

Breaking Through Barriers to Thanksgiving
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GFC – 11-21-21

We're in a sermon series called Forward with Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is one of my favorite times of the year. It's a time for the 3 F's: food, family and football. That's true – but it's also sad. Why? Because it leaves out the original reason for thanksgiving: God.

That's the question I want us to ask ourselves today? Did we really ever get around to thanking God on Thanksgiving? Family's good. Food is good. Football is good. But if we never get around to God, we've missed the point!

This is an example of the many barriers to thanksgiving. Many people are held back from giving thanks, praising with abandonment of worshipping in freedom. Something seems to block them.

Today I am preaching on Breaking Barriers to Thanksgiving. When these barriers are overcome we truly understand and live out the meaning of the word Thanksgiving.

1- To be thankful we must overcome a wrong view of God

A wrong view of God can cause you to become performance oriented where you feel you have to earn your way into God's presence. Or it can cause you to be under condemnation because you don't understand the grace and forgiveness of God. Or it can cause you to blame God for something He did not do.

But you cannot praise God and stay mad at God. You cannot simultaneously praise God and blame God. 1 Chronicles 16:34 tells us to:

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.

If you do not believe that God is good, you will not give Him thanks. If you think that God is the cause of all your problems and pain, you will not give Him thanks. If you think God is withholding good things from you, you will not give Him thanks. To give God thanks, you must have the right view of who He is. Where does that view come from? From the word of God. So,

2- To be thankful we must overcome limited Bible knowledge

Limited Bible knowledge results in limited thanksgiving.
 Limited Bible knowledge results in shallow praise.
 Limited Bible knowledge results in weak worship.

Hosea 4:6 says:

My people are being destroyed because they don't know Me. Since you priests refuse to know Me, I refuse to recognize you as My priests.

You might be thinking – this doesn't apply to me – it's for priests. But I remind you of what 1 Peter 2:9 says about believers:

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

We are a kingdom of priests who declare thanks and praise to God. And if we don't know God and His word, we will be unable to offer Him thanksgiving and praise.

If you are having a hard time thanking God – get in His word and learn who He is and you will become thankful! How do I know that? Because Colossians 1:9-12 says:

We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

We see here the results of knowing God and His will and understanding His Word: Living a worthy life – pleasing God in every way – bearing good fruit – growing in the knowledge of God – being strengthened with His power – and joyfully giving thanks!

The ability to give thanks is a direct result of knowing God and knowing God is a direct result of spending time with Him in His word.

3- To be thankful we must overcome ungratefulness

I told you last week that it's easier for most people to be ungrateful than grateful. If you want to break through the barrier of ungratefulness, you must develop deliberate thankfulness. You must look for things to be thankful for.

Let me ask you this – Which do you express more: ungratefulness or gratitude? Most Americans don't realize how blessed we are, or how thankful we ought to be. Many of us think we have it so bad, but we are clueless about what most of the world experiences.

We complain when there is a line in the drive-through at McDonalds. But did you know that 25,000 people in the world will die of starvation today and tomorrow and everyday. We should be thankful for food to eat.

We complain about our jobs, but did you know over 220 million people in the world have no job? We should be grateful for employment.

We complain that the music was too loud and the sermon too long, but did you know that billions of people on our planet cannot worship at all without fear of persecution? We should be thankful for our freedoms.

We complain about our income, but did you know that half the world – nearly 3 billion people – live on less than \$2.50 a day? 80% of the world lives on less than \$10 a day. We have so much to be thankful for.

Do you know that statistically almost every single American is among the world's richest people? If you don't believe it, go to a website called howrichami and type in your household income. They compare your income to the whole world's median income.

According to the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, the median household income in America is \$79,900.

That puts half of Americans in the top 1% richest people in the world.

If you make \$50,000 you're in the top 1.5%.

If you make \$35,000 you're in the top 3.5%.

If you make \$25,000 you're in the top 7%.

If you make \$15,000 you're in the top 14%.

If you make just \$10,000 a year you're in the top 20%.

We are so blessed and most of us don't even know it. We must overcome the barrier of ungratefulness by choosing to be grateful for what we have.

4- To be thankful we must overcome self-centeredness.

Self-centered people have a hard time worshipping. Why? Because in worship your focus must get off of yourself and onto God.

Worship does not focus on us; it focuses on God. In worship we give before we receive. Worship requires dying to self. Worship takes sacrifice. Worship is costly. Many people have a hard time with this.

Listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

If those words do not describe these days, I don't know what does.

People are lovers of themselves, proud, boastful, and unthankful. They love themselves and pleasure more than they love God. Those kinds of people do not make good worshippers. Why? Because the heart of worship is giving. If you want to break through the barrier of selfishness, you must die to self and totally give yourself to God. That kind of giving is the heart of worship. Romans 12:1 says:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

Worship is more than singing songs or lifting your hands – you can do those things and not worship. True worship flows out of a heart that is dead to self and alive to God.

This verse shows us what it takes to break that barrier of selfishness. You cannot truly worship without giving, without sacrifice. The word sacrifice means to give up something for someone else.

What sacrifices can we offer to God? We do not sacrifice in order to be made right with God. Jesus did that. So what sacrifices are we to make? One of the sacrifices we can make is a sacrifice of praise. Hebrews 13:15-16 says:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

The sacrifice of praise includes the fruit of our lips giving praise and the fruit of our lives giving to others. They go together – worship and giving – because they are both an expression of the heart.

