

Thankfulness

Thankfulness should be something we invest in every day of the year. Thanksgiving is a good time to remind ourselves of this important activity. It also comes approximately one month before Christmas and the end of the year. So let us begin our highest holiday season in the spirit of thanksgiving. The Lord tells us, *"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"* (I Thessalonians 5:18).

Thanksgiving is a royal command. We should be thankful for everyone and everything. Paul said, *"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you"* (Philippians 1:3). He even thanked God for the precious memories.

1. Thankfulness is natural for a Christian.

The unregenerate have no thankfulness toward God, *"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened"* (Romans 1:21). The Word of God points out that not only is the lost heart an unthankful heart, but it is also a dark heart. As Christians, we are commanded to *"...walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks"* (Ephesians 5: 2-4). Instead of wallowing in the filth of this world, God says give thanks for who He is and what He does!

One way for thankfulness to become more natural is to start your day out thanking God for every little or big thing and continue until the day is done and even then, give Him thanks for a bed to sleep on and the gift of sleep itself *"... for so he giveth his beloved sleep"* (Psalm 127:2). *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"* (Colossians 3:17).

Thankfulness should be as natural as eating and drinking. When Jesus fed the four thousand, not counting the women and children, the Bible says, *"And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude"* (Matthew 15:36). When Jesus fed the five thousand not counting the women and children, the Bible says, *"And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would"* (John 6:11).

When our Lord instituted the Lord's Supper the Bible tells us, *"And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves"* (Luke 22:17). *"And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:19). When I have been out with my preacher friends and they serve us chips to munch on before the main course, some of my friends will ask, "Are you pre-chip or post-chip pray-er?" This is an eschatological playful play on words referring to pre-trib or post-trib (tribulation) rapture. I always like to tell them I eat like I believe in the second coming, I am therefore pre-chip. In other words, they are asking if we pray before the appetizer or wait for the main course. I say let us be thankful for every morsel that enters our mouth. *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"* (I Corinthians 10:31).

The custom of prayer before food continued all the way through the New Testament, so let us carry this rich tradition as well: *"And when he (Paul) had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat"* (Acts 27:35).

2. Peace and contentment accompanies thankfulness.

If God is ruling in our hearts, so also should the gift of peace with contentment. *"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful"* (Colossians 3:15).

A famous sermon my father preached was entitled, "Please Pass the Salt." The theme of the message was "sins that accompany other sins." In other words when asked for the salt, along comes the pepper. When you invite one sin into your life another one comes with it. I submit that when we operate in one of God's virtues, another one comes with it. If I have thankfulness, peacefulness will soon follow. A thankful person is a contented person! *"But godliness with contentment is great gain"* (I Timothy 6:6). A thankful person knows the value of what he or she has and doesn't merely accept it but celebrates its worth. *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (Philippians 4:11). *"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content"* (I Timothy 6:8).

God never blesses sourpusses. Don't let anyone or anything steal your joy. Keep on smiling if for no other reason than just to confuse the Devil! *"And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your*

heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:22). "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

3. Appreciation is the springboard of thankfulness.

Four times in Psalm 118 and all twenty-six verses in Psalm 136 we are reminded, "O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: because His mercy endureth for ever." No less than forty-one times in Scripture we read the phrase, "...for His mercy endureth for ever." Dr. Bob Jones said, "The prettiest flower that God ever grew in the garden of appreciation is the flower of gratitude and when the flower of gratitude dies on the altar of a man's heart, that man is well nigh hopeless."

We should give thanks on purpose. The Psalmist said, "Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:164). It may serve you well to set the alarm on your cell phone or watch and when the beeper goes off, stop what you are doing momentarily and give God thanks. We should also give thanks randomly. The Psalmist again said, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:62). There is an old saying, "when you can't sleep, don't count sheep; talk to the Shepherd." Better yet, talk to Him with a thankful heart.

4. Thankfulness is the victor's cry!

If you are having a hard time knowing what you can be thankful for, consider what Jesus has done for you on the cross and in His death and in the fact that the tomb is now empty. He purchased our victory! "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:57). The victory that Christ won on the cross is good throughout every aspect of our life ~ wherever we and whatever we are doing. "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place" (II Corinthians 2:14). "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Corinthians 9:15).

I am thoroughly enjoying going through our series on prayer. This is a good time to remind you that thankfulness and praise is a precursor to prayer! We enter the temple of prayer by going through the vestibule of praise (Psalm 100:4). Notice Paul told the Thessalonians, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers" (I Thessalonians 1:2). It will affect our intercommunications with others and our overall attitude if we begin to thank God for people and all events He has placed in our lives. When we open our hearts to God in thankfulness, He opens the windows of heaven to us with manifold blessings!

-Pastor Pope-