

Community Church of Issaquah

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## Be Thankful for **All** Thing? Really?

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This Thanksgiving, it seems important that we stop for a few minutes, look at what blessings we have, and then listen to what comes to mind about what God wants us to learn from His presence in our lives. My hope is that once we have done this, we'll really know what thankfulness is. There is a meaning to thankfulness that is deeper than just a simple, "Thanks, God." We all experience times when the words "Thanks" or "Thank you" just don't seem to fill the void. We want to be kind and caring people who often give our thanks for large and small things, but there are times for all of us when we don't feel very thankful.

Like most of you, I was brought up by a Christian parent who taught me to be a good follower of Jesus and always say thank you for anything someone did for me. Oddly, I hope I still make my mother proud by continuing to do what I was taught. Someone holds the door open for me as I slowly approach the entrance of a store. "Thank you! Someone sends me a very tender and thoughtful card that really means a great deal to me. "Thank you!" Someone brings me a bag of cookies each Sunday that I munch on for several days. "Thank you."

But those are the small things that we find it easy to say our thanks for, and it's very appropriate. We usually call that "good manners." This is learned behavior. And most

of the time, we've learned it from someone other than ourselves. This gratitude is housed in our attitude toward other people. If we turn our attention to the Bible and seek to understand what the Scriptures want to teach us about thankfulness, you'd be a bit surprised what you might find.

Like the verse from the Psalm we had read today, believers are directed to come before the Lord with thanksgiving and to praise him with music and song. That's a lovely commandment, but how do you plan to come before God with your thanksgiving if you don't have a song or any music? Can you get by without that concept and just come to God with an attitude of being thankful without making it a celebration? That's a haunting question. What does the Bible require of us regarding our duty to be thankful?

Suppose you turn to the New Testament and see what Paul said to the church in Corinth.

*"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him."*

Or maybe we could learn something from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians when he said:

*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

That's a hard pill to swallow. The apostle is telling me that I have to be joyful or happy all the time, that I have to pray without stopping, that I have to give thanks in every situation. Do you think Paul was speaking for himself or for the Lord.

Now, here's an interesting fact if you decided to go on a search for what Jesus actually said about thanksgiving or being thankful. You can search the four Gospels and you will not find the words 'thanks' or 'thanksgiving' in a single verse. Oddly, all the recordings of what Jesus taught and said do not contain the word. Oh yes, there are examples of people being thankful for something that happened to them. Remember that man who was among the 10 lepers healed who alone came to offer thanks for his healing? That's only one of the many stories about good deeds that were done that merited thanks. I found that fascinating as I researched and prepared for the message today.

Let me go back to Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians. I had a hard time trying to weave the words "give thanks in all circumstances" into my daily life in Christ. How am I supposed to be thankful for everything in my life? Do I want to say, "Thank you, Lord" when I have to rush my spouse to the hospital as he suffers more serious complexities with his heart issues? Do we want to say "Thank you Lord" when a loved one dies and leaves a void that we often cannot fill? Do we want to say, "Thank you, Lord" each day as we read the news about more deaths as a result of war, or the loss of a location for the homeless of TentCity 4, or the divisiveness that our democratic country is experiencing now? Do I want to say, "Thank you, God" when my own health issues cause me to struggle? No.

For me, there does not seem to be a requirement that we be thankful for everything. More realistically, the Bible shows us that when we are blessed in any way, large or small, we can reflect the teachings of Christ by our gratitude and

thankfulness. When we all sit down at the Thanksgiving table, if we do, each of us can and should find those people and experiences that the Lord brings to mind. Once that list of blessings is evident, you will undoubtedly find a wonderful cause to be thankful.

In truth, each of us has a great deal to be thankful for. We could start right here, right now. The Lord has blessed each of us by bringing us into a faith family that loves and cares for us. That should be at the tip top of our blessing list. Each of us has a list, whether long or short, of family members that we want to express our thanks for – some more than others. I could go on and on, but I trust you see the message from Christ. When we are blessed, we are to acknowledge our gratitude. This is how we grow in Christ.

This is the second year I have led us to a Thanks-Giving and Receiving experience. There's a simple reason why I find this event meaningful for me. First, it gives me a small opportunity to give someone something from my heart. And second, it gives me an opportunity to receive a small gift from someone who has the same feeling of thankfulness. Thanksgiving isn't about just giving thanks. It is also about receiving thanks. For me, this is the true message of the teachings from the Scriptures, whether Old or New Testament, whether from the singer of Psalms or the preaching of an apostle.

Let me close this short message with my own word of thanks for each of you. God has richly blessed me by allowing me to lead such an amazing group of believers. It is certainly at the top of my blessings list for which I will

offer my thanks when I sit at the table on Thanksgiving Day. You will be there in spirit, and that will bring me enormous joy. Thank you for who you are and what you do. You are dearly loved.

Let me borrow this Thanksgiving Prayer from another minister, Thomas Fischer. It goes like this:

Dear God:

I want to thank you for what you have already done.

I am not going to wait until I see results or receive rewards.

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until I feel better or things look better,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until people say they are sorry or until they stop talking about me,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until the pain in my body disappears,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until my financial situation improves,

I'm going to thank you right now.

I am not going to wait until the house is quiet,

I am going to thank you right now.

I am not going to wait until I understand every experience in my life that has caused me pain or grief, I am going to thank you right now.

I am not going to wait until the journey gets easier or the challenges are removed,

I am thanking you right now.

I am thanking you because I am alive.

I am thanking you because I made it through the day's difficulties.

I am thanking you because I have walked around the obstacles.

I am thanking you because I have the ability and the opportunity to do more and do better.

I am thanking you because you have not given up on me. God, thank you for being so good to me.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

May we all have a blessed Thanksgiving and may we all find a time to fill our hearts with thankfulness.