

The Rewards of Thankfulness

How many of you broke your diets this week? We can do some feasting can't we? Friday morning we were trying to decide if pumpkins were a fruit or a vegetable, but either way, pumpkin pie was a nutritious breakfast, and with the dairy of Cool Whip, and the grains of the crust it was a balanced breakfast. Some of you did two or three thanksgivings. It's easy to be thankful when you're stuffed full, but what about when you're not.

My grandmother is about to celebrate her 90th birthday. She shared the following story with the family this week about her childhood friend. She writes,

I have a dear friend who lives in Florida. We've been friends almost all our lives; we were thirteen and fourteen when we met and instantly hit it off together. We did silly things, like going to town after dark and climbing fire escapes in back alleys to the roofs of the store buildings, walking along the tops of them and feeling daring. Later on were the boyfriend days. My friend's parents wouldn't let her go out with her boyfriend unless I was along as a chaperone. I didn't mind going because he let me drive the car and that was the only way I got to practice driving. She was with me the night I met my future husband...in church. We were singing in the choir. After we married, our paths parted and we did not see one another for forty years. Still, we kept in touch through letters at least at Christmas time. When we finally got together again, it was as if no time had passed.

Her husband gradually lost his eyesight and she developed health problems too. She became unable to swallow solid food and has to be fed through a tube in her stomach. Then last year, her husband died. This year, her grandchildren, who live next door and do much to help her and cheer her, are going out of state for Thanksgiving to be with the "other side of the family." Only her daughter will be there. My friend can't eat, so what to have for Thanksgiving? She told me, with pleasure: hot chocolate! For years, she had not been able to drink it because she had been drinking hot chocolate with her father, when he suffered a heart attack and died suddenly. Because of that association, she simply couldn't bring her emotions in line to drink it. But years had gone by, and recently someone had prepared some hot chocolate and asked if she would like to try it. It smelled good, so she drank some and relished the taste. Now this year, her daughter will buy some "take out," bring it over to her home to eat and my friend will have her hot chocolate and thank the Lord for His goodness.

Now, doesn't that give you a new perspective on being thankful. On Tuesday I spoke at the community Thanksgiving service where I talked about some ways we could develop a more thankful heart. I would like to talk about the benefits of a thankful heart– the rewards of a

grateful spirit. These are the “side-effects,” if you will, of being thankful. There are a lot of positive consequences of gratitude, and this is something we know not only from Scripture, but also science and sociology. This is just one more area where human knowledge and human learning has come alongside and confirmed everything God’s word has been telling us for thousands of years.

I. Increase Your Personal Happiness

For one, being a grateful person can INCREASE YOUR PERSONAL HAPPINESS. I recently read an article in Forbes magazine called *7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude that Will Motivate You to Give Thanks Year-Round*.¹ This article refers to several studies that show how thankfulness could contribute to our personal happiness. It improves your physical health as well as your psychological health. It helps you sleep better. There’s a happier person right there. It gives you greater mental strength and improves your self-esteem. So, right there you can say a grateful heart will increase your personal happiness.

But I think Scripture takes us deeper than that. Happiness, by definition, is determined by circumstances. Happiness is based on what happens to you. But who wants to be at the mercy of external forces that are often beyond your control. On that level, happiness goes up and down. If I asked you, on a scale of one to ten how happy you are right now, you might say, “Well, I’m about a 2, or I’m a 7 on the happiness meter because of my circumstances.”

God leads us to something deeper and more lasting than momentary happiness. He offers us joy. Joy comes from within, and is not based on what is from without. Joy is determined by attitude. It is really in how we see things. The apostle Paul wrote these words from prison (yes prison).

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Joy derives from our attitude, and it is an attitude of gratitude that fuels that joy. Thanksgiving is the spring which supplies the fountain of joy. Paul was happy despite being in prison and how, he learned to thank God in everything he did. It was really his perspective on life. Having the right perspective can change your view on many things.

A young woman wrote her mother from college:

“Dear Mom: Sorry I haven't written sooner. My arm really has been broken. I broke it, and my left leg too, when I jumped from the second floor of my dormitory... when we had the fire. We were lucky. A young service station attendant saw the blaze and called

the Fire Department. They were there in minutes. I was in the hospital for a few days. Paul, the service station attendant, came to see me every day. And because it was taking so long to get our dormitory livable again, I moved in with him. He has been so nice. I must admit that I am pregnant. Paul and I plan to get married just as soon as he can get a divorce. I hope things are fine at home. I'm doing fine, and will write more when I get the chance. Love, Your daughter, Susie.

P.S. Mom, none of the above is true. But I did get a "C" in Sociology and flunked Chemistry. I just wanted you to receive this news in its "Proper Perspective!"

