

## “Gratitude”

November 17, 2024

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Philippians 4: 4-9

After a short time of reflection on our “Walk” campaign along with the wonderful Thanksgiving feast we will be celebrating after Sunday School today, it became obvious that gratitude was to be the theme of the day. You might remember in our resource book for “The Walk”, Hamilton highlights gratitude in 2 of the 6 chapters. Chapter 1 was all about worship and prayer, and Hamilton boiled down both worship and prayer to saying “Thank You” to God. Thank You for creating us. Thank You for sustaining us. Thank You for not giving up on us. Thank You for saving us. Thank You for your bountiful blessings. Thank You for Your love and for those who love us. The core of worship and prayer is gratitude – recognizing the gift of God in our lives. A few weeks later in chapter 4, Hamilton was talking about “the good life”. On page 94 he says, “There are 3 habits or practices that actually play a key part in helping us to experience ‘the good life’. The first was articulated by Stoic philosophers in the Greco-Roman world, and it says ‘the good life’ is the not found in a life of acquisition of those things you don’t yet have, but instead is learning to want what you already have. How do we cultivate a desire for what we already have? The answer is surprisingly simple – giving thanks for what you already possess.” Giving thanks, being grateful, gratitude. He continues on page 96 to say, “I’ve found the Stoics were right. As you give thanks for what you have, you find contentment and freedom; you possess your possessions rather than your possessions possessing you.” Or in my language, “You find contentment and freedom” because you own your stuff instead of your stuff owning you.

There is great power in gratitude. Billy Graham says, “Nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. And nothing will do more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness.” Max Lucado says, “Gratitude is a mindful awareness of the benefits of life. It is the greatest of virtues. Studies have linked gratitude with a variety of positive effects. Grateful people tend to be more empathetic and forgiving of others. People who keep a gratitude journal are more likely to have a positive outlook on life. Grateful individuals demonstrate less envy, materialism, and self-centeredness. Gratitude improves self-esteem and enhances relationships, quality of sleep, and longevity.” He goes on to say, “If it came in pill form, gratitude would be deemed the miracle cure.”

It is interesting how our Scripture lesson slides the idea in there. Starting in verse 6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” It is almost like Paul

wanted to just say lift your prayers to God and everything will be okay, but he couldn't. He had to slide "with thanksgiving" in there. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Then "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." There will be no peace that passes understanding without persistent thanksgiving.

When it comes to being grateful to God, we can break our prayers of thanksgiving into 4 categories. We start with the most obvious. 1. Thank God for the material blessings in your life. It is easier said than done because no matter how much we have; we always want more. I was watching a show on the History Channel entitled "The Men who Built America". Part of the series focused on Rockefeller, Carnegie and Morgan and the incredible amount of wealth that these 3 contemporaries accumulated. In calculating their wealth into today's standards, some put just Rockefeller as high as 400 billion dollars. Yet he and the others were constantly striving for more. Their companies did not pay a livable wage, had deadly working conditions, polluted egregiously, and treated people like cattle; all so they could make more money and compete with each other. They never had enough. But there is a better way. Stopping and taking the time to be grateful changes things. It breaks the chains of always needing more and gives contentment a chance. Category 1 is thanking God for our possession. Yes, you worked for them, but God sustains everything that made that work payoff. Gratefulness moves us past being preoccupied with what we don't have and helps us be content with what we do.

The 2nd category of thankful prayer is for the people in your life. It is so easy to take people for granted, or even to complain and become angry because they do not meet our every wish and exceed our expectations. But if you prefer joy over frustration, try gratitude. Be thankful for who they are and the gifts they have. Look for and express your thanksgiving for the gifts you have in your spouse, children, relatives, friends and others. Intentionally being grateful for the people in our lives and the gifts they share moves us from frustration to joy.

The 3rd category of thankful prayer goes directly to God. Thank God for the gift of life, the gift of new life, and the gift of eternal life. Thank God for Jesus who died to take away your sins and shortcomings, for forgiving you and granting you access to the divine. Access to the God who will never leave you nor forsake you. Whose presence and power make you more than you could ever be on your own. Whose very presence turns helpless fretting into life giving praying. Give thanks for God's character, the generosity of God's heart, and the wisdom of God's choices over our lives. Sharing thankfulness with God connects us with what our Scripture calls the "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding."

The 4th category of thankful prayer is a little different. It is more of a when than a what. It says thank God in the midst of the trials and the mundane. None of us are exempt from trouble in our lives. None of us are exempt from boredom when one day runs right into the next without

anything significant to talk about, much less give thanks for. But a life of gratitude is not dependent on mountain top moments. As a matter of fact, gratitude changes not only ordinary moments but even struggles into mountain top moments. It is about claiming the beauty and miracle of a sunrise. It is about taking a deep breath, and not taking it for granted. It is the cool morning air and the comfort of a warm cup of coffee. It is about not getting so caught up in the destination that you fail to cherish the moment, the stuff, the people, and the presence of God. Gratitude is especially important in the midst of the trials and the mundane of life. To help us claim those moments, our Scripture says, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Gratitude, in the midst of trials and boredom, brings the gift of hope.

Gratitude, it is so simple. Intentionally think of 3 things you are thankful for each day – even write them down. I know, after reading "The Walk", I should make it 5 things a day, but I am sticking with 3. It is so simple and packs such power, yet most of us won't do it. We won't do it because it is too simple to be taken seriously. But it is that simple and that essential. When we read the first chapter of the book of Romans, Paul begins his argument of the people's need for a Savior. He says God has been right before them this whole time, and verse 21-22 says, "though they knew God, **they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him**, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools." A failure to honor and give thanks to God moved humanity from being wise to becoming fools.

I say we go with the wise. You want to know the secret to a fulfilling marriage? Gratitude. Don't whine and fester over what your spouse is not, give thanks for who they are and the gifts they bring. Granted, the not-so-good things don't disappear completely, but when you choose to be thankful, negativity loses its grip on you. You want to know the secret to a better relationship with your children? Gratitude. Find the joy instead of the disappointments. You want to know the secret to contentment? Gratitude. Giving thanks for what you have frees you from always needing the next thing. You want to know the secret to lasting peace? Gratitude. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." You want to know the secret to sustaining hope? Gratitude. Finding the blessing in the midst of the trials and the mundane.

Gratitude has been known to reduce symptoms of depression, alleviate anxiety, and relieve stress. Studies show gratitude has also been shown to improve relationships, increase resilience, and improve overall health and well-being. But gratitude needs to be practiced. Gratitude isn't a one-and-done thing. Consistency is key. Intentionally lifting up 3 things you are

thankful for each day. Make it part of your routine. You can even make it part of your 5 prayer times a day. Gratitude – foundational for the good life.

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