

"Thank You"

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on Nov 25, 2023

1 Thess 5:16-18 -

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Luke 17:11-19 -

11 Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the



midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up [their] voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 So when He saw [them], He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on [his] face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 17 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where [are] the nine? 18 "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

1 Thess 5:16-18

Remember when you were a child and some aspect of dinner sat before you...an aspect that you did not want to eat? And a parent spoke those timeless words "there is some child in Africa that would be quite happy to have that food!" Yes, and the worst part of that, is it is very true. But we didn't care, we just wanted to move on to desert.

As Christians, we are called to do many things: pray, serve, love our neighbor, and give of our finances. The list goes on. And while most Christians likely agree that these are essential aspects of Christian life, many of us perpetually fall short. As confessing believers, we can become so involved with worldly desires and perceived obligations that finding priority and time to invest in our spiritual lives inevitably takes a back seat. Rarely do we base our life decisions on what's good for King and kingdom, our church family and its mission, or our brothers and sisters that we call our own. The same is often true of our call to be thankful. The heart of thankfulness is illusive to both sides of the spiritual "isle." Even in the world, psychologists interested in moral development have spent a great deal of time trying to understand what the benefits of gratitude are and how to foster higher levels of gratitude in individuals. Few of us...across the board, see the practice of gratitude as a life discipline.

History...yes even biblical history, is full of terrible examples. Moses and the children of Israel had just been rescued from years of bondage and servitude, and just days after their rescue they were already complaining about the food and water. Naaman was offered a healing from leprosy, but he didn't like God's methodology so he initially rejected the healing out of pride. Peter was given unprecedented forgiveness after denying Jesus 3 times on His way to the cross, and yet his response was to be jealous and pushy concerning young John. ("What about *Him*?" Jn 21) Even Adam and Eve were not satisfied with paradise and reached out for more outside of God.

Jesus told a parable in Matthew 18 about a man who owed a great amount and his master forgave him his significant debt. The man, instead of living the rest of his life in the shadow of such an act, went out and had a guy who owed him just a little thrown into jail. The man's master retaliated and had *him* imprisoned because he acted without gratitude and thanks.

Multiple times in the Bible, believers are reminded of the importance of being thankful and continually expressing our gratitude. Yet truly living out such a life isn't easy and even in the greater family of faith, such a heart is rare. Like any spiritual discipline, it requires time, effort, and faithful practice. Without priority and effort, feelings of gratitude are often fleeting, passing as quickly as they come. For example, I'm grateful to have a clean bill of health but gripe as soon as a cold interferes with my busy life. I have a kitchen filled with food but complain about cooking and a closet filled with clothes but "nothing to wear."

Second Timothy 3:2 describes what people will be like in the last days, and one characteristic is ingratitude. When pride and self-rule become fashionable, the human heart has no one to thank. We become convinced of our own supremacy and consider all we have as a just reward for our efforts. We are wise to heed Paul's rhetorical questions "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Research suggests that gratitude can't simply be grouped with other emotions, like happiness or anger, because, unlike other emotions, gratitude takes a conscious effort. Meaning that to be grateful, we must first take the time to recognize that something has been done for our benefit and moreover most often there was no mandate or compulsion to do so.

In 2023 we tend to believe that life owes us certain things and a certain standard of comfort, success, and living. Things that were once received with thanksgiving is now expected as a "human right." Freedom, healthcare, a job and food on the table. Gratitude is one of those subjects that is usually avoided in the midst of secular society and certainly groups of those we go to church with. But if pressed...*and we all will eventually BE so pressed*, we tend let loose in restless exasperation, "*Where's mine!?*"

Paul, writing to this church, a church that knew persecution, hardships, difficulties, war and foreign occupation, told them to "*Rejoice always, (to) pray without ceasing, (and) in everything give thanks...*" Moreover, he went so far as to lay down such as a mandate, saying "*...for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*"

Here on a Sunday, we recently stepped back from the traditional tourist's view of life and acknowledged that the world is in great pain today: wars, political upheavals, natural disasters, pandemics, and violence. Yet we still seem to be purposely blind to all of it, or calloused enough not to care. We have, as a nation, become so self-absorbed that our insatiable appetites for material possessions, titillating adventures, and sexual experiences are killing us. We are clearly leading the pack on "having other Gods before us," and all evidence says that the greater church is doing no better than the secular world at large. We are watching for Satan to come in the front door of persecution, and we are ready to fight, and in the meantime, he is sneaking in the back door, slowly and quietly luring us away from our post to partake of the things of the world just like those who live openly in it. Satan will not stop Christianity through overt frontal assault; he will do so through prosperity and compromise.

Ingratitude toward God is not so much a cause of evil but the result of it. Once we have hardened our hearts to the point that we no longer see God as the source of our gifts, nothing is off-limits. We become a law unto ourselves. One reason the Bible takes such a strong stance against unthankfulness and ingratitude may be that God knows that the end result of such arrogance is a reprobate mind. Romans 1:24-25 speaks of such, saying "*Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.*" When we remind ourselves often that all we are and all we have is a gift from God (James 1:17), we are guarding ourselves against idolatry and pride.

