

Growing In Gratitude

Giving Thanks

November 19, 2017

For the past two weeks we have been focused on “*Growing In Gratitude.*” There is tremendous power in gratitude. In fact one might conclude that the healthiest human emotion is love. I would argue, while love is a wonderful emotion, gratitude is actually the healthiest.

Gratitude actually increases your immunities. It makes you more resistant to stress and less susceptible to illness.

We all know thankfulness can change a person’s heart, but did you know it’s also good *for* your heart?

The American Psychological Association did a study in 2015 of 186 men and women with heart damage. They rated the people’s levels of gratitude and spiritual well-being and found that those with higher gratitude scores experienced better moods, higher quality of sleep, and less inflammation – which can worsen the symptoms of heart failure.

Bottom line ... grateful people are healthy people and happy people.

Gratitude is that important!

We must learn to practice gratitude. Not only because it makes us feel better, but because it is an expectation of God’s. He desires and expects us to live lives of gratitude.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NLT)

All circumstances?? How do we do that?

Let me share a couple of ways.

1. Recognize what God has done.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 1

We must have our eyes opened to what He is doing and what has done for us. If we miss this, we end up heading down the path of negativity.

Two weeks ago Pastor Dale gave us some really good reasons why we should resist negativity. If you missed it, it's available online.

Here is what often times happens. We get so caught up in the pressure and stress and negativity of life that we miss the God sightings all around us.

The greatest cure for stress and negativity is taking an inventory of what God has done.

This practice will greatly change your outlook. It will change your negative attitude into an attitude of gratitude.

Psalm 111:2

How amazing are the deeds of the Lord! All who delight in him should ponder them. Psalm 111:2 (NLT)

We need to take stock of all that He has done.

Let's do that now. Let's just take a quick inventory right now. Let's "ponder" a few of them.

There are three things that I want to "ponder". Three things God has done for us. There are many more, but let's focus on three.

- God provides relationships

Philippians 1:3

³ Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. Philippians 1:3 (NLT)

The author of the verse, the Apostle Paul found himself in some very stressful situations.

His journey of following Jesus included things like: shipwrecks, beatings, robberies, hunger, thirst, sleepless nights, and more and yet He remained thankful for the relationships in his life.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 2

Illus:

Last month we all watched with horror as so many in California lost all they had to the horrible wildfires that ravaged their area. 8,400 homes and buildings were destroyed.

I was particularly moved by one couple. A retired couple that spent 6 hours in a neighbors swimming pool as they watched their entire house burn to the ground. They lost everything. Everything but each other.

When asked what they were going to do, they replied, "*We will start again. We are OK. We have each other.*"

In the midst of perhaps the worst tragedy of their lives, they were thankful for one another.

- God provides provision

There are two tracks we can often find our selves running down.

The first is to complain. How easy it is to complain about what we don't have as opposed to thanking God for what we do have.

Another path we sometimes take, is we tend to run down the path of entitlement. The belief that somehow we deserve what we have, or that we have earned it.

While it is important to work for what we have, we must remember that everything comes from God.

Romans 11:36 tells us,

For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen. Romans 11:36 (NLT)

We bring glory to God when we are thankful for what He has provided. Even Jesus did this...

Imagine that. Jesus owns it all and yet look at what He said in John 6:11 as He was feeding 5,000 hungry people.

John 6:11a

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Johns 6:11a (NLT)

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 3

In doing so, He was giving glory to His Father.

As we give thanks for God's provision to us, we give Him glory, we worship Him.

Philippians 2:5 tells us that, "*You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*" Therefore like Jesus, we should be thankful for what has been provided.

It is for this reason that I appreciate the habit that some many of us are in, in giving thanks to God each time we sit down to a meal.

While it is easy for that to be come a rote and meaningless habit it should instead serve as a reminder to you and your family that all we have is provided by to us by God.

- God provides peace

God provides us peace in the midst of the most troubling of times. And as we experience it we can't help but give thanks.

In fact what we are going to discover here is that peace and thanks go hand in hand.

Philippians 4:6-7

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

As we give thanks we experience His peace.

Illus.

I am always moved by the story behind the great hymn, "*It Is Well With My Soul*"

The writer of that hymn, Horatio Spafford, a business man in Chicago, sent his wife and three daughters to Europe by ship while he remained back in the States, intending to join them later. En rout there was a terrible storm and a shipwreck during which their three daughters drowned. Mrs. Spafford made it to safety and wired back saying, "*All of our daughters have been lost. Only I have been saved.*"

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 4

He took the next vessel. As they came near the place where his daughters drowned, the skipper of the ship pointed to the place where the other ship had gone down. It was there on the deck of the ship he wrote these stirring words:

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
“It is well, it is well with my soul.”*

And that is what peace is. It is a sense deep down in our soul that it is well.

