

November 26, 2017

Why Thanksgiving

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"
Philippians 4:4-7

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."
Colossians 3:15

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
I Thessalonians 5:16-18

So, we just celebrated our version of Thanksgiving. This holiday traces its origins back to the 1600s when the first European settlers celebrated their first harvest with a three day feast. During George Washington's tenure as President he decreed a national day of Thanksgiving be held on the last Thursday in November and every President up to Franklin Roosevelt followed suit. Pressured by the CEO of what would become Macy's, President Roosevelt changed the date to the fourth Thursday in November to add one more week to the Christmas shopping season.

Each year we celebrate this holiday called Thanksgiving as a time to eat too much and watch a lot of football, but in reality it should be a call for all of us to thank God for our many, many blessings more often than we do. The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi that they should incorporate giving thanks into their prayers and he repeated the same instruction to the Thessalonians and to those in Colossae. Why thanksgiving?

When we pray, no matter how we might do it, we are asking God to intervene in our lives for good. We might ask him for healing, for direction, for forgiveness, and/or for peace. Taking time to thank God requires that we acknowledge what he has been doing in our lives. When I present my requests to God I am asking for him to intervene. When I give thanks to him I am acknowledging that he is and has already intervened.

Without thanksgiving we are attributing the answered prayers in our lives to something else; to ourselves, to others, or to dumb luck. Overlooking God's active intervention in our lives means we miss out on the ***"...peace of God, which transcends all understanding..."*** Paul absolutely ties these two things together. We ask for God's help in dealing with our constant anxieties, but we will find no peace there until we acknowledge that the Father is already at work in our lives.

In many ways then, giving thanks to God needs to be a constant part of our relationship with him. It is in our thankfulness that we find evidence of God's hand in our lives. That is a hard thing for us to acknowledge. We like to believe that the good things that happen to us are the product of our hard work and determination. That is, in fact, a fundamental belief for most Americans. We were brought up believing in that ideal.

Sadly, that training dims our view of God's work in our lives. We study hard, seek and find a good paying job, find a great mate for life, have wonderful and gifted children and grand children and we attribute it all to our hard work and determination. Someone else working just as hard as we do, with as much or more determination than we have, faces hardship and loss and we think they are doing or have done something wrong.

In truth, none of what we have accomplished, none of what we possess, would be ours without God's blessing. All of those good things that come our way, come from God and not from us. James, our Lord's brother, would write, *"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights..."*

Giving thanks to God for his work in our lives and for the blessings which we enjoy needs to be a part of every day, not just one day. Yes, celebrate Thanksgiving. Eat lots of turkey, watch lots of football, get your Christmas shopping started. But make giving thanks to God a part of every day's conversation with the Father.