Joy is really determined by our perspective in life not by circumstances. If we learn to be grateful people despite circumstances that will greatly increase our sense of happiness. As Christians, we look at things with an eternal viewpoint that give things a whole new perspective.

B. Improve Your Witness for Christ

Being a grateful person can also IMPROVE YOUR WITNESS FOR CHRIST. Having a noticeable countenance of thankfulness and joy will certainly make us better witnesses for Christ. What is sad is that some Christians are the most negative, sour people in the world, mean spirited and ungrateful lugs. We act like WE have been baptized in vinegar not in the Holy Spirit. It is no wonder people don't want to have anything to do with us.

But when we are thankful, joy-filled people, we attract the lost with our spirit of gratitude because the world is so dark and depressing and ungrateful. Have you looked at this world lately? People are so discouraged? Yet if we can learn to be different, thankful and filled with a joy based in something beyond our circumstances, we will attract them. As individuals and as a church we are to be a people magnet, because have something they don't. 1 Peter 2:12 reads, *"Live such good lives among the pagans that they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*

C. Enhance Your Relationships

Being a grateful person will also ENHANCE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. No one likes being around a sour person. People who take everything for granted, who act like you owe it to them; people who are ungrateful and always complaining are repulsive. Having an ungrateful heart is like having a people force field around you.

Having a grateful heart, however, draws people to us. People want to be appreciated. They want to be valued. They want to know they make a difference in your life. Learning to express your thankfulness will oil the gears of all your relationships. It will enhance your relationships at church, at work, and at home. In fact, it is in the home where we can readily see where a lack of appreciation robs the relationship.

The first year of marriage the wife gets a bad cold. The husband seeing the wife is sick, says, "You don't look good. You should go to the hospital. I have already arranged it. I know the food is bad there, but we are going to have meals catered in." The second year he says, "You don't look so good. I have called the doctor. Go and lay down. I will take care of the kids." The third year he says, "You know you are not looking so hot. When you are done feeding the kids and cleaning up the kitchen, you ought to go lay down." The fourth year he says, "Would you quit walking around here barking like a seal, you're going to give me your cold?" The longer we become familiar; the less thankful we are for each other.

But husbands imagine about how much your marriage would improve if you came home one day with some flowers and just told your wife how thankful you are for all she does. You might give her a heart attack.

Wives, just think about how much your marriage would improve if you told your husband how much appreciate him once and awhile. Kids, think about how much better things would go for you in the home if you told mom and dad once and awhile how grateful you are for the money they spend on you and the stuff they get you? And the things they do for you?

Just imagine how much better our church relationships would be if we expressed our thanks for each other from time to time. Instead of picking at each other faults so much, what if just stopped and became grateful for each other.

Do you know how the apostle Paul began most of his letters in the Bible? To the church in Rome he wrote. *"First, I thank my God for all of you."* (Romans 1:8) To the church in Corinth. *"I always thank God for you* (1 Corinthians 1:4). To the church in Ephesus, *"I have not stopped giving thanks for you; remembering you in my prayers."* (Ephesians 1:16). To the church in Philippi, *"I thank my God every time I remember you."* (Philippians 1:3). To the church in Colossi, *"I always thank God when I pray for you."* (Colossians 1:3).

Paul made sure that he let people in the churches know that he was thankful for them. Imagine how much better our church and our relationships would be if we expressed our thanks for each other.

D. Solidify Your Relationship with God

There is another relationship that being thankful will enhance. It is important enough, though, that I made it its own separate point. It will SOLIDIFY YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, which is the top benefit. Someone once said that God lives in two places. He lives in heaven and in a humble, grateful heart. Hebrews 12:25 says, *"Let us please God by serving him with thankful hearts."*

Harriet Martineau was an atheist. One morning she & a Christian friend stepped out into the glories of a beautiful fall morning. As Harriet saw the brilliant sun peeking through the haze, & the frost on the meadow, & the brightly colored leaves making their way lazily to the ground, she was filled with the beauty & burst forth with “I am so thankful. I'm just so grateful for it all.” And her believing friend asked, “Grateful to whom, my dear?”

There is something inside of each of us that needs to give thanks to God. Thankfulness draws us closer to Him. It reminds us of our dependence on Him. It reminds us that he is the giver of every good and perfect gift. It reminds us that we can't do it all on our own, that we have to look outside of ourselves. How do you feel as a parent when a child comes up and says, “Thank you mommy. Thank you daddy. I love you.” When I spend time giving thanks to God for all I have, I just feel close to him, don't you? I think that is exactly why, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, *“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* It is God's plan, his will for us to give thanks to him. He made us for that.

ⁱ Morin, Amy. "7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude That Will Motivate You to Give Thanks Year-Round." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 23 Nov. 2014. Web. 28 Nov. 2015.