

## The Stewardship of Gratitude: *The Challenge of Being Thankful in the Age of Stuff*

1 Thess. 5:16-18

11.22.2020

**Slide #2 INTRODUCTION:** This is the season of Thanksgiving. There is an old hymn, that has the perfect lyrics for this holiday: “*Come, ye thankful people, come, Raise the song of harvest home; All is safely gathered in, Ere the winter storms begin. God our Maker doth provide, For our wants to be supplied; Come to God’s own temple, come, Raise the song of harvest home.*”

Harvest Home, also called Ingathering, is a traditional English harvest festival, celebrated from antiquity and surviving to modern times in isolated regions. Participants celebrate the last day of harvest in late September by singing, shouting, and decorating the village with boughs. People would take great pride in decorating the churches and would often keep the best of the harvest for this festival. The altar in the churches is decorated with vases which hold autumn leaves, berries and flowers and special tables are set up to hold the offerings that people bring. There are pumpkins, cabbages, baskets of fruit and vegetables of all kinds. Sometimes the window ledges are used to display the results of harvest.

People also come to church to say prayers of thanks and sing hymns. At the end of the service the produce that has been left as offerings are each blessed and sent to hospitals for the sick and needy. Also, in some places at the end of the day there is a Harvest Home supper after which people dance and have a band play.

You know what, Harvest-tide is but a foretaste of the final harvest and the victory of Christ. It affirms for us that the whole of world history is geared around one man and His triumph over sin and death. The hymn, Harvest Home, is often sung during the whole Christmas season, it is perfect as we celebrate the arrival of the Lord of the Harvest and to recognize that the baby in the manger is the Lord of all Time who will judge sin and the world and divide the wheat from the tares on the final day.

So, as a hymn of Thanksgiving, it is designed to remind us of greater truths about our relationship with Jesus—the Lord of the Harvest! But as we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> c.—an age of absurdity that twists and distorts our understanding of Thanksgiving. As one writer explains, “The incredible rise in living standards for the majority of Americans and Western Europeans has made them more affluent, healthier, more comfortable, more free and sovereign over ever taller piles of stuff—but it has not made them any happier.” (Gregg Easterbrook in *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*).

Have you ever considered why the Pilgrims were so thankful, grateful? They had uprooted themselves and sailed for America, an endeavor so hazardous that published guides advised travelers to the New World, “**First, make thy will.**” The crossing was very rough, and the Mayflower was blown off course. Instead of reaching Virginia, where English families had settled 13 years earlier, the Pilgrims ended up in the wilds of Massachusetts. By the time they found a place to make their new home—Plymouth—winter had set in.

The storms were frightful. Shelter was rudimentary. There was little food. Within weeks, nearly all the settlers were sick. Many never recovered. “That which was most sad and lamentable,” Governor William Bradford later recalled, “was that in two or three months’ time, half of their company died, especially in January and February, being the depth of winter, and wanting houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy and other diseases... There died sometimes two or three of a day.”

When spring came, they tried planting wheat, but the seeds they had brought from Europe wouldn’t grow in the stony soil. Friendly Indians showed them how to plant corn, but their first crops were dismal. When supplies ran out, their sponsors in London refused to replenish them. And the first time the Pilgrims sent a shipment of goods to England, it was seized by pirates.

If you had been there in 1621 having seen half your friends and/or family die, if you had suffered through famine and sickness, if you had endured a year of disappointment and tragedy—would you have felt grateful? Would you have Celebrated? They did.

**Slide #3** Thanksgiving—Gratitude—isn’t some mystical experience that wells up inside of us at the smell of roasted turkey. It is the obedient response of those who understand and cherish the significance of their relationship with God. **[READ 1 Thess. 5:16-18 – Always be joyful. <sup>17</sup> Never stop praying. <sup>18</sup> Give thanks no matter what happens. God wants you to thank him because you believe in Christ Jesus.]**

**Slide #4 REJOICE ALWAYS:** The only possible way to rejoice always is to recognize that rejoicing has nothing to do with circumstances, situations or stuff, but it has everything to do with the relationship.

