

**Introduction:**

- Acts 16:22-25
- Mark Batterson writes: “This week I read about a fascinating research study done by Vicki Medvec, a professor at Northwestern University. She studied Olympic medalists and she discovered that Bronze medalists were happier than Silver medalists. Here’s why. Medvec found that Silver medalists tended to focus on how close they came to winning gold so they weren’t satisfied with silver. Bronze medalists tended to focus on how close they came to not winning a medal at all so they were just happy to be on the medal stand at all. I think that study reveals a fascinating facet of human nature: your focus determines your reality. How we feel isn’t determined by objective circumstances. If that was the case, Silver Medalists would be happier than Bronze medalists because they had an objectively better result. But how we feel isn’t determined by our objective circumstances. How we feel is determined by our subjective focus.”
- Here’s another way of saying it: your internal attitudes are more important than your external circumstances.
- John Milton said it best: “The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make a Heaven out of Hell, or a Hell of Heaven.” I want to talk with us this morning about Creating or preparing your heart for a life of thanksgiving and not just an event.

**I. God Must Be Your Source**

- A. We have to become like Job in Job 13:15 *“Though He slay me yet will I trust Him.”* We have to adopt the view that our lives are either in His hands or not. When our lives are in His hands He becomes our source. Think about the historical roots of our own Thanksgiving:
1. 1620 Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock. Before winter is finished over half of them died. They receive ‘divine’ help and by next fall they are experiencing a bountiful harvest. “As Pilgrim Edward Winslow (later to become the Governor) affirmed, “God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn”; “by the goodness of God, we are...far from want.”<sup>1</sup>
  2. This became an annual practice. Then the first Continental Congress set at date each year to give thanks to God. Most of the Founding Father’s have written and made proclamations of Thanksgiving to God for His provision and protection.
  3. Abraham Lincoln was born again at Gettysburg and that fall choosing the last Tuesday of November declared the National Holiday of Thanksgiving. Presidents for the next 75 years followed that tradition until 1941 When Congress declared it a national thanksgiving holiday. Pilgrims, First Congress, Lincoln, all acknowledged God as their source in the midst of most trying circumstances.
- B. The Hebrew Word often translated ‘Thanksgiving’ in our English OT is (yada).
1. First, it emphasizes “recognition” and “declaration” of a fact. In this case, it’s about God.
  2. Second, this verb was predominately employed to express one’s public proclamation or declaration (confession) of God’s attributes and his works. This concept is at the heart of the meaning of praise. Praise is a confession or declaration of who God is and what he does.” - Theological Wordbook of OT.
  3. “Thanksgiving follows praise, for when one declares God’s attributes and works, he cannot help but be thankful for these. Praise leads regularly to thanksgiving.” Theological Wordbook of OT.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mourt's Relation or Journal of the Plantation at Plymouth*, Henry Martyn Dexter, editor (Boston: Jim Kimball Wiggins, 1865; reprint of 1622 original), p. 133. See also William S. Russell, *Guide to Plymouth and Recollections of the Pilgrims* (Boston: George Coolidge, 1846), p. 95, quoting from a letter of Pilgrim Edward Winslow to George Morton of London, written on December 21, 1621.

Take note of this: most often in the OT, especially the songs and poetry books you will find Praise of who God is preceding thanksgiving about what He has done. Ie. Ps 105, 106, 145. Song of David. Song of Moses.

- C. When God becomes our source, all things become possible, peace is so great it's almost unimaginable, and the worse thing that could happen is death and that just leads to Life! So what do we have to do to develop a heart of Thanksgiving? One, recognize God as our source and be grateful. Two, we have to ...

