

Rhythms of a Disciple

Rhythm #4: Thanksgiving

Throughout scripture, we see Jesus giving thanks often. He does it before He eats a meal, first of all, which is a pattern we still follow today. We also see Him giving thanks before a great miracle, as he does before the resurrection of Lazarus or the feeding of the 5,000.

Most notably, though, we see this:

“And when [Jesus] had taken a cup and **given thanks**, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.” (Mt 26:27)

The Greek word for "given thanks" is "eucharisteō," meaning "to express gratitude. This is why many of our brothers and sisters in the more Orthodox traditions use the word "Eucharist" instead of "Communion" or "Lord's Supper." It's because when we are taking that sacrament, we are, first and foremost, given thanks to Jesus for His sacrifice.

If we want to be like Jesus, we have to people who are marked by Thanksgiving.

There are some admonitions from scripture to give thanks. Here are 2 examples from Paul and 1 from the Psalms:

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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.” (Col 3:15-17)

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:4-7)

As we can see, we do not have to feel thankful in order to be thankful. We don't have to pretend. We can admit we have needs, but we also need to admit we have blessings.

Psalm 100:4-5 (ESV)

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

*For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Here is the same passage in Eugene Peterson's "The Message:"

Enter with the password: "Thank you!"

*Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.*

*For God is sheer beauty,
all-generous in love,
loyal always and ever.*

“So, why are we including thanksgiving as a discipline? Isn’t it just prayer?”

Yes and no. You could also say “it’s just worship.” There is always overlap with these spiritual rhythms. However, since our culture has largely become an entitled culture, and thus, we have corporately forgotten how to give thanks. Therefore, we must now practice Thanks until it becomes a reflex.

Romans 1 demonstrates the darkness that man can delve into:

“...[God’s] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So [unrighteous men] are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:18-23)

Notice when the downward spiral begins: it starts with ungratefulness. When we cease to recognize that God is the giver of good gifts, we stop seeing those gifts as gifts, while simultaneously complaining when something doesn’t go right. Thus, God gets none of the credit for blessing us, but He gