

A Thankful Heart

Proverbs 17:22

I hope this was a great week for you as you celebrated Thanksgiving. What are you thankful for today? We all know the word means the act of giving thanks. The New World Dictionary goes so far as to offer that thanksgiving is a formal, often public expression of thanks to God in the form of a prayer. We see a number of them in Scripture. Solomon prayed in thanksgiving to God when the Temple was dedicated. Nehemiah prayed giving thanks to God when the walls were completed. Hezekiah prayed giving thanks to God for deliverance from an enemy.

Thanksgiving then is an expression of gratitude for something given or received.

The waitress gives us a refill on our water and we express our thanks.

We get a birthday gift and express our thanks.

We are waiting to turn onto a road and the driver who is positioned at that cross section waiting for the light to turn green motions us to turn out into the lane ahead of him and we wave back to express our thanks.

Have you ever gone up to your boss and expressed thanks for your job or for the paycheck you were given?

Have you thanked a teacher for helping you through a subject or thanked a coach for letting you be part of the team?

We thank others, do we thank the Lord?

Every day brings countless opportunities to express our thanks in gratitude whether we consider it something that was big or small. My encouragement to you today is not to miss those opportunities. *I believe that the more thankful you are, the more you will be thankful for.* The opposite is also true, the less thankful you are, the more you

will believe you are entitled to or deserve something. Instead of thankfulness there is ingratitude.

We could also extend the definition of thanksgiving to include gratitude for something we are able to do or give to another. Thankfulness isn't just in response to something we receive from someone else, it is also about being thankful for the opportunity we have to give to someone else.

Be thankful when you are able to help someone out by bringing in some canned goods for our grocery basket in the foyer.

Be thankful when you can buy a gift to go toward Operation Christmas Child so that they have the opportunity to hear the gospel. If you couldn't give this year, be thankful for those who could so that our church could participate in sharing the good news of Christmas with children.

Be thankful when you are able to help a neighbor by mowing the lawn or shoveling their driveway.

As the produce in the garden comes in Robyn is always thankful for the Lord's bounty and the opportunity to be generous by sharing it with others.

Whether in giving or receiving we have good reason to be thankful and we have plenty to be thankful for. **If you were to make a list today, how many items could you write down?** And don't forget to include thanks for the times you were able to help someone else.

Now before we go any further I want to show you very quickly the consequence of an ungrateful heart, a heart that is unappreciative.

Romans 1:18-23

Now notice verse 24. **"The Lord gave them over."**

Notice verse 26. **"The Lord gave them over."**

Notice verse 28. **"The Lord gave them over."**

Because of an unthankful heart, God gave them over to the passions of their lust.

The very first question of the Westminster catechism asks what the chief end of man is. The answer is that man is created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When we are unthankful we have turned away from the very purpose for which we were created – to glorify God by giving Him thanks for all His works. It is willful rebellion where I willingly choose to ignore God's provision and claim that what I have come by my hands. As the verse suggests our thinking becomes futile or worthless. Our unwillingness to give God thanks leads to a rapid downward spiral: there is first worthless thinking, then moral depravity and finally idol worship – or what one commentator called “religious stupidity.” Instead of worshipping God we worship ourselves.

We are called to be thankful, not just once a year but every day of the year. I read about one woman who hosted 8 or 10 thanksgiving dinners a year. She would call up the family and invite them over to celebrate something for which she and her family were thankful. She wanted to share her gratitude to the Lord for His blessings with others.

Paul was expressly clear to the Thessalonians when he encouraged them to give thanks for all things at all times. **(I Thessalonians 5:16-18)**

One author noted we need to turn thanksgiving into thanks-living, making and taking every opportunity each day to give thanks not in a trite fashion but truly stemming from a heart of gratitude throughout the day. **I had a friend who died a number of years ago, but it became his habit that when he would drive to the grocery store or some other location, he always gave thanks for safety. When he bought his groceries he thanked the Lord for the money to purchase them. When he arrived home in the driveway it was always with thanksgiving.** We take so much for granted. **What do you have to be**

thankful for today? Family? Friends? Food? Finances? Fitness? How about a difficult boss? Unemployment? Health concerns? Irresponsible neighbors? A flat tire? A traffic ticket? A tough teacher or class?

Proverbs 17:22

Proverbs speaks to daily life and certainly when a person is wise and stands in a right relationship with the Lord, that person will naturally have a disposition of thanks, no matter the circumstances – favorable or not.

