

Good morning, Fellowship. How are we doing? For those of you who don't know me, my name is Richard Kerry and I serve on staff as the Marriage and Parenting Pastor. I am thankful to be with you this morning – especially this week. It's Thanksgiving week and I don't know about you but I'm ready for some turkey and dressing. This past week my wife had my son do a craft and asked him to write what he was thankful for on the feathers of the turkey. I thought I would take a minute this morning and share those with you.

He's thankful for his home and for shoes. He's thankful for markers. He's thankful for his drums. Now at this point my wife stopped him and said, "Roman, are you just looking around the house naming things you're thankful for?" So, then he closed his eyes and continued on with the project. Let's see, he's thankful for his school – give that a few years buddy. He's thankful for his best friend who is also his cousin, Kennedy. He's thankful for his generic friends – none in particular. He's thankful for the gym. Kid is 4 but he's ready to pump iron. He's thankful for – and this is my favorite – IKEA. He's not even Swedish. But he just had the feels for IKEA. Now, I have to tell you – I was disappointed that me, my wife, his siblings – none of us made the list. But you know who did? You. Because his last thing was that he was thankful for a very generic – everybody.

If I asked you this week what you're thankful for – what would you say and would you be able to take your eyes off the things around you to make that list? I bet if I asked you we'd hear answers like: I am thankful for my job promotion. I am thankful for our new baby. I am thankful for a new relationship or a relationship that's been restored. I am thankful election season is over. I am thankful for my health or this vacation we went on or our new house. I am thankful for the overcoming of a sickness, disease, or addiction.

But that's not the case for all of us. I know some of you this week - if that was your family tradition or if I asked you that question right now – you'd have a hard time finding something to be thankful for. Because this year, instead of a job promotion - you got laid off. Instead of new children - you lost one or have struggled to have one. Instead of a new relationship – you lost one to divorce, a break-up, or death. Instead of a vacation – you struggled to pay your bills. Or maybe this year you received a horrible diagnosis.

Turn to Colossians 3 and as you're turning there I am going to bring up another passage on the screens. This week and next you're going to hear from us on this topic of Thanksgiving. We're calling it, "In All Things..." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "¹⁶ Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." **In all things** – that's a loaded statement, right? I have to confess, in difficult seasons, I don't know that I've always give God thanks IN ALL THINGS.

Then Colossians 3 starting in verse 15 says:¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Be thankful. Sing with thanksgiving. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do it in the name of Jesus and give thanks. Thankfulness. Gratitude. They're desired and demanded by the Lord. Why does God want us to be thankful? How does He want us to be thankful? And how can we be thankful **in all things**? Go back up to verse 1.

“Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” At the beginning of chapter 3 we see Paul use the word, “therefore.” He’s just made a big point in chapter 2 that sets up his statement, “if you have been raised up with Christ.” In chapter 2, He has laid out for the Colossians the message of and the power of the gospel. He tells them they were dead in their trespasses and sins. He reminds them that the penalty for their sins was death. In other passages, we’re told that we were children of wrath – obeying only our flesh and incapable of obeying the Lord. We were trapped there with no escape and no ability to change our position before God.

But because of Jesus’ work on the Cross and His Resurrection, we have been given life. That’s the story of the gospel. He steps in and does for us what we could not do for ourselves. He pays the penalty for our death – He dies for our sins and He rises from the dead, and through Him we are given life. So, when Paul opens chapter 3 with the words, “If you have been raised up with Christ,” it’s a reminder of the power – the transforming, resurrecting power of the gospel for those who are in Christ.

Friends, you need something to be thankful for this morning? Here’s the first why: **The Why: In Christ, we are given life instead of death.**

“The heartbeat of the Christian faith is Good News—not good advice, good technique, or good behavior. In other words, the root of Christianity is not “do something for Jesus.” The root of Christianity is “Jesus has done everything for you.” – Tullian Tchividjian

When I was in junior high, my front yard was the meeting spot for all of my friends because we had a basketball goal. One particular day, my sister and I are outside playing with our friends. My dad, who worked shift work at that time, had just come off a graveyard shift where he worked all night and was asleep in the back room of our house. Meanwhile, my mom is inside giving the house a good cleaning.

She’s a bit of a neat freak. So, it just so happens that at that time we had a deep freezer in the corner of our kitchen with space behind it because of the way it was positioned. That deep freezer belonged to my grandmother and because she didn’t want any scratches on it she put a sheet over it. As my mom is cleaning, she finds my dad’s keys and tosses them on the freezer and they slide off the freezer in that space behind the freezer in the corner of the kitchen. As she leans over the freezer to get the keys, the sheet slides with her and she goes head first.

She’s pinned in. Trapped. Stuck. There’s no getting out. She begins screaming for help. BUT...my dad is sleeping like a rock in the back room and my sister and I are outside. There’s nothing she can do. Eventually, I come in to get something to drink and hear her yelling. I find her head down, feet up in the air, screaming for me to get my dad.

So, I did what any junior high boy would do. I ran outside and grabbed my friends to come look at my mom. That’s when she really screamed and I went to get my dad. He comes in there, moves the deep freezer and she is freed.

That’s the gospel. We were stuck, head first, pinned in, and powerless to change anything BUT God steps in and changes everything FOR us. He doesn’t leave us trapped in our sin and death but He comes after us – in His love He comes after us – and brings us life and freedom. In Him, we are given life instead of death.

So how do we show we're thankful for that? I want to make it very practical for you this morning. **The How: Tell His story and Celebrate It!** Be bold in telling his story. Tell others of His love for you. Tell others how you were once lost and broken but that you now have salvation in Christ, have experienced healing and redemption in this life and the one to come. Celebrate it through worship. The end of Colossians 3 tells us to sing songs, to sing with thankfulness in your hearts. Worship Him. Write about it – journal about it.

I want to acknowledge with you – this is hard work. Having a thankful and grateful mind requires discipline but it's also life changing and did you know there's science behind it? Every minute of every day, your body is physically reacting, literally changing, in response to the thoughts that run through your mind. Your thoughts literally change the structure of and the way your brain operates. The more negative your thinking – griping, complaining, and pessimism – the more negative you'll continue to be. The more positive your thinking – grateful, celebratory, joyous – the more positive your brain will become. You are literally changing a **piece of your mind** with each thought. Science today is supporting Scriptural claims from thousands of years ago – that you are transformed by the renewing of your mind. Listen, change your brain and you'll change your life. Give the Lord a **piece of your mind** and watch Him change it entirely.

Telling His story and celebrating it are a practice in thanksgiving because you're reminded of the peace you have in Christ and for that you can always be thankful.

Thank God His power – the gospel – transfers us from death to life. He gives us life instead of death. The next Why: in Christ, we are given hope instead of despair.

Let's re-read those verses at the beginning of Colossians 3. **3** Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

If you are a follower of Jesus you have been moved from death to life but you also have been assured of an eternal life to come and we know that Jesus Himself, is there, preparing that place for us and interceding on our behalf at the right hand of the Father. He is there – next to the Father reigning supreme in all His glory and there is a day coming, when He will return and He will be returning for us, His bride, to usher in a new kingdom – the kingdom of heaven.

In the passage we just read, Paul demands that we keep seeking the things above and other translations say to set our minds on things above. Set our minds on Christ's eternal control and a day coming when we're made completely whole – a day when we're revealed with Him in glory. The gospel has changed our position before God from children of wrath and His enemies to children of love – to sons and daughters and there will be a day when we're made completely righteous and holy, without sin, and that day is coming with Christ who is sovereign over all creation.

Last week, Courtney Kidwell, who attends church here, posted a blog on Facebook – one that caught my attention. The name of her blog site is Sacredly Scarred and the title of this particular post is, "Seasoned with Thanksgiving." Her words were so powerful, I asked for permission to share her story.

19 months ago, this week, Courtney and her husband Ryan were days away from the arrival of their little boy, Tyler. Up until this point in the pregnancy, everything had been normal and Tyler seemed to be a healthy little boy – ready to make his appearance and to join 3 siblings in his family. Being her 4th child, Courtney knew what it felt like for a baby to move into position preparing for delivery. Throughout the pregnancy, Tyler had been a very active baby but on April 28th, Courtney woke up and could no longer feel him moving. She rushed to the doctor and hours later, doctors confirmed Courtney's greatest fear and she encountered what no pregnant woman wants to encounter – a missing heartbeat on a monitor.

