

Find the Good: An Attitude of Gratitude

Psalm 65, 1Thessalonians 5:16-18

We're taking a pause this Sunday from the Sermon on the Mount to step back, take a deep breath, and reflect on gratitude. With so much going on— new covid restrictions because of increasing infection rates, a Presidential transition (or no transition!), changes in our Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations at home and with family, Alex Trebek passing away (what's going to happen to Jeopardy now?!?), this morning we're going to take a step back from everything, attempt to set it aside for a few moments, and pause to remember all that is good and beautiful and life-giving around us.

Fall is a time of harvest, a time when peoples throughout history and throughout the world celebrated the abundance of creation, and the abundance of God. This actually provides a nice transition from last week's message from the sermon on the mount about how God provides abundantly, through creation.

The sermon will be shorter today, to make way for another delightful videos for you to watch and listen to.

I'm going to read Psalm 65 for us. Listen to this Psalm, and as you do, think abundance. Abundance. An affirmation of God's goodness.

Psalm 65

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed,

O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.

When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might.

You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.

Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.

You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,

the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

I think I told this story I told a couple years ago... Pilot of small plane in AK, a friend of mine who had taken me on a little trip, and we encountered turbulence on our way home, and he landed the plane brilliantly in gusting winds, which is no small feat when piloting a small plane! After I thanked him for preserving my life and getting us on the ground safely, he said this:

“The most important thing about a safe landing is the attitude of the plane.” I said, don’t you mean **altitude**? “No,” he explained. “The **attitude** has to do with the nose of the plane. If the attitude is too high, the plane will come down with a severe bounce. If the attitude is too low, the plane may go out of control because of excessive landing speed. Plus, the nose of the plane has to be pointed in the proper direction in windy conditions.” What he said next is what really got my attention. He said (with a smile) *“The trick is to get the right attitude in spite of atmospheric conditions.”*

Even Alaska bush pilots are good theologians! What a great principle for life and faith: getting the right attitude in spite of our conditions or

circumstances. Attitude is everything. A right attitude can create health and happiness and change the world around us. And a bad attitude, well, not so much. A right attitude can change the course of a person's entire life.

Here is a little poem, in the form of a limerick, which describes the importance of attitude:

*One ship drives east and other west
With the selfsame winds that blow.
Tis the set of the sails and not the gales
Which direct the way it will go.
Like the winds of the sea are the ways of each day
As we voyage along through life;
Tis the set of the soul that decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife.*

Easier said than done, but point taken. Attitude is everything. This morning I'd like to share briefly about having an attitude of gratitude. Of course, it's Thanksgiving week and it's obviously a natural time to talk about this.

Yet we need to remember as people of faith that Thanksgiving is a holiday. Gratitude, however, is a spiritual practice. Thanksgiving is a holiday—we associate the holiday with that word in our minds. But gratitude is the word that

our spiritual mothers and fathers have used to describe a regular, even daily practice, and an attitude and disposition toward life. And this year, with safe social distancing and alternative holiday observances and other restrictions, it may need to be more of a practice and discipline than ever.

That's what I'd like to focus on for a couple moments. The importance of gratitude in everything. No matter our circumstances.

It's easy to give thanks when things are going well, and when life is overflowing with obvious good gifts. But what about when things aren't going so well? Like, when there is a pandemic? When you can't see and hug your family members, who you haven't seen for a while?

1Thessalonians 5:16-18, which I quote a lot... these three short and easy to memorize verses say everything about our attitude, and apply to our lives right now in a big way: "Be joyful *always*, pray *continually*, give thanks *in all circumstances*. This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Again, do you ever wonder, what is God's will for my life? Here it is! Give thanks *in all circumstances*. This is why it needs to be a consistent practice, even a daily habit.

Parenthetical comment: the Scripture does not say "give thanks **for** all circumstances..." There is a big difference... We don't say, "thank you *for*

covid19, or thank you *for* my financial challenges, or *for* my family challenge.” But we can give thanks while *in* those circumstances because we’re assured that God loves us no matter what, that God is growing us, leading us, and reminding us that he is always with us. And we can handle anything when we know for sure he’s with us. Even if God takes a long time to grow us, resolve issues, and calm our society down. Our prayer group last Wednesday read a poem, which says in part, “Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you...” With faith, we can thank God that he is leading and growing us.

Why gratitude, especially if circumstances aren’t what we want or hope for? First, because gratitude helps us see that our God is a God of abundance! Did you get that sense of God’s abundance from Psalm 65? Look what David says, in part: God forgives and he satisfies us with the goodness of his house (spiritual abundance!); God visits the earth with rain and sun, grain and food, blessing all of the growth of the earth. Our communion table contains the signs of abundance here as a symbol of God’s provision. Our God is a God of abundance.

We give thanks in all circumstances, secondly, because when we are grateful—when we have the attitude of gratitude—we see God’s gifts to us. We

see signs of God's presence with us. We can see the good, find the good, as Miss Pearl and Heidi encouraged us to do. Ingratitude blinds us to seeing the good, and we see scarcity and inadequacy or trouble instead (which can lead to fear, like Jesus talked about last week). But gratitude opens our eyes to see God's gifts, and to find the good, even in tough circumstances.

Henry Ward Beecher: *If one should give me a dish of sand and tell me there are particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my clumsy fingers and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it, and the almost invisible particles would be drawn to it. The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies. But let the thankful heart sweep through the day, as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find some heavenly blessings.*

Amidst the routines of our day, even if they seem boring right now, or difficult, we can find things to be grateful for.

Corrie ten Boom, incarcerated at Ravensbruck concentration camp, with her sister Betsie because they were caught hiding Jews in their house during the holocaust. There was an infestation of fleas in the barracks, and during a Bible study they were reading those verses, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances" and Corrie decided that giving thanks for everything

included the fleas. And as they gave thanks, they realized that the fleas kept the guards away (the guards would not come near them), who otherwise would have prevented their Bible study. And they gained hope from their Bible study every day and it helped them survive. Because of thanking God for fleas! Here is the story in more detail: <http://vancechristie.com/2016/11/22/giving-thanks-circumstances-corrie-ten-boom/>

When we are grateful, we see the good. We can find the good.

Finally, having an attitude of gratitude helps us take our eyes off of ourselves and puts our eyes onto the needs of the world around us. Again, ingratitude focuses on me and what I don't have, and my vision then narrows or becomes self-focused. Gratitude focuses on the abundance of God and the good gifts I *do* have, and then redirects my effort and energy toward helping to supply others' needs in Jesus' name. Gratitude begets generosity.

And... gratitude changes our brain! Robert Emmons has become known as the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude (who knew there was such a thing?!?). He is a professor at Univ. California Davis and wrote a book titled, *Gratitude Works! A 21 Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity*. He, like many others (you can do a Google search and find the same results), has found

that daily gratitude has positive results for our health, better sleep, and general satisfaction in life. Neural transmitters get rewired. This is nothing new. It's just that science is now proving that gratitude is part of God's good design for us, for the sake of our lives, and for the world around us.

God grant us the grace of gratitude, to see abundance, find the good, and become a blessing to those around us.

I'll pass it along now to a video that you are going to love. It's about gratitude, and the first couple minutes are a professional photographer who authored the project explaining his vision behind it. Enjoy! And, have a safe and happy Thanksgiving!