

## November 22, 2020 James Gallaher The Art of Thanksgiving

Looking forward to a conflicted holiday week? Do you have a range of emotions thinking of the holidays? Does anxiety go up during this time? No matter what we are going into, we have clear instructions on how to get through and to thrive through these difficulties. God will lead us through these things as we see the Word as absolute truth.

**Philippians 4:1-9** *Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, whom I long to see, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also, help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement as well as the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all people. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Writing from a Roman jail, Paul tells us:

- **Verse 4** *Rejoice and again, rejoice.*
- **Verse 5** *Let your gentle spirit be known to all people.*
- **Verse 6** *Be anxious for nothing.*

Every one of our experiences can challenge these commands. Anxiety means to have a divided heart or focus - desiring one thing and hoping for another. **James 1:8** *a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.* Worry can bring paralysis in making a decision. Anxiety can grip us. Anxiety disorders are the most common disorders in America. Anxiety disorders have increased 1200% over the last three decades.

Why is it so concerning even among Christians? As Christians, applying the Word is hard. There is no room for compassion in an anxious heart. Yet we want to be a compassionate church. So what can we do? What is the answer to anxiety? The art of thanksgiving...

- **Verse 4** *Live in harmony.*
- **Verse 4** *Rejoice always.*
- **Verse 5** *Let your gentle spirit be known to all.*
- **Verse 6** *Do not be anxious for anything.*
- **BUT: Verse 6** *but in everything by prayer and pleading, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*
- **THE PROMISE: Verse 7** *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Thanksgiving is the posture in which we pray. How often are our prayers in hope rather than in faith? We need to trust God that He will use struggles for our benefit. Acknowledge that you are thankful that God will not leave me or let me suffer alone. God sustains us in the midst of trials. He will walk with us.

What has consumed us? What fears do we have? Marriage, jobs, money, relatives? Plead with God - with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving can be the antidote to the relational problems that we might have. It is a catalyst for every situation.

Even secular science sees benefits to being thankful... Thankfulness encourages people to seek more from that relationship. Grateful people have fewer aches and pains. Gratefulness reduces envy, resentment, frustration, regret, and depression. Gratefulness increases happiness. Thankful people get better sleep. It makes everyone think more positively. The more we are grateful, the more we find to be grateful for. It makes us less materialistic.

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Gratitude journaling participants have less depression symptoms as long as the journaling continues. Gratitude journaling is used as a treatment for depression.

Worry is based on fear, concern, that I'm not enough, that God is not enough or is unwilling to help. God's Word does not leave us but gives us instruction to lay it down at His feet. Thanksgiving turns us from hope to faith. Thanksgiving declares God's wisdom and trust in His plan for our lives.

With thanksgiving...then the promise of peace will come and dwell in our hearts. Scripture tells us to cast our cares upon God because He cares for us. There is a difference between carrying a burden and laying it down. It produces worry or thankfulness. God's peace is not dependent on my understanding. Having understanding is important but it can rob us of peace –always trying to solve the problem in front of us. Paul's words give clarity – *a peace that passes understanding*. We don't have to understand it.

What is consuming my heart and mind today? What am I facing that has robbed me of peace and joy, rejoicing in all things, all times, all circumstances? Do we understand peace? We want to but this peace goes beyond our understanding. This peace that's promised in scripture is a peace found through thanksgiving. It is the answer for a troubled and anxious world.

**Verse 7** *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

The answer to anxiety is thanksgiving. God will replace it with peace. Don't attempt to understand it. He will stand as a protective watchman over your heart and mind from further attack.

**Luke 6:45** *The good person out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good...for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.* Do you feel like you are fighting for everything? Fighting for every breath? We attack people we love. Luke says out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Do we stuff things down until we figure it out? Then we become more anxious, more bitter, more downcast. His sufficiency gives a peace that we can't help but rejoice about; brings a confidence that we can't help but be thankful for; His sufficiency allows me to rejoice in the midst of the storm. It's not about changing our words, but it's about changing the heart. Get to the root. Approach God who takes our cares.

God doesn't comfort you to make you comfortable; He comforts you so that you can comfort someone else. Comfort often comes from another person who is being used by God.

**Verse 8** *Dwell on these things to be thankful...what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, any excellence, any worthy of praise.* Then the promise in **Verse 9**... *the peace of God.*

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** *Rejoice always; pray with ceasing; give thanks in all things.*

**2 Corinthians 10:5** *and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*

Be intentional at thankfulness. Something breaks free in a heart that is focused on thanksgiving. It is difficult at times to consider being thankful especially when it entails failing relationships or provision responsibilities. Paul presents an impossible scenario with a solution...thanksgiving. Maybe this week, bring the fears of the past and the seeming insurmountable things and apply thankfulness. Jesus waits for us to lay our burdens down and to give thanks.

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How would it change our lives if we would begin every day with thankfulness?

Tell about times that God has been faithful lately.

Reflect on how giving thanks and being compassionate go together.