Last week, 19 months after that devastating moment, Courtney penned these words:

“As the modern culture dubs this month as the season of Thanksgiving, I desire to pray for the hearts that are wrestling with this idea of offering thanks when their circumstances seem so dark or painful. It's counterintuitive yet in doing so, it allows us to be clothed in humility and receive the honor of bestowing the glory upon the only One who deserves the praises of thanksgiving...May your season of thanksgiving be secured in Christ. May you trust the work of the Spirit as He wraps you in a blanket of gratitude and changes your heartache to be accompanied with thanksgiving. May we all be seasoned for expressing our gratitude as we remember the sacrifice He made on our behalf.”

– Courtney Kidwell

What enabled Courtney – 19 months after encountering the greatest tragedy of life to post a blog called, “Seasoned for Thanksgiving?” I asked her and she told me two things. First, this story isn't about her. This is God's story and she has the privilege of telling it and telling it well. You hear that? Courtney has found security in the gospel and comfort in knowing that this story isn't about her – it's about Him and it's her job to tell His story well. She wants to point others to Him. Second, she told me she daily fixes her gaze on Jesus. She daily fixes her eyes on the Cross and the Resurrection. She daily turns her affections towards heaven where she'll be reunited with her Savior and with little Tyler.

Here's the last thing she shared with me: “My biggest fear in life used to be losing a child – the biggest fear now is living life without the certainty of Christ. I hate that it took my son's death to cause me to look at both the Garden and the Cross. Jesus willingly laying His life down. I hate that it took me losing my son to set my gaze elsewhere. Without Christ, I would've crawled into the grave with that little boy. So daily, I look to Him and I cling to His coat tail.”

How can we be thankful during tragic times like this? **The How: Fix your gaze upward. Set your gaze on an eternity where Christ reigns supreme forever and always. Set your minds on things above.**

Are you in the midst of pain and suffering? Fix your eyes on Christ. Turn your eyes towards heaven – where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Set your gaze on the Resurrection so that you might have hope in the midst of a dark and desolate place. Know that the Holy Spirit is present with you and working in you right now. Turn your heart, your affections, your attention towards Christ and His reign both now and eternally. If we only focus on the horizontal – if we just keep our eyes fixed on this war torn, sinfully depraved, disease infested world - we'll be anxious, depressed, and no good for one another or the kingdom of God. Setting my mind on things above isn't an attempt to escape reality it's to set my mind on an ultimate reality so that I can be who He has called me to be in this reality – here and now. In spite of what is happening on earth, I can live

confidently and securely because I know of what's coming in the life to come – I know what's coming at death and at the end of this time. Setting my mind on things above empowers me to bring the things that exist there – here.

Fixing my gaze upward isn't escapism – it's not an attempt to avoid the reality of living on earth and the issues that come from that – but it's a way to remind me that there is better coming. It's hopeful. It doesn't matter what your circumstances in life – if you've been raised with Christ – then nothing on earth EVER has victory in your life. Pain, stress, death, sadness, and loss NEVER win. Those things do not reign. Christ our King does – right now and for forever. And when that is the TRUTH of your life – that Jesus is King – then you can have a grateful heart no matter life's circumstance.

How does fixing your gaze upward lead to thanksgiving – because when you do – you'll be reminded of the hope found in Christ both now and in the future and for that you can always be thankful.

In Christ, we are given life instead of death. We show our gratitude by telling His story to others and by celebrating – worshiping Him. In Christ, we are given hope instead of despair. We show our thankfulness by setting our gaze on Him daily – by daily fixing our eyes on Heaven. And the final why: In Christ, we are given His righteousness instead of our sinfulness. In Christ, we can be clothed in His character and we can rid ourselves of our old character.

Let's read the rest of Colossians 3:5-14.

⁵Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— ¹¹*a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

If we were going to boil this down to one word – we'd call this sanctification. It's us slowly but surely becoming more like Jesus. It's us putting to death those things that caused our death to begin with – and putting on those things which give us life. It's allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us - revealing to us and convicting us of our sin and impurities – and then allowing Him to work in us the character of Jesus Himself.

