

The Value of Gratitude

Psalm 92:1-8

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They hit the grocery store shelves over fifty years ago and were an instant success. However, had it not been for Thanksgiving, I am not sure that TV dinners would have been designed and produced.

In 1953, the Swanson Food Company had too many turkeys on their hands after disappointing Thanksgiving sales. One innovative employee came up with the idea of packaging individual servings of turkey and vegetables on an aluminum tray. Marketers showed people eating from the trays while watching television, giving them their name. Sales skyrocketed and a new industry was born.

Thanksgiving has done far more than give us TV dinners, though. It has highlighted the value of gratitude and reminded us of the importance of expressing appreciation for those that have helped us along our journey.

This is the intent and focus of Psalm 92. Labeled a Psalm of Thanksgiving, it begins with those simple words, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." The Psalmist proceeds to list those things for which he is grateful, primarily God's love, generosity, righteousness and faithfulness. There is no doubt his relationship with God has brought him great joy and a sense of peace and security. He is utterly amazed that there are those around him that do not trust God and walk in His ways.

I am intrigued by the Psalmist's declaration, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." I like the simple yet profound way he begins this Psalm used to lead people in worship. It raises some questions for me that I wish to use to frame this sermon.

When did the Psalmist come to this realization? Had he always felt this way? Had he been one of the fools he describes in 92:6 that failed to understand the importance of trusting God and expressing gratitude? Did someone have a talk with him or did he figure this out on his own?

He doesn't tell us. All we know is that at this point along his journey he was convinced that expressing appreciation was one characteristic of a good person.

Why did the Psalmist believe it was good to give thanks to the Lord? Again, he doesn't tell us but maybe that's best. He leaves it to us to answer this question.

So how would you respond? Why do you think it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord? I've given that a lot of thought in recent days and would like to offer some suggestions for you to consider. I encourage you to add your thoughts to mine as the week progresses.

I think it is good for God that we express our gratitude. Before we talk about what it does for us, let's talk about what it does for God. I think expressions of gratitude feed His spirit.

How do you feel when your children thank you for what you have done for them? It means the world to you, doesn't it? It nourishes and strengthens your spirit. I think it does the same for God.

I believe that God is sovereign and needs no other to exist. However, even though He doesn't need us like we need Him, our expressions of gratitude bring Him great delight. I have to believe they nourish and strengthen His spirit the same way they do ours.

How do you think God felt when He heard the Psalmist express gratitude for the works of His hands, His profound thoughts, His goodness, generosity, righteousness, love and faithfulness? I think it moved Him to tears. Doesn't it you when your children express heartfelt gratitude?

Recently I was cleaning out a desk at home when I came across a small piece of paper upon which my youngest son, Josh, scribbled a note almost three years ago. He had been here for a visit and I helped him with something very important to him. When I went upstairs after he left, I found this note on my desk. "Dad, can't thank you enough. I love my new place, Josh."

Why did I keep this scrap of paper? Why do I keep it to this day? If you are a parent or grandparent, you know why. Expressions of gratitude are some of our most cherished memories and significant gifts. Each time we read them, they feed our spirit like manna from heaven.

I also think it is good for us to express gratitude to God and others for what they have done for us. Gratitude helps us to count our blessings, something we can so easily fail to do.

If there was ever a Thanksgiving when we needed to take an inventory of our blessings, it is this one. For months, all the news on the economic front has been bleak. All this negative talk can put cataracts on our eyes and take our sight away. Negative news can turn us into negative people.

For sure, these are difficult days filled with uncertainty and insecurity. Not many of us have ever traveled down this road. I am unwilling, though, to focus only upon what we have lost or might lose. Our journey is filled with blessings too numerous to mention that no recession can take away. Faith, family and friends are among these and this is only the beginning.

Dr. Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh was famous for his pulpit prayers. He always found something to thank God for even in bad times. One dark, stormy morning a member of his congregation wondered what Dr. Whyte would find to thank God for on such a dreary day. He grinned when he heard Dr. Whyte begin his prayer, "We thank thee, O God, that the weather is not always like this."

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale acknowledges that the inspiration for his mantra, "The Power of Positive Thinking," came from a friend that told him he was not grateful enough. After pouring out all his woes and being so negative one day, his friend looked him squarely in the eye and told him that he was ungrateful.

"What do you mean I am not grateful enough?" he objected. "What does that have to do with my problems?"

"You are not thinking about your blessings, but your adversities. When you think only about your adversities, you bring more problems into your life. Quit thinking about your adversities. Start thinking about everything for which you should be grateful."

Gratitude improves our vision. It helps us to see life from a different perspective, one that can sustain us in tough times. Perhaps this was why the Psalmist was committed to thanking God every morning and evening. His expressions of gratitude were not dependent upon his moods. The first thing every morning and last thing of an evening he would concentrate on God's goodness and faithfulness and express his gratitude.

Without a doubt, gratitude helps us to count our blessings, but it also encourages us to count the people that God has used to help us. When we express gratitude, we are acknowledging that we are who and where we are because of the influence, help and sacrifices of others.

"When you see a turtle on a post, you know he did not get there by himself." Neither did we get where we are by ourselves and wise is the person that acknowledges this.

I value the words of Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation. "Intoxicated by unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us." May we never be that arrogant.

I must share one of my favorite parts from the movie, *Shenandoah*. Charlie Anderson, played by Jimmy Stewart, offers the blessing before a meal by saying, "Oh, Lord, we tilled the ground. We planted the seed. We watered the crops and we harvested the grain. But, we thank you anyway." Even when you are tempted to think you are a self-made person, don't believe it.

I believe expressing gratitude does something else for us. It encourages us to be generous and share our blessings. Grateful people make good neighbors. They are willing to see others' struggles and help them along their journey.

Physician, theologian, philosopher and musician Albert Schweitzer put it this way. "In gratitude for your own good fortune, you must render in return some sacrifice of your life for other life."

Dr. Martin Luther King put it this way. "As long as there is poverty in the world, I can never be rich, even if I have a million dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than twenty-eight or thirty years, I can never be totally healthy even if I just got a good checkup at the Mayo Clinic. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way our world is made. No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are interdependent."

Remember the movie “Pass it Forward?” It was based upon the premise that good deeds don’t necessarily need to be paid back as much as they need to be passed on to others. Do for others as others have done for you.

I’ve never forgotten the story about the little boy who was admiring a beautiful sports car. When the owner arrived at the car, he told the boy that his brother had given it to him as a present. The boy looked at him and shocked him when he said, “One day, I wish I could be a brother like that!” That was not how he expected this boy to respond. You know what he expected him to say, “I wish I could have a car like this or a brother like yours.” He wasn’t prepared for that kind of gracious response.

This week, I challenge you to surprise some people with your expressions of gratitude. Children, why don’t you leave a note thanking your parents for something they have done for you? Parents, why not write a note to your children? How could you let your mate know that you appreciate him or her? Who in this church or community needs to know of your appreciation for their goodness and generosity? What could you say or do this week that would bring tears to God’s eyes? I am confident you will come up with just the right thing.