

The Characteristic Trait of Thankfulness

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[0:00] Oh, wow. Please, please, please, pray for me. I should always ask you that, but obviously today is a little bit different.

! I went out with my normal Saturday morning run, and I got back home and my wife said, your phone has been going off. And I said, I know who it was, because I had actually talked to him on Friday, and he could barely speak.

And so I actually asked Connie to make a copy of his message that I could take home and look at. And so yesterday afternoon and evening, I spent working on this. And some of you here will say, wow, that sounds just like what Pastor Kenoya would have said. Well, he did, okay?

Other parts of it, maybe not so much. But so it's a combination. And one of the things I wanted to do was to keep the slides the same.

So the slides are all Pastor Kenoya's slides. So hopefully those will fit in with what I say. But I started with those points and then filled in around it. So if you would pray for me. And I'm going to pray right now.

[1:26] Gracious God and Father, we thank you so much. This is the day we celebrate or think about Thanksgiving. It's easy to be thankful for all the things you've done, all the things you've given us.

Help us to be even more thankful for who you are. Father, I do pray that you would be with me today, that I would stick to the text, that I would speak your words and not my own.

And Lord, that you would be honored and glorified. It's your name we pray. Amen. Today we are here to celebrate Thanksgiving. It's a day set aside in the United States. And it was actually done by Abraham Lincoln, right, in the midst of the Civil War.

And he said there needs to be a day to give thanks. It's celebrated on, we actually, Connie and I looked this up because we were, thought we were missing something. It's actually celebrated on the 4th, Thursday of the month of November.

And because of that, it can be as early as, I think it was the 22nd. And as late as the 20, whatever today is, 24th.

[2:30] And that doesn't make sense. It can be some, it can be any, whatever the 4th Thursday is. How about that? Okay. And so, and as I said before, Pastor Sethi, the overall plan for this.

And if that was the case, you knew it was going to be in one of two books. And that is either the book of Ephesians, which is his current favorite book. Or the book of John, which is his almost favorite book.

Because that's the one he's going to be doing next. So we're going to look at Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 4. Let me read it for you. Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place.

But instead, let there be thanksgiving. It's that last part. Instead, let there be thanksgiving. That we're going to focus on today.

In the book of Ephesians, it's moved from what God has done to what his actions ought to call and encourage us to do. And it starts in verse 1 of chapter 5.

[3:46] He says, be imitators, walk in love. And Paul gives them lots of examples of how not to do that in these first few verses of chapter 5.

And then he sets in contrast this one separate individual idea. But let there be thanksgiving. And so it's the nature of thanksgiving.

It's the chief reasons that we have for thanksgiving that we want to spend time thinking about and looking at today. First one is the nature of thanksgiving.

The nature of thanksgiving. In order to kind of think through it a little bit, I looked up thankfulness in the dictionary. And it said, thankfulness is expressing or feeling appreciation or gratitude. And I thought, well, that was real helpful. Okay? It's like, it's one of those words you look it up in the dictionary and it says that thankfulness is being thankful. And again, you say, okay, now I know that much.

[4:44] But one thing we can agree on with or without the dictionary, and that is that thankfulness is something that connects or relates us to some other person.

Or say it in a little different way. Giving thanks usually happens because of someone else. We're naturally thankful when we receive something from someone else.

Yesterday in the evening, I was sitting there and suddenly I decided, wow, I am really, really hungry. And so my wife kindly stopped decorating the Christmas tree and went and fixed me dinner. And I was very thankful. I thought I was going to be famished. I thought I was going to pass out or something. I was so hungry. And then I was thankful for that. See, the thankfulness comes when there's somebody else connected to it.

We thank other people for doing something like that. Sometimes you go to get on the freeway and you see there's this long line of cars. And there's an ever-shortening on-ramp.

[5:49] And you're thankful when someone opens up a little space and lets you pull into it. When we receive something from other people, that's when our thankfulness comes out.

Being thankful, however, runs contrary to our nature. Whatever else Romans 1 says about the unbeliever and about the world, one of the things that's key in that is that the person is not thankful. Thanksgiving is an expression of unselfishness. The selfish and unloving person doesn't give thanks because they think they deserve it. They think they've got it coming.

So when someone gives it to them, they say, okay, yeah, they just do what they were supposed to. It's that selfishness that marks our nature.

We're children of our father and mother, Adam and Eve, who didn't see all the blessings and weren't thankful for all the blessings that God had given them, but instead saw the one thing that they didn't have that they thought, wow, that's what I really need to be happy.

[7:05] It's that same kind of attitude that marks each and every one of us. We see it in children. We need as parents to be consistently reminding our children both to be thankful and to express thankfulness.

If we want it to happen, we have to over and over encourage them. Now say thank you. Now tell the person thank you. Over and over, we have to tell them that.

Sometimes we need to tell ourselves that. Not only do we need to be thankful for what they receive, but they need to be thankful even if it's something that they don't want.

If we go to a restaurant that they would not prefer to go to. Not too long ago, we were traveling to Indiana regularly for cross-country meets.

And at the last meet of the year, we went over and we went out to dinner with them afterward, and then we're going to come back here real quick. And we went to the place that Joseph, who was the runner, got to choose which place he would want to go to.

[8:10] Well, the place he chose was at the bottom of the list for his brother, who said, oh. And Samuel, in his very engineering-like way, when Peggy was trying to make him happy or be glad about being at Chipotle, he said, well, at least it's fuel for the fire.

He said, well, at least he was being thankful. At least he was getting to eat that day. But it's something we have to teach our kids. We have to help them do that.

This is going to fall off, so it's okay. And we need to continually to work at them with that. Or otherwise, they will not be thankful, because giving thanks is something that we are taught to do. Well, if that's true, then Scripture teaches us to be thankful to one, and that one is God. When I looked up thankfulness and didn't find much help there, I looked up thanksgiving.

And I actually am going to read to you what the dictionary is. The dictionary comes on my iPad, so it's not a Christian dictionary. It's just some app that was free. But I want to read it to you, because it's interesting what it says.

[9:30] It says, The act of giving thanks, grateful acknowledgement of benefits or favors, especially to God. An expression of thanks, especially to God.

A public celebration in acknowledgement of divine favor or kindness. A day set apart for giving thanks to God. I found it interesting that even our secular society recognizes that the issue of thanksgiving is at the center of our view of God, and who God is, and what He does.

What perhaps the secular world doesn't understand, is that thanksgiving is rooted in our view of God, and His undeserved kindness. It's the nature of true salvation that draws thanksgiving out of us.

If Christians are known for anything, it should be that we're known for love expressed toward God and others by unceasing thankfulness. I want to just read another passage, a very similar one to you.

1 Thessalonians 5, verse 18 says, In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

[10:51] You think about that, and so oftentimes, no matter what age we are, but especially when we're younger, maybe a college age or that kind of thing, one of the things that we focus in on, what's God's will for my life?

Life. What's God's will for my life? I just want to know what God wants for me. And the passage tells us, In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Your and my lives should demonstrate the consistent nature and characteristic of thanksgiving. Of course, that begs the question, is thanksgiving a characteristic of your lifestyle?

Something that you're known for? Or is it something that needs to be prompted, like we have to do with children? We're going to talk about what we as believers ought to really be thankful for, and what we need to be thankful for.

Before we do, though, I'm going to take this coat off, not because I'm too hot, because I'm just comfortable, but it's fiddling with my microphone, and it's going to fall off.

[12:00] The pastor and I don't have the same ear, and so I need to make an adjustment here. Otherwise, I'm going to be thinking about it all the time. First of all, I want you to think about causes from our past.

Being thankful and thanksgiving flows out of a need. You know, if I don't have a need for anything, if I'm not hungry or thirsty, if I'm not trying to get on the freeway and it's packed with cars, then I really don't have any interest or any need in being thankful.

It's when I'm running out of the ramp. It's when I'm actually hungry and need something to eat and need someone to help me with it that those are the times. And so we want to look at our past, not because so much the things that we have to be thankful for, but things that drive us or give us that need for being thankful.

Ephesians chapter 2. They're almost all in Ephesians, so you can actually flip over to each one of them as I do. And I think they'll be on the slides as David puts them up, although David is also being stressed this morning.

So a different set of notes that wasn't written for these slides. Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 to 3 says, I was dead.

[13:40] I walked in the course of the world. I willingly, willingly followed Satan. I lived out what my own flesh desired. I was a child of wrath.

I was in deep trouble. And it was all my own doing. Not only that, same thing is true for you. You were in deep trouble.

And it was all of your own doing. You know, being hopeless is much worse than simply being hungry. It's much worse than simply trying to get someplace.

It is saying that there is nothing, nothing, nothing that you can do. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 19. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God.

So then it says you are no longer strangers and aliens. I was lined up on the wrong side. I was on the side opposite of God.

