

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, October 13, 2019

Rev. John Tapscott

“GIVING THANKS IS GOOD FOR YOU”

Philippians 4:6,7

A few years ago Citibank in the U.S. ran television commercials to say “thank you” to its customers. One commercial showed two women in a grocery store. One woman put her hand on the other’s stomach and asked when her baby was due. The woman looks at her and says, “I’m not pregnant.” Oops. The first woman, not knowing what to do, says simply “Thank you.” With this simple reply the offended woman forgets the insulting words about her supposed pregnancy and the two women embrace. Along the bottom of the screen, the caption reads, “It’s amazing what a simple ‘thank you’ can do.”

Then there was the doctor who prescribed for certain patients what he called his “thank-you cure.” When someone came to him discouraged, pessimistic, and full of woes, but without any symptoms of serious ailment, he would give this advice: “For six weeks I want you to say ‘Thank you’ whenever anyone does you a favor, and to show you mean it, smile as you say it. ” “But no one ever does me a favor, ” the patient might complain. Using Jesus’ words, the wise old doctor would reply: “Seek and you will find.” Six weeks later, more often than not, the patient would return with a new outlook, set free from a sense of grievance, and convinced that people had suddenly become more kind and friendly.

Yes, giving thanks is good for you. From the Scriptures today I want to show a specific example of this principle. In Philippians 4, verses 6 & 7 Paul writes, “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Notice the important place of thanksgiving in these verses. Paul told the Philippians not to be anxious about anything. “But if you are anxious about anything,” he says, “take it to God in prayer. Be specific about whatever is causing your anxiety. Name it before God as you pray. And do so with thanksgiving.” Why thanksgiving? I believe it’s because praying with gratitude focuses our minds on God’s faithfulness. And God’s faithfulness overcomes our anxiety.

Anxiety marks human life to a large degree. Now not all anxiety is bad. Legitimate concern over an important matter is good. It is very frustrating to work or interact with someone who shows no anxiety or concern, but has the attitude of “whatever, whenever.” It’s good when legitimate anxiety moves us into action. If we have a real concern about some situation, taking steps to deal with it often overcomes or lowers our anxiety level.

But sometimes anxiety can be quite debilitating. It is more than just worry, though worry is part of it. "Don't worry," someone may say. I've said it to people, rather smugly perhaps. Then I go home and worry about something to the point of not being able to sleep at night. But anxiety goes beyond worrying. Anxiety is a combination of worry and fear which causes us great distress. It destroys our peace of mind. Rather than moving us into action it seizes us up. Psychologists tell us that anxiety is often subconscious, attacking us in our sleep or in quiet moments and causing nightmares. Now sometimes there are medical issues behind anxiety. But it can also be a symptom of living in this culture, in which the family unit has been weakened and peoples' awareness of God and connection with church has largely been severed. We can be anxious about the past, the future, and our present situation. Anxiety really is a sign of our human brokenness. There is a deep spiritual dimension to it.

Many books have been written and many lectures delivered offering ways to overcome anxiety. Sometimes people deal with anxiety by taking prescription drugs. There is nothing wrong with that if they are really needed. Though the taking of drugs to deal with anxiety can produce anxiety of its own kind. Anxiety is a fierce enemy, very hard to conquer. Adler the psychologist wrote "Anxiety is an extraordinarily widespread trait. It accompanies an individual from earliest childhood to old age. It embitters life to a marked degree, keeping us from human contacts, and destroying one's hopes of building up a peaceful life or making fruitful contributions to the world. Fear can touch every human activity. One can be afraid of the outer world, or of the world within oneself."

Now the apostle Paul didn't know about the psychology of anxiety. But he knew that anxiety is not God's will for his people. And he knew that there were anxieties in the Philippian congregation. Perhaps there was anxiety because outside enemies were attacking the new Christian faith and the church. Perhaps there was anxiety that a fight between two people in the church would grow and cause a church split. Maybe some people were anxious because of illness or other personal concerns. Who knows what all the worries and anxieties were? But Paul didn't want the Philippians or anyone else to suffer from anxiety. And he knew that every spiritual issue has a spiritual solution, a solution which comes from God. So he gave a spiritual prescription for anxiety which as I said, has thanksgiving right at the center of it. "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

Now again, notice the order. When you find yourself becoming anxious about a situation, go to God in prayer. That doesn't mean ignoring human forms of help - friends, doctors, counsellors and so on, but certainly God has to be one of the sources of help, in fact, the prime source. "I lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth."

