

Tom Coop
Philippians 4:2-9
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COUNT YOUR MANY BLESSINGS

A certain preacher was known for his uplifting prayers. He always found something for which to be grateful.

One Sunday morning the weather was so cold, dark and gloomy that one the church members thought to himself:

“I’ll bet the preacher won’t be able to think of anything for which to be thankful to God about today.”

But to his surprise, however, the preacher began by praying,
“Gracious God, we thank You, that the weather’s not always like this.”

I like his attitude!

You and I have so much for which to be thankful.

Unfortunately, sometimes it takes specific holidays and times of worship to remind us of that fact. Or even to just take time to give thanks to God.

Sometimes it seems like we don’t have any trouble coming up with a list of needs and desires, but it’s usually harder for us to come up with a list of things for which we are grateful.

I will make a generalization: I suspect that on this Thanksgiving Day, 2017, there will be more genuine Thanksgiving in the more modest homes in our city than in the most luxurious ones.

I could be wrong, of course, and even if I am right, it won't be true in every home. It is a generalization.

As a graffiti artist once said: "Be suspicious of all generalizations, including this one."

But it happens often enough to be troubling.

Some people who have been blessed beyond measure don't seem to have a grateful bone in their body, and others who have been dealt blow after blow, seem overwhelming in their thankfulness.

In 1993, Robert Greene was severely injured in a head-on traffic collision. He spent weeks in a coma, and over a year in rehabilitation before he was able to leave the hospital.

During this grueling and painful time, Robert wrote a wonderful letter to his mother, Anita, listing ten different reasons he had to be thankful in his situation.

Let me just give you three of them.

Reason #3 to be thankful: "I have good strength in my arms. This helps me move with the wheelchair and helps me walk with crutches."

Reason #6: ". . . nearly everything I have experienced has been of value and support to me."

Reason #10: "I am thankful for the future, for it holds not only a promise, but also a challenge and an opportunity."

Thankful that he can get around on a wheelchair and on crutches?
Thankful for months of rehabilitation? What kind of nut is he?

Doesn't he know that he should be cursing God rather than thanking God?

I was reading recently that we lose as much in loose change each year as the rest of the world has to live on. Figure it for yourself.

I'll admit, these figures are a little out of date, but adjusted for inflation they are still valid.

The estimated cash lost each year in the United States amounts to about \$75 per capita. It's money that has fallen out of pockets, is misplaced, and so forth.

The total average income for most of the earth's people comes to about \$69 per person.

Thus, the average American thus loses more money each year, than a lot of people earn.

Do we have any idea how fortunate we are? And yet we whine, we complain, we act as if somehow life has mistreated us.

In our text this morning, Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

That says to me that gratitude ought to be the dominant theme of our lives. And not just on Thanksgiving Day, but our whole year should be marked by an attitude of gratitude.

Such an attitude will do wonders for your health, by the way, as well as your psychological well-being. At least that is the testimony of many people who study such things.

Call it a self-fulfilling prophecy if you like, but it appears that the more grateful you feel, the more things you have to feel grateful about.

As our closing hymn we will be singing, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one; count your many blessings see what God has done."

And it works. Try it!

Scientist Robert A. Emmons, in an article on "The Joy of Thanks," considers the physical and psychological benefits of thankfulness to even be equal to that of therapy.

He writes, "My colleagues and I are finding that gratitude, which we define as a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life, is more than simply a pleasant emotion to experience or a polite sentiment to express.

"Gratitude promotes a basic disposition, one that seems to make lives happier, healthier, more fulfilling--and even longer."

Then there is David McClellan, a psychologist at Harvard University, who once did a study that has some interesting implications.

He had a group of students watch a film about Mother Teresa while he monitored their body's production of antibodies. Antibodies, of course, help us fight off infection.

He discovered that as the students watched this uplifting film, their antibody level rose significantly, even for those who did not like Mother Teresa (as some thought of her as a fraud.)

He then showed the students a film on Attila the Hun, and their antibody levels dropped.

The implication is clear. The things we focus on can affect the way we feel. If we want a feeling of gratitude in life, we need to focus on what's good in life.

The novelist A. J. Cronin tells of a physician friend of his who often prescribed a "Thank You" cure for depressed and frustrated folks.

