Thanksgiving 101

Dec 1, 2019- Pastor Matt Troupe

Psalm 92:1-4, Ps 9:1-2

1. What it is
2. How we show it
3. Why it’s good
4. And How we grow it

**First, What is Biblical Thanksgiving?**

* **What it isn’t:** The issue of experiencing the good life…
  + **American Playwright Thornton Wilder said,** “We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures.”
  + This perspective says that a truly satisfying life will come from thinking about and being aware of how good your life is- and about the truly good things you have.
  + **Many people think** about gratitude the same way- **that Gratitude is being conscious of our treasures**…. That we are thankful when we feel good about life, or feel lucky or more fortunate than others…. When we stop taking things for granted…. And when we do this instead of focusing on what we do not have.
  + And while those things may be true, they start in the wrong place and they don’t go far **enough**… It is true Biblical thanksgiving does involve being “conscious of our treasures,” it does want us to avoid complaining or comparing ourselves to others. But it goes further: Biblical thanksgiving involves being conscious of our treasures AND realizing they are a gift from God, AND realizing that **we do NOT deserve them** AND **expressing that in worship!**
  + It is not just feeling fortunate because you have more than others, or you accomplished your goals… or feeling good about winning, or even seeing someone else go through suffering and being glad it didn’t happen to you….
  + Why do I say this? - look at these texts.
    - Ps 9:1- it is recounting his deeds and thanking him for it. It is not even primarily about what we have accomplished, but acknowledging his works.
    - Ps. 92:2- It is about recognizing and confessing his steadfast love and his faithfulness.
    - Biblical thanksgiving is decidedly God centered. We ought to thank one another! This is true and very important…

**It involves these 3 things: Awareness, interpretation, & the Response of faith to our circumstances…** (AIR)

* **1-Awareness:** Illustration: Imagine my wife does something very nice ad thoughtful for me while I am at work. But when I come home I don’t notice what she has done…. Then I can be thankful. I have to be aware of the gift to thank the giver.
  + The same for all of us. We can be surrounded by God’s goodness and not see what is happening.
  + Throughout the Bible the word “behold” is used, and it is often a call to look and pay attention. It literally means to “look or see.” And it is used to call attention to something. I John 3:1 “Behold what manner of love the father has given unto us that we should be called the sons of God.”
  + James 1:17 “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Everything all around us comes from the hand of God.
  + But if we don’t take time to notice, we won’t be thankful.
  + I keep a journal for gratitude and I can tell you that I often am so distracted that I don’t know what to write.
  + Psalm 106:21 **“**They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt.”
  + These are the three enemies of awareness of God’s goodness: busyness, distraction, and forgetfulness.
* **2-Interpretation:** Once we see our circumstances, we are going to do something very unconscious- we are going to make an interpretation and a conclusion about those circumstances.
  + And this conclusion will affect our emotions and our words, and the way we treat other people.
  + We were made to be interpreting creatures. God is the first interpreter- he saw what he had made and said, “it is good” and we are called to do the same. That is basically the nature of the command to name things. To interpret them and put that interpretation into language.
  + 10 different people can experience the exact same thing and come to very different conclusions.
  + For example, We can look at the success in our lives, and conclude that we are better and work harder than others…. **And we could even boast or look down on others. Or the opposite, we could see the success of others and become envious or despair.**
  + We could conclude that we are victims and deserve better, we could conclude that God owes us better …. **And complain or become angry with God or others.**
  + **Or we could act in faith**- my circumstances are much better than I deserve! I have so many blessings! God has been so kind to me!
  + The point is that all of these reactions, are based on interpretations of the details of our lives.
  + Biblical gratitude involves making a specific interpretation… coming to a conclusion about what you have, vs. what you deserve.
  + **Ps 103:10** “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”
  + **Ps. 92:2** “The psalmist is looking around and is able to see in the details of life around him that God is acting in faithfulness and love.”
  + **Illustration:** sometimes artists put little tokens of themselves in their artwork. Alfred Hitchcock has all these cameos in his own films. Or The famous Arnolfini portrait by painter Jan Van Eck. He painted a picture of a married couple, standing together and holding hands. It is an amazing picture full of all kinds of unexpected details, some of them are so small that they were painted with a paint brush made from a single horse hair. And in the background, between the couple there is a mirror. And the artist painted the reflection of the couple and included a picture of himself as the artist, and above the mirror in beautiful script is written “Jon Van Eck was here 1434.” But it is so small that you might miss it unless you really looked. And what happens is that the more you look at this painting the more amazing details you see, including little signs of the painter himself.
  + **And this is what happens the more we are thankful, we not only notice God’s blessings, but we see his gracious hand**
  + We see him as the author of them.
* **3- Response:** True thanksgiving then moves from our mind and heart to express gratitude.

