

ESF Lord's day service message
11/20/2016

The Benefits of Thanksgiving

Text: Psalm 50:23, Philippians 2:14-15

Psalm 50:23

He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.

Philippians 2:14-15

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation." In which you shine like stars in the universe.

Are you usually a thankful person or a grumbling person? When do you feel happier, when you are thankful or when you are complaining?

We know that thanksgiving makes us happier. But often, it is not easy for us to be thankful because we have many difficult problems.

Let's see how a man who was struggling with difficult problems was able to be thankful. He was thankful by finding something positive in all the problems he faced. Here are the reasons of his thanksgiving:

I am Thankful that we only elect presidents once every four years.

I am Thankful that teenagers will grow up and that one day they will have children that will become teenagers of their own.

I am Thankful that hugs and kisses do not add weight or cause cancer.

I am Thankful that TVs, Radios, & CD players can be turned off.

I am Thankful that I am not a turkey this week.

I am Thankful that God's love never fails.

There are many benefits we can get from thanksgiving. Today, we want to see just three main benefits from thankfulness. They are contentment, positive influence, and God's deliverance. Also we want to find out how we can be thankful always.

Thanksgiving brings contentment

When we live with thankfulness, the first benefit we gain is contentment in our hearts. According to the Bible, the origin of trouble in man's heart is ungratefulness.

In Rom. 1:21 Paul says, *"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."*

Psalms 77:3 also says, *"I complained and my spirit was overwhelmed."*

Therefore, to overcome the troubles in our hearts, the first thing, we must do, is being grateful to God. When we are grateful to God for everything, God removes the troubles in our hearts and fills our hearts with contentment and peace.

Paul was a thankful person at all times and in all circumstances (Acts 28:15; Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Co 2:12-14; Phil. 1:3-5; Col 1:3-6; 1 Tim 1:12-14). And the Lord blessed him with contentment. He testified of God's blessing of contentment through his gratefulness in Philippians 4:11-12, *"...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ...I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."*

Henry Frost served for many years as a missionary to China. In his journal, he wrote of a very difficult time in his life. He says, *"I had received sad news from home, and deep shadows had covered my soul. I prayed but the darkness did not vanish. I summoned myself to endure, but the darkness only deepened. Then I went to an inland station and saw on the wall of the mission home these words: 'TRY THANKSGIVING.' I did, and in a moment, every shadow was gone, not to return."*

A bishop of the early church, who was a remarkable example of the virtue of contentment, was asked his secret. The venerable old man replied: "It consists in nothing more than making a right use of my eyes.

In whatever state I am in, I first of all look up to heaven and remember that my principal business here is to get there. Then I look down upon the earth, and call to mind how small a place I shall occupy when I die and am buried. I then look around in the world, and observe what multitudes are in many respects more unhappy than myself. Thus I learn where true happiness is placed, where all our cares must end, and what little reason I have to complain."

Are you discontent with your life today? Do you have uncontrollable trouble in your heart today? Try to be thankful to God for everything. Even if you don't understand why you must be thankful, try to be thankful. Even if you don't feel like being thankful, try to be thankful.

When you are thankful to God, He will immediately bless you with contentment in your heart. Through thankfulness, God will heal all bitterness, and depression in your minds and bring sweetness to it.

Thanksgiving makes you a person of positive influence

Usually people get used to complaining about negative things that are happening in and around their lives. When you are at a gathering of people, you may easily hear people complaining about something negative rather than hearing them saying a word of gratefulness for something positive. Where there are people complaining and grumbling, there is a negative and dark atmosphere.

To bring a positive light to such a negative and dark atmosphere, there should be people there who stop complaining and are thankful.

The Bible says that when we are thankful, we can be a light that shines like stars.

Philippians 2:14-15 says, "*Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God*

without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.”

A thankful person can bring a positive light to this dark world where people are complaining. We shine when we are thankful. The positive and energetic light comes to the people through us when we are thankful.

Thankfulness produces an attractive character. People can see a beautiful character in us through our thankfulness. And it gives us an opportunity to tell them about our faith in God's goodness.

When you are grateful to God even when you are in difficult times, people see a difference in you. Especially unbelievers may become curious about your attitude, because they can't do as you do. They would like to know the reason of your difference. It gives you an opportunity to share your faith.

