

Community Church of Issaquah

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Learning to Be Thankful

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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 email that really means a great deal to me. “Thank you!” Someone brings you a bag of cookies each Sunday that you can munch on for several days. “Thank you.” Someone provides our treats each Sunday. “Thank you.” Someone works hard at the close of each service to put away all the chairs. “Thank you.” Someone comes quickly to me when they come to church and gives me hugs. “Thank you.” A guest comes to our church to sing a solo. “Thank you.” There are a million ways to say it when we remember to do it.

But those are the small things that we find 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.

There is a meaning to our being thankful 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 that verse from Psalm 100 that tells believers to come before the Lord with thanksgiving and to praise him with music and song. That’s a sweet commandment, but how can you plan to come before God with your thanks if you don’t have a song or any music or you can’t sing or read 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 difficult question. What does the Bible require of us regarding our duty to be thankful? If I asked you if you are thankful and say thank you all the time, would you say “yes, I say thanks, God, hundreds of times every day.” I wish I could say that, but I can’t. Being grateful or thankful all the time I hard to do. I want to do what the Bible says to do but I can’t always do it.

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

“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? Whichever one it was, that is a tough pill to swallow.

Now, here's an interesting fact if you decided to go on a search for what Jesus actually said about being thankful. You can search the four Gospels carefully and you will not find the word 'thanks' or 'thank you' in a single verse that is written as words Jesus spoke. Oddly, all the recordings of what Jesus taught and said do not contain those words ever. Oh yes, there are examples of people being thankful and saying thank you 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 have always wondered why the other 9 lepers who were healed didn't even bother to say one word to Jesus. I bet their mothers weren't happy with them!

But, let me go back to Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians. I have a very 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” every day as we read the news about more deaths as a result of war, or the growing number of homeless, or the divisiveness that our country is experiencing now? Do I want to say, “Thank you, God” when my own health issues cause me to struggle? No. I don’t and I would bet you find it hard sometimes as well. I want to, but I just can’t always do it. For me, there does not seem to be a requirement that we have to 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. Often in just a quiet whisper of “Thank you, Lord.”

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 could very well be at the top of our thank you list. But there is so much more for us to want to say thank you for. I’m not your mother, and I can’t teach you how to learn to be thankful. If you haven’t learned that by now, you have a lot of homework to do, so you’d better get busy. Anyone who knows me knows that I am a huge fan of Hallmark Channel and the Golden Girls. If you’ve ever watched an episode of the Golden Girls, you will remember that there is a theme song that begins each episode. Do you remember it? It goes like this, “Thank you for being my friend. . . .” If I could sing, I would sing that just for you today, but I don’t sing because I’m tone deaf,

so I'll just utter the words again, "Thank you for being my friend."

Let me repeat some good advice that Paul gave the believers 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."

That's what thankfulness means to me. My thankful heart desires to spread the presence of Christ everywhere. I'll close this message with my own words of thanks for each of you. God has richly blessed me by allowing me to lead such an amazing group of believers. Thank you for who you are and what you do. You are dearly loved and I rejoice that you have chosen to spread the fragrance of Christ on me and on so many others who would say loudly, "Thank you!"

In closing, I'll share these words from another minister, Rev. Thomas Fischer. He wrote it this way:

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.

My hope is that each of us continues to learn to be thankful and to say "Thank you" often on our journey of life.