## II. You Must Change Focus

- A. We tend to see what we're looking for. I think there are two basic types of people in the world: complainers and worshippers. Complainers can always find something to complain about. Worshippers can always find something to praise God about.
- B. Notice that Paul and Silas are praying and singing. Praying tells me that they see God as their source.
1. Develop the scriptural setting. It is not a good day for Paul and Silas unless you are keeping score by the number of lashes or fists you take.
  2. How could they possibly be praying and singing? They knew God was their source! They saw their pain in light of Christ's mission not their own comfort. Their beating did not change who He was...so sing! Thanksgiving follows declaration of praise in who He is!
  3. There are four focuses to begin changing if you want to be one who lives a life of Thanksgiving.
- C. One, focus on who He is and what you are becoming in Christ. Look up, think up, grow up. If He is our source then every negative circumstance we encounter is an opportunity to become more like Him. Ie. Victims are never praisers because they are focused on themselves. To get out of the victim mentality and stop asking God "why?" we must start asking "How am I to see you in the midst of this pain/trial/circumstance?" So the first focus we must change is God as our source not ourselves.
- D. Two, Change your focus from what you do not have to what you do have.
1. Can I help you for a moment regarding this holiday of Thanksgiving? Companies pay big dollars to create need in your life. They are called advertisers. Advertisers make eskimos by ice and desert dwellers by heaters. It is what they do. Don't fall for it. Ie. Black Friday is only successful if you go into the red. Don't fall for it! Pay cash so you feel the pain of spending as you go.
  2. Complainers are more focused on what they do not have rather than on what they do have. Paul and Silas focused on what they did have...God and a captive audience to hear the Gospel.
- E. Three, Focus more on being a blessing than on being blessed.
1. People who are always concerned about getting will have a hard time being thankful. Ie. Oprah in 2004 gave everyone in her audience a new, (Pontiac...) Those people were all happy until they discovered. This \$28,000 dollar car put them in a new tax bracket, cost them the local tax, cost them their state tax, and made their insurance higher.
  2. And we are entering a season of giving and getting, which one will rule in your heart. Giving is always a great joy! Being a blessing is a great joy.
  3. In order for there to be meaning and direction in your life, your life needs to be used by God. Only when you invest your life in the lives of other people do you find purpose. It was what Paul and Silas were doing in Philippi...investing in others. Giving themselves away so that others might experience God's amazing grace.
  4. There is no fulfillment in self-centered living. We find life by giving ours away. Jesus put it like this: "*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*" Mt 10:39 IF you want to be great serve! Ie. Kids it is a great time of year to serve by washing

dishes or sharing in clearing the table. Ie. You can go with Ismael and Sharon to the nursing homes on Sunday afternoons.

- E. Four, Change your focus from being earthly to eternal.
1. To much of our life gets lived for this life and not for eternity.
  2. We ourselves often don't realize how blessed we are, or how thankful we ought to be, until what we have is threatened to be taken away. Ie. I talked with a man this week who said, "I'm not going to lose my family 'over this.' I don't want to be on my death bed with regrets." That shows me a man who is living with values in his life and beginning to see this life with an eternal perspective.
  3. Hebrews 11:13,16 speaks of those living with eternity in mind, who walked in faith and did not obtain the promise. But they did not stop. They kept going in spite of obstacles because they had eternity in mind.
  4. How would your life change if you had more of eternity in mind?
  5. This is why the Bible can say,
    - a) *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things"* (Philippians 4:6-8).
    - b) When we have the hope of eternity in our hearts, we understand why the Bible says to: *"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:19-20). Paul and Silas were doing this while in prison.
    - c) And again: *"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19)

### III. Thanksgiving Will Be Your Fruit

- A. Thanksgiving happens when we see God as our source and we change the focus of our lives from being about us to being about others and what we are becoming in Christ.
- B. Worship is the way we stay positive in negative circumstances. No matter how bad things get, as a follower of Christ, we have eternity in heaven to look forward to! Our pain is real. But so is heaven. The good news is that this reality is temporary. That reality lasts forever!
- C. Napoleon Hill said, "Every negative event contains within it the seed of an equal or greater benefit." By changing our focus to look for God or look 'at God', we open the door for Thanksgiving (acknowledging God as our source)
- D. *"Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name."* (Psalm 100:4, NLT)

### Conclusion:

- God is worthy of all our praise! Let's remind ourselves to be thankful, daily. This is a message dedicated to a lifestyle of praise and thanksgiving not just a day of it.
- Invitation to receive Christ.