

“Thank Goodness for Thanksgiving”

Psalm 92:1-5

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Frankfort, Kentucky

November 22, 2015

How old were you when you first uttered the words *thank you*? I don't remember, but I am pretty sure my first expression of gratitude was associated with chocolate.

I wonder how old the Psalmist was when he discovered the value of expressing gratitude. There is no way to know, but I suspect he was very young because Hebrew children were taught the greatest of all prayers is a prayer of gratitude. Today's text is an example of what children were taught and adults were reminded of often.

“It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord and make music to your name, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness at night.” (Psalm 92:1-2 NRSV)

Why is it a good thing to give thanks to God or anyone else for that matter?

I think gratitude brings the best out in us. It is hard to be grateful and grumpy, although I know some people who are.

Ingratitude turns us inward and make us cynical, arrogant, angry, envious, jealous, fearful, suspicious and vindictive. Gratitude, however, does just the opposite.

Gratitude promotes humility, kindness, compassion and generosity. This is because gratitude enables us to see those who have helped us on our journey, along with those who need our help.

“When you see a turtle on a post, you know it did not get there by itself,” someone wrote. None of us arrived where we are today without help, and lots of it, and wise is the person who acknowledges this.

Whose hands taught you a skill? Whose voice gave you directions? Whose advice kept you from making mistakes, and whose heart forgave you when you made mistakes?

Whose feet raced to you when you were in trouble? Whose fingers caressed your brow when you were sick? Whose ears listened to you when you were upset? Whose eyes looked into your soul and saw good when others saw only bad? Whose arms held you when your world came crashing down, and whose arms lifted you on their shoulders so you could succeed?

Whose garden fed you when you were hungry? Whose word vouched for you when others were skeptical? Whose cheers encouraged you when you were ready to give up? Whose business provided you with your first job? Whose pocketbook opened up when you needed money? Whose scholarship made it possible for you to get an education, and whose recommendations opened doors of opportunity for you to enter?

Don't forget these people and don't forget to pass it forward. Be everything to someone else these people were to you. Use your influence and resources to be a good family member, friend, neighbor and community leader.

The only way to do this is to be grateful, as the Psalmist was. Gratitude will not let us forget these dear people who shaped and molded our lives. It certainly will not let us forget those who saved our lives.

Yes, gratitude has a way of motivating us to live by the Golden Rule. This is because grateful people truly are their brother's keeper and consider others' needs as well as their own. If a decision is not good for their neighbor, it is not good for them, even if it is to their advantage.

Gratitude really is this influential and powerful. It brings the best out in us and keeps us from becoming cynical, arrogant, angry, greedy, self-centered, insensitive to others' needs and hard-hearted. Ingratitude does just the opposite. It always has; it always will.

Do you realize, as a friend once reminded me, gratitude and greed start at the same place but end up miles apart? Both begin with gifts we need in order to live full and meaningful lives: talents, skills, abilities, money, possessions, relationships and opportunities. What we do with them makes all the difference in the world.

Gratitude makes us wise and generous stewards. Greed makes us indifferent and self-indulgent.

Which path are you traveling down? Which direction do those around you need you to go?

If you are like me, you face temptations every day to change directions. You want to be a grateful person who is humble, compassionate and generous, but there are times when you question whether this is really in your best interest.

How can we stay on track? How can we remain faithful to God and truly reflect God's loving and generous nature? Perhaps the key is found in this Psalm.

"It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord and make music to your name, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love **in the morning**, and your faithfulness **at night**."

The Psalmist was committed to thanking God every morning and evening for God's goodness and faithfulness. His expressions of gratitude were not dependent upon his moods. His mood was dependent upon his gratitude! So, the first thing every morning and the last thing every night, he concentrated on God's unfailing love and extravagant generosity.

What difference do you think this daily habit made in his life? I believe it kept him from succumbing to the temptation to change direction. It prevented fear, jealousy, envy and arrogance from controlling him.

I believe it can do the same for us. I've never met anyone who sincerely said thank you to God every day that did not say it to those around them, too. Those simple yet profound words, thank you, have always developed and cultivated more friendships than any others.

Do you need to be more like the Psalmist? Why not begin this week. Who will be sitting around your Thanksgiving table that needs to hear you say, "thank you"?

How would it change their life? How would it change yours? How would it change your relationship? Why not try it and find out.