**The Power of Gratitude** Sermon for October 10, 2021

October is here, and along with it our Canadian celebration of Thanksgiving. Across this beautiful country families are gathering this weekend to share a special meal and enjoy each other’s company as they pause to consider a few of the things they are thankful for.

For many years, our family tradition was to travel to Penticton at Thanksgiving, in conjunction with a week-long Thanksgiving retreat. The excitement and anticipation would build as we packed our bags and hit the road, savouring the sights of yellow aspen trees, red sumac, and sometimes even snow in the mountains. Who would be the first one to see the Penticton sign high in the hills? Once we arrived, we settled in our lodgings, filled the fridge, and set up for the retreat. The excitement and joy of seeing old friends and new, of being together to worship filled us with gratitude as we lifted up our hearts and voices in praise to the great God who made every good thing.

 A highlight of the celebration was the Thanksgiving banquet, when we shared stories, laughter, and camaraderie over a delicious turkey dinner. We would learn about the amazing ways Jesus was working in Grace Communion International across the country and around the world. At the end of the banquet not only were our bellies full – our hearts were full of praise and thanksgiving to our awesome Triune God.

What if we could capture that feeling, that feeling of overwhelming gratitude, and experience it every day? What if we framed our mindset by thankfulness to God each morning? Sadly, often we are robbed of this joyful worship by our distraction with life and its challenges.

Today, on our Thanksgiving weekend, I’d like a closer look at the power and benefits of gratitude.

**What is it?**

According to Wikipedia,

“Gratitude, thankfulness or gratefulness, from the Latin word *gratus* "pleasing, thankful", is a feeling of appreciation felt by and/or a similar positive response shown by the recipient of kindness, gifts, help, favors, or other types of generosity, to the giver of said gifts.” Wikipedia

A Christian definition might be more specific:

Gratitude is a loving, thankful response toward God for his kingdom presence with us and among us, and within the whole world. It acknowledges, praises and celebrates his goodness, love, faithfulness, mercy and grace.

**Why Is It Important?**

For one thing, gratitude is good for us on many levels.

Numerous scientific studies have been done confirming the benefits of gratitude

In a 2020 article entitled “31 Benefits of Gratitude: The Ultimate Science-Backed Guide,” I came across this illustration of the benefits of gratitude:

Practicing gratitude can help us emotionally, in our personality, career, family and physical health.



Science is fascinating, especially when it validates what the Life Giver has told us in his living Word. From cover to cover, the Bible reminds us of the SOURCE of every blessing, the One to whom we need to express gratitude and praise every day. It is an important spiritual discipline.

I’m not one for long lists, but here are 12 short but powerful insights from the article “The Power of Gratitude: 12 Benefits of Giving God Thanks” by Lisa Appelo.

**1. Gratitude glorifies God.** This alone would be reason to give thanks to God. Our gratitude glorifies God as we exalt not the gifts, but the Giver. Gratitude helps us realize all we have comes not because of us, but from God.

And as God’s grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory. 2 Corinthians 4:15

May heaven and earth be filled with His praises.

**2. Gratitude helps us see God.** Gratitude opens our spiritual eyes. There’s a beautiful cycle in giving God thanks: the more we thank Him, the more we see Him working in us and around us. Gratitude helps us sense God’s presence, His personal care and His perfect timing.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. James 1:16-17

May we have eyes to see God’s good and perfect gifts, his work in us and around us.

**3. Gratitude puts us squarely in God’s will.** We often make God’s will out to be some big, mystical plan when sometimes, it’s simply obedience. And part of His will for us is to be thankful, not just on the sunny days but on the hard ones as well. Paul tells us to

…give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

**4. Gratitude brings peace.** “Count your blessings, not sheep” we’re told to get rid of the worry keeping us up at night. Gratitude helps us see that God’s hand is all over our circumstances. And God tells us when we give him our thanks, He gives us supernatural peace.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

**5. Gratitude draws us to God.** Gratitude for the magnitude of God’s undeserved kindness draws us to Him. We see this illustrated when Jesus healed 10 lepers. As Jesus walked by, all 10 cried out for healing. “Go, show yourselves to the priests,” Jesus commanded and as they went, they were healed! Fingers were restored and ulcers disappeared as full sensation returned to their faces and limbs. Certainly they were all happy, but only one was thankful. Only one came back to Jesus, fell at his feet and thanked him.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” Luke 17:17-19

Gratitude should draw us to the Giver of every gift.

**6. Gratitude brings contentment.** It’s said that gratitude makes what we have enough. If we aren’t grateful for what God has given us, getting more won’t satisfy us either. Being thankful is the key to contentment.

. . . godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and neither can we carry anything out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 1 Timothy 6:6-8

**7. Gratitude deepens faith.** Keeping a record of God’s past faithfulness is a faith boost when we face new difficulties. I have been journaling for a number of years, recording my gratitude, thoughts, prayers, my blessings. The simple exercise of writing down your blessings, your gifts, can change your attitude and perspective for the rest of the day. In fact, scientific studies have shown that consistently expressing gratitude in writing can over time improve mental health, lessening depression and anxiety. Maybe you could start a gratitude journal, if you aren’t already doing it.

 My gratitude journals are testimonies that on my hardest days and in the worst circumstances, God’s record of faithfulness is 100%. That’s why God commanded Israel to remember His great deeds.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Psalm 136:1

**8. Gratitude leads to joy.** The overflow of gratitude is joy. Realizing God’s abundant goodness, even in the hard times, is a gateway for joy. Psalms 126 shows this so clearly as the Hebrew exiles sang their thanks to God for bringing them back to Israel. Their gratitude overflowed into joy.

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Psalm 126:1-3

**9. Gratitude defies Satan’s lies.** Satan is so wily! He whispers that God isn’t good; that He’s withholding good from us. His scheme as old as the garden of Eden, where he questioned Eve: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” When Eve responded only the tree of good and evil was off-limits, Satan suggested God was keeping good from them. “You will not certainly die. . . For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

In a garden that was perfect, that produced abundantly without work or weeding, where every single plant but ONE had been given to Adam and Eve, Satan focused on the lack. True gratitude for God and the abundance He gives protects us from caving to the enemy’s lies.

No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. Psalm 84:11

**10. Gratitude guards against envy.** Envy makes us want what someone else has, again, focusing on what we don’t have rather than what we do. After all, we deserve it! Gratitude makes us realize God has given us far more than we deserve. Because there’s enough for everyone, we can cheer rather than compare. A heart wholly grateful has no room left for envy.

I will give You thanks with all my heart; Psalm 138:1

**11. Gratitude helps us live in the present.** “Wherever you are, be all there!” Jim Elliot famously said. But that’s difficult to do in the worry and rush of life. Gratitude helps. Gratitude opens our eyes to the simple beauty of ordinary days. It lets us see *this* day and *this* moment as gifts and to take in the abundance right now.

Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Ecclesiastes 7:10

The final point is the one I want to emphasize the most. Because

**12. Gratitude is a powerful testimony.** When we thank God openly and acknowledge what He’s done for us, we proclaim a personal, caring God to the world around us. We show that contentment and peace come not from what we have but Who we know.

Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done. Psalm 105:1

Some of you might be thinking, “How can I be grateful when I’m in so much pain?” --whether that pain is physical, emotional, relational or otherwise.

“It’s easy for you to tell me to be grateful but you don’t know what it’s like to walk in my shoes, to suffer what I’m suffering.” You’re absolutely right. I don’t know. But I do know Jesus, who is compassionate, faithful and true, and my prayer is that he will continue to sustain you as you look for his hand in your situation and provision to get through the day. May the hope of eternity in his kingdom--where every tear will be wiped away, where death and sin will be banished forever--be your focus. He will redeem everything for our good.

The apostle Paul suffered greatly in his lifetime with beatings, imprisonment, hunger, even death threats. Perhaps he was burdened by guilt and mental anguish, having signed the orders for the deaths of hundreds of Christians before his conversion. How profound, then is his instruction in Ephesians 5:20 that we should be

Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ…. Ephesians 5:20 ESV

Expressing gratitude is a powerful testimony and witness to not-yet believers that God is good, especially when suffering is present.

Gratitude reframes our perspective. It reframes negative experiences from the past and the negative experiences we’re in now. It sees God’s sovereignty over every circumstance, that in the end “all things work together for good” as it says in Romans 8:28, because God has the big picture.

Let me share a story from the book, “Through Fire & Sea” by Marilyn Meyers. Marilyn and her family spent 4 years on a Mercy Ship that sailed to various nations to offer Jesus with life-changing medical treatments and surgeries.

A little 3-year-old girl named Cavilla had a cancerous tumor the size of an orange protruding from her eye. After months of chemotherapy, finally the surgeons were able to remove the tumor. Following the successful surgery, Cavilla started to have neurological distress. The Mercy ship crew prayed fervently, but sadly the little girl died. With her lifeless body, nurses travelled in silence to her village. Uncharacteristic for his culture, the father met them and carried her body to his home, weeping loudly.

During the funeral, Cavilla’s father challenged the elders in the village to consider their lack of love and response to his child’s need. Many had advised them to stop feeding her and leave her in a corner to die, to go on and have more children. He contrasted this with the extreme love and care shown her by the Mercy Ships people. With passion, he urged them to consider the God of the Christian white man.

Days later, the highest chiefs and elders of the village requested a visit to the ship. They wanted to know how to follow ‘Your Jesus’ way.’ They asked for Bibles and a teacher and asked, ‘How should we live now?’ Many converted to Christianity. One child died. One father was grateful, and because of his testimony, one village was converted. That’s the amazing way God works.

So on this Thanksgiving weekend, let’s be renewed in the spiritual discipline of gratitude. Start up a gratitude journal and commit to writing something every day. Even reading your list out loud can boost your mood. Share a few things with a family member, coworker, or friend. We have SO many reasons to give thanks!

Thomas Merton, an American monk, theologian and scholar wrote the following:

“To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything He has given us—and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.”

**Closing Prayer**

Almighty, triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, thank you for this opportunity to consider the power and importance of gratitude in our lives.

Help us in this spiritual discipline of gratitude, opening our eyes to see what we have and not what we’re missing, to focus on our gifts and not our losses every single day.

And in the hard times, when it’s a struggle just to be alive, may gratitude renew our minds and transform the way we see our difficult circumstances. May our gratitude be a powerful witness, a powerful testimony of our living hope, of our conviction that you are a good God and our eternal future is secure in you Jesus.

We join all the angels and elders and the four living creatures, who are falling on their faces before your throne and worshipping you saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen. — Revelation 7:11-12