.** It makes us happier and healthier.

4. Focus on being positive, instead of negative thoughts and speech.

These are all choices we can make. You can train yourself to be a positive, grateful person that people enjoy being around.

You can train yourself to be exuberant in worship no matter what kind of week you had. That is not being fake if it is flowing from gratitude in your heart.

Colossians 3 – "Sing to God with gratitude in our hearts." He is always worthy because he is always faithful toward us. He is a good, good father all the time. Even when he says no or wait to our prayers he is looking out for our good.

As kings' kids there is absolutely no reason for you and I not to be grateful people.

Conclusion:

Application: Join me in a *Negativity Fast* for one week beginning today.

For one week we will only speak positive and thankful things. We will stop all complaining, criticizing, unbelief, and negative statements. This includes everything. About work, school, spouse, parent, children, government, weather, eagles, cowboys.

I think we will be surprised how much of the world's negativity around us has shaped how we think and talk. Kingdom people are to think and talk differently.

This does not mean we can't talk about difficulty things. It means we change how we talk about them. We find the positive in them. We express faith and hope for them. *"The Eagles are learning what doesn't work and they will become a better team in spite of all their losses."*

I am dealing with a difficult problem at work or with my health, but I am believing God for a breakthrough. Because I know he is with me and for me I can find the positive in the negative.

How many will join me in a negativity fast for this coming week? Let's do it and kindly help each other when we slip up.

Closing Video: *"Thanksgiving Anthem"*

Closing Prayer/Ministry Time