It will be a natural outpouring of his heart. Thanksgiving begins with humility. A humble spirit acknowledges they didn't earn or deserve it. The person who is humble understands that everything he or she has comes from the Lord and that He deserves our praise and thanks because He makes it happen.

I Chronicles 29:11-13

So we read in our Proverb that a cheerful heart has medicinal purposes. It makes even the most dismal circumstances full of meaning when viewed with thanksgiving. We understand God has some purpose.

The word merry means joyful or glad and it refers to the disposition of the whole being so that our mind, body and spirit are engaged in thanksgiving. The Bible speaks about a number of things that bring joy to us. Scripture says tangible things such as wine or perfume bring joy.

Proverbs says that a wise son brings joy to his father.

A kind word brings joy as does meeting a loved one. My spirit is lifted when someone whether I know them or not gives me a kind word.

Thank you for holding the door for me.

Thank you for visiting me.

My spirit is lifted when I get together with family and friends to share some laughs over a meal or time at the beach. My spirit is lifted when we have our Board meetings. Even though we take care of

church business, I am grateful for their encouragement and support.

They are all times to be thankful because we never know when it will be the last. The last words I heard my Mom speak were words as I bent over her to kiss her goodbye the day Hospice was called in and she thanked me for driving up to see her. They are cherished memories, memories that bring a glad heart. Mind what you say when parting because they may be the last words you speak.

Scripture also states that when the righteous increase we are joyful and when we obey God's law we have a merry heart. But of all the things in Scripture that bring joy, the Lord and His salvation are most often cited reason for a merry thankful heart.

You don't need a reminder about the serious effects on health because of depression and anxiety. On the other hand the merry heart, the thankful heart is free from anxiety and depression because he knows where all things come from.

And we agree then with the songwriter who penned:
Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Even psychologists agree that "the heart is the center of the individual life and the condition and the tone of the heart communicates itself to this life, even to its outermost circumstance; the spirit is the power of self-consciousness which according as it is lifted up or broken, also lifts up or breaks down the condition of the body."

According to the Hebrew mind the cheerful heart is a happy heart. A happy heart is a thankful heart. On the other hand J. Vernon McGee notes that a sad heart has a heart sickness that exhibits a lack of joy.

It isn't any secret then that medical science supports what Scripture has said all along that thankfulness acts like a medicine. It can be healing to body, mind and spirit.

Psalm 100:1-5

This Psalm shows us several things about thanksgiving. From the very beginning of the passage we see that thanksgiving is to be vocal.

I. THANKSGIVING IS TO BE VOCAL

The psalmist encourages us to make a joyful noise or to shout our thanks. The primary meaning is to raise a noise. The word can mean a noise calling for battle. It can be a noise calling for victory or triumph. It can be a noise expressing pain or a noise expressing gladness.

Our thanks should be with a loud cry or call. In the Hebrew it's a word that means to shout in triumph or applause and with religious impulse. The Psalmist is here stating that our thanks to God for what He has done should never be subdued. It should never be stifled. It should never be muted. Don't worry about what others think. You're not trying to impress them; you are giving praise to the Lord. You don't need to be apologetic in your thanksgiving. Go ahead and let it out.

Ex. 15:1-18 Israel's triumphal song of deliverance
I Sam. 4:1-5 When the ark was return from Philistia
Isaiah 44:21-23 **"Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you, you are my servant; O Israel, I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.' Sing for joy, O heavens, for the Lord has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob, He displays His glory in Israel."**

In **Psalm 145:4-21** we are exhorted to pass on words of thanksgiving for all the Lord has done to the next generation so that there will always be thanksgiving given to the Lord for His mighty acts. Notice the things we are to express in thanksgiving.

In **Psalm 149:1** we are told to give thanks when gathered together by singing praise to God publically. Don't be worried that you can't sing, when it comes from the heart, the expression of thanks to God is beautiful to Him.

“Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, His praise in the assembly of the saints.”

One of the most difficult weeks as a counselor was handicap week, what they now call His ability week. Most could care for basic needs, but some needed to be guided because they were blind or because of cerebral palsy they couldn't walk very well or needed to be pushed in a wheelchair. Pushing wheelchairs along woodchip paths or on sandy roads tested the most physically fit counselor. It was physically demanding work when it was time to go down to the lake for swimming. Going to the lake wasn't the problem; it was coming back up the hill. For those of you who have been there you know how long that hill is on the West Side from the dining hall. At meal time you had to clean up spills and drool. Getting them to sit still in chapel was also a challenge. They had lots of wiggles. It was taxing physically, mentally and emotionally.

