

Thanksgiving Therapy

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Preface

In my lifetime, the medical community has made enormous advances. Open heart surgery, angioplasty and stents are all life saving procedures that did not exist in my youth. For that matter, outpatient surgery did not exist just a few years ago.

Another area of medical advancement is physical therapy. Just a few years ago, having a stroke likely meant you would suffer a substantial degree of paralysis for the rest of your life. Today, thanks to the advancements in physical therapy, many people are able to return full mobility.

Just this past week, I met with a gentleman about testing some soil for the feasibility of digging a pond. It was while he was turning the hand auger to test the soil that he passively mentioned that he had a stroke last year. Thanks to advancements in physical therapy, you would never know of his stroke.

Just as physical therapy can have life changing effects on the physical health of stroke victims, God in His Word, prescribes a therapy for our spiritual health.

God gives us a **prescription for keeping a healthy spirit and positive perspective on life**. What is this therapy God prescribes? It is the therapy of having a thankful heart, an attitude of thankfulness.

Scripture – Read

¹⁶Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV

Introduction

Illus: You might have heard the story about a Psychologist who was studying the opposite attitudes of two brothers. It seemed that one was always optimistic and thankful. On the

other hand, the other was always pessimistic and negative about life. The Psychologist decided to place them in separate rooms and analyze their behavior. He placed the negative brother in a room full of toys all wrapped nicely in gift boxes. He placed the optimistic brother in a room filled with nothing but a huge pile of horse manure.

After an hour he returned to see their responses. When he arrived in the pessimistic boy's room, he found the little boy crying. The boy wanted to go home and seemed distraught. The doctor asked, "Why have you not opened any of the gifts and played with the toys." The boy responded that he did not think they were for him and he was afraid he might get in trouble.

As the doctor approached the optimistic boy's room, he could hear the little boy screaming and shouting, "Yippy, yahoo." When he walked in the boy was eagerly digging in the manure and having a good ole time. When he inquired about what the boy was doing, his response was, "With all of this horse manure, there's got to be a pony in here somewhere."

How we view life has a direct determination on how much we enjoy life.

If we are thankful and appreciative for what we do have, we enjoy life. We find positive things upon which to focus. On the other hand, without an attitude of thankfulness, we are forced to focus on the negative and we become overwhelmed with self pity.

Your degree of pleasure in life and appreciation for life is directly related to your attitude of thankfulness. God knew this all along and that is why he commands us to give thanks. **Giving thanks is the God prescribed therapy for a happy life.**

I would like to look at three reasons while a heart of thanksgiving is the prescribed therapy for a happy life.

Content

1. Thanksgiving Keeps the Scales Tipped

Everyone has problems and difficulties. No one is immune from heartache. I realize that some of us enjoy generally good health while others struggle from one challenge to another.

Regardless of your circumstance, there is always plenty to rejoice and be thankful for. It doesn't matter how big your health, financial or even family problems may appear, there is always plenty you can thank God for in your life.

Be thankful your home wasn't destroyed as was the case of our friends just a few miles away. Yet, even they have much for which to be thankful.

Look into the eyes of a grandchild, loved one or even a friend and tell me you do not have anything to be thankful for.

Go outside and look around, take a deep breath and you will easily see you have much to be thankful for.

² *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Col 4:2*

Throughout God's Word, we are encouraged, even commanded to give thanks to God for all that we receive. **Being thankful keeps the scales tipped so that we focus more on our blessing and less on our challenges.**

If you are consumed with your hardships, if you feel like you are drowning in sorrow and discouragement. The problem is a lack of thanksgiving in your heart. Your problem is that you are not giving thanks for the good in your life and therefore the scales are tipped in the wrong direction.

You might say, "Well, you just don't understand what I am facing." I understand this. Our Lord gave thanks always and I know you are not facing the punishment He faced. He continued to give thanks even when he had the sin of the world on His shoulders.

If it is your desire to maintain a dismal outlook on life, then refuse to give thanks. If you want a positive and optimistic outlook, then stop focusing on your limitations and start focusing on what you can do.

Look around you and **thank God for the good in your life.** Soon you will find the **scales tipped to a more positive life that is filled with joy** and appreciation.

2. Thanksgiving Keeps the Ego In-Check

When we fail to give thanks to God, our ego goes unchecked. Failing to thank God causes us to become inwardly focused with self pity or self pride.

Illus: This reminds me of the fortune 500 CEO who pulled into a service station to get gas with his wife. He went inside to pay and when he came out he noticed his wife engaged in a conversation with the service station attendant. It turned out that she knew him. In fact, back in high school before she met her eventual husband, she used to date the man.

The CEO got back in the car, and the two drove off in silence. He was feeling pretty good about himself and finally he spoke, "I bet I know what you are thinking. I bet you are thinking you sure are glad you married me, a fortune 500 CEO and not him, a service station attendant." To which she responded, "No, I was thinking if I'd married him, he'd be a fortune 500 CEO and you would be a service station attendant."

There are no self made people. We all had help with every accomplishment along the way. The Bible says:

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:11

Being thankful means we acknowledge God's greatness. Being thankful reminds us of our dependence on God and takes away our feelings of arrogance or excessive self worth.

Everything we have - money, friends, homes, cars, jobs, even life itself is a gift from God. When we are thankful, we give God recognition for all we have.

Being thankful is not passive. It must be active. It is not something that is done to you, it is done by you.

Illus: I heard someone say recently, "In bad times it is never as bad as I think it is. And, in good times it is never as good as I think it is."

Even when we think we have the world by the tail and everything is going our way. Tragedy is sure to come and often tragedy lies right around the corner.

We must learn to faithfully thank God for all we have in the good times and the bad.

3. Thanksgiving Makes the Hardships Pay Dividends

The ultimate test of thanksgiving is when we **learn to be thankful even when life hurts.**

I have come to realize that it is the most difficult moments, the really challenging **struggles of life that have shaped my character the most.** It has been those scary times when I have turned to God with complete helplessness that have strengthened my faith the greatest.

Real thankfulness is born out of difficulty. It is the difficulties and hard life challenges where we experience God's grace and grow in our trust in Him.

Illus: I have a friend who is a new Christian. He is now consumed with books and other materials that argue the existence of God and the validity of God's Word. There is nothing wrong with that. But those of us who have been Christians for years do not feel compelled to build up our faith by proving the existence of God.

When we have been through the "**valley of the shadow of death**" and when our Lord has walked with us, **we know first hand of His presence.**

There is no proving to be done. There is nothing to argue about. I know He exists because if it were not for Him I would not be here. I could not make it through life without the presence and leadership of almighty God.

You see our trials and difficulties pay dividends when we learn to be thankful. We learn that **every struggle becomes a new plateau of faith in Him.** Every challenge brings us closer in our trust and dependence upon our Lord.

James spoke of this in his letter:

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4 NIV

If you are like me, you have not arrived to the place where you can "count it pure joy" when the trials come. I have never reached the point where I can say, "Bring it on, I welcome the trials."

However, as Christians, our trials **pay great dividends when we learn to be thankful in all seasons.** They pay dividends of trust, character and understanding of the grace of God. James says we are then "blessed."

➤ Conclusion

In conclusion, I want you to notice two things about our text for today.

¹⁶Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV

First, God clearly wants His people to be joyful. God wants you to be happy. God does not intend for you to be miserable.

Secondly, your key to living a joyful life is found in continuous prayer and being thankful in every circumstance.

Thankfulness is every bit as important to the Christian life as prayer.

A heart of thankfulness is God's prescription for you and me if we are to have a joyful life.