**Not just reflecting on good times and good gifts** …. Gratitude involves giving God the glory, in worship and delight.

* Eph. 5:20 says we are to “give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ…”
* What this means, is that when times are good we see it as the kindness of God, and when times are difficult- we still see God at work in the midst of trials.
  + Both Psalm 9 and 92 are **written in the middle of problems!** For instance Ps. 9:9 “The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.”
  + **James 1:2-4 “Count it all joy,** my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”
  + **This is the interpretation of faith- That in the middle of every Trial, there is still something to be thankful for.** That even when God sends difficulty and pain, for the Christian it is laced with mercy! And so I should be thankful!
  + This is very different than the response and interpretation of the flesh- which lives full of fear and discontentment.
  + Many of you know of Ravi Zacharias, an teacher and defender of the Christian faith from India. He came to have hope in Christ after attempting suicide during a time of despair. He tells of how he learned that the first members of his family to be saved, were saved many years before he was born. He went to visit his great, great grand-mother’s grave. No one had visited it in 30 years, and as he cleaned off the tombstone he saw a verse of scripture written on it. He didn’t even know that she was a Christian. And so he began to research the story.
  + Ravi writes “On both my mother’s and my father’s sides, five and six generations ago, the first believers came from the highest caste of the Hindu priesthood. The first to come to the Lord was a woman. She was intrigued by the message brought to her village by missionaries and continued to seek them out, in spite of her family’s terrible displeasure. But one day, as she was about to leave the missionary compound in order to be home before her family found out where she had been, the doors of the compound were shut because a cholera epidemic had broken out in the village. She had to remain with the missionaries for several weeks until the time of quarantine was past. By that time, she had committed her life to the Lord. The walls of a closed compound were the means of bringing her face to face with Jesus Christ.”[[1]](#endnote-1)
  + Notice that Ravi wrote this down, his response was to share this story and give glory to God. We are marveling at God’s goodness because he told the story.
  + This is what real biblical gratitude does! This is the response of the believing heart… not just to blessings, but also to struggles and pain! It gives praise and honor to God.

**Second, How do we show it?**

* It is one thing to feel thankful… and to come to the right conclusion about our circumstances, but this is not enough…. It is important to actually do something with our gratitude.
* **First, by Singing- Ps. 92:1-2, and Ps. 9:2**
  + Singing in gratitude- (strange thought at first… we have Christmas carols but no thanksgiving carols….) this is an indication of just how deeply we should feel about God’s goodness. We should be overwhelmed, and moved to sing.
  + Look at v. 4- You have made me glad by your work! And 9:1 “with my whole heart.” No restraint.
    - Singing is the natural response of the thankful heart! **Like the response of a sports fan.**
    - This is a great encouragement for us. When we come to sing, we should try to come prepared, with reasons to be thankful!
  + We also, see that when we sing, we should be expressing the truth of God’s Character- His love and faithfulness.
* **Second, By repeating and recounting his works.**
  + 9:1 “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.”
  + In gratitude we should do more than say that we "feel” thankful.
  + We should actually recount what he has done… We should explain why…
  + This is one of the reasons I sometimes ask, “Where do you see God working in your life?” Not just to be cute, but to point us to see where God is at work and give thanks. And one of the reasons it is a shame when we cannot answer that!
  + Col 2:7 says that we as believers are to be “abounding in thanksgiving.” What would that be like if our church was abounding with thanksgiving. That routinely when we gathered you know you will hear people pouring out words of gratitude!
  + And we should do it **with our whole hearts… not just the polite** “thank you” that we give because we have good manners…. But hearts **completely shocked by his grace.**

