

Series: **THANKSGIVING** - October 9, 2011

WHY WE CAN'T JUST *BE* GRATEFUL

Psalm 107

Speaker: Ken Davis

1. How many of you, when you were a kid and didn't want to eat your supper had a Mom that said, "You should be **grateful** for that meal! There are starving children in...!" So. Were you more grateful for her lima bean and spam casserole? One Mom we knew served up zucchini casserole to her girls—and when the family was done giving thanks—her daughters eyes were still squinted shut. She said, "What are you doing?" Her daughter said, "I'm praying that God will turn it into macaroni and cheese!

-I **think** I've made an important discovery when it comes to gratitude: Guilt and shaming people for what they have doesn't work well—and it doesn't make us more grateful. But the **other** side of the pendulum—entitlement—"I deserve better than this!" is just plain obnoxious!

-Because I knew I was going to be speaking on Thanksgiving—I've done a **lot** of thinking about gratitude.

- a. How many of you would agree with this statement: **Gratitude is a beautiful, attractive quality!** It is. Most of us would rather be around a grateful person—than a whiner or complainer, right? And most of us feel good when the people in our lives are grateful for what we do.

-Now, here's the core question: **Is gratitude primarily a feeling that comes over you?** If it's a **feeling**—well, feelings are very unpredictable.

- b. So, here's the **second** question: **Is it hypocritical to show gratitude when you don't really feel it?** Should you express gratitude to your kids only when they hit all five things on your list? Should you express gratitude for a spouse who still hasn't adopted the **improvement plan** you spent so much time custom-designing just for them?
- c. Something else I've wondered about: **Is gratitude a personality thing?** I mean, it's pretty clear that some people are born happy-go-lucky—and others—well, they're more melancholic; moody—or as they might say, "Discerning!"
-I found something called **Dog Diary vs. Cat Diary**—that illustrates this pretty well.

The Dog's Diary:

8:00 am - Dog food! My favorite thing

9:40 am - A walk in the park! My favorite thing!

10:30 am - Got rubbed and petted! My favorite thing!

1:00 pm - Played in the yard! My favorite thing!

3:00 pm - Wagged my tail! My favorite thing!

5:00 pm - Dinner! My favorite thing!

7:00 pm - Got to play ball! My favorite thing!

8:00 pm - Watched TV with the people! My favorite thing!

The Cat's Diary

Day 983 of My Captivity

My captors continue to taunt me with bizarre little dangling objects. They dine lavishly on fresh meat, while the other inmates and I are fed hash or some sort of dry nuggets... The only thing that keeps me going is my dream of escape. In an attempt to disgust them, I once again vomit on the carpet.

2. Can I share some thoughts on gratitude with you this morning? First, I do some people, simply because of their personality, have to work harder at being grateful and showing gratitude. I'll leave it at that, okay?
 - a. What I **have** noticed is that people who have more, have healthier bodies and have more advantages in life are **not** usually more grateful than those who have less in terms of money, health and natural advantages. And younger people—with their slimmer waistlines and firmer skin—and **not** usually more grateful than people who need an overhaul to look younger!

-I **do** think that a culture like ours—a **culture of dissatisfaction**—that mainly reports bad news is tough on our gratitude quotient. And every single day the marketing industry plots new ways to **create** dissatisfaction with everything—from our cars to our cell phones to our weight and our breath. Some, I suppose, **should** be dissatisfied with their breath.
 - b. Now, in a world of pain and fear and sadness and desperate need—how can the Bible continually say things like Psalm 100 does:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation. (Psalm 100:4-5 NLT)

-How many of you would say that you wake up most morning with thoughts like these on your mind? Is God asking us to **fake** it when we don't **feel** it? Or--do you just let all your disappointment and pessimism hang out? "Well, yes, I know I'm sour and crabby—but I've got a crappy life—and I'm not going to be a hypocrite and fake it!"
 - c. I guess what I'm saying is that I think sometimes we feel **stuck! That may be precisely where you are this morning!** Now, if gratitude is spilling out of every pore in your life—that's great! We're happy for you. Just wait! My point is that life rarely travels in a straight line over the mountain tops. So, I want to talk about the times when life doesn't naturally fill your heart with gratitude.
3. The first thing is this: The Psalm of thanksgiving that I read is by **lots** of others that say, "God, **where are you?**" I feel abandoned!" And some say, "God, **do** something!"

