

A Simple Thank You Would Suffice
Psalm 92. 1-4

*1 It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;*

*2 to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,*

*3 to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.*

*4 For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your
hands I sing for joy.*

Over the past few years I have become convinced that a chief, if not the chief, characteristic of a healthy, maturing Jesus follower is: thankfulness.

Thankfulness, however, is a funny thing. It can be found in the most unlikely of lives, and be missing in the places we figure it should abound. It eludes those we think it shouldn't, and can arise out of poverty alongside the stench of garbage.

Thankfulness is a funny thing.

The Psalmist calls it a good thing.

Imagine if you will, the perfect moment, or the ideal conditions that might produce a thankful attitude:

It's 8:07AM, and you are awoken not by your alarm clock, or you kids, but the gentle kiss of warmth delivered by a ray of sunlight your face. You're not fully awake, however, you're resting in that in-between place of consciousness and Neverland.

You're eventually coaxed from slumber, after some time, by the soft chirping of 3-5 birds outside your window. You open your eyes and can tell it's a beautiful day, likely between 23-26 degrees. You stretch, and it's a good stretch, and somehow you can tell you're

going to have a great hair day. You just know it, even though you're balding.

Your sheets and comforter smell fresh and crisp because you changed them the prior evening (you're so smart). You stretch again and drift off once more, comatose by the prospect of a worry-free day. It's a holiday. No work for you. The kids are away, cared for by loved ones. Your final exam was written a couple of days ago. At this point in the morning you couldn't even spell the word stress.

You wake for the final time, now roused by sound and scent. Bacon is cooking, coffee is brewing, and is that fresh baked bread? As you anticipate the feast someone else prepares for you, the stereo begins to play your favorite music. Maybe Mozart, maybe McCartney. If you're Mike Vaters, it's Taylor Swift. You don't know how it gets better than this. You're feeling fearless.

Finally you roll out of bed, make your way to the washroom, and from there find your way to the kitchen, where the table is full of breakfast delights you dared never to dream of. You sit down, knife and fork in hand, still in your pajamas, and exclaim...

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hands I sing for joy.*

**Thankfulness is a funny thing. The Psalmist says it's a good thing.
Sometimes it's a conditional thing.**

- The problem is the Africans don't have bacon, or Mozart, for fresh linen, or most of the time rain, for that matter.
- The ideal conditions for thankfulness elude them most of the time.

They can tend to elude us, too.

It's 6:15AM, and the screeching alarm clock doesn't have the chance to jerk you from your brief bit of rest because the toddler's catapulting knee drop beat it to the punch. If not your kid, then it was your neighbors noisy truck. If not the truck, your own mind already racing, fueled by the worries and care of your home, job, finances, or the growing concern of global warming...which must be real, because it's raining, again.

The only smell you're met with this morning is the stench of a fresh diaper, or the sink full of dishes your someone left for you a special blessing. The radio plays no music, but forces traffic reports and bad news upon you, along with words like DOW JONES and NASDAQ. What is a NASDAQ? You should probably know that by now, think to yourself. It's likely going to affect your retirement, and you feel ill-prepared, at best.

Even though you've not yet looked in the mirror you know you're going to have a bad hair day. You can just tell. Because you balding. You grab a coffee mug and an overly bruised banana as you rush out the door and jump in the car (which is filthy by the way). You turn the key, and the gas light comes on. You're not out of your street before you realize you've left your phone in the house, you hit the breaks spilling coffee on your pants, and with a jolt you exclaim:

1 *It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praises to your name, O Most FORGET IT.*

Thankfulness is a funny thing. The Psalmist says it's a good thing. Sometimes it can be a conditional thing.

The Unmerciful (unthankful?) Servant

- When we walked through the Lord's prayer a couple of years ago Doug taught on the segment pertaining to forgiveness.
- His teaching included a parable from Jesus which is both of his most disturbing, but also most revelatory concerning human behavior.
- The story isn't only about forgiveness, but also awareness and thankfulness.
- One of the implications of the story is that thankfulness isn't worked out and expressed in the court of the king, but in the every day matters of life. It should translate there.
- Thankfulness, and in turn forgiveness, isn't just about God and us. It's about us and others. Jesus takes this seriously

A Thankfulness Cycle

- Not long after Jesus lived a group of his followers sprung up in a city called Thessalonica. Population around 100,000, and a cultural and economic hub of its region.
- They were generally doing well, loving each other, living simply, being generous.
- They did have some problems. There was some relational tension in the community, there was prolonged external pressures from their culture, and some of the church members had recently passed away.
- These problems caused some of them to worry about the outside pressure, but also about their friend's who had died. They were

disheartened by death, but also unsure of what would happen to their friends. They were young in the faith.

- Paul writes them a letter to encourage them, and remind them of how well they were doing. He teaches them how to deal with the relational discord, the external pressures and reminds them to stick together. He also clears up their questions about the friends who have died, and assures them that everything is going to be ok.
- Towards the end of the letter (1 Thessalonians 5. 14-18) he writes:

***14** Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.*

***15** See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.*

***16** Always be joyful. **17** Never stop praying. **18** Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

- Paul's instruction here models his practice earlier in the letter, and in many of his other letters. His prayer's are often rooted in thankfulness. Specifically thankfulness for the people he's surrounded by or in relationship with.
- His instruction about and practice of prayer often includes mentions of joy, and thankfulness. For Paul, there's some kind of connection between joy, thankfulness and prayer.
- Some would say a cyclical affect, even.

- Prayer (however expressed) rooted in thankfulness brings about an experience, though it varies from case to case, of joy.
- Paul experiences and prays with joy even though he's in apparently dire circumstances.
- The key for Paul was that his thankfulness was always directed towards God (his focus was clear) and his thankfulness was primarily rooted in God's great love and grace.
- The other major motivation for thankfulness for Paul, was people. It was rarely, if even, a product of his physical condition, or circumstances good or bad.
- This brought him joy.

The gift of gratitude

- I was brought up to be polite. Minding my Ps and Qs was expected in my home. It was obligatory.
- It's easy to regard thankfulness as obligation.
- But thankfulness is really a gift.
- Paul, the Psalmist and other's would say that saying thank you is in itself a practice or lifestyle that begets joy and contentment, even in the worst of circumstances.
- Thankfulness might be a great prescription for joy. Or maybe the remedy for discontentment, or even the antidote for materialism or greed.
- The beauty of thankfulness is that it disregards conditions. Victoria's African friends teach us this. Thankfulness is gift.

- The power of thankfulness is that it won't be controlled by to outer circumstances. Thankfulness can trump anything: death, sickness, poverty, extreme relational discord.
- I would encourage you to explore it, as I'm learning to explore it myself.

Learning to say Thank You

- Thank God for God. (explore God's multi-faceted grace and mercy)
- Thank God for people.
- Thank God for conditions.

Let's not invert the list.

Discussion Questions

- Do you know any thankful people? What makes them so?
- How is thankfulness evidenced in your life?
- What makes thankfulness a challenge at times?
- How can we creatively express thankfulness in our lives?