

Give Thanks in All Circumstances

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[0 : 00] So today I'm going to share a short message about Thanksgiving. When I think about this topic, I think there's a lot of things come to my mind what Thanksgiving is about.

And one of the things that I, the more I think about the way that we give thanks, it actually points us to our Christ-centeredness. The more we give thanks, the actually, the more we will center our lives in Christ.

So this is the big idea. So there's no better time for us to actually give thanks to God in the end of this year. God has done a lot of things in our lives, including some of the people we share.

And I'll be honest, if you give thanks and you give thanks properly, I think it will increase the Christ-centeredness in our lives.

Okay? But in the Bible, what are we talking about when we talk about Thanksgiving? Thanksgiving is described pervasively through the Bible.

[1 : 13] In the New Testament, there are roughly 72 places where Thanksgiving is being mentioned and being articulated in the form of the words like thankful, grateful, or giving thanks.

And in the Old Testament, there are 102 times that Thanksgiving has been actually presented to us. Largely, it's from the book of Psalms.

So if you look at Psalms 104 to 5, which is on the screen, it summarizes what Thanksgiving to God is about. So the psalmist repeatedly called the people of Israel to thank the Lord on two things.

The first thing is his loving kindness. And the second thing is his miraculous work among the people of Israel.

How do we give thanks usually? If I be honest with you, sometimes we give thanks without any passion.

[2 : 41] So we give thanks like, although we give thanks, our heart is very distant from God. So we give thanks for our meals.

Okay, thank God for this meal. But we need to ask ourselves some hard questions. Are you actually grateful to the food on the table?

Why not, if not? So I think that's the thing that I'm thinking. Sometimes our thanksgiving is quite repetitive and mechanical.

And it doesn't have that heartfelt thanksgiving attitude. So if you look at the Psalms 147, verse 1. The psalmist described this quite well. He said, He sings to the Lord with grateful praise. Make music to our God to the harp. So what does it mean?

[3 : 42] How does it look like when you carry that attitude and trying to give thanks before your meals? I would suggest something like this.

In addition to our gratitude to God's providence, we joyfully thank God for creating such a delicious food. God, thank you for the ice cream. Thank you for the barbecue pork.

So let your heart be joyful when you really give thanks to God, rather than a mechanical, repetitive way of giving thanks.

That's point number one. What about the New Testament? The New Testament also talks about thanksgiving.

Especially I pick a passage in 1 Thessalonians 5.18. There Paul actually explains thanksgiving in a profound way.

[4 : 46] So God's will for us is rejoicing, praying, and giving constantly.

These are commands that are interdependent on each other. What does it mean? It means that rejoicing comes out of giving thanks. The more thankful you are, the more joyful and prayerful you will be.

So what does it look like when Paul encourages us to give thanks in all circumstances? I'll look at it in two angles. One is when we are at a very good time.

The second one is when we are actually in a time where we are facing some challenges and difficulties in life. Let's look at it in these two angles. When good things are happening in our lives, giving thanks seems to be very natural.

But do we realize the ways and attitude in which we give thanks to God make a big difference in growing our Christ-centeredness? We say we give thanks.

[6 : 05] We are thankful for such and such things happening in our lives. When a child was admitted to a school, we give thanks.

We are thankful. When we got a job or we got a promotion, we are thankful. But what are we actually thankful for? When we thank the gifts without thinking about the giver, we will put our faith into the wrong place.

That's the... Imagine when the father gives toys to his son. The child is so thankful for the toys, very happy.

When he only focuses on the toys, not the father who gives the toys. The excitement on the toys dissipates very quickly.

And the thankfulness will dissipate together with it. On the other hand, when the son turns his thankfulness to his father for the toys, the excitement continues even.

[7 : 18] He gets bored with the toys because he knows that there are some more toys coming on his way. So that's the difference between when we actually give thanks to the gifts rather than the giver.

When we give thanks to God himself, the giver, it draws our attention to him. The goodness of the giver always sticks with us more than the gifts.

We tend to remember the giver, not the gifts. Just like the son, an example I show. And when we actually know that who is the giver that gives us this job, or gives us this school, or gives us this relationship, we look at these things differently.

Because God never provides you something without a purpose. God never gives you something randomly. Okay. So in other words, when you actually identify that the giver is the important focus, we know that whatever we receive has a purpose on it.

For instance, if you receive a job, you get a job promotion. If you know the giver is God, it points you to how you do the job.

[8 : 39] You do it differently from you actually do it as if this is a random thing happening in your life. So focusing on your thanksgiving on God will help you to actually receive the gift and carry out what God wants you to do in that gift.

Make sense? Okay. The other end goals I want to look at is the bad times, which is a little bit more challenging.

How will we actually give thanks when things are not happening in the way that we want it?

Perhaps in a year like Joshua, losing his job, right?

So some of us may be becoming jobless this year. Some of us may be breaking up a relationship with a girlfriend and boyfriend. And some of us may have persistent health issues.

And some of us may be having a very difficult boss to work with. Okay. In those situations, is it even possible to give thanks? And my answer to you is that it's not only possible, but also transformational.

[9 : 44] So I would like to use this passage to encourage each one of us. James 1, verse 2 to 4. Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

When we look at our disappointment, failures, and even sufferings, we are often led to think along the line, what have we done wrong, what have we done wrong, that God is allowing this and that happening in our lives.

Or is it mere bad luck? It is not exactly what James encouraged us to think. On the contrary, James is telling us to rejoice.

Think about Captain America.

It is invincible. This is exactly what this verse is about. But how does it look like in real life? Let's explore a little bit on this.

[11 : 10] No one will enjoy disappointment, isn't it? No one will enjoy failures or suffering. What is James trying to say here? I think the key phrase in that verse is considerate.

So the path of joy is the phase considerate. So it means that there is something that we need to think through in the midst of our disappointment, failure, and suffering in order to produce that kind of joy that James is talking about.

Okay. Okay. And then the second question you would ask, what are we going to consider? Okay. I think of two things. One is to consider a bigger picture.

The second one is consider that God is shaping you through your circumstances. Okay. Okay. When we look at things happening in our lives, we are so drawn to fixate on the outcome. When the outcome does not come the way that we want, we are easily disappointed, and our hearts grumble.

[12 : 20] We refuse to see beyond the circumstances for the greater good God is producing. I remember I asked a friend, hey, in your midst of these challenges, can you consider this and this?

But people tend to resist that idea, tend to refuse to accept that idea. So, I remember when I was in college, I prayed for, you know Michael Chang?

I prayed for Michael Chang, the tennis player in Taiwan, or America, to win the Grand Slam match. Okay.

And I'm one of his fans. He was a good Christian, always glorifying God after winning the match, and an excellent tennis player.

This seems to me a legitimate ask of God to help him win. So, I asked, I prayed. Then I happened to know that there's a good brother of mine who is praying for Stephen Adbert.

[13 : 30] is Chang's opponent on that same match to win. So, what was God going to do with our prayers?

What do you think? So, I think the point I want to illustrate is not the silliness of this ask, but to point out the fact that we often see things through the lens of our own interests.

We never look at other people's interests. We always see things in our interests. I always want Michael Chang to win. Right? And God is looking at the big picture.

Okay? And he is causing all things to work for good for those who love him. Romans 28.28.

Wherever we experience disappointment and suffering, could be the very blessing that God is using it to bless someone else.

Right? So, when we look at the big picture, probably, we will actually have some sense of what God is doing. So, there are a few examples in the Old Testament or New Testament on this.

[14 : 40] A very famous story about Joseph. A very famous story about Joseph. Joseph. Right? Joseph was actually put into slavery by their brother.

Sailed into slavery by their brother. Instead of growing bitter and giving up, he lived a God-honoring life in the palace of Egypt.

What was actually in his mind, we may be able to see the hint at the response he made to his brother when there's a famine and their family come to his palace to ask for help.

He considered the suffering he induced as a means for God to work for the good of his family. He was put there to save his family from the famine.

