

GIVE THANKS

A week ago Thursday I received a call from Drew Marshal wondering if I would be interested in being on his radio talk show on Joy 1250 that coming Saturday. To be honest, I was not really interested. I was just getting ready to say no when he told me that I would be interviewing author Max Lucado. That peaked my interest. Max Lucado has always been a favorite author of mine. Back in 1989 I was in seminary when my father was diagnosed with cancer. It was a difficult time in my life. At that time a friend gave me a book by Max Lucado entitled 6 Hours One Friday. That book really spoke to me and ministered to me in a powerful way. I partially learned to preach from Max Lucado. People ask me why I tell so many stories when I speak – I learned that reading his books.

When I heard that Max Lucado was going to be on the program, I decided to do it. Not because I was interested in being on the radio. I did it because it was an opportunity to say thank you to a person who has been a blessing to my life. I did it out of gratitude.

This is the Thanksgiving weekend. We have been going through a series entitled Forward in Faith. Today I want to pause and speak about thankfulness. Are you a thankful person? Is your life marked by the attitude of gratitude?

Luke 17:11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him -- and he was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well"

As Jesus was traveling a group of 10 men with leprosy met him. These men would have lived very hard lives. Lepers were outcasts. They were separated from society out of fear. They were separated from their families. No one knows how long it had been since these people had felt the touch of their wife or the kiss of their children. They were shut out from their Friends. They were shut out from Fellowship of the temple and synagogue. Even to be seen in public was dangerous.

In faith they called out to Jesus asking Him would heal them. In faith they took Jesus at His word and were healed. Nine of those who were healed left and did not return. One (a Samaritan) returned to thank Jesus for what He had done. Have you ever wondered why only the one returned?

Have you ever wondered why so many Christians, who have been healed of a disease far worse than leprosy, who have experienced the blessings and forgiveness of Jesus do not seem to show gratitude in their lives?

Our biggest problem in the church today is this vast majority of Sunday morning Christians who claim to have known the Master's cure but do not return to thank Him by presence, prayer, testimony and support of His church. In fact, the whole Christian life is one big "Thank You," the living expression of our gratitude to God for His goodness. But we take Him for granted and what we take for granted we never take seriously. -- Vance Havner

1. Remembering to Give Thanks –

Have you ever forgotten to give thanks? I know I have. When was the last time you gave of yourself to another and, instead of receiving thanks, only saw indifference? E.g. Yonge St. Mission – I don't like beans! Gifts are usually only received with thanks when they are recognized as gifts. Perhaps these lepers felt somehow that they had got what they deserved. With all they had been through and suffered they deserved to be healed. God owed it to them. Have you ever thought like that? I have gone to church and said my prayers and done my service - I deserve the blessing of God in my life!

Sometimes we are much like the little boy who was given an orange by a man. The boy's mother asked, "What do you say to the nice man?" The little boy thought and handed the orange back and said, "Peel it."

Some people are appreciative by nature, but some are not; and it is these latter people who especially need God's power to express thanksgiving. We should remember that every good gift comes from God and that He is "the Source, Support, and End of all things." The very breath in our mouths is the free gift of God. Thankfulness is the opposite of selfishness. The selfish person says, "I deserve what comes to me! Other people ought to make me happy." But the mature Christian realizes that life is a gift from God, and that the blessings of life come only from His bountiful hand. -- Warren W. Wiersbe

All of us like the lepers were once hopeless. We could not earn our salvation or win God's favor through good works. We all deserved death but received the gift of life. Remember the story of the sinful woman in Luke 7. Jesus summed up his parable by saying:

Luke 7:44-47 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

A lack of gratitude in life shows that we do not really understand our need for salvation and the lengths God went to in order for us to be saved.