Stingy people do not make good worshippers. Worshippers understand there is a cost in worship. But many Christians want a relationship with God that is all blessing with no cost – discipleship without commitment – blessing without sacrifice. All receiving and no giving.

But God asks us to devote ourselves entirely to Him, to be set apart for His purposes – to be living sacrifices who glorify Him with our lives. We can only do this by putting God first, before ourselves.

I don't know where we get the idea that giving should be easy. I don't know where we get the idea that we can only give when we have something extra left over after we've paid everything else and done everything else we want to do.

Thanksgiving begins in the heart with an attitude of gratitude, but it is expressed through giving. When we give with the right heart – it will produce thankfulness in us and others.

That's right - the Bible teaches that giving results in thankfulness.

2 Corinthians 9:7-11 says:

Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver... Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

Giving leads to thanksgiving. So – if you want to break the barrier to thanksgiving – start giving!

All through the Bible God said to give to Him first before anything or anyone else – including ourselves. This is called the Principle of Firstfruits.

Proverbs 3:9-10 says:

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Firstfruits were exactly that, the first part of the crop. God said the first 10% belonged to Him – that's what the tithe is: 10%.

We should give to the Lord before anything else. We should not be giving only if we have anything leftover. If that's your plan – I can guarantee you there will be nothing left over for God.

Notice in this verse – the blessing followed the giving. The message is this: if you put God first – you will be blessed and have plenty. This is not just Old Testament! 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 says:

Now about the collection for God's people: On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.

New Testament giving happens when? The first day.

Of what weeks? Every week.

New Testament giving involves who? Each one of us

New Testament giving is how much? A sum in keeping with our income.

What does that mean? The Amplified version says it this way:

On the first (day) of each week, let each one of you put aside something and save it up as he has prospered (in proportion to what he is given).

Sounds like tithing to me. I know there are different views about tithing and giving. At GFC, we don't believe we are under the law to tithe, but we do believe that tithing is a principle that started before the law and which was confirmed by Jesus Himself. If you go back to the origins of the tithe, you will find it was an act of worship. That's why giving is such a big part of our worship.

Giving is the way God wants us to bless others. But giving also blesses us. Remember what Jesus said in Acts 20:35

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

One of the greatest blessings of giving is that it breaks through the barrier of self-centeredness to worship. To break the barrier of selfishness, begin to give.

5- To be thankful we must overcome grumbling and complaining.

To grumble is to complain. Gratitude is to express thanks. Now, there is a place for justified complaining, but some people do nothing but complain. They have developed complaining to an art form. They have something negative to say about everything and everyone. Nothing's ever good enough. They are chronic complainers.

Did you know God absolutely hates grumbling? When we think of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years – we think it's because of unbelief. That's part of it – but there are 5 other things that hindered them. They're listed in 1 Corinthians 10:5-11

God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were... We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did... We should not test the Lord, as some of them did... And do not complain, as some of them did... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.

God lists grumbling and complaining right up there with idolatry and sexual immorality. It's serious.

Think about this: the Children of Israel had been in the bondage of slavery in Egypt for 400 years when God set them free.

They were happy and full of praise... for about 30 days.

Then they started grumbling.

They grumbled about being thirsty.

They grumbled about their living conditions.

They grumbled about being hungry.

So God gave them the miracle of manna.

Then they grumbled about the manna.

They grumbled so much God would have killed them without Moses' intercession.

Grumbling is serious!

Let me ask you - are you grumbling or grateful? If you're a grumbler, you can turn that around. The way we turn grumbling into gratitude is through thanksgiving.

Grumblers have a hard time thinking of anything to give thanks for. If you can't think of anything good, think of what is not wrong.

Thank God for what doesn't need healing.

Thank God for what isn't broke.

The more things you are grateful for, the more things you will have to be grateful for.

Jesus walked the lonely road to the cross; He gave His life on our behalf.

He made salvation possible to us all. He's blessed us in so many ways.

But are we saying "thank you" in return? Where is our gratitude?

Remember this: complaining is to Satan what praise is to God.

Grumbling is to Satan what gratitude is to God.

So, I'm closing today by encouraging you to move forward in thanksgiving by overcoming barriers to expressing your gratitude to God.

You see - The optimist says, the cup is half full.

The pessimist says, the cup is half empty.

The child of God says; My cup runs over.

The complainer says, "This is the day the devil has made, let us complain and be miserable in it."

The grateful person says, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Ungratefulness says - "What I have is never enough."

Gratefulness says - "I've learned in whatever state I'm in to be content!"

Grumbling says, "I don't know how I'm going to pay these bills."

Gratitude says, "My God will supply all my needs according to His riches in glory."

Grumbling says, "This is way too hard for me."

Gratitude says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Grumbling says, "I don't think I'll ever get ahead."

Gratitude says, "Thanks be to God who always causes me to triumph in Christ Jesus!"

Grumbling says, "Everybody's against me."

Gratitude says, "If God is for me, who can be against me?"

I encourage you right now to stand to your feet and begin to break through the barriers to thanksgiving by giving God thanks and praise.

Don't wait till later - do it now because our God is worthy of all our thanks and praise and worship!