Also, when you are thankful to God, the thankful spirit overflows to others around you. You become a thankful person to others. When you are thankful to others, they feel that they are honored by you. They feel that they are very important people in your life. They feel that you are a very thoughtful person. So, they like doing more favors for you, and they want to have a close relationship with you.

Do you want to build an attractive character? Do you want to be a person whom others want to stay close to? Be thankful always to God and to those who are around you.

How, then can we be thankful to God and others always? To be thankful always, we must intentionally try to see and think positively in all circumstances and of all people. Focus on what you have instead of what you don't have. Focus on something good in others instead of something weak in them. Whether you live with a grateful heart or a grumbling heart depends on your attitude toward circumstances and toward people

One day a tour guide was guiding a foreign traveler in a remote Mexican village. The traveler noticed that there was a plenty of hot water. It was welling up from hot springs and running down through creeks. The hot water was clean and it was very convenient for the people in the town to wash their clothes. The traveler said to the tour guide, "people in this town must be very thankful for having such clean and naturally heated water year round." The tour guide said, "No! Senor. Here, people are complaining that there is no natural soap."

It was Thanksgiving day at a nursing home. The small resident population was gathered about their humble Thanksgiving table, and the director asked each in turn to express one thing for which they were thankful. Thanks were expressed for a home in which to stay, families, etc. And one little old lady in her turn said, 'I thank the Lord for two perfectly good teeth, one in my upper jaw and one in my lower jaw that match so that I can chew my food.'

Several churches in North Dakota were being served by an old preacher known as "the pastor of thanksgiving." The people were always amazed, for no matter what the circumstances, the preacher could always find something to give thanks for. As he made his rounds one cold December morning, he was late in getting to worship because of excessive snow drifts. As he began the service with prayer, the parishioners were eager to see what the old preacher could come up with to be thankful for on this dismal and frigid morning. "Gracious Lord," his prayer began, "we thank you that all days are not like today."

If you are thankful only when there is no trouble or no difficulty, you will never really be a thankful person. Because there is no life which is completely free from trouble or difficulty. But if you try to find something positive in every circumstance you will find it always. And if you keep doing it, it becomes a habit. And the habit will shape your character.

Thanksgiving brings God's deliverance.

God is pleased with a grateful heart. God delivers those who are thankful from all trials. In Psalm 50:23, God says, *He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.*

Let's see several examples in the Bible of how God delivers thankful people from trials.

Daniel was a thankful person in all circumstances. Even when his life hung in the balance by an evil plot of powerful people who were jealous of him, he gave thanks to God: *Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, give thanks to his God, just as he had done before* (Daniel 6:10). Eventually he was thrown into a den of lions. The den was completely sealed. There was no way he could escape from the hungry lions. But God miraculously protected him from the hungry lions. When the king went to the den to find out what had happened to Daniel early the next morning, he heard the voice of Daniel, alive and well: *"O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me."* (Daniel 6:21-22).

Once Jonah was disobedient to God and ended up in the belly of a big fish in the deep ocean. It seemed that his life was over. There was no hope of getting out of the fish and breathing fresh air again. But in that hopeless condition he started giving thanks to God: *"I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord"* (Jonah 2:9). And God moved the fish to come out from the ocean and vomited Jonah onto dry land. So Jonah was miraculously rescued from a sure death.

We can find one more example of thanksgiving in the story found in Acts chapter 16. While Paul and Silas were on a mission trip to the city

of Philippi, they were falsely accused, beaten by an angry mob and thrown into a jail. In the jail, their bodies were aching. They did nothing wrong to deserve such harsh treatment. So did they start grumbling about the trial? No. Instead of grumbling, they started singing and giving thanks to God in the jail. Then what happened? Suddenly the place was shaken by a strong earthquake and all the jail doors were opened. As a result, they were able to bring a prison guard, a Roman soldier, and his entire family to Christ's salvation that night. And eventually they were released from the jail.

In all these three examples, there is a common ground of thankfulness. It is their faith. They believed that God is good. And they believed that God is in control of all circumstances-either bad or good.

Are you suffering from a trial today? Are you in a hopeless situation now? Do you need deliverance from almighty God of a trial or hopelessness? Believe that God is good. Believe that God is in control. And be thankful to God in all circumstances. God will be pleased with you and deliver you from all trials.