Make his wife a widow—and his kids orphans!” ***Turn them into twitching grease spots with hair!***

-The Psalms, more than any other writings in the Bible, express this raw honesty about the ambivalence of life; about how sometimes it’s fantastic—and sometimes it’s hard and disillusioning. Anyone her ever feel ripped when the unjust fat cats in the world win the day—and godly people suffer? That’s what Psalms expresses—but, and here’s the difference—***that’s not where the story ends.***

a. A great example of that is Psalm 73. It’s ***magnificent!*** Listen to how it starts:

**Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
(Psalm 73:1-3 NIV)**

-The writer of this Psalm is goes on to talk about how he almost gave up on God when he saw arrogant fat cats prospering—and then people running to them for advice! He said, “I feel like *I* get punished every day!” And then—the turning point. Listen.

**When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.
(Psalm 73:16-18 NIV)**

-It was ***then*** that the author apologizes to God:

I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. (Psalm 73:22-23 NIV)

b. Does anyone know what process is called? ***Gaining Perspective!*** The loss of perspective sucks the joy and gratitude right out of life. And this is the most important thing you see here in this Psalm—and throughout the whole Bible.

Gratitude is a *choice* we have to make, not an emotion we wait for! See, if you just wait for the emotion to show up, it becomes something like, ***I will be grateful when...*** So, ***when?*** What would it take for ***me***, for ***you*** to actually ***feel*** grateful?

- Gratitude is ***too*** important—too ***attractive*** for God to leave it up to chance or DNA. And that’s why an early leader in the church can say to people going through a ***really*** tough time:

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV)

-See, God could **never** tell us that giving thanks in **all** of our circumstances is God's will for us **in** Christ Jesus—if it wasn't a choice **everyone** could make. Right?

-Getting back to the Psalms—David, who wrote most of them, became great in being faithful in—and overcoming some **horrible** circumstances. After he had lost everything for the **second** time and had 400 tough, discontented soldiers ready to stone him—listen to what the history book says:

...But David found strength in the Lord his God. (1 Samuel 30:6 NIV)

-How did he do that? Well, we can see the pattern in some of the Psalms he wrote. Take Psalm 42, for example. He starts out with all these raw emotions toward God. The first thing he says is, "**Why have You forgotten me?** Don't you see these massive threats I'm facing?" And **then** there's this turning point:

Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again - my Saviour and my God! (Psalm 42:11 NLT)

-It looks like this; Notice what's going on and be honest with God; look at your own heart--at **why** you feel lost, beaten down and discouraged; then **choose...** Choose to not put your hope in yourself—but in God as an act of faith in His love and power. **I will praise him again...!** Here's the deal; the choice is an act of **faith!**

4. I want you to think about your fitness—your muscle tone for a minute. Do we have any **exercise Nazis** here? **We goin' to pump you up!** How many of you **feel** like exercising—are really **excited** about exercising when you **know** you should? How many of you **CHOOSE** to do it anyway? Why? Because you know that if you let the muscles get out of shape—it feels even **worse**. Muscles, if they're not used regularly, whine and complain and rebel when you ask them to do something!
- I think, to put it crassly, we have a **gratitude muscle**. And you and I have to make a choice to exercise it. When we do—it grows stronger. And it changes your perspective on life—and brings hope. And then joy. It's like you find God's strength to face the tough stuff—and move through it to a point where you can honestly praise God again. Now, please understand—I am **not** saying, **FAKE IT TILL YOU FEEL IT!** I'm saying that we have to **choose** to be grateful.

-There's a key component that is **so** vital, **so** important—it runs like a thread through the entire Bible. Here's how David puts it in the Psalm of his we just read:

Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you... (Psalm 42:6 NLT)

-And that is many times the missing piece in our lives. Remembering. At all the strategic times in God's history with His people—you'll find the Spirit whispering: **Remember! Remember!**

There's one Psalm that is **very** specific about this—and I'd like to close with it. As we do—I want to encourage you to read your life into the four scenarios you'll see. Psalm 107 starts with these words:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies. (Psalm 107:1-3 NLT)

-You read that or hear it and you think, "Well **that's** pretty generic?" But it gets more specific and digs into some of the painful moments of our lives.

- a. **Some wandered in the wilderness, lost and homeless. Hungry and thirsty, they nearly died. "LORD, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he rescued them from their distress. He led them straight to safety, to a city where they could live. (Psalm 107:4-7 NLT)**

-Has anyone here ever found themselves in some kind of wilderness—not one with sagebrush and snakes—but a dry, awful place where you felt totally lost. Far from home? In **that** culture, everyone knew that the wilderness was a **nasty** place to be lost.