[14:45] It's like picking the wrong team. It's much worse than picking the wrong team in sports. It's being on the wrong side of the creator. Saying, God, I know that you created the whole universe, but I want to pick a fight.

It's like saying, I know that you know the end of times from the very beginning, but I want to challenge you to a little mental game. Let's play a game of chess. We don't fit. We're on the wrong side. It's like being an OSU fan in the big house or being a Michigan fan at the horseshoe. I saw a quote yesterday that Tom Parsons had.

He said, this is as close to hell as the believer will ever get and as close to heaven that the unbeliever will ever get.

Yeah, I enjoy life. I enjoy so many things. I've already announced my upcoming retirement, and I'm thinking, wow, I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this, and I'm kind of running out of time, and I haven't even started yet.

[15:56] There are so many things I enjoy doing, but you know what? None of those things, none of this place, is any better than heaven. They don't even compare with heaven. I told you I was out yesterday running, and I love to run.

And so I was out, and I was just going along, and I thought, you know what? I don't know if I'll be able to run when I'm in heaven, but I really do enjoy it, so maybe I will get to run.

But what I do know is that the wind will be behind you in both directions. And I won't sound like a wheezing steam engine anymore.

Some of you might wonder why it would go like that. But I recognize there will be a lot of different things. All the things I like to do, they will be so much better even if I do them.

I was an alien. I was an outcast. I was also darkness. Ephesians 5.8. I do want you to look at this one. It's close to where we were anyway.

[17:04] Ephesians 5.8. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light. You know what? It doesn't say we were in darkness. If it just said we were in darkness, it would be like Paul saying, you know, you were used to be in darkness, and you couldn't really, you couldn't see very well, but you know, I can kind of maneuver around the chair that sits in the middle of our bedroom floor because Peggy usually leaves it in the same place.

So even when it's dark, I know how to avoid that. She ever moves it, I'm in trouble, okay? But I can make my way around that. But that's not what this says. It's not that I was just in darkness.

It says that I was darkness. Scripture doesn't support the kind of victim outlook that our world today sees.

It's not our broken families. It's not our broken neighborhood. It's not what our parents did or didn't do. It's not your social, economic level. It's not your education.

[18:15] It's that you're darkness. Until you know the Lord. And you know, that doesn't seem like a list of wonderful things that we ought to be thankful for at this Thanksgiving.

I don't think that Thanksgiving Day is we're all sharing what things we're thankful for. It's probably not the list that you'll come up with. But what it does is it leads us to Thanksgiving.

Because it tells us just where we really were. And the second two of those, you will notice in each one of those, it says, but now you.

The change that takes place. These point to the present. And if we consider the present, we have so much to be thankful for.

1 John 3, verse 1. So see what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.

[19:16] And so we are. We are sons, daughters of the Most High. It's like John is, the wording there is just so interesting, so fascinating to me.

It's like John saying, wow, can you believe it? I mean, what kind of love does God have after all? I mean, He's taken us and actually made us His sons. It's mind-blowing.

It's also an encouragement to Thanksgiving. That God, in His mercy, in His grace, has chosen us to be His very children.

were accepted in the Beloved. Ephesians chapter, back to Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 1, verse 6. I'm going to read out of the New King James, because I like the wording a little bit better, and I'll point that out to you in a second.

To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted. The ESV says, blessing in the Beloved.

[20:23] The word blessing, or the translation that I read, the word accepted, is the Greek word for favored. It's the same word that's used by the angel in Luke chapter 1, verse 28, when the angel is speaking to Mary and says, O favored one.

Accepted one. It just doesn't, almost doesn't seem like it's enough. It's not like God just saying, well, you know, I've got to let some people in, and hey, I guess I'll have to let you in.

It's not that. God has chosen you, and He desires to have you in His presence. He desires to have a relationship with you.

It goes beyond just, you know, kind of God just relenting and saying, well, I've got to have some people filling in heaven, so I guess you're not worse than anybody else. You were worse than anybody else, and God said, despite that, I want you in my eternal presence.

When I dwelt with the Spirit, and empowered, Ephesians 1, 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

[21:54] Not only are we no longer doomed to follow Satan, the desires of the flesh, but we have every spiritual blessing. And there's a parallel passage over in 1 Peter, or 2 Peter, that says, we have all we need for life and godliness.

God didn't shortchange us. He didn't save us, but then leave us out on a rope. He didn't say, well, you know what, I'm going to go ahead and forgive you, but from now on, just try a little harder, and maybe you'll please me.

