



We set the last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn, and sowed some six acres of barley and peas, and according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings or rather shads, which we have in great abundance, and take with great ease at our doors. Our corn did prove well, and God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn, and our barley indifferent good, but our peas not worth the gathering, for we feared they were too late sown, they came up very well, and blossomed, but the sun parched them in the blossom; our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a more special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the company almost a week, at which time amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain, and others. And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.¹

This is a letter from Edward Winslow, dated December 11, 1621. Winslow was one of 53 Puritans who survived the first winter at Plymouth that claimed half of their original company,² From our Christian History we know that Winslow's mention of God protection and faithfulness was not mere formality. He really meant it. I was pretty disgusted this week when a host on public radio was doing his best to link the Christian commitment of these Puritans with evil fanaticism of ISIS. Shame on them.

But can you truly be thankful when this same God allowed 50 people to die in a span of only six months? Can thankfulness be genuine when your own dear wife was buried on the hill behind you, as Winslow's wife was?³ That first Thanksgiving was a celebration of their first harvest. But it was not a pagan harvest celebration. It was done in praise to the Lord who had brought them to the New World.

I have never done a strictly Thanksgiving message before. But this will not be about turkey and pumpkin pie or funny men in tall black hats. This Thanksgiving message will be the same as the first one in 1621—to find more and more reason to celebrate true, daily thankfulness to the one who gives all things.

1. All thanks giving is derivative of God's character and gifts.

What I mean is that any time anyone give thanks for anything, you can always trace it back to God's character—his very being and/or his gifts—gifts such as creation and salvation. So even if an unbeliever is thankful for something like his or her family, without even being aware of it, they are giving thanks for what God has given them. Even if they never acknowledge God, you and I know the source of all goodness. Each time you enjoy a crisp, Fall day or a hike through the woods in summer; when you bag a 10 point buck or even a small doe; each of these gifts come from God's creation. They are part of who God is and what he has done for us.

And of course, the greatest gift is the gift of salvation.

Give thanks to the LORD of hosts,
for the LORD is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!' (Jeremiah 33:11)

The enduring, sacrificial love of God is infinitely greater than any other gift you could receive. But salvation is not merely a gift, is it? It's not a thing. Salvation is a person. Our inheritance is not eternal life per se, but eternal life with Jesus.

And this gift is not only the best of all gifts, it is a wholly sufficient gift. What I mean is that if Jesus is all you had, then he would be sufficient. You don't need Jesus plus anything else. He is our sufficiency. Now obviously in order to survive you do need basic life sustaining things. But if even all of that was stripped away, Jesus would be sufficient.

2. All complaining is sin.

This is true both Biblically and logically. It is true Biblically because God says it is wrong.

How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me (Numbers 14:27).

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door (James 5:9).

But it's also true logically. If all thankfulness is driven by and flows out of God's character and gifts, then all complaining is against God's character and gifts. When we complain about

something or someone that God has given us, then we are questioning his goodness and wisdom. I will bring up Dave Hart's teaching again here. All circumstances and all people are called what? They are triggers. Are triggers given for our good or for our punishment? These triggers which have the potential to set us off are ultimately for our good. They are meant to reveal the parts of our life where we are resisting the Lord's sanctifying work. So who and what are your triggers? When we complain about and of them, we are questioning God's provision for us. We are telling God that he made a mistake. Can you get through one day without a single complaint? Do you think you could do it? We really ought to be more convicted about our grumbling. Even a long sigh can be a type of complaint.

Now I am not making light of real suffering and sorrows in life. Creation itself groans in eager expectation of Christ's return so we should be allowed to have similar kinds of groans. No matter how old you are, each of our bodies are breaking down and often causes literal groans. So not all groaning is the same as grumbling but I would hazard a guess that most is. I think we tend to view grumbling like anger. We know it theoretically possible to be angry and yet not sin, so we tend to think that our anger is a righteous anger. I think we also tend to believe that most of our grumbling is a righteous grumbling. Rather than try to justify our complaining, why don't we ask God about it? The next time grumbling rolls off your tongue why not say, "What would you say, Lord—is this a righteous grumbling or not? Are you giving a long sigh because you are weary from well doing or because you hate your present circumstances?"