He would insist that for six weeks the patient say "Thank You" for every kindness, and keep a record of it!

And, according to Cronin, the doctor had a remarkable cure rate!

There is something about the gratitude attitude that brings peace to our hearts "that lightens our spirit" that makes glad our every waking hour.

Do yourself a favor, and learn to thank God daily for your blessings. And not just when things are going your way. Learn to say thank you every day you live, regardless of your circumstances.

British preacher, John Henry Jowett, said, "Gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin and an antiseptic.

"It is a vaccine to prevent the invasion of a disgruntled, discouraged spirit. It is an antitoxin to destroy the poisons of cynicism, and criticalness.

"It is an antiseptic to soothe and heal the most troubled spirit."

Do you ever think about the words of the doxology that we sing every Sunday? Bishop Thomas Ken wrote the words.

Bishop Ken was born in England seventeen years after the Pilgrims came to America.

His life was extremely turbulent. He experienced personal problems as well as political turmoil.

He lived through the great London fire that destroyed four-fifths of the city as well as the devastating bubonic plague that brought death to thousands.

In spite of this, he maintained an attitude of praise to God. And he demonstrated that attitude in his time-honored chorus:

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

And if you are having difficulty trying to think about what to be thankful for, I’ve included a list of 35 things (out of the 100 or so I came up with) I am grateful for to help you out.

You just can’t be grateful for my wife – I reserve her all to myself!
Ah... go ahead 😊

It doesn’t have to be big things – often we find God in the ordinary and need to remember to be thankful even for that. That is best illustrated by the following fable.

Once upon a time, there was a faraway land that was ruled by a vicious king. His iron fist reached into every corner of his subjects’ lives.

Every corner, except one. Try as he might, he couldn’t destroy their belief in God.

In his frustration, he finally summoned his advisors and asked them: “Where can I hide God so the people will forget about him?”

One suggested hiding God on the dark side of the moon.

This idea was debated, but was voted down because the advisors feared that their scientists would one day discover a way to travel into space and God would be discovered again.

Another suggested burying God in the deepest part of the ocean. But there was the same problem with this idea, so it was voted down.

One idea after another was suggested and debated and rejected.

Until finally the oldest and wisest advisor had a flash of insight. "I know," he said, "why don't we hide God where no one will ever even think to look?"

And he explained, "If we hide God in the ordinary events of people's everyday lives, they'll never find him!"

And so, it was done. And they say people in that land are still looking for God, even today.

I hope that is not you. I hope you can see the hand of God in the most everyday of things: a child's laugh, a friendly smile, green grass...

I believe the whole point of thanksgiving is to remind us that God is still very much alive and active.

It's to remind us that God is continually seeking to be in relationship with us.

Charles Dickens once visited America and gave some lectures across the country. He told one audience that we, here in this country, are a bit mixed up.

He said we shouldn't have one Thanksgiving Day, but that we should have 364 Thanksgiving Days.

Then have one day just for complaining and griping; the other 364 should be used to thank God.

What would your life be like if you only grumbled and griped for one day a year and used the other 364 to live into thankfulness?

In 1998 there was a film that was nominated for seven Academy Awards. It is titled *Life Is Beautiful*.

Life Is Beautiful is a touching story about an Italian Jewish family that is taken to a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War.

The lead was played by the Italian actor and director Roberto Benigni.

When Benigni received the Best Actor Award, the first for a male performer ever given by the Academy for a non-English-speaking role, Benigni, in a burst of joy danced over the tops of chairs and leaped up on stage.

When Sophia Loren presented him his award, he squeezed her so tightly, that he nearly crushed her.

Then Benigni said he wanted to “kiss everybody and die in this ocean of generosity.”

Later, explaining his behavior, Benigni said this: “It’s a sign of mediocrity when you demonstrate gratitude with moderation.”

What a beautiful statement, and I want you to ponder it for just a moment: “It’s a sign of mediocrity when you demonstrate gratitude with moderation.”

That is a sentiment with which the Apostle Paul would agree without any hesitation. Listen again to Paul's words from today's reading from the Epistle:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

"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."

May we all be thankful for the big, the small, the significant, and the seemingly insignificant.

And then may we be changed by that thankfulness by a God who deserves all our thanks and gratitude...

Amen!