A man tells a very simple story about his daughter, Carlene, who was four years old. One day he heard her crying in the back yard and went out to see what had happened. From Carlene's perspective tragedy had struck! A wheel had come off her wagon. No longer could she take her dolls or the family's pet rabbit for a ride. No longer could she put the dog Cinders in the wagon and give him a ride for two feet before he jumped off. No longer could she give her sister Cheri a

ride down the hills around the house. Her life had been turned upside down and she was terribly upset. The thing she had not considered was the genius of her father! He took the broken wagon in hand. Soon he saw that the pin which held the wheel on the axle had fallen out. So he slipped the nail into the hole and bent it with pliers so that it would stay in place. Lo and behold, the world was back together for his daughter. She had been dwelling too much on the problem and not enough on the ability of her wise and loving father. Quite often our problem in life is similar. We dwell too much on the wheel that has come off the wagon and not enough on the wisdom and ability of our Heavenly Father.

So the first step in dealing with anxiety is by going to our Heavenly Father in prayer. Then name the situation that is causing you to become anxious and fearful. That's what supplication means – "praying in detail." Now God already knows about it, but it is always good to verbalize and name the issue before God. It means you're not running from the problem, but facing it.

Paul says next, "Let your requests be made known with thanksgiving." Why is praying with thanksgiving so important? It's because thanksgiving brings to mind God's faithfulness. It reminds us how God has helped us and helped you in the past, graciously, far beyond what any of us has earned or deserved. Giving thanks reminds us how God's loving kindness has met us at every unknown corner of our lives. It reminds us of how God keeps his promises. It reminds us that God promised to give the world a Saviour to meet our deepest need, and so he has, his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, who became flesh, who lived among us in complete obedience to the Father's will, who himself suffered terrible fear and anxiety in Gethsemane, and went to God in prayer, prayer that was answered as God sent Jesus a strengthening angel, this Jesus, who then rose up with great courage and went forth and laid down his life for our sins on the cross, who rose triumphantly from the dead, who ascended to the right hand of the Father, who will come again to judge the living and the dead and take his redeemed people home.

Giving thanks to God as you pray about your issue reminds you of the God who watches over you, the God in whose care you rest now and for eternity, the Heavenly Father whose love is from everlasting to everlasting. Praying to God with thanksgiving reminds us of his presence with us now by the power of the Holy Spirit. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore, we will not fear." Praying with thanksgiving brings us in touch with God and his faithfulness.

When you purchase certain investments there is a disclaimer, "Past performance does not guarantee future results." That may be so for investments but it's not true for God. God is unchanging. His name and his character are irreproachable. And just as he has brought you through past challenges and trials, he will do so now and in the future. Giving thanks in prayer and in worship brings to mind God's faithfulness. And God's faithfulness overcomes our anxiety.

Paul tells us the result of praying with thanksgiving, "And the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." As we worship today on Thanksgiving Sunday, your anxieties are being replaced by the divine peace which stands as a guard around your heart and mind. Anxiety throws arrows at you but they deflected away by God's protecting peace. God himself guards you and keeps you in Christ Jesus.

“Great is thy faithfulness,” says the Bible of God. Now I hope in some ways that I have been faithful to God’s calling on my life. Perhaps I might hear these words as I enter God’s heaven on the last day through the blood of Jesus, who is my hope and my Saviour. “Well done, good and faithful servant.” But if and when I hear those words, it’s only because of God’s far greater faithfulness to me. My faithfulness has imperfect. But his faithfulness to me has been impeccable. God has been faithful to me, even when, especially when, I have been unfaithful. And for that I give him praise and thanks. Scripture tells us “even if we are unfaithful, he remains faithful,” because that is God’s character. And as I pray with thanksgiving and think of God’s faithfulness I really feel my anxieties melting away and being replaced by divine peace.

Yes, giving thanks is good for you. So try this prescription for six weeks and see if it doesn’t make a big difference to your outlook. Just see if your burdens don’t feel lighter and less onerous. Expect some solutions to pop into your mind you hadn’t thought of. Look for doors opening. “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” God’s faithfulness overcomes our anxiety.

And let us together on this Thanksgiving Sunday, “Give thanks to him and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”