3. Thanksgiving, gratitude and contentment are all the same.

We use the word thanksgiving and thankfulness all of the time but when you dig deep and pull back the covers on thanksgiving, what's underneath is contentment. Contentment is a deep and quiet thankfulness. Paul has powerful words on the subject.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want (Phil 4:12).

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

If you are content, you will not complain. And you know that the reverse is true. If you complain, you cannot be content. Contentment is deep and quiet thankfulness. And Paul said it's a secret but it's a secret which can be learned. The secret is simply not being dependent upon your outward circumstances but being satisfied with Christ alone. But this applies not only to not having enough but have more than enough. It is often more difficult to be content when we have more than enough because we realize that we are still not satisfied. If I have more than enough, it is Christ who is my sufficiency, not those things. And if I don't have what I think I need, then it is Christ who is my sufficiency, not those things which I do not have.

4. Nothing is outside of thanksgiving.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:4). This principle is a good partner to the last one. When you learn of

Paul's secret of being content, you might begin to think that you should have less things than you have right now.

Francis Chan was convicted that he had too much. He and his wife decided that their house was too large so they sold it and bought a smaller one. He was worried about the money he was making from the success of his book, *Crazy Love*, so he gave away 100% of the royalties from the book.⁴ He did not want to be controlled by any of these things, whether they be fame or money. We can all be controlled by things. This is the essence of materialism, but does this mean that a wealthy person cannot be content? Proverbs 30:8 says give me neither poverty nor riches for he knows that both are difficult. Jesus said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven. We don't have to live like Francis Chan but we do have to seek contentment and be thankful for all things. Everything our Father gives to us is good and is to be received with thankfulness.

5. Giving thanks is a habit and a lifestyle.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17).

You start to see how the whole Bible's teaching on thankfulness fits together so perfectly. Not only can we *receive* everything from the Father in thankfulness but we can *do* all things with thankfulness. But obviously this does not mean every possible action that can be done. We can't rob banks in the name of the Lord Jesus with thankfulness, right? But can we go deer hunting in the name of the Lord Jesus with thankfulness? Absolutely. We can enjoy all manner of activities and do all kinds of service in the name of Jesus with thankfulness.

Thankfulness is meant to be like James 4:15. "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." To say, "Lord willing" is not just something you say occasionally, it is something you believe at all times. Nothing happens unless the Lord wills it to be so and we would do well to live and think like that is true. Lord willing, then is a lifestyle and a habit. In the same way, thankfulness is supposed to be a lifestyle and a habit; something of which we are continually conscious of and daily practicing.

6. Grace PRODUCES thanksgiving.

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:11).

Now this verse has to do with generosity and giving but the larger context in chapter eight shows that generosity stems from grace.

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-2).

Did you catch why the Macedonians were generous? They were generous because of "the grace that God had given" to them. So God's grace allows you to be generous and the generosity produces thanksgiving to God. Therefore, God's grace produces thanksgiving.

But that is true not just from our generosity but especially from saving grace. There is no getting around the fact that your entire Christian life is driven by your gratitude toward God's saving grace. If I gave you a thousand dollars, you'd be shocked and very thankful. If I gave you a hundred thousand dollars, you may not thank me every day, but you would not forget it for the rest of your life. But if I pulled you from a burning building and then gave you a hundred million dollars, your gratitude would know no end.

That's an absurd illustration but you get the point. Our gratitude grows in proportion to the gift. If you are not very thankful, then you have failed to realize the gift of salvation. Were you completely dead in your trespasses and sins or were you merely in need of someone to make you better? Were you living in the kingdom of darkness, following after the prince of the power of the air or did you just need some self-improvement classes? If we understand salvation as the Bible teaches it, gratitude ought to be pouring out of our hearts and lives every day. That kind of saving grace produces thanksgiving, and if it's not there, something is wrong.

7. Giving thanks kills anxiety.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6).

I was mean to Amanda Kappel when we met with them this week. Karen asked her to describe her greatest fear when she thought about the possibility of uprooting her young family and moving to Viroqua. And I quickly added, "Yes, and as you answer that question, remember that anxiety is a sin." That's a nice way to help people open up their feelings, don't you think?

