

A THANKFUL JOURNEY IN HIM

THANKSGIVING EVE SERVICE – NOVEMBER 21, 2018

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The Lord has given us powerful Scriptures to guide our devotional time this Thanksgiving Eve. *"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18) *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful...And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."* (Colossians 3:15,17)

Every day of our lives is but one stepping stone on the thankful journey we get to take in Christ Jesus...

We have a beautiful Thanksgiving tradition that we share around our family dinner table. Each year, we hand out scriptures that point us to the Lord and focus on having hearts of thanksgiving. As we go around the table, each person reads their Scripture verse and then takes a moment of quiet reflection before sharing where they have seen God's blessing in their lives over the past year. I love how His Word allows the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts into a sense of gratitude. We realize that no matter what the circumstances of the year have brought our way – either blessing or battles – we each can be thankful for God's presence in our lives.

Our reading from 1 Chronicles this evening reminds of this simple faithful promise *"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."* (1 Chronicles 16:34) David goes on in this Psalm of thanksgiving to remind us to give praise to the Lord because giving glory to His holy name reminds us that His presence in our lives is everlasting. When we give God the glory, we can shift our minds away from the daily struggles, challenges, and shortcomings that are present in our journey and instead look to God's mercy, grace, and love for the hope in His promises – knowing that His plans will far exceed our anticipated possibilities.

For many of us, we may be facing trials and tribulations in our own lives or in the lives of family and close friends during this season of thanksgiving. Many in our congregation are directly connected to loved ones who lost all their belongings in the Camp Fire. Some may even be mourning the loss of someone close to them whose life was taken in the ravaging flames of the wildfires. Others are facing health battles either personally, within their families, or among those closest to them – battles that seem overwhelming at times. Some among us may be going through job transition or loss that has created a wave of uncertainty over what the future may hold.

In Psalm 138, we are reminded to give praise to the Lord because His love and faithfulness in never-ending. He is walking with us through the storms of life. He is giving us strength to persevere as He moves us into the steady waters so we can find rest and comfort in His presence and His promises. *“The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever— do not abandon the works of your hands.”* (Psalm 138:8)

We are God’s creation and as we go to him in prayer and praise, He gives us boldness and strength of heart to trust in Him in the midst of trying circumstances. As we turn to God for his guidance, his blessings, and his provision, we should also thank him for His answered prayers. How often do we ask God in our prayers for His gift of protection, strength, comfort, peace, patience, discernment, or love? Upon receiving His answered response to our prayers, do we return to him with hearts of gratitude and offer him a humble thank you or do we just move on with our lives failing to exalt and praise Him?

In Colossians 3, Paul reminds us that when we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, we can be thankful, we can be grateful. When we do or say everything in our lives in the name of Jesus, we can give thanks to God for the indwelled Holy Spirit that allows us to look beyond our circumstances to the hope and promise that can be found in Christ’s resurrection, bringing victory of life over the devastation of death. We are given new life in Christ to begin our lifelong journey of spiritual formation and growth.

Throughout this passage in Colossians, Paul gives us a roadmap to follow as one called by Christ to model Him. Paul shows us how to reflect Christ in all our actions and words. To begin our trek, we imitate Christ’s compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience as we live out our own lives and engage with others. As we continue ahead, we let love guide our hearts and minds and demonstrate a willingness to forgive others and move forward in a spirit of unity and peace. As we draw closer to Him, we share His love with others giving them hope in times of trouble and rejoicing with them in times of blessing.

When we look to God’s Word to guide our hearts and minds, we can find hope in knowing He alone can give us an attitude of gratitude for whatever life brings our way. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”* (Colossians 3:16, NIV84) We can be a light to others when darkness comes into their lives by pointing them to the love of Christ and promises He gives us in His Word.

As we journey through life’s ups and downs, we must recognize God’s presence and active involvement in every aspect of our lives. We should be thankful of His presence and know that He will bring us through the twists and turns life may throw our way. Paul reminds us *“be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)

When we seek Him in the journey, acknowledging our dependence on Him and praying continually for his direction, we can rest assured that He will deliver us through all circumstances and keep us aligned to His will. Walking in obedience to His desires, we can move beyond any present distress to a joyful hope of what the future will bring.