God has given us victory over sin and death – no matter who you are. If you are IN Christ, you have been given power over these things. You are called to put these things to death. But unfortunately, some of us are still living as though we don't have victory over sin and death. We've jumped back behind the freezer - pinned and trapped. But I need to tell you this morning - you don't belong there. You're meant for so much more.

"The Christian must kill self-centeredness; he must regard as dead all private desires and ambitions. There must be in his life a radical transformation of the will, and a radical shift of the center. Everything which would keep him from fully obeying God and fully *surrendering* to Christ must be surgically excised." – William Barclay

Paul is demanding an extermination of our old life and a putting on of a new one. It means daily pursuing His righteousness, His love, His character, and praying that the Holy Spirit would do a mighty and powerful work in your life to produce those things in you from the inside out.

How do I show gratitude for that? How do I increase my thanksgiving for Christ's righteousness being imparted to me? The How: Continually surrender yourself to Him and community with His people.

In Colossians 3 Paul says to "let the Word of God dwell in you richly." Romans 12:1-2 says this, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Where the Word of God dwells, peace reigns. And where peace reigns, thanksgiving is poured out. By continuing to present myself and surrender myself to the Word of God – I am worshiping the Lord – I am offering Him thanks. I am serving Him. It's a continued pursuit of Jesus. It's daily getting in the Word of God so that the Word of God gets in me. It's letting the character and righteousness of Jesus invade my life – changing me from the inside out. It's knowing that this Word, when ingested, brings life – righteous, godly, holy life.

Notice though, it's not just a surrendering to the Word of God but showing thanks is also a surrendering to the People of God. We're told to not lie to one another – in other words be honest about your life and struggles, to bear with another, forgive one another, and admonish one another. We're to offer our lives to each other in humility – to walk through life together – pointing each other towards Christ and His character. We're to confess our sins, walk alongside of each other in those struggles, to forgive one another for the harm those sins cause, and then to challenge each other with Scripture. How is this Thanksgiving? It's a recognition that my life is not my own anymore – it belongs to Him and it's to benefit others. It's also a recognition of who I was and who I am becoming and that should bring great joy as I see that gap widen. And joy is something I can always be thankful for.

In college I held onto some sin in my life and shared it with no one. I held onto some of these sins for over a year. One day I decided it was time to stop hiding, to share my struggles, and open myself up in humility. My friend heard my confession, he responded with grace, with an encouragement, and a challenge to me. The same night I confessed those things, I had a dream where I was having heart surgery and when they opened my heart all of this black tar came out of my chest.

I woke up the next morning relieved. Some of you are walking around trapped. Oppressed by your hidden and unconfessed sin. You need to be reminded this morning that you've been made free. You need to confess sin so that it no longer holds power

over you and allow your brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage you and come alongside of you in those struggles.

I was talking to another friend – another member of this church last week. Through tears my friend shared with me how his life 2 years ago was on the verge of disaster. His relationship with the Lord had faltered. He was wrestling with doubt, his own struggle with PTSD, he had made some poor decisions in his first marriage, that marriage had ended in divorce, and he had multiple patterns of behavior that were slowly becoming addictions. But the tears he shared with me last week weren't about his old behavior, they were tears of joy because of how the Lord had changed his life. What changed? He surrendered his life to the King of Kings and is on a journey to know Him and love Him more every day through the reading of His Word and approaching others with humility – letting them speak Truth into his life. It doesn't mean the journey has been easy, is easy now, or will be easy moving forward, but it's a journey he is committed to in order to show thanks to the God that has literally saved his life.

This morning, maybe you're here today and you would say, "Richard, I am having a hard time being thankful. I have had a terrible week, month, year, or maybe 10, 20, 50, years. And I have realized today, it's because I have never placed my life in the hands of the Savior. I have never responded to the gospel message for salvation." Or maybe this morning you realized you haven't given the Lord control of every area of your life and that's preventing you from being thankful. I want to invite you to that today. I want to invite you to respond to the gospel and I want to invite you to deliver your life to Jesus Christ today. We have prayer partners outside of these rooms waiting on you.