

Overflowing with Thankfulness

Three Uncomfortable Ideas

Monday – Luke 17:11-19

Firstly: we find it uncomfortably easy to forget to thank God. When these ten people were healed, I'm sure they were all overjoyed, amazed at God's power, and genuinely thankful to Jesus. How, then, did only one person go and personally thank Jesus? In my own experience, I think that it is easy receive what we want, and forget the one who gave it. I imagine that these people were healed and thought, "Yes! This is incredible! Now I can finally... (fill in the blank)" - and they went straight into doing that, rather than straight to thanking the God who gave it to them. It's easy to focus on the gift, rather than the giver.

Secondly: thanking God challenges us to remember His true character and nature. God is always doing amazing things - and sometimes, we can't ignore them! Miraculous healing is an obvious act of God! In those moments, we come face-to-face with a great and mighty God, who is very much worthy of praise. We tend to avoid, and procrastinate, giving God the devotion, praise and worship he deserves; we make ourselves feel better about our effort in this by downplaying the glory we give him for what he does. If we don't thank him, we don't acknowledge his work, and we don't remember the need to worship him, so we don't.

Finally: I find it interesting and important that a Samaritan was the only one that returned, rather than God's chosen people. As a modern day equivalent of God's chosen people, I feel like I am in the habit of taking God's amazing character for granted. "The Son of God died for my sins? Well yeah, that is just what he does, because he is awesome. Duh." When we see people new to the faith (like a foreigner, a Samaritan) God and his works blows their minds! As it should ours.

Do you tend to focus on the gift or the giver? Do you remember *who* you are thanking? Does God blow your mind like he used to? **Pray** about your reaction to God working in your life.

Say 'Ta'

Tuesday – Colossians 2:6-15

It's funny watching parents teach their kids to say 'thank you.' "Say 'Ta'," they say, in a slow tone of voice. Then there's this moment where the parent withholds the piece of food, drink or toy, until the child realises that they're not getting what they want until they attempt this 'Ta' word. Sometimes, it's a pretty good copy of 'Ta', sometimes it's a murmur, or a grunt. And then they toddle off happily, not turning back or giving the exchange of gift and thank-you a second thought. You are left, however, shaking your head, and wondering if your teenage son will ever get it.

(I jest.) In any case - somehow or another - kids learn to say thank you, and an idea of 'appreciation' bubbles up in their understanding and human experience. "Say thank you," we often remind each other. We almost have to create a habit to remember to say it. But we all understand it as an important exchange, person-to-person, in everyday life.

Grace is a pretty common occurrence in many family homes - giving thanks to God for food, sometimes for family and friends, too. It's a pretty good reaction we've got - food goes on the table, we all sit down, thank God, and eat. But, there are many exchanges of God giving to us that we do not have an... can you call it 'automatic'? response to. God will *probably* not play the parent and withhold his gifts until we say 'ta' - but we probably need to remember his gifts more frequently, and remember to say 'thank-you.' The aim is not a check-box, "did you say thank you?"-"yes, I did" exchange. The aim is *overflowing thankfulness*. It's not forced. It's an experience of thankfulness and appreciation and gratitude, remembering God's ridiculous and wonderful giving.

Proceed with caution

Wednesday – Deuteronomy 8:10-18

We have a not-great habit, when we are given significant blessing. We assume that the blessing, or the good thing, came about because of us! We earned it, we worked for it, we made it happen. When we look at the development of the world in the past hundreds of years, we see great success in "Christian" countries. God has given us many things! But, our "Christian" society as a whole, has mostly forgotten God - and forgotten that he has been the source of our many great things.

It generally isn't deliberate: we don't generally decide that we are awesome, and thus forget God (in the shadow of our awesomeness.) It is generally a very subtle process. In Deuteronomy 8:11, it says to 'be careful.' Luke 12:15 says, "Watch out! Guards yourselves against all kinds of greed." A similar warning is written in Matthew 16:6: "Be careful. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Do you see a common theme? When it comes to pride and sin, we have a warning to 'proceed with caution', be aware, and be ready; be 'proactive' in guarding against it, to save having to be 'reactive.'

Make a level path: Hebrews 12:13 and Proverbs 4:26 talk about making level paths for yourself so that you will not fall or become injured. This is a good way to be thinking of the way we structure our lives around how to live for God. This includes thankfulness and remembering God's place in our lives. This week, put a structure in place for your life to help you to remember to be truly thankful. Maybe you could set an hourly alarm, at which time you need to take note of your surroundings and thank God for the great things that are a part of your every-day. Maybe you could make a list of the 5 most important or big things in your life right now, and every time you do something to do with an item on that list, stop, pray and thank God for it.