All that said, while it was the most challenging week it was also the most rewarding week. They are uninhibited in their expression of joy and thanks. In spite of physical or mental handicaps of one kind or another they are vocal about their thanks to God. Most don't know they are different from the general population, but that doesn't matter to them. At chapel they sing off key or make up their own words, but the ear of God is touched by their heart of simple worship and thanks. When the night of last chapel came and they gathered on those wooden pews, many would stand and give a very

simple testimony that both breaks and warms the heart. Speaking for some was very difficult. It took a lot of energy and when they spoke it was difficult to understand, but you are able to discern a very simple testimony “I love Jesus.” It's their way of vocalizing their thanks to the Lord. They are not subdued in thanking God.

I think back to those days as a counselor and think about my own expressions of thanks and admit that at times my thanks are shallow. At other times when I should give thanks I remain silent. It's really an ungrateful heart because I expected God to work or act. He did not get the praise from me that was due Him.

Our testimony of thanks is to be shared with each other so that together we all lift our voice in praise to God for what He has done. Public thanks is an act of worship to the Lord. When God acts on behalf of someone in our fellowship thanks and praise to God should come from all of us not just from the individual who was the recipient of God's blessing.

Psalm 149 ends by stating that **“this is the glory of all His saints.”** Let's join together in thanksgiving.

Did you notice that in our shouting of thanks we are to voice not only praise to God for what He has done, but also we are to express our thanks and praise for who He is. Do we thank Him for His character? Do we thank Him for His love, His forgiveness, His patience, His mercy, His grace, that He is unchanging and eternal? Do we thank Him for His wisdom and holiness, the gift of salvation? Do we thank God for His Son who died for us and is now interceding for us in His presence? Do we thank Him for the Spirit who indwells us and has gifted us to help the body of Christ and who also intercedes for us?

Vocalize those expressions of thanks in the assembly. It is to be expressed by all the earth.

As Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem the week before His crucifixion, the people shouted joyously that the Messiah had come. The Pharisees rebuked Jesus that He could not restrain His disciples from what they considered blasphemy, but Jesus said that if they remained silent, the very rocks would call out in praise of Him and to Him. **(Luke 19:40)**

Could you, would you make time today to vocalize your thanks to the Lord to someone or with someone about what He has done or who He is? If you aren't sure where to begin, let me suggest from the pen of Paul that we are to give God thanks for EVERYTHING because it is His will for us. **I Thessalonians 5:16-18 "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."**

To the Philippians he stated that we are not to worry about anything but instead pray about everything with thanksgiving. **(4:6-7)**

Thank the Lord for everything. Say that with me.
THANK THE LORD FOR EVERYTHING.
Can you? Will you?

Thanksgiving is to be vocal.

Implied in Psalm 100 is the idea that thanksgivings should be volitional.

II. THANKSGIVING IS TO BE VOLITIONAL

By volitional I mean that thanksgiving is an act of the will. I choose to give thanks to God who is the proper recipient of my praise.

Psalm 145:1-2

Psalm 146:1-2

In these passages, David is making a vow to the Lord that he would express His gratitude every day, forever. This is a conscious act of the will to humbly acknowledge that all we have comes from God; that even the trials are from Him to shape us

into His image. For that we are to intentionally give Him praise.

Every Sunday is a day of volitional worship and thanksgiving as we gather with other believers to express our gratitude for all the Lord has done for us in the prior week. Make the effort to willfully share those with each other before and after services. Express them to the Lord as you sing. Be intentional about your thanksgiving. Be volitional.

Along with thanksgiving being vocal and volitional, it should also be voluntary.

III. THANKSGIVING IS TO BE VOLUNTARY

While God deserves it He doesn't demand it. He wants thanksgiving to come from hearts of gratitude who offer it freely rather than being forced into giving it or doing it ritualistically. He's not going to hold up a sign after some blessing that He bestows on us that says "applause." Thanksgiving is to be voluntary.

That it is voluntary means to me that it is spontaneous, that it just happens. Nothing planned. Nothing staged. Nothing prompted. You may be driving along the road and notice a beautiful sunset. You may be sitting at home praying. You may be alone out in the yard weeding the flower bed when an overwhelming sense of the presence of the Lord is evident or when you get a test back that you studied hard for and you just thank Him for His promise to always be with you or for the beauty of His creation or for passing the exam. Your heart is filled with thanks and you just spontaneously give God praise.

The book of Revelation speaks of voluntary thanksgiving. The angelic host is gathered around the throne of God. It is a beautiful scene depicting the eternal praise that will be voiced to God for who He is and for His mighty deeds.