-The Bible in referring to us describes us as **sheep who've gone astray**.

That's not very flattering—cause, see, sheep are pretty stupid. Turn them loose in the wilderness—and they're like lawnmowers with hooves; they'll walk right over cliffs and right into thorn bushes—just searching for the next clump of grass. And David says, "The Lord is my Shepherd—**He's** the One who comes looking for me—and **restores** me when I've lost my way!

-Most of us have, at times, have felt lost—and **been** lost. Sometimes we're lost in a marriage—when we find out that the person we married no longer wants us. Sometimes we get fired—and suddenly we don't even know who we are anymore. When you're lost in some barren, awful place—what do you long for? Well, we **long** for home!

-You need to something this morning—if you are lost, there is a Good Shepherd out looking for you—and He wants you back! If you've been lost—and He's brought you back Home—well, remember. Remember what it was like to be lost—and what it was like to come home. And say **Thanks!** Make **sure** you say "Thanks!"

- b. There's a second scenario here. Some of you may be able to relate

Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom, imprisoned in iron chains of misery. They rebelled against the words of God, scorning the counsel of the Most High. That is why he broke them with hard labour; they fell, and no one was there to help them. "LORD, help!" they cried in their trouble,

and he saved them from their distress. He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; he snapped their chains. (Psalm 107:10-14 NLT)

-Most of us have never been in prison—but most of us know what it’s like to be **im-prisoned**. The bars and leg-irons are invisible—but they’re **very** real. We know about this, right? There are the obvious things that imprison us—steal our freedom and our lives—things like drugs, alcohol—sexual addiction.

Some things aren’t quite as obvious—like bitterness or greed—or anger.

-It’s interesting how it’s stated here; the we end up in prison because **scorn the counsel of the Most High**. In our language—we flip Him off—and what He says about how to love Him, how to treat others—and attitude issues like coveting, jealousy, and pride. No one ever thinks stuff like that is going to be a prison—but when we make this impulsive grab for it, the first bar is already in place.

-You need to know that if you’re locked into something that you have this love/hate relationships with—God has the power to cut bars of steel—**if** you want to be free! Big if, right?

-Most of us have watched Amanda Knox this past week—free when she thought she’d spend her life in prison! If you know what prison feels like—and **now** you know what freedom feels like—you need to say **Thanks** to the One who set you free. Remember what He’s done. **Just say Thanks! Remember!**

c. There’s a third scenario that is a little more difficult for us to admit:

Some were fools; they rebelled and suffered for their sins. They couldn’t stand the thought of food, and they were knocking on death’s door. “LORD, help!” they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them, snatching them from the door of death. (Psalm 107:17-20 NLT)

-Confession: Has anyone here ever done anything **really** stupid—and suffered for it? I think most of us, if we have enough life under our belts, would fit into that category.

The physical suffering that’s referred to here is not the normal medical condition; it’s the consequences of living a rough, rebellious life. Like a couple I once worked with who loved partying more than their three little children—and had them taken away.

That’s soul-sickness at it’s most heartwrenching level. Sometimes we **see** the destructiveness of our rebellion—and feel the consequences quickly; sometimes we don’t.

-But we serve a God who knows how to heal the worst kind of guilt and shame. He knows how to help us when we’re **sick** with worry over something stupid

we've done—or a bad example we've set. We rebel because we tell ourselves that we'll get away with it; that we're too smart to get caught—blah, blah, blah.

-The main thing to know is that when our world comes crashing down—when we have the courage to say, **Behold, I have played the fool!**—God has mercy. And there's *nothing* He can't heal—and *no one* He can't save. And if He's healed you—reached out to you way down at the end of some detour—it would be fitting for you to say, **Thanks!** Thanks for not giving me what I deserve—thanks for giving me the grace I *don't* deserve!

- d. There's one final category mentioned in this Psalm. Let's read it:

Some went off to sea in ships, plying the trade routes of the world...Their ships were tossed to the heavens and plunged again to the depths; the sailors cringed in terror.

They reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end. "LORD, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.

He calmed the storm to a whisper and stilled the waves. What a blessing was that stillness as he brought them safely into harbour! (Psalm 107:23, 26-30 NLT)

-Has anyone here ever been in a storm at sea? I once went mackerel fishing with my Dad in bad weather. At 90 foot trawler looks *really* big and safe at the dock. But when the waves are so high on either side that you can't see over them? When you're sick as a dog—staggering around—trying to keep your footing? Well, it was *bad*—and I was *sick!* When we *finally* got back to shore—I would've kissed the ground but I was still too sick!