I can't imagine feeling that way in the face of such a loss. I can though imagine God supplying the peace needed in order to face it.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Colossians 3:15 (NLT)

Again, peace and thankfulness go hand in hand.

Peace comes from Christ and it will fill our hearts.

What a gift. A gift worth thanking Him for!

After we recognize what God has done the next step is to respond.

2. Respond to what God has done.

Gratitude is a choice.

We are either going to take notice of what He has done and respond in thanks or we are going to miss what He has done and neglect to give thanks.

We must keep our eyes open to what I like to call “*God sightings.*”

We must not miss the great things God has done and is doing in our lives.

We must not let the business of life cause us to miss out.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 5

Illus.

I'm reminded of the story of a violinist who set himself up and played in a busy Washington DC subway. It was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. Since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Over the course of that 45 minutes only 6 people would slow their pace to listen or even stop for a few seconds. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He ended up collected \$32.

The one who paid the most attention was a 3-year-old boy. His mother tried to hurry him along but he resisted finally being forced to continue walking turning his head the whole time so as not to miss the violinist.

Here is what is most interesting, no one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. In that subway he played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars.

Two days before the social experiment he had sold out a theater in Boston with the average seat price being \$100.

You see if we do not take the time to slow down long enough to notice what God is doing, we will miss it; to slow down long enough to notice the God sightings.

We must remember that God is at work right in front of us. He is working in both the good circumstances of life and the bad.

Let's look at the two.

- Practice gratitude in the good times.

Don't let the good times of life distract you from God's work in your life.

Sometimes even in the midst of good times, we miss what God is doing.

As we have already considered, thank God for His provision, the gifts He has given you. They are many!

I love the spirit of thanks found in the words of the Psalms. Just listen...

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 6

Psalm 100:3-4

Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name..* Psalm 100:3-4 (NLT)

Psalm 107:1

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Psalm 107:1 (NLT)

Psalm 118:28-29

You are my God, and I will praise you! You are my God, and I will exalt you! ²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Psalm 118:28-29 (NLT)

Psalm 105:1-5

¹ Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness.

Let the whole world know what he has done.

² Sing to him; yes, sing his praises.

Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.

³ Exult in his holy name;

rejoice, you who worship the Lord.

⁴ Search for the Lord and for his strength;

continually seek him.

⁵ Remember the wonders he has performed,
his miracles, and the rulings he has given,

Psalm 105:1-5 (NLT)

Prayers like this are only possible when we have our eyes open to all that God is doing.

Choose to have an attitude of gratitude as you see all the good God is doing in and around your life.

But what about when life is difficult? What about the times in which we don't feel God, or have a hard time seeing His involvement in our lives?

- Practice gratitude in the bad times.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. 1

Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT)

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Philippians 4:4 (NLT)

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 7

Paul doesn't say here to be joyful only in the good times. The message here is *always* be full of joy.

Is that even possible?

Is there a way to find joy and be thankful in the difficult times of life?

He continues in the next couple of verses with kind of a formula to follow.

Philippians 4:6-7

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

The formula:

- Don't worry
- Pray
- Give thanks

THEN ... you will experience God's peace!

When we are at peace we are not experiencing stress. In fact it has been shown that people who are grateful are happy. People who are ungrateful are miserable.

Matthew Henry, the eighteenth-century preacher whose commentary remains among the most popular of all times, was once accosted by robbers while living in London. His response is amazing!

"Let me be thankful, first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

What a perspective!

There is such power in gratitude.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 8

May we always be a people that are fixated on Jesus and all that He is doing around us, in us and through us.

If you need to, spend some time today or this week alone with Him, ask Him to give you His perspective, to show you all that He is doing and then write it down.

Reflect, Recognize and Respond.

INVITE WORSHIP TEAM TO STAGE.

Read:

Psalm 136:1-9

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods.

His faithful love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁴ Give thanks to him who alone does mighty miracles.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁵ Give thanks to him who made the heavens so skillfully.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁶ Give thanks to him who placed the earth among the waters.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁷ Give thanks to him who made the heavenly lights—

His faithful love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to rule the day,

His faithful love endures forever.

⁹ and the moon and stars to rule the night.

His faithful love endures forever.

Pray.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 9