Revelation 4:1-11

Revelation 7:9-12

Gazing on God who sits on the throne and on His Son with those nail pierced hands are enough for those in His presence to shout out a spontaneous expression of thanks. The anthem of thanksgiving reaches a crescendo and much like the scene in the Old Testament, the place will shake with thunderous praise.

Our thanksgiving is to be vocal.
 Our thanksgiving is to be volitional.
 Our thanksgiving is to be voluntary.
 Our thanksgiving is to be venerable.

IV. THANKSGIVING IS TO BE VENERABLE

By that I mean that thanksgiving is to be with reverence. Again from **Psalm 100:**

Vs. 1 – “Shout for joy to the Lord...”
Vs. 2 – “Worship the Lord with gladness...”
Vs. 3 – “Know that the Lord is God...”
Vs. 4 – “Enter His gates with thanksgiving...”

This is a reminder that our thanks is to be to the very God who through the power of His spoken word created the heavens and the earth.

This is a reminder of His sovereignty; that He controls everything and allows things to happen or keeps things from happening that demonstrates His power and will over events so that everything ultimately will come together for His glory. It's a reminder of His holiness, of His provision. This is a reminder that we come into the very presence of God Himself and that He is worthy of all praise, He is worthy of all worship. He is to be revered, He who blesses, He who forgives transgressions, He who heals disease, He who redeems life from the very brink of hell itself, He who makes the lame to walk and the blind to see and the deaf to hear, He who is righteous, who is majestic in His splendor, who is gracious and merciful and patient and loving.

Psalm 104:1 “Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great.”

Revere Him who is able with the touch of His finger to send the lightning or who is able from the breath of His nostrils to send the fierce winds or who is able with the wave of His hand to stop a violent storm. It is He who with just the power of His voice causes men to fall down or to speak a man's name and have Him rise from the dead. Thanksgiving is a time to revere Him.

He alone is worthy. He alone is to be venerated. He is a jealous God and will not share His praise with any other.

Our thanksgiving is to be vocal.
 Our thanksgiving is to be volitional.
 Our thanksgiving is to be voluntary.
 Our thanksgiving is to be venerable.
 Our thanksgiving is to be with variety.

V. THANKSGIVING IS TO BE WITH VARIETY

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving.”
“Enter His courts with praise.”

Our praise is to be with variety. It protects our praise from becoming trite or stale. **For what should we praise Him?**

Praise Him for His name. In the mind of a Hebrew, a name spoke of their character. Praise Him because He is good. Praise Him because His love and faithfulness endure forever.

Lamentations 3:22-23 “It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed because His compassions fail not, they are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness.”

There isn't one time where His mercy will fall short. There isn't one time where His love won't last. There isn't one time when His compassions will fail. Every morning they are new.

Praise Him for who He is – His character and attributes.

Praise Him of what He has done.

Give variety to your thanksgiving. Today thank Him for His attributes.

Tomorrow thank Him for his gifts and blessings.

The next day thank Him for the trials.

Maybe there is a passage of Scripture that best expresses your thanksgiving, read that back to the Lord as a way of giving praise.

Give thanks for His unfailing love.

Psalm 107:8 “Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men.”

Give thanks that the Lord is good.

Psalm 106:1 “Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.”

Give thanks for His answer to prayer.

Psalm 118:21 “I will give You thanks, for You answered me; You have become my salvation.”

Give thanks for His Word.

Psalm 119:62 “At midnight I rise to give You thanks for Your righteous laws.”

Give thanks for our eternal home.

Hebrews 12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.”

Give thanks for the gift of His Son.

II Corinthians 9:15 “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

Ephesians 5:20 reminds us that we are always to give God thanks for everything.

Those are just some of the many things we can thank the Lord for. **How then should we praise Him?**

Psalm 150:3-5 “Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise Him with the harp and lyre, praise Him with tambourine and dancing, praise Him with the strings and flute, praise Him with the clash of cymbals, praise Him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

Thank Him through singing.

Thank Him through prayer.

Thank Him through reading His Word.

Thank Him in doing acts of kindness to others.

There are so many ways to express our thanks.

Many today choose not to give the Lord thanks.

They have been given over to minds that are dark and confused. We have been created to give Him thanks. It provides health and well-being to body, mind and soul. Thanksgiving is good medicine.

As we close today, do you have a merry heart filled with thanksgiving to the Lord for His blessings?

We really do have much to be thankful for.

Let's endeavor to come into His presence with thanksgiving in our heart and give Him praise.