Sometimes it's only a matter of perspective. One young college woman supposedly wrote home to her mother: "Dear Mom: Sorry I haven't written sooner. My arm really has been broken. I broke it, and my left leg, when I jumped from the second floor of my dormitory...when we had the fire. We were lucky. A young service station attendant saw the blaze and called the Fire Department. They were there in minutes. I was in the hospital for a few days. Paul, the service station attendant, came to see me every day. And because it was taking so long to get our dormitory livable again, I moved in with him. He has been so nice. I must admit that I am pregnant. Paul and I plan to get married just as soon as he can get a divorce. I hope things are fine at home. I will write more when I get the chance. Love, Your daughter, Susie P.S. None of the above is true. But I did get a "C" in Sociology and flunked Chemistry. I just wanted you to receive this news in its "Proper Perspective!"

2. Returning to Give Thanks –

Perhaps these men were grateful but they simply chose not to return and express that gratitude. Maybe they thought "I'll make sure that the next time I see Jesus I will thank Him." I am sure that these men had people to see and things to do now that they were healed. They wanted to thank Him – just latter.

Have you ever been like that? Someone shows you an act of kindness and you think to yourself, "I need to write then a note of thanks but then you forget". It is easy to put off giving thanks.

In Vermont an old farmer was sitting on the porch with his wife. He was beginning to realize how much she meant to him. It was about time--for they had lived together forty-two years, and she had been such a help, a very willing hard worker. As they sat together, he said, "Wife, you've been such a wonderful woman that there are times I can hardly keep from telling you."

A few years ago Dr. Nick Stinnett of the Univ. of Nebraska conducted a series of studies in an attempt to discover what characteristics were common in strong families. He and his researchers discovered six qualities. And the first quality and one of the most important to be found in strong families was that of appreciation. They concluded that families which were strong were strong because family members expressed appreciation for what each member DID and for who they WERE.

Thankfulness is an act of the will and not just an emotion. It is not something that happens automatically but requires a conscience decision and action.

That is the reason we have thanksgiving. It is time set aside to remember the power and importance of gratitude. It is a day that reminds us to take the time and be thankful.

You can learn to give thanks even if you don't feel particularly thankful. If God gives a command, he expects obedience, whether you are in the mood or not. Thankfulness, like forgiveness, is not an emotion. Thankfulness is an intelligent response of gratitude to God. -- Erwin W. Lutzer

3. Rejoicing - Living a Life of Thankfulness

Giving thanks is not just something you do in response to a gift or when you remember God's mercy but for Christians it is a lifestyle. Perhaps the lepers did not return to thank Jesus because they had forgotten how to be thankful. They had lived the life of un-thankfulness too long. After all, what reason does a leper have to give thanks? Sometimes we can become like that. When we see only tragedies in life and not triumphs then our hearts turn cold. As Christians we are told to give thanks at all times and for all things. Every day is thanksgiving.

Col 3:15-17 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Today is thanksgiving. Maybe you are here today and you have long list of things to be thankful for. Maybe you are here today and you have been going through a difficult time recently and are having a hard time finding things to be thankful for. Whatever the case we are called as Christians to live a life of thanksgiving.

If one should give me a dish of sand and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes and search for them with my clumsy fingers and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it and now would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction. The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but

let the thankful heart sweep through the day and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings, only the iron in God's sand is gold! -- Henry Ward Beecher

The one leper recognized that what had happened was a gift he had not earned. He remembered and he returned and to thank Jesus and to worship Him. How about you? This day we set aside as a time to give thanks. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. Remember today you have many reasons to give thanks. Return today to the feet of Jesus and offer that thanks and may we daily live a life of thanksgiving before everyone we meet.

Count your blessings this morning. Name them one by one. As we come to this communion table, we must come with an attitude of gratefulness, remembering again the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross.

There was a father and mother of a young man killed in the military in a little church. One day they came to the pastor and told him they wanted to give a monetary gift as a memory to our son who died in battle. The pastor said, "That's a wonderful gesture on your part. He asked if it was ok to tell the congregation and they said that it was. So the next Sunday he told the congregation of the gift given in memory of the dead son. On the way home from church, another couple were driving down the highway when the father said to his wife, "Why don't we give a gift because of our son?" And his wife said, "But our son didn't die in any conflict! Our son is still alive!" Her husband replied, "That's exactly my point! That's all the more reason we ought to give in thanks to God."