Luke 17:11-19

Immediately proceeding this passage, we have an account wherein the apostles...deeply moved by the teaching of Christ, said to him, “*Show us how to increase our faith.*” Jesus answered them by firstly stating, “*If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘May you be uprooted and thrown into the sea,’ and it would obey you!*” As Christians, we tend to know that passage, but ironically it usually only fuels the fires of materialism, self-empowerment and self-actualization. The problem lies in a classic case of “pulling out of context.” If we would only read on, we would hear Jesus also immediately say, “*When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, does his master say, ‘Come in and eat with me’? No, he says, ‘Prepare my meal, put on your apron, and serve me while I eat. Then you can eat later.’ And does the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do? Of course not. In the same way, when you obey me you should say, ‘We are unworthy servants who have simply done our duty.’*” There simply is no way to receive those words other than Jesus is clearly saying that He and the pursuits of the kingdom come first. Before you, before me, before **anything**. If only we could hear those words of Matthew 6:33... “*Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*” (NLT)

Following these words, Jesus went further in this same thinking, this time with some visual aids. In verse 11 we read “Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem...”

Jesus begins to set the stage for a supreme lesson. Here we have 10 lepers, the absolute bottom of the social spectrum. They came seeking mercy, they came seeking healing. This was nothing less than an act of desperation. The men had leprosy, the most feared disease of that day. They were lepers, meaning they were truly “dead men walking.” Death was assured...it was only a matter of time. Unlike mankind today, they understood their state. Notice the level of humility. They “stood afar off.”

A leper would have to announce himself whenever people would come near. They would have to shout “Unclean! Unclean!” Again, they knew what they were. Oh, if only we would have that same clarity! They called out to Him, “*Jesus, Master...*” The term they used means “chief and commander.” They understood who they were dealing with. They knew He held the answer.

Despite the fact that leprosy was considered incurable, there is hidden deep in the Law of Moses the instructions of what to do when you were healed and desired to reenter society. It was clear that what was “impossible for man, is possible with God!” (Matt 19:26) Jesus, following those instructions, sends them off to the priest to be declared clean. Notice that Jesus ***gave them instructions***. It was their obedience to His instruction that would be the exercise of their faith!

We, too, are expected to manifest our healing with the exercise of obedience. **THIS** is faith! There is to be a “testimony” in life deeds and words of the transformation that has occurred within us. Faith is moving in belief of what He has said is fact, even though we cannot immediately see it. Thankfulness is the manifest expression of the fact that we understand...that we “get it.” “*And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.*”

Sadly, only one of these guys recognized not only the magnitude of his healing, but moreover who and what was the one who healed him. This ***one man*** came back to Jesus and glorified Him before all. He fell to his feet in thanks! Moreover, this man was a Samaritan. That meant he not only had the stigma of leprosy, but he was a social throw-away before he had even acquired that disease. He knew clearly what Jesus had done, and it was not going to go un-heralded! Nine went to acquire the benefits of their cleansing, and one came back to bear

witness of his cleansing...in action, in humility, on his knees! Because thankfulness...*gratitude*, is a thing of action.

His faith, asking and believing, not in the healing but in the person behind the healing, made him well. It made him whole. It made him a child of God. In all his humility, this man knew his blessed duty. I will never know on this side of eternity, but I am willing to bet that this one man never forgot what happened there that day. And in that state of remembrance, his life was profoundly and eternally altered. Things would never be the same for him again. His thanks would permeate every aspect of his life. He would thereafter live a *life* of thankfulness. His search was over. He was home.

All the lepers had been healed, all of them had been equally blessed and should have been thankful. This was true of the ten lepers, and it should be true of every man. Every one of the ten should have turned back and given thanks. They had all been blessed by Christ. Not just at that moment, but for every moment that would follow in their lives. Note they had all...

- recognized their need.
- shown humility.
- cried for mercy.
- persevered.
- believed and obeyed.

Their need had been met: they had all been healed. They now needed only to turn back and give thanks and show appreciation. But only one seemed to truly understand what had happened. Only one stopped to give thanks. Note what he did.

- He glorified God immediately. He witnessed for God. God had cleansed him and he wanted all to know the great mercy and love of God.

- He worshipped Jesus. He fell down on his face at the feet of Jesus. This was both humility and recognition of the power of God in Christ, two essentials for true gratitude and thanks.

But again, most did not give thanks. Most still do not. They kept going about their business at hand. They did not stop what they were doing nor return to the Lord to give thanks. But note something: they apparently did return to their former world, the lives they used to live. They wanted the gift, but not the giver.

Once a year on thanksgiving...we are awoken from our worldly stupor, and reminded to “give thanks.” That is, if we can dig out from all of the hub bub of food, football, and family gatherings. But this issue is crucial to our successful Christian lives. For it is the individual that embraces a life of thanks that knows and experiences a living of peace, of joy, and a true reflection of authentic salvation. In such a soul there is rest. Such a soul says “God has found me, healed me, and is Lord of my life...”

So today I asked us to pause...

Look around you and look at your life. Can you see it? As the world around us is plunging into chaos and despair, here **we** sit...so very very blessed...