

“Turtles and People Need a Lot of Help”

Psalm 92:1-5

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I am glad Thanksgiving Day is on the calendar. I could give you several reasons and most are loaded with calories. You know what I'm talking about, turkey and dressing smothered in gravy, mashed potatoes and sweet potatoes, green beans and lima beans, corn pudding and broccoli casserole, and of course, chocolate cake, chocolate pie and chocolate candy.

However, there is another reason I am glad we have a holiday called Thanksgiving. We need to be reminded of the value of gratitude and the importance of expressing appreciation. Evidently the Psalmist felt the same way when he penned the words, *“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord”* Psalm 92.

Why is it a good thing to give thanks to the Lord? I think it is good for God and us. Let me explain.

I believe, first of all, that it is a good thing for God that we give thanks. I think our expressions of gratitude feed His spirit. Ever thought of that?

I know how I feel when my children or others express their gratitude. It nourishes and strengthens my spirit. I think the same is true for God.

Now, I believe that God is sovereign and needs no other to exist. However, even though He doesn't need us like we need Him, our expressions of gratitude bring Him great delight. I have to believe that they nourish and strengthen His spirit the same way they do ours.

How do you think God felt when He heard the Psalmist express gratitude for the works of His hands, His profound thoughts, His goodness, love and faithfulness? I think He smiled while tears rolled down His cheeks. Wouldn't you?

Yes, I think it is good for God that we give thanks. Very good.

Secondly, giving thanks is good for us. It promotes a **positive attitude** that compels us to count our blessings, which is something we can easily fail to do. And when we do, I think our ingratitude hurts God deeply. As Shakespeare has written, “Blow, blow thou winter wind. Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude.”

It seems that many people operate on the assumption that the glass is half-empty rather than half full. That's unfortunate and has to be quite depressing.

A.T. Hollingsworth tells about an incident that occurred in Washington, D.C. upon his return from teaching in Saudi Arabia for eighteen months. As he came through customs, everyone was pleasant, with little pushing and no one cutting in line. It was a nice experience and certainly different from other countries he had visited.

As he was riding in a cab downtown, the driver started telling him how bad things had been during his time out of the country. Mr. Hollingsworth interrupted his tirade and pointed out all the nice things he saw, the polite people, the clean countryside, the beautiful green trees, the cultural advantages and the precious freedoms. He could not say enough about how great America was, especially after having been away for so long.

When he arrived at the hotel, he asked how much he owed the driver. He turned and said to Mr. Hollingsworth, “You have already paid your fare by reminding me what a wonderful country this is. The ride’s on me.”

You know how the old hymn goes, “Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings see what God has done.” Go ahead. Count them. Better allow a lot of time, though.

Gratitude also **promotes humility**, a virtue that strengthens our relationship with God and others. When we express gratitude, we are acknowledging that we are who and where we are because of the influence, help and even sacrifice of many others.

“When you see a turtle on a post, you know he did not get there by himself.” Neither did we get where we are by ourselves and the wise person knows it while the humble person expresses his or her appreciation to all that have helped.

I value the words of Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation. “Intoxicated by unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us.” May we never be that arrogant.

I must share one of my favorite parts from the movie, *Shenandoah*. Jimmy Stewart offers the blessing before a meal by saying, “Oh, Lord, we tilled the ground. We planted the seed. We watered the crops and we harvested the grain. But, we thank you anyway.” Even when you are not in a mood to count your blessings, thank God anyway. The Psalmist implied in Psalm 92 that gratitude was not to be left to the mood of the moment, but at all times, morning and night, and in all circumstances.

Finally, gratitude **promotes a spirit of unselfishness**. Last Sunday, I told you that I want to place an offering box for the Stone Mountain and Lilburn Coops in the narthex. I said that even though we have offering boxes outside the office and at the entrance under the gym, we need one closer to the sanctuary. My reason for this is that helping the poor should come naturally from grateful people on their way to and from worship. There is no way you can take an inventory of God’s blessings and be selfish.

Remember the movie “Pass it Forward?” It was based upon the premise that good deeds don’t necessarily need to be paid back as much as they need to be passed on to others. Do for others as others have done for you.

I’ve never forgotten the story about the little boy who was admiring a beautiful sports car. When the owner arrived at the car, he told the boy that his brother had given it to him as a present. The boy looked at him and shocked him when he said, “One day, I wish I could be a brother like that!” That was not how he expected this boy to respond. You know what he expected him to say, “I wish I could have a car like this or a brother like yours.” What would you have said?

Yes, I am glad Thanksgiving Day is on the calendar. While I’ll do my share of eating a lot of rich food, I’ll also take some time to thank God and others for their contributions to my life. I’ve had a lot of help down through the years and suspect you have, too.