

Text: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
Theme: "Gratitude and Generosity"
#983

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Advent 1 C
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Roughly 10 days after Thanksgiving our Second Lesson today pops up. It comes amidst the theme of the apocalyptic end-times when Jesus will return to take all believers home. St. Paul begins: "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?"

How can we thank God enough for you...? Paul writes. Thankfulness is an emotion that emits a positive, healthy feeling for anyone on the receiving end of such a statement. It's good to think about all the things you have to be thankful for or grateful of at Thanksgiving time, but gratitude and thankfulness are feelings that we should be feeling year around.

St. Paul begins many of his epistles by thanking God for the people to whom he is writing. He talks about their faith and their faithfulness to God as they struggle to keep faith in Jesus as the Messiah amidst the false gods, the distractions of the world, and the people who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. Paul is grateful for the beginnings of the Christian Church that are springing up in the regions around the Mediterranean Sea. He is grateful for leaders in those places who are doing the work of apostles and followers.

It's obviously important to Paul to give thanks and to praise those who are working to spread the faith—even at the risk of their own health and their lives. If these things are so important to Paul, it would be good for us as well to think about people and things that bring us happiness and gratitude.

What are your 'triggers' for being thankful and thanking God for the blessings in your life?

Important life events: a health scare, healing from a disease such as cancer, an accident, or being spared in a natural disaster?

Are you prompted to give thanks for your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, or other family members? Are you grateful when someone gets a job promotion or finds meaningful employment?

Are you thankful for friends, co-workers, or others who give you support, encouragement, or help you with a task?

Are you grateful for your church family—people you worship with, work alongside on a project or committee, or those who discuss and grow in their faith with you in a Bible Study? Are you grateful for meaningful projects where you can use your God-given talents, share your time, and cultivate friendships as you help make the world a better place?

Meaningful work, positive friendships, and a good cause, are all ways that we find happiness and joy in life.

A friend borrowed me a book titled, “FLOURISH”. It’s about understanding happiness and well-being in our lives. Martin Seligman, a highly esteemed psychologist, has studied what creates happy, meaningful lives—lives that are filled with gratitude and generosity. Seligman wrote of research that is being done in companies to try to understand how positive emotion is such a powerful force in companies that succeed as opposed to those companies that are not doing well.

They went into 60 companies and transcribed every word that is said in their business meetings. One-third of the companies are flourishing economically, one-third are doing okay, and one-third are failing. The researchers coded each sentence for positive or negative words, and then they took a simple ratio of positive to negative statements.

“There is a sharp dividing line, a chief researcher said. “Companies with better than a 2.9:1 ratio of positive to negative statements are flourishing. Below that ratio, companies are not doing well economically.’ But they cautioned not to go overboard with positivity. That can cause a person or group to lose credibility.

A lawyer asked the researcher about negativity. He said that his days are spent arguing. Their negativity ratios must be quite high, which is the very nature of litigation. He then asked if lawyers should be forced to spend the day sweet-talking!

“A negative ratio may make for an effective lawyer, but it may have a huge personal cost,” the chief researcher said. “Law is the profession with the highest depression, suicide, and divorce rates. If your colleagues take their office ratio home, they are in trouble.” In families, they used the same study and ratios and found that a 2.9:1 ratio of positive to negative statements means that a couple is most likely headed to divorce. A healthy ratio for families is a 5:1 positive to negative ratio—five positive statements to a spouse or children for every critical statement that is made. (pages 66-67)

These findings are important for how we as humans get along and have healthy relationships with those around us. Here in church, as we work alongside people in committees or teams, this positivity is important. We all need to feel as if we are contributing to the good of a project, committee, or team’s work. We all need to know that we are appreciated and that our efforts are worthwhile. We might be doing something with people we consider friends, or we may be on a team with some folks we

don't know as well. In all situations, it is important to recognize the achievements of those we are spending time with. It is important to say 'thank you' and appreciate the ideas, work, or efforts of others. As I read in the book, FLOURISH, failure to be positive and encouraging could very well spell failure for a project, a committee, or it could cause someone to burn-out or feel as if their efforts are unappreciated. It could be damaging to the spirit of cooperation and fellowship in the church as well.

To this end, EL J, our Christian Education Coordinator has implemented a plan for you to send thank you notes to those who may have done something that 'goes under the radar' as far as recognition goes. He has printed up some thank you cards with little gifts that can be sent to someone you think is doing a good job or deserves a 'thank you' for something they did. You can pick these up in the office and send them out yourself. You can also take the initiative to bring a container of soup to someone you may feel needs a boost either physically or emotionally. They may have had a health issue, lost someone important to them, or are feeling down for some reason. Just check with Lynn or Me and we will get you the container of soup to bring to someone.

We normally don't do things, get involved in a project or committee, or give money in order that we be thanked or receive special recognition.

But a 'thank you' in some way, shape, or form is a great way to acknowledge something positive a person has done. A 'thank you' goes a long way to encourage and support someone in a positive way. I encourage you to use these ideas in your workplaces and in your families. Think about the positive to negative comment ratios that exist and try to improve upon them.

So are we living a life of gratitude and joy for what God has done in our lives? Are we thankful for all the blessings, both large and small, that come our way? Do we take them for granted, or think we deserve them?

A life that is filled with generosity and gratitude is a life that overflows with joy and thankfulness to God. It is a life that gives itself in service to God in Christ looking for the good in others and responding in joy and faith which overflows to others.

AMEN

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