

Build Your Thankfulness – 12/1/24

One of the great lies of our culture at this moment is that each of us is an independent, autonomous, self-sufficient individual. We are formed to believe that we can choose our own destiny and on our own we can select and cultivate a life according to our desires.

If you stop and think for just a moment, you will see how utterly dependent you are on other people in every area of your life. Nearly all the food you ate this morning was grown and harvested by someone else. Your car was built by someone else and the gas you put in it was pulled from the earth, refined, and shipped here so that you can drive a car full of it. Your parents, with all their faults, cared for you, fed you, changed you, and helped you to reach adulthood. One author described our dependence this way:

“However independent and autonomous we imagine ourselves, none of us are remotely self-sufficient. No matter how strong or clever, prosperous or credentialed, famous or secure, all of us are fundamentally dependent and vulnerable. We’re all one heartbeat away from radical and utter dependence, of course, but even absent the weakness and susceptibility of our bodies we live and cannot but live within networks of dependence. Water, food, safety, medicine, sanitation, law, trade—these all depend on the many who work and watch and wait while others sleep. We would have no civilization without others.” – R.J. Snell

We just celebrated Thanksgiving, and a posture of thankfulness clearly demonstrates awareness of my dependence on others and need for others. When I thank other people, I’m acknowledging that they have impacted my life in some way. Even something as simple as handing me a cup of coffee. But thankfulness can’t remain horizontal. It must turn vertical because all of reality is a gift from God and we are utterly dependent on Him. I want to spend a few minutes this morning trying to help you cultivate a life of thankfulness. To do that here’s what we’re going to look at: **2 Reasons and 1 Practice to Cultivate Thankfulness in Your Life.**

1. Thankfulness Aligns Your Perspective with Reality as It Is

Here’s what I mean by this. All of us want to see and know the truth about the world and ourselves. We want to see reality as it is. When you direct your

thankfulness to God, you are seeing things as they truly are. Your perspective aligns with the grain of the universe. Let me show you this. Turn to 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

In this passage Paul is confronting some false teaching and helping Timothy navigate the time and culture he's living in. Notice the description of this false teaching in verses 1-2.

People will depart from the faith because they are caught up in teaching that is a lie. It's not true. This teaching is promoted by deceitful spirits and liars. The one's teaching it have seared consciences, which again points to an inability to see the truth. A seared conscience can't accurately determine good or evil.

This sounds pretty bad, so what is this teaching? Look at the beginning of verse 3. It's a doctrine that forbids us from partaking in and enjoying the good things God has given to us. Two examples are given, marriage and foods. And what's the real problem here? Continue in verse 3.

The truth is that God created all things for us to enjoy in such a way that we give thanks back to God for His gifts. Notice the end of verse 3 again. Those who believe and know the truth are those who live a life of grateful praise to God for His gifts. Did you enjoy that Thanksgiving meal? It was a gift from God. Look at verses 4-5.

Paul is specifically attacking this false teaching here, but he gives us the correction to it. How should we live? Constantly thanking God for the gifts of creation because He has made them and given them to us. That's reality. That's true.

This means learning to regularly thank God for all things, even the little things. Life is certainly a challenge at times, but there are so many small gifts we receive every single day. Little things. A quiet moment. Watching your dog chase a squirrel. A good sandwich. A baby's laughter.

This is why the NT repeatedly exhorts us to give thanks in everything. Listen to a couple of verses. Col. 3:17; Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18. All three of these exhortations come in sections of Paul's letters where he's telling people how to live out their new life in Christ.

How does a life of thankfulness align your perspective with the truth? It recognizes that everything is a gift from God. James 1:17. God is the Creator of all things and has given us all of it to enjoy and return praise to Him.

Now, if thankfulness to God is the way to match our perspective with the way things are, lack of thankfulness blinds us to the truth about reality. And this is our second reason to cultivate thankfulness.

2. Lack of Thankfulness Blinds You to the True Nature of Reality

To show you this let's turn to Romans 1. Verse 21 is where we want to end up, but let's start in verse 18 to make sense of verse 21.

Verse 18 points out that God's wrath has been revealed or shown or seen against ungodliness and unrighteousness in human beings. God created us to enjoy a relationship with Him and to trust and obey Him because He is our loving Creator God.

Human beings have rebelled against God in unrighteousness and have suppressed the truth about God. What truths about God have they suppressed? Look at verse 19.