So, he is looking beyond his own circumstances. For a greater good. Another very, very important example is Jesus himself. Look at Jesus himself.

[15 : 41] He is looking beyond his suffering to the joy of our salvation, which empower him to endure the cross and shame associated with it. In Hebrew 12.2, the author encouraged us to endure the suffering by looking to Jesus as an example.

What does it say? Let us run with endurance, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, some of you know that I have a brother, an elder brother. I need to take care of him because he is kind of disabled.

He has always been in my heart to share the gospel with him. But his life seems to be moving further, further away from believing in God and going from bad to worse.

A few years back, he experienced a stroke causing by excessive use of alcohol, and his left arm was partially paralyzed.

[17 : 06] His memory has been impacted a bit, meaning that he cannot remember things quickly. But his thinking is fully functional. His wife and daughter left him after this instance.

And you can imagine that his life is basically turning upside down. Right? And during the recovery process of the stroke, I was struggling to take care of him as well because I was under a very demanding job, traveling all the time.

Our conversation was getting more direct on the gospel. Talking about life and death, really direct. Meaning and purpose, regrets and sin.

There were a lot of seemingly hopeless and crying moments in that few years. But I felt that these were the work of the Holy Spirit in both myself and him.

So virtually, his heart was somehow open to the gospel. He saw himself a great sinner that is beyond forgiveness.

[18 : 27] He knew that he could not pay back anything that pay back anything to his wife and his daughter. and in his despair, God showed him that he could be forgiven regardless of his past.

And this become a very important message to him and later on led him to come to Christ. He was, he eventually put his trust in Christ and be baptized afterwards.

And this is from his own saying, if there were no stroke, there is no Christ in me. I think the big picture of this suffering is that God was using a stroke to help him to see his need for forgiveness. I think this is worth to thank for. The second thing to consider, sorry about too serious.

The second thing to consider when it comes to Thanksgiving in our bad times is that failure, disappointment and suffering shape and grow our faith.

[20 : 03] Right? We read it before. In James 1, 2 to 4. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and that steadfastness have its full effect.

that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing. So how does it actually work? Just want to point you back to the story of my brother.

After he became a Christian, not everything is good. Actually, a lot of challenges during the process of discipling him.

His faith journey is basically defined by worries and fears. And discipling him is a very tough period for me because it's over a long period of time and it's constantly week by week discipling.

I would honestly say that I don't want to visit my brother because every time I visit him there's a grumbling and complaining and you can tell my wife, ask my wife, she keep praying for me every time.

[21 : 21] life. But as I disciple my brother, one thing I find that God is reviewing to myself my own fraud through understanding what my brother's fraud is.

I see myself in my brother. We are same mother, same father. We carry similar blood, carry similar upbringing.

So that actually resonates a lot of me on his challenge. What he needs from God's mercy is also my needs for God's mercy. And I'm so thankful that I understand more about myself by looking at my brother.

the second thing which is very, very thankful is that I start to learn how to take care of people that are in need.

The billion ways I use to counsel people with good reasons. All this strategy doesn't work with my brother.

[22 : 39] He doesn't understand. it doesn't stick with him. He just need me to be there. I recall many moments that I am frustrated and really becoming a few a little bit hopeless how to help him.

right? And almost every time the Holy Spirit will give me words to say to my brothers.

Sometimes it's strange. The words come out to me are silly words but to my brother he resonated a lot. That's why I see that this is from the Holy Spirit.

it's not for me. What I think I am clever on trying to do reasoning doesn't work with my brother. I'm so thankful that God is humbling me and comforting me in this way so that I will be able to comfort others.

It also reminds me Paul's own testimony in 2 Corinthians 1 4 God will comfort us in all our affection so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

[24 : 13] So I'm so thankful that I went through this experience and also think about the topic of thanksgiving. This is worth for us to give thanks even in bad times.

One final point. Sorry. One final point. In Colossians chapter 1 12 to 14 Paul encouraged the believers to thank God the Father for the salvation through redemption work of his Son.

