

**Series: THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION - October 12, 2008**

**OPEN!**  
**Matthew 5:15-16**

1. Lori and I occasionally watch a program called ***Mayday!*** on the Discovery Channel. It's about airplane crashes. We don't collect air miles any more! A recent episode featured the story of an airliner that was preparing to land in Miami back in 1972. The whole flight crew on a plane with 180 passengers and crew was concentrating on trying to fix a \$2 bulb in the control panel. Without realizing it—as the captain was grouching and cursing at everyone, he bumped the autopilot, gradually lost altitude and slammed the plane into the Everglades, killing over 100 people. The episode was called, ***Fatal Distraction***.

a. If there was ever a phrase that describes our lives in 2008 it's ***fatal distraction***. We are crazy busy ***distracted*** people! It's like we live on autopilot—like the porch light's on—but nobody's home! Our eyes are open—all of our senses work perfectly well—but as we fuss over the \$2 bulbs in life—we miss the stream of magnificent gifts we take—but never think about. And when that happens, we end up with an existence instead of a life.

b. I think in a world like ours where it is possible for life to be this blur in the side window, we have to be careful. Careful to live with open eyes—eyes that really ***see***. Ears that actually ***listen***. And a heart that's open and engaged. We need to see the wonder and goodness of God around us every single day. We need to do more than just rattle off some thank you at a meal that says "Thanks" but offers no gratitude. Every day is a gift. If you don't believe that, ask people who don't have very many left. To breath—to digest food, to move, speak, drink clean water—as much as we want—is a gift. Believe it or not—***families*** are gifts.

-When we get too crazy busy to notice and say "Thanks"—guess who loses? We do! We cheat ourselves because a heart and mouth full of genuine gratitude is one of the best feelings we have—and one of the most powerful forces on the planet.

-Are your eyes open? Are you seeing the conveyor load of good things that stream by you? If not—I have a couple of suggestions. First, you have to slow down. At Mach 3—hair on fire—everything's blur. Second—to cultivate gratitude—you have to learn to be thankful for ***imperfect*** gifts. Imperfect moments. Anyone here who would say, "I'm ***glad*** I have a ***perfect*** body?"

Anyone here glad you **have** a body? It's **does** come in handy, doesn't it?

- 2 There's another dimension to gratitude that takes it to a whole other level. It's living with a soul—a heart—that's open to God. How many of you can hold your breath for a minute? A day? A year? 10 years? Sometimes people open their hearts to the Spirit of God—once in a lifetime and thing, "There! That ought to do me!"

-Several years ago I was running one day—and feeling really gross inside. I became conscious of breathing in and out—and remembered a song about how cooperating with the Spirit of God is like breathing. Breathing out the sadness, guilt, fear and other junk—and breathing in the ***Pneuma—Breath—Spirit of God***—His courage, His grace, His love. That realization was a transforming experience!

-See, there are things best described as ***gratitude killers***. Things like fear, resentment, jealousy, self-pre-occupation. This stuff has to be breathed out—to make room for gratitude. I'll prove it. Anyone here ever met a fearful, unforgiving, selfish person? Gratitude can't survive in a sea of garbage!

-One of the reasons we planned this celebration this morning is because we are inundated with bad news every single day. I was reading the October 13 edition of Time magazine—ironically, ***Thanksgiving*** edition. If I counted correctly, out of 30 news items—28 were negative—from the financial crisis to milk powder in China with melamine in it to a new TB plague in Indonesia.

-Our need for perspective is ***huge***. And for that perspective—you have to take the time to open your heart to the goodness and power of God, cause, see, if you don't—you'll lose your hope under the load of the 24/7 flow of bad news in a decaying world. And God will get very small.

4. To live a grateful life, there's something else you and I need to open. Our hands. See, we can read Psalms of gratitude and sing songs of gratitude—and that's really, ***really*** good—but not enough. But we have to ***engage!*** Personally. God pours good things into our lives and hearts; we open our eyes; we ***see***—and then we open our ***hands***. God uses ***our*** hands to express his goodness in the world.

-I heard something recently that I haven't been able to get out of my mind. It's the fact that most of the 6.5 billion people in our world will ***never*** realize that God is good. They have ***no*** idea that God sent His Son to bring life and hope and all the power of Heaven to people.

When life is just **hard** every day, filled with need, work, hunger and death—as you saw in a number of ways this morning--how does a person without no perspective on God look to the sky and say, “There must be a really good God up there who **loves** me!”

-Jesus said: **You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:14-16 NLT).**

The overflow of **our** gratitude and thanksgiving is what makes God's goodness obvious in a dark world.

-Know why the kids did the 72 hours thing? Why people volunteer to be a part of Hands Across the Nations? Why Judy and Cynthia dance at Participation House? Because this overflow of gratitude is one of the best feelings in the world. Some people call it a feeling of **significance**.

-Friends—please understand this—when blessing gets tanked up and stored up inside with no exit—it goes bad! Jesus lived with open hands—and died with them nailed open—his arms outstretched. And He's the leader!

5. Years ago I was driving home to PA after visiting in Toronto when I noticed that my fuel gauge was bouncing on E. I thought, “This is a VW Rabbit diesel—I can make it!” I didn't. And it's **raining!** Then this guy had mercy on my scrawny soul. He stopped, drove me for more diesel, and drove me back. I was diving into my pockets for something to pay him. He waved me off and said these unforgettable words, “Just look for someone else who needs help—and pass it on to them.”

\*We look at all that we've been given—and say **Wow!**

\*We look up to God, fall on our knees and say **Thanks!**

\*And God says, **Look for someone who needs help—and pass the gift on!** Open eyes. Open hearts. Open hands.