All humans are born into this world suppressing the truth about God even though God consistently and faithfully makes truths about Him known. How does God make these truths known? Look at verse 20. Creation. It's obvious there's a Creator filled with goodness power and love and all you have to do is look around to see this truth, but humans have been denying it and suppressing this truth. How? Look at verse 21.

The right response to God's position as Creator and powerful loving Father is to honor Him and give thanks to Him. That posture aligns us with the truth about God and the truth about everything. If there's a Creator who made it all and we are responsible to Him and you don't recognize that, you aren't seeing reality correctly. You are living aligned with the truth. You are acting like there's no such thing as gravity.

How can you tell if you are seeing things correctly and honoring God? You regularly give Him thanks because He's the good Creator. This ought to be the

normal, everyday posture and belief of every human being. We live best and how we were meant to live when we honor God and give Him thanks.

But what if we don't give Him thanks and instead, we rebel against Him and His Created order and we suppress the truth about Him? Look at the end of verse 21.

We become futile in our thinking. Our thinking becomes nonsense and our hearts are darkened. We can't think correctly about anything if we don't recognize God as Creator and give Him thanks and our hearts are darkened by sin. We become foolish.

If you see a person standing on railroad tracks and hear the horn of a train blowing loudly, you will consider them foolish if they keep insisting there's no such thing as a train. That person isn't seeing reality as it is, and neither is the one who suppresses the truth about God by failing to give Him thanks and honor Him.

So, we've seen two reasons to cultivate thankfulness. One positive and one negative. Finally, let's talk about how to build your thankfulness. How do you grow in it?

3. Pray Your Gratitude to God

Let's talk about two different types of people this morning. First, if you are outside of Christ and find yourself in Romans 1 as the type of person in rebellion against God and still failing to honor Him and give thanks to Him. How should you respond to this? You want to see things as they are, and God's Spirit is working on you even now.

Paul continues in Romans to talk about our sin and rebellion against God demonstrated in our lack of gratitude to Him. And then he gets to this marvelous phrase in Romans 2:4 that I want to draw your attention to. If you are living life your own way and not in thankfulness to God, you are presuming on His kindness this morning. You are acting as if you are the center of the universe, and you are fully self-sufficient. You aren't recognizing His gracious gifts and returning thanks to Him. Paul says at the end of verse 4 that His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.

So, here's what needs to happen in your heart. Let God's graciousness and the many gifts He's given stop you in your tracks. Pause and reflect for a moment on

how kind He has been, let that soften your heart, and turn from your sin in repentance and to Him in faith.

If you are a believer in Christ this morning and desiring to cultivate a deeper thankfulness in your life, listen to Paul address this. Colossians 4:2 and Phil. 4:6.

Both texts indicate that our prayers ought to be filled with thanksgiving. In other words, pray your gratitude to God. Don't just make a list of 50 things you are thankful for. Don't just mentally pause and identify God's kindness. Actually talk to Him about it. Prayer is the main way we grow our relationship with God and personally interact with Him.

Prayer is not a to do item. A list of items to pray for is good but understand that prayer is meant to be more like a conversation with your spouse in the quiet at the end of a very busy day. It's recounting what happened, how you felt about what happened, what lessons learned and what you are thankful for. Prayer is intimate communion and to truly enter into this communion takes a posture of thankfulness.

So, to bring all this together. Thankfulness aligns us with the truth about God and ourselves and lack of thankfulness blinds us to the truth about God and ourselves. The pathway to cultivating thankfulness is through the recognition of God's kindness and grace and to pray your gratitude to Him.

And I'll end with this exhortation. Start small. Short times of prayer of thankfulness and watch God do His work in you. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 12/1/24

- What in our culture trains us to believe that we are self-sufficient autonomous individuals?
- List some of the ways in which we are dependent on others.
- How does thankfulness show that you recognize your dependence on others? Why is this a good and healthy recognition?
- Explain what it means that thankfulness aligns our perspective with reality as it is.
- What are some of the small things you can thank God for on a regular basis?
- Explain the flow of thought between Romans 1:18-21. How does a lack of thankfulness blind us to the truth?
- How does God's kindness lead us to repentance? (Romans 2:4)
- Why must our thankfulness include prayer to God?
- What did you do over Thanksgiving to demonstrate thankfulness to God?
- Did you read or learn anything about Thankfulness that impacted you?

- Are there any new practices you plan to incorporate into your life involving thankfulness?
- What's one truth from this sermon that you can use to encourage and help another believer this week?