



A New Way of Seeing and Living

Message Notes, November 5, 2017

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The discipline of seeing and thanking God for His goodness opens us to the blessing of experiencing His presence in a deeper way. Over the next three weeks, we will examine three different contexts for thanksgiving: In the ordinary moments of life, in lacking – those moments when it seems there is not enough – and in the hard moments of pain and struggle. Today we explore the first of these.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 gives us a simple summary of the “will of God for us” (the way God wants us to live).

Thanksgiving certainly honors the Lord, the source of all goodness, but it also does something in us. It opens us up to a new way of seeing. It gives us clearer focus – about life, about what is important, about our loving Creator.

What makes giving thanks difficult for us?

- Focus on self (our strong bent is to self-centeredness)
- Focus on circumstances (especially when these are difficult or painful)
- Forgetting who God is and all that He has done.
 - Psalm 103:1-5 is a strong reminder that we “forget not all His benefits ...”
 - The Hebrew word for “thanksgiving” inherently embodies the concept of who God is and what He has done.
- Falling into ruts and routines (whereby our eyes get dull to the beauty and blessings around us)
 - Even our prayers can become ritualistic. We must develop the discipline of being mindful of what we are praying, truly pondering the words we say. E.g., *How* is God great? *Where* do we see His goodness? *What* gifts and grace is He giving – right now?

We need to rediscover a spirit of *neotony* – maintaining a childlike wonder and awe; seeing beauty, wonder and goodness; enjoying these things with enthusiasm and joy. The discipline of thanksgiving opens us up to neotony, to seeing and enjoying.

Psalm 136:1-9 is a responsive song in which the Hebrew people would recognize and declare the goodness of God.

A soulful transformation happens in us when we practice thanksgiving as a lifestyle, actually naming (and perhaps even writing down) the countless gifts of God. Such naming can transform how we walk through the ordinary, lacking and difficult circumstances of our lives.

Ann Voskamp gives powerful testimony of the transformation of thanksgiving (*Eucharisteo*) in her book *One thousand Gifts*. She writes, “*Eucharisteo* opens up a cathedral of worship in which we move beyond the gifts to the Giver Himself, seeing Him more fully and experiencing His intimate, loving presence more deeply. He is the real gift!”

Psalm 92 captures well this idea. Read and enter into this “cathedral of worship.”



Responsive Questions

1. Is the practice of thanksgiving difficult for you? What are your obstacles?
2. What is one step you can take to begin to cultivate a lifestyle of thanksgiving in your life?
3. Consider Ann Voskamp's example of actually writing down daily gifts, large or small. She had pads and note cards all about. When she would recognize a "gift," she would write it down. Her initial target of 1,000 gifts was easily surpassed.
4. Consider reading through the Psalms as a catalyst for seeing and giving thanks. Read your own circumstances into the Psalms, make them personal.
5. Can you share an experience when thanksgiving transformed how you were seeing things or maybe even a time when thanksgiving "opened up a cathedral of worship" in which you experienced God's deep, intimate presence?