The Good News of Jesus Christ gives us confidence and conviction that comes only from His victory on the Cross. A victory which He has granted to us by His grace alone. In the first chapter of Thessalonians, Paul encourages us that *"because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake."* (1 Thessalonians 1:5) Whenever we pursue His promise, we live transformed lives.

Inspired by the hope we have in Jesus; we can walk alongside others giving them the same confidence. Offering them the same truth our Lord offered us. Assuring them the same promise we have been given in Christ is the same victory they can claim for themselves. When we actively and openly confess Christ as Lord; when we live out life's journey aligned to His ways; when we serve as a witness to others of the joy that comes from our hope in His promises; then we can give thanks when we see the Holy Spirit complete His work in those we love.

I would like to close this evening reflecting on 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, *"we always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."* As I look across the ministries, outreach activities, and missional callings that each of you have brought forward at St. Timothy's – I wanted to give thanks to God for each of you. At the risk of overlooking some, I want to highlight a few acts of love that I have felt blessed to witness, in some cases humbly participate alongside you.

In the 20 months since being called to shepherd with Pastor Dan and Pastor Jonna, Debi and I have seen this congregation be the head, hearts, and hands of Christ in so many ways. In serving those in poverty, the homeless and seeking addiction recovery, many of you have come alongside CHAM/Mercy Mobile, Cityteam, FISH and Village House. So many of you give of your time and your talents during the month long engagement for Village House at St Tim's – what a joy to see how we turn the Carter building into a shelter of love and an opportunity to bring the Good News alive to the women in the program.

I have been blessed to see our mentors at Cityteam make a huge difference in the lives of men and women through the homeless shelter, men's program, Heritage Home, House of Grace, the learning-career center, and community services. We had a number of the men from Cityteam participate in our Men's Advance at Mount Hermon and continue to call St. Timothy's their church home as they grow as disciples of Christ.

Over the past year, we watched the community being served by FISH grow to new heights. The volunteers being able to pray over those picking up the basic necessities of food and household items for their families. What a wonderful time of fellowship at a cookout we had on Carter field to welcome those benefitting from the ministry to just enjoy a day of building deeper relationships.

For all those who contribute their gifts and talents to St. Timothy's Christian Academy, we give thanks to God for the vital outreach ministry this has become to many families across the San Jose area. Our Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP) at St. Timothy's Christian Academy is designed for intelligent and creative students with language-based learning differences who are struggling in traditional classrooms because their reading, writing, and organizing skills do not match their potential. Through this program, students are empowered to be independent learners. Praising God for all our Academy staff, students, teachers, parents and volunteers who make this ministry a beacon of light to the next generation.

Over the past few weeks, we once again gathered together in community across the school and church for Operation Christmas Child to make an impact globally on many young lives. A few months back, we continued our annual Walk for Water Mission project and the generosity of so many throughout our communities and workplaces outside St. Tim's to donate precious dollars needed to bring clean water to countries across the globe.

Praise God for our JHS and HS Youth who give of themselves through short-term missions each year at home and in Mexico setting the example for the rest of us – doing local work projects, building homes and bringing bible stories to life in VBS for the Mexican children.

Within our Children and Family Ministry, we are a light to the community through our week-long VBS and annual Christmas Tree Lighting activities each year. Our revival of the MOPS program is serving as an outreach to young mom's. Many in our congregation provide care ministry and homebound visitation to those congregational members and their families in time of need. Just this week, many have donated to the victims of the Camp Fire through an effort led by one of our college students. So many ways to count our blessings...

We give thanks to God that we can live out 1 Thessalonians 2:8 here at St. Tim's - *"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."* As we go to prayer this Thanksgiving Eve, some closing heartfelt thoughts from Thessalonians as we rejoice together in God's work here at St. Tim's ... *"How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?... May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you."* (1 Thessalonians 3:9, 12)

Let us pray...