

Thanksgiving is the posture of covenantal faithfulness. 2x

Sometimes the best way to learn what something means is to clarify what it doesn't mean. And today, that is the role 1 Corinthians 10: 1-16 plays for us. The verses Alex just read from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth define the very antithesis of covenantal faithfulness, namely, idolatry.

The early church in Israel had a covenantal tradition in which thanksgiving and praise were known as the posture of a people blessed by divine grace. They were the one's blessed by God's divine grace and therefore, they needed to obtain a posture, a way of living, an attitude and demeanor, about them of thanksgiving and praise to God. For, to neglect thankfulness to God was to forget God's benefits. And to forget God's benefits would be to fall prey to idolatry, the antithesis of covenantal faithfulness.

Perhaps one of God's most identifiable covenants with God's people are the 10 commandments and God could not have been clearer from the beginning. God said, **“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God... showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”** (Exodus 20:3-6)

No other gods. No idols. No bowing down to anyone or worshipping anyone or anything else. Instead, thanksgiving to God. Instead, praise to God. Instead, worship God. In the morning, noontime, and when the sun goes down. In the past, in the present, and into the future. Thanksgiving defines the covenant community as God-centered. Thanksgiving is the posture of covenantal faithfulness.

Psalm 136 echoes out, **“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever.”** The entire psalm reads as a resumé of sorts of all of the great things God has done from creation on. God's never-ending, consistent, “steadfast love” lasts forever. Always. Without limitations.

In preparation and inspiration for the Thanksgiving holiday in 2022, writer Brian Flewelling offers this reflection to Psalm 136:1, **“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good1 His love endures forever.”**

“The practice of giving thanks in all things—which is what the Bible teaches in verses none clearer than 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, **“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”** — is being lost and may be one of the most underrated spiritual habits in our generation. It’s been said, “if we really understood our faith we’d pray less and thank more.” We do not need to beg God for something he has already freely given us. Developing thankful dependence upon God is the perfect posture for anxious and ambitious creatures like us to learn to live in humility and trust.”

I want to invite you to take a moment now and think about your day from the moment you woke up this morning. If you were to take a piece of paper and write down everything from the beginning until now for which you are grateful, what would the list include? Perhaps you woke up after not sleeping well. But you did wake up, and you have an assurance that “God’s mercies are new every morning.” Would it help you to know that the things on your list are not to be dependent on your feelings? I think this is really important to note. I need this reminder. Thanksgiving, or gratitude as we often call it, is a state of being, a choice, a practice.

After you woke up, maybe you said a little prayer of thanks to God and had a quiet time. Maybe, like any one of the hundreds of thousands of moms and dads, and maybe even grandparents, out there with kids in your home, you got up and the rush was on to get children breakfast, get them dressed, and get them to church. It may feel like an amusement park in your house- full of noise, maybe crying, sometimes weeping and gnashing of teeth- and then there are the children to deal with 😊 We laugh because it is real for us. The important thing to remember is that whether we are in the quiet or whether we are in the chaos, God is there, and God is the same, and our posture of thanksgiving can be there and the same as well.

When we hear the word posture, we likely think of sitting up straight, shoulders back, and not slouching. Yes, physical posture can be described this way. In a similar manner, the posture of our lives can be described this way as well. Thanksgiving as a posture is the readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness, both actions that embody being upright and of strong back. Our emphasis today is on embodying an attitude and heart of reverence and thanksgiving before God.

“Thanksgiving is more than just words, a seed or a song; it is a spiritual substance that proceeds out of the heart of a grateful believer, and it is a highly valued virtue in the realms of the spirit, commanding heavenly attention and support when activated. It is a way of thinking, feeling, being, and acting. One who has a posture of gratitude sees all of life as full of God’s good gifts. A person with this posture pays attention to how God showers us with blessings upon blessings. Spoken thanks to God flows naturally from such a posture.”

Elisa Puliam writes in her blog “More to Be”:

*It's easy to become weary nowadays. We turn on the TV and within minutes we can easily spiral downward in fear and worry. The events of today can feel so very heavy; catapulting us into a posture of control. We grab on to everything and everyone around us, trying to hold on to a semblance of peace and control, leaving us tight fisted walking through our days.*

*I recently heard someone say that the first thing you should do when you're feeling angry or threatened is to release your tight fists — a posture we all go to in response to such feelings — open your hands and turn the palms of your hands towards the sky. This posture, they explained, eases tensions, fears, and anger. It puts us in a place of release.*

*As I have been pondering the events of our world lately, I've realized that I so quickly ball up my fists in fear. I grab a hold of anything I can in order to control my little world, because what is outside the walls of my life seems so ugly, so sinful, so evil at times. And it's not even like I can blame it solely outside of my home. My heart is too often a place where ugliness lingers all the more. My own heart is a breeding-ground for sin and selfishness; a truth I can't neglect to bear witness to as well.*

*I'm learning, in the midst of the ugliness and sin that hovers, that the key to unlocking this fear is to foster an environment of thanks. “Darkness cannot bring me down when my heart is exploding from a root of gratitude and praise.” My posture can't be one of control when I recognize that all good and perfect gifts are given from above.*

Take a moment now and look at the palms of your hands. Open them up and look at them. Ask God to take what is in your hands—those thoughts, that hurt, the anger, and resentment—those things that cause you to walk tight-fisted. Ask God to take it away and then ask God to show you all of the little things for which you can be thankful. The point here is that you look at every situation and see God's goodness in it and you express that thankfulness to God. We are to live a life of gratitude because the alternative is to live a life of Bah-humbug!

Oddly enough, so many people act as though they want to remain entangled by the hurt and the chains. We don't have to. God doesn't want us to. We can open our hands in humility and trust, we can open our hearts in thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is the posture of covenantal faithfulness.