More giving, more joy

Thursday – 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Long story short. (Very short.) Elkanah had two wives: Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had children - Hannah did not. Hannah was sad, she prayed to God, she promised she would give God her son, God remembered her, Hannah gave birth to Samuel, Hannah was joyful, and she gave Samuel to God.

At the heart of this, I love that Hannah honoured her promise. I would have thought it would have been very tempting to pray for a child, be given a child, and... want to keep him? We're talking years of watching your husband's other wife have children - daughters *and* sons! All the while, having none yourself. When Samuel was old enough, Hannah brought him to Eli at the house of the Lord (1 Sam. 1:24). Hannah gave back to God, what God had given her - *joyfully*.

Not begrudgingly. Not out of unwanted obligation. Not even in the slightest! I cannot find a hint of doubt or complaint in Hannah's prayer; she was joyful in giving her child to the Lord - utterly overwhelmed with thankfulness to God! Isn't that refreshing? Joyful giving to God. She remembered God and honoured God, and experienced such wonderful joy in thanking God.

In my own giving, I sometimes let myself feel resentful, or self-righteous, or hesitant. I get selfish with what God has given me - money, time, belongings, talents. There is so much more I can and ought to be giving, joyfully, honouring God as the provider of all! How about you?

Pray fervently that you would more joyfully give what God has given you!

The word, the whole word, and nothing but the word

Friday – 1 Chronicles 16:1,7-36

Sometimes I feel that the Bible has said everything that could be said, ever, in the very best way that everything could be said. God's word is perfect and wonderful and complete - and says everything in a better, more precise, more accurate, more godly way than I could ever write or say. I often feel that I am better off reading the Bible, learning verses, and pointing to what it says – than trying to make up my own version of advice or knowledge.

Today is one of those days - I just want to point out what is in the Word! It is so good, so perfect, so complete, in and of itself!

Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name! Make known among the nations what he has done! Sing to him, sing praise to him! Tell of all his wonderful acts! Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always! He is the Lord our God! Declare his glory! For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods! Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness!

How. Good. Are. These. Words. There is nothing better! Oh, that I would think of nothing but his words all day long. Psalm 19:14! Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight O Lord, my strength and my redeemer!

When he said it, I think he meant it

Saturday - Psalm 100

There are some beautiful ideas in Psalm 100. I would love to unpack: faith journeys and entering His gates with thanksgiving and praise, *knowing* our Lord is God, being the sheep of his pasture, gladness, giving thanks, God's continued faithfulness through generations... Alas, these devotion pages are so brief!

To go no further than verse one, I would say: we could probably do with more undignified expressions of joy around here. Get a little bit noisy, expressing ourselves! We get stiff-necked and solemn in worship - this is pretty far from the picture of joy that is painted in the Psalms, don't you think? Maybe you missed it - but I think when David wrote 'shout for joy'... I think he meant *shout* for joy!

We spend so much of our lives trying to be refined, and quiet, and dignified. Mellow. Proper. Respectful. Gentle. We forget how to have the hot-feelings, when we are always insisting that lukewarm is the goal! When I read the Psalms, however, I cannot but start boiling over with the hot-feelings! I want to shout for joy! I want to praise! Be zealous, we're told! (Romans 12:11) Don't be mild - be hot!

In a Francis Chan sermon I once listened to, he said, in terms of understanding what the Bible is saying, **if the literal sense makes sense, seek no other sense**. So, when we're reading and responding to God's word, what do we do with Psalm 100? I don't know about you, but I think some shouting is in order.

Look back – it helps!

Sunday – Psalm 136

Our experiences of God build our faith. Our trust in his faithfulness grows when we recognise his work in our lives. Too often though, we find ourselves only looking forward to 'what is God going to do next?' There is a practice throughout the Bible that seems to have been long forgotten today: 'I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds' (Ps 77:12); 'I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done' (Ps 143:5). We spend so much time waiting on God's next move to help build our faith; God himself often reminds us, however, to look *back* on what he has already done as a basis for greater faith and understanding of Him - "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt" – sound familiar?

A common practice in Old Testament stories is, when God shows up and answers or interacts with his people, they build an altar and name the place to remember what God has done. Imagine if we set up a pile of rocks everywhere that we noticed God answering our prayers. I think we would find ourselves reflecting on what God has done, and growing in our faith in God's love and faithfulness, **so much more** than we currently do. Why don't you try it this coming week? Use sticky notes, or candles, and create a habit of remembering God's work – and praising Him.

Creative response: Write your own Psalm 136, and sing about what God has done in your life using the pattern of A: God's action, B: *His love endures forever*. Maybe you will also find that you cannot help but see how his love endures forever through his work in your life – praise him for that!