**Third, Why is Thanksgiving Good?**

* **1- It is Good for me**
  + “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” (I Tim 6:6) When you express gratitude you are nurturing your own contentment!
  + Being grateful and expressing gratitude actually has the potential to grow our own happiness.
    - Why? **This is because joy has very little to do with how much you have, or how successful your life seems to be going.**
    - You have probably met **people that seem to have everything but are very miserable,** and people that have very little and are really happy. What makes us happy? It is not our circumstances but our heart’s response to our circumstances.
    - **If we complain and focus on what we do not have, nothing will ever be enough to make us happy**.
    - **This is a major issue in our society**. There are a lot of people who consider themselves poor because they don’t have as much as other people have.
* **2- it is Good for others**
  + **Just as complaining is contagious, so is gratitude**. Our words have the power to affect other people (Awareness, Interpretation, Response)- to help them grow in joy and even learn to handle joys and trials.
  + **Illustration of Joni Erickson Tada-** a woman that became a quadriplegic in 1967 after diving into shallow water in the Chesapeake bay… she broke her neck. But came through the times of doubt and struggle to have a vibrant faith and even to praise God…. You know awkward it can be when you get in an elevator with strangers. How about when that person is severely disabled. She is known to shock people when she motors her wheelchair into an elevator- and everyone is there, looking away… feeling uncomfortable and she invites them to sing a hymn with her and she actually starts to sing! And you can imagine the effect that has on everyone! Not just a thankful person but of a joyful, thankful quadriplegic! (Note a great passage with part of her testimony for NOT being healed.[[2]](#endnote-2))
  + **BTW this is a great use of social media.** Not showing off and disguising a brag as gratitude, but true humble gratitude
* **3- It Glorifies God**
  + **Psalm 50:23** “The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”
  + It is unique and can be one of the most pure forms of worship… because it is not asking for anything else from God.
  + It is responding to what God has already done.

**Fourth, How can I grow it?**

* **Reflecting and repeating** with delight the defining moments in our lives.
  + Remember the words- all his works! (9:1)
* **First, reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus for you.**
  + This is the most important thing of all. We have to remember this pivotal act of our redemption. The work of Jesus is the guarantee of God’s grace to us.
  + **Rom 8:31-32** “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”
  + **If you cannot remember anything else, you can always remember this… and this is amazing!**
  + **This is why we take the Lord’s supper often. And this is why the supper always includes giving thanks!**
* **Second, The story of our own salvation- our testimony. You should tell it often.**
  + This is important, because it is the moment where we see God stepping into our lives with his violent grace… pursuing us to rescue us and raise us from the dead… to forgive us and begin the process of renewal.
  + When we reflect on our testimonies, we need to remember something important- the before and after picture… We need to think about what we would have become without his grace.
  + Your testimony needs to have Jesus as the Hero- otherwise you don’t have it right!
  + Jesus told the Demon possessed man in Mark 5 to go and tell his family and friends what great things the Lord has done for us. And we need to!
  + Paul often told his testimony! It is a great part of our witness to others.
  + Parents, your kids should know your testimony backwards and forwards.
* **Third, Key moments of provision and deliverance in our lives.**
  + The song “come thou fount of every blessing….” Very famous hymn. There is a line that sounds strange to us. “here I raise my ebenzer…” what does that mean? It is a reference to I Samuel 7, when God gives the people victory. It means “stone of help.” It is a monument to permanently recall the help of God.
  + And these are throughout the OT.… memorials to God’s works…. Holidays, like Passover, literal monuments, piles of stones, names of places, songs. All meant to promote the retelling of God’s faithfulness. IN fact, in several places these are set up so that our children will ask us, “what does this mean?” and then we will tell them. (Joshua 4:6, Ex. 12:26, etc.)
  + Journals… I actually think that we should take time to record the great acts of God in your life.
    - How? Up to you… Journals, videos, photos, writing poems, writing songs, write a book…
    - You should make it a habit and a tradition to tell stories often of God’s grace in your life…especially the remarkable times, but also the simple ones where he works through blessings and trials.
    - Find ways to put yourself in memory of the ways God has delivered you.
    - Our unbelieving hearts tend to forget and we need this if we are going to make it with thankful hearts

1. Zacharias, Ravi K. *Jesus among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*. Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 2000. Kindle edition location 462 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.forgottenword.org/joni.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)