That is only possible when we are considering things from a greater perspective:

- You know the grace shown by our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though he was rich, he became poor to help you. Because he became poor, you can become rich. (2 Cor. 2:9).
- God’s grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn’t come from anything you do. It is God’s gift. (Eph. 2:8)

This Thursday, as you gather together in your family gatherings, why not have each person write a personal card to God, expressing all the things you are rejoicing over. The things that are only about your relationship with him, who He is, what He has done, what He has promised. Look for opportunities at family gatherings to express Joy over your relationship and riches in Him. Quiz your children en route Grandmas, at the table. Begin with rejoicing this Thanksgiving.

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**Slide #5 PRAY CONTINUALLY:** Don't worry about anything. No matter what happens, tell God about everything. Ask and pray and give thanks to him. (Ph. 4:6). Prayer is the missing discipline... Some people struggle to cultivate thanksgiving, because they have neglected the power, importance, significance of prayer in their lives.

For many the Holiday Spirit is one of anxiety, worry and stress. Paul said don't be anxious -- Pray. We need to do a lot more of the in everything type of praying if we really want to reduce the stress level in our lives.

They saw him pressed by crowds; they saw him confronted by Pharisees, doubters, seekers. Time and time again people called out to him, respond. They saw him handle all the stress in such a different way that you and I. Seeking insight, the disciples who had prayed for a lifetime ask the giver life, "Teach us to pray."

"When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'" (Luke 11:2-4).

- Prayer Reminds us of Who is in Control (Our Father in Heaven)
- Prayer Returns us to a place of perspective and Hope (You Will be done, give us our daily needs)
- Prayer Restores in a right spirit. (As we forgive)

Some of us will never discover the peace of a grateful heart in the midst of all the stuff of our live simply because we have failed to talk to Creator, the redeemer, the Lord of Life about life. We are more apt to ask others to pray for us than to pray.

**Slide #6 GIVE THANKS in all circumstances:** Gratefulness is recognition that God is always good and always right in his dealings with us. Gratefulness is not solely about out comfort, our things, and our financial situation. Gratefulness is our declaration that we trust him, not because we get everything we want, but because of who he is worthy.

The biggest challenge to a grateful heart is coveting. For the covetous heart, the stuff and the circumstances always comes first. In times of plenty or in need the covetous heart says, 'I want, I need, I must have.'

The grateful heart says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, bless the Lord and all that is within me, Bless His Holy Name."

**Slide #7 CONCLUSION/CHALLENGE:** Thanksgiving in the age of stuff can be discovered and experienced. **Rejoice always, Pray continually, Give thanks in all circumstances.**

For all this week, practice having a grateful spirit. You can do this by making a **Thankful List**, a compilation of things, situations, truths, realities for which you are thankful.

- As a family post it on the refrigerator. Make it a game. How many items can you get on the list.
- Put it in you Bible, on your desk at work, make a thanksgiving notebook.

And, practice **Grateful Speech** so as to take the attention of self and to put in on another.

- Don't just write them down. Begin to express it. Husband's, imagine what a week your wife would have if you genuinely thanked her for something 3 times a day. Wives try the same thing. What would happen if you went crazy with thanksgiving?

Finally, practice **Grateful Giving** by placing a thank offering in the mail or going on the church website giving page and designate funds for Willowbrook or to a specific family you know is in need this year.

### PRAYER:

**BENEDICTION:** *May the Lord bless you and keep you, May He make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.*

*May the eyes of your heart be open to all the blessings which surround you; may this awareness produce a harvest of generosity in your spirit.*

*May thankfulness rise up within you, not just during this short season, but day after day, from the early morning watch until you retire for the night.*

*May your prayers reflect gratitude, while also acknowledging the needs of others whose situations are so drastically different.*

*May thoughts of Jesus fill your mind, and thanksgiving be your response.*