We will have fears and anxiety at times. It is inevitable, but it's what you do with your anxiety that matters. You can water it and feed it and help it grow into something much bigger or you can decide to kill it with gratitude.

Even secular science has proven this to be true. Several research studies have shown the anxiety killing effect of regular thankfulness.

Gratitude can have such a powerful impact on your life because it engages your brain in a virtuous cycle. Your brain only has so much power to focus its attention. It cannot easily focus on both positive and negative stimuli. It is like a small child: easily distracted. Oh your tummy hurts? Here's a lollipop. So you lost your job? Isn't it wonderful we're having KFC for dinner? On top of that your brain loves to fall for the confirmation bias, that is it looks for things that prove what it already believes to be true. And the dopamine reinforces that as well. So once you start seeing things to be grateful for, your brain starts looking for more things to be grateful for. That's how the virtuous cycle gets created.⁵

These secular psychologists have unknowingly tapped into some Biblical truths. They are talking about changing your thinking which in turn changes the way you feel. There is a Christian heresy called the word-faith movement. They teach that your words have the power to create reality. This is absolute absurd heresy and not at all what I am talking about. All of these truths about thankfulness and contentment can change the way we think. We are not creating our own reality but just agreeing with God's reality. And as your thinking changes and aligns itself with

Scripture, you will eventually begin to feel differently. You will not feel forced to be thankful, you will want to be thankful.

I have never been one to follow secular psychology but this is one time when it completely agrees with the Word of God.

8. Giving thanks is God's will.

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

If this all that the Bible said about giving thanks it ought to be enough. We should give thanks because God said so. But that doesn't always go over so well, does it, because it feels like we are being forced to be thankful. It's a bit like telling your kids to be thankful for something they may not even like. "Hey kids, grandma just brought over some asparagus and artichokes. What do you say to Grandma?" (Unwillingly) "Thanks, Grandma."

We should want to give thanks. It should not be something that is forced upon us. And that's exactly why we need to make a habit of it; why we need to contemplate the reasons for our gratitude and allow that to actually change the way you feel. You may not be thankful for asparagus and artichokes, but you can be thankful that your grandma wants you to eat healthy food. If we are always looking at our negative circumstances, we will never actually feel thankful.

9. Worship is impossible without thanksgiving.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

(Psalm 100:4)

All worship in the Bible is a type of thanksgiving. The Psalms are continually extolling the character and gifts of God. They praise God for who he is and they praise him for what he has done. I don't care how many times you sing "Give thanks with a grateful heart" if your attitude stinks, if your heart is ungrateful, if your mouth utters complaints, then you are doing the very opposite of worship.

10. Giving thanks is evangelistic.

*Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!* (1 Chronicles 16:8)

Our attitude may be one of the greatest detriments to our evangelism. We need to remember that we witness to unbelievers every day of our lives. "No I don't," you say. In fact, I haven't witnessed to anyone in several years. If you never witness with your words you do witness every day with your actions. Most of us are not horrible gossips and we don't steal from our employer, but we do carry an attitude with us at all times, and that can speak more loudly than your words.

As this Scripture states, giving thanks is worship but our worship is intended to overflow to the nations who do not know the Lord. People who spend lots of time with you know your gratitude level.

Now in all of this talk of thankfulness I am not suggesting that you just fake a friendly smile and pretend everything is OK. Christians tend to be fake enough as it is without some preacher saying fake until you make it. I am talking about the Scriptures regularly changing the way you think about your circumstances. You feel a certain way because you think a certain way and you think a certain way because you are allowing something other than the Word of God to shape your thinking. May God shape our hearts and minds into a shower of daily thankfulness.

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¹ <http://mayflowerhistory.com/letter-winslow-1621/>

² 5 died at sea during the voyage and 45 died the first winter.

³ <http://mayflowerhistory.com/winslow-edwar/>

⁴ <http://christianity.about.com/od/christiancelebrities/a/JZ-Francis-Chan.htm>

⁵ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/prefrontal-nudity/201211/the-grateful-brain>