

“I Will Give Thanks”

Psalm 138

It's the first Sunday in February and you may be suffering from the seasonal doldrums. You may not be interested in the Super Bowl because your team ended the season over a month ago with a 5 and 11 record. Or maybe just the cold and short days makes you unhappy.

In a book entitled “The How of Happiness,” Sonja the psychiatrist does a study of our culture in which she slices happiness up like a pie and says there are 3 major pieces to our being happy.

50% of our happiness comes from our DNA. We are Tigger or Eyore based more on Mom and Dad than anything else.

Surprisingly to me, she says only 10% of happiness comes from our life circumstances. A raise at work. The kid's good grades. Having a cute guy in the church youth group ask you out.

In her book, she studies newlyweds and lottery winners, finding that after life events spike their happiness, they provide little lasting change as people quickly return to their overall life temperament.

But Sonja says that still leaves 40% of the pie that we can manage through what she calls “happiness fostering habits.” She suggests 12 behaviors that promote happiness including forgiveness, avoiding social comparisons, nurturing deep relationships, taking care of your body, and practicing religion and spirituality.

Her number one happiness habit is being appreciative. Fostering an attitude of gratitude. Not just feeling but expressing thankfulness. Writing “thank you” notes. Thanking a family member or friend. Praying prayers of thanksgiving. Thanking the person who holds the door open or volunteers to drive or offers a cough drop.

People we intentionally thank also experience increased happiness. Expressing gratitude is like throwing a pebble into still water. It creates a ripple that affects everything around it. Sonja says to make your acts of thanksgiving planned, intentional, and habitual – not just random acts of kindness.

Giving thanks brings joy to the giver, but also radiates happiness to people around them. In the same way, Psalm 138 is a psalm of thanksgiving that begins in the first 3 verses with David’s personal thanksgiving; then in the next 3 verses a communal thanksgiving; and then the last 2 verses answer why God should be thanked.

David’s personal thanksgiving in verses 1-3 answer the question; “Who should I thank?” David explains – I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; ²I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. ³On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

David had much to be thankful for as do we. David was plucked from the obscurity of being the youngest son in a shepherding family to be anointed king by the prophet Samuel. God empowered David with courage to kill the Philistine giant with a sling shot and become

over the next years a military hero. David's life was continually spared as he ran from a jealous King Saul and his headhunters. David became a king with power and privilege and then undeserved grace when he abused his power and privilege by stealing another man's wife and putting her husband on the front lines where he was killed by an arrow.

I could go on and on with many stories about David, but it comes down to David having tons to thank God for, just as each of us has tons to thank God for. What are you thankful to God for? How can these first 3 verses of Psalm 138 be your thanksgiving to God?

Let's do a corporate pray of thanksgiving right now as we join together in saying out loud what we're thankful for . . .

Guinness beer advertises that "It's not just good; it's good for you!" The psalmist advertises that giving thanks is not just good; it's good for you!

I give thanks for the taxes I pay because it means I'm employed. I give thanks for clothes that fit a little to snugly because it means I have enough to eat. I give thanks for all the complaining I hear about the government because it means we have freedom of speech. I give thanks for my heating bill because it means I live in a warm home. I give thanks for my early morning alarm going off because it means I'm alive. I even give thanks for the crazy people I work with because they make each day different and interesting.

Personal thanksgiving in verses 1-3 transitions into communal thanksgiving in verses 4-6. David calls for corporate praise of God with these words . . .⁴All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. ⁵They shall sing of the

ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. ⁶For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

In her book “Contagious Joy,” Barbara Johnson writes: “So much of the time our prayers are only pleas for help. God welcomes those needy prayers, but just as any parent gets tired of hearing, ‘Please, please, please!’ so does God. And of course we know to thank God for all the blessings he has bestowed on us. He likes to hear our words of gratitude as well. But the thing most of us probably forget to do is simply to praise him – to say ‘Yea, God!’ now and then to cheer him on and let him know we admire him and respect him.”

“After all, God made us in his image, and since we like to hear praise, that must mean he does too! When’s the last time you prayed simply to praise God.”

We gather in this place three times every weekend and now on Wednesday evenings during Lent to corporately praise God – “to sing of the ways of the Lord, that great is the glory of the Lord.”

In verses 1-3 our personal thanksgiving. In verses 4-6 our communal thanksgiving. Finally in verse 7-8, why God should be thanked . . . ⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. ⁸The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Thank God he “does not abandon the works of his hands” which certainly includes our churches. Thank God he does not leave our churches over a lack of recognition or because our

focus is on some social issue or some disagreement rather than on him. Thank God he does not abandon us when our communal songs and liturgies encourage words of gratitude but our individual souls, hearts, minds, and attitudes are not thankful.

Thank God for his patience with David and his patience with each of us. David's life like ours was often a train wreck. He had moments of spiritual brilliance and other moments of spiritual disaster. But God kept using, molding, delivering, and listening to David and God keeps using, molding, delivering, and listening to us.

When you experience that kind of love and forgiveness in your own life, it changes you from the inside out. You join with David in knowing that even "though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe."

We are changed from the inside out when our worship liturgies, hymns of praise, and prayers radiate out of a heart of gratitude and thanksgiving that moves us out into the world this week with lives and behaviors and prayers of thanksgiving.

"I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart." When each of you gives thanks, the peace of God . . .

#879 - For the Beauty of the Earth - Sermon Hymn

#836 - Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee - Closing Hymn