He gave us the ability to change. He gave us the indwelling Holy Spirit so that we could change from the people that we were, hopeless, corrupt, sinful, and we could be, act as the sons of God, accepted in the beloved, indwelt, empowered.

That gives us great confidence in the future. not only in this life. It says that next week can be different. It says the week after that can be different.

It says next month can be different. But it's not just that. It also gives us even more comfort for the future. Turn over with me to 1 John chapter 3.

[23:22] 1 John chapter 3. Verse 2. Beloved, we are God's children now, and yet what we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. That passage, if you just think about that passage for a moment, it's so encouraging.

It's so much to be thankful for. It says that we will be like Him. I don't know what that means. I do not believe that we will be gods like the Mormons believe.

But I do know that we will put on eternity. We'll have heavenly bodies. There'll be no more pain, no more sickness, no more sorrow, no more need.

We will be like Him. We will see Him.

[24:34] You know, you think about the Old Testament and how often people were protected. Moses. Moses wanted to see the glory of God, and what did God say?

No, Moses, you can't do that. You couldn't take it. But what I'll let you do is I'll let you stand here in this little inlet in the rock, and I'll put my hand over you, keep your face away from me, and I'll pass by, and you'll just be able to kind of catch a little glimpse of me as I pass by.

And what did Moses say? That's enough. Book of Isaiah. And we were just doing the grip by the greatness of God in our small group.

And James MacDonald pointed out a really fascinating idea. He pointed out that in Isaiah chapter 6, when the prophet is going, is there in the throne room, okay, it says that the throne room was filled with smoke.

And James MacDonald said, and I think he may be right, he said the reason it was filled with smoke was to protect the life of the prophet. Because seeing God would mean that he died.

[25:45] And so God in his mercy filled the temple with smoke so that Isaiah could see through it and he could see the grandeur but without being impacted by it.

It was God's protection. And here it says that when he comes we shall see him as he is. We no longer need protection.

We no longer need for God to cover himself so that we don't aren't impacted by his presence. It says that we will be with him forever.

Not just a brief visit. Not just stop in for a little while. But we will be able to be with God for all eternity.

Do you ever have times where it feels like God's not very close? I do. Usually it's my own fault.

[26:52] In fact it's always my own fault. But for all eternity we will be in the very presence of God. God's God's God how do we come to be thankful?

How do we have all these precious and great promises? We each have to come to the place of saying I am a sinner.

It's not just that the world is dark it's that I am darkness. I have to come to the place of recognizing that it is my own sin that is causing the challenges and the difficulties in my life.

It's my own sin that is making the division between me and God and why isn't God seen very close right now. Recognizing that sin and that that sin provides not only currently but it provides for all eternity damnation if I don't turn to him.

Second it requires that I come before God and I say and I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave the penalty he paid the price for us but it's up to us to accept the gift that he has actually provided.

[28:25] We have to actually accept. We have to say yes Jesus Christ paid the penalty for me I accept that and I ask that God you would save me from my sin.

It then takes from that point forward believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done. It's not enough to just say well I know all the facts.

I have to actually make it personal by accepting what Christ has done for me. If you've done those things then the issue of thankfulness ought to be the natural outcome of your heart.

If not then all you have to do is all you have to go on in this time of thankfulness is well I'm thankful that nothing bad happened this week or at least nothing worse than it could have been.

So that's where each one of us has to come down to where are we in terms of our thanksgiving. Do we have thanksgiving for the right things? Is it directed to the right direction?

[29:39] Let's pray. If you've never come to the place where you have something to be thankful to God for I would encourage you to in your mind before God that you would say the same things that I'm just going to say.

Father I know I'm a sinner. I know that my sins cause a separation between you and me and there's nothing I can do about it.

But I do reach out to your son Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for my sin and I rely upon him to provide the forgiveness.

forgiveness. I ask that you would save me. If you've done that I just ask that you would encourage you to raise your hand and just ask someone to pray for you.

maybe I've done those things and yet thankfulness is not something that you can recognize that marks your life.

[31:00] It's a consistent problem of being unhappy. Consistent attitude of sadness. And I would call on you to recognize the great promises that God has given to you.

That he has already fulfilled. And you would cry out to him asking for his forgiveness for overlooking the great gifts that you've been given.

And asking him to help you to grow in your thankfulness. Father, you know our hearts. You know whether our thankfulness is external from our heart.

You know whether our thankfulness is for the things that you've provided or from you. And Lord, we ask that you would bring about the change in our hearts and our lives that we might be able to grow in our thankfulness to you.

For it's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.