-Life brings storms, doesn't it? Sometimes it's like the financial crash in 2008—that affects everyone. But sometimes they're very personal—and intense. They come in the form of phone calls, diagnoses—like you saw in the videos. Nothing prepares you for them.

-Has anyone here been through a storm? There is *nothing* like it when stops, is there? You realize one day, "The storm's over!" Storms come. God brings us through—and calms the storm. If you've been through a storm—***Remember what it felt like! Remember how peaceful the calm was after the storm. And...say Thanks to the ONLY one who can calm the sea!***

-What you see in *all* these scenarios is the God is watching *all the time*--no matter *what* mess we get ourselves in. And when we ask for help, God doesn't shame us, kick us around, or ignore us for a while. He's merciful--and His goal in all we go through is to bring us back to Himself where there's hope—and life. The phrase you hear again and again here is—***choose gratitude!***

Let them praise the LORD for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them. Let them exalt him publicly before the congregation and before the leaders of the nation. (Psalm 107:31-32 NLT)

5. In this whole thing of remembering—and choosing gratitude, there's something else we need to know. My life is built on a **Tell**. So is yours.

If you've ever read anything about archaeology, you know that most ancient cities are built on mounds—and **in** those mounds are **layer after layer** of the buildings and civilizations that have gone before. Life is a **tell**.

-I was having lunch the other day with a friend who was telling me about how his Grandfather and Father moved from China to Canada decades ago. They sacrificed—worked tough, low-paying jobs in laundries and restaurants so that he could have the education he has as a medical professional.

-Everything we have, friends, is built on the sacrifices of others. We have freedom—because **someone** fought for it. We have land here because **someone**—like my wife's ancestors—moved here, paid for it—and cleared it. We have our faith because **someone** sacrificed, maybe gave their life, to pass it on.

-I'm here because my parents sacrificed, Sunday School teachers put up with me, loved me—because professors—who were paid scandalously low wages—taught me and mentored me. I'm here because of the countless sacrifices Lori has made over the years to stand beside me. My life is built on **mound** of sacrifice. And so is **yours**. If I didn't have another thing to be grateful for—I have that, and I always will.

6. I look at life like this—and it's something I'm learning, but not quite there yet. Where we struggle is in the **everyday-ness** of everyday. Remember Forrest Gump? "Mama says, life is like a box-a chocolates; ya never know what ya gonna get." Maybe a better analogy would be the a Jack-in-the-Box. Turn the crank—you don't know what's gonna pop up! Or, the weather—especially this year. Thunderstorms. Rain. Snow. Wind. Hail. And in between it all—blue skies with clouds.

-Here's the question—will the everyday stuff of life determine your gratitude quotient? The Bible talks about this curious thing called **joy...the life of the ages** that is steady no matter what you're experiencing. Here's the way it works. If the quality of your day runs your gratitude—you will likely be a sad person—or at least unpredictable. This **life of the ages—joy—shalom—flourishing**—is like the sky **above** the clouds and nasty, unpredictable weather.

-**That's** why gratitude and joy is a **choice**; it doesn't have to depend on your feelings. Feelings come and go—based on how any given day is going. The **life** above that is our faith. Our hope. We're called to live close enough to the lives of others to care and engage in their trouble and their joy. But we are called to find the **core** of our life in the joy and flourishing of God's Presence. And **that's** where we make our choice. -It could be this morning that you're **loaded down by life**. And what you have right before your eyes is pain and need and grieving and anxiety. You can't carry all that and find peace. And **that** is why Paul, in the context of a book about joy, says these words:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT)

7. This morning—we're going to practice exactly what we've been talking about. We're going to **Remember**. 2000 years ago, Jesus made a sacrifice—it was His life.

He made that sacrifice so **we** could have life.

-His sacrifice, represented by this cross, is going to be our **Wall of Thanks**. Maybe you need to thank him for finding you in the wilderness and bringing you home. Maybe you need to write out your thanks for freeing you from some prison. Maybe you need to write out your thanks for bringing you back from disastrous detour you were on. Maybe you need to thank Him for helping you through a recent storm. Or maybe you will want to thank Him for all the sacrifices others have made—that your life is build on.

-If you're too broken and hurt and overwhelmed to do that—then maybe you need to bring him your need, put it on the cross—**thank** Him for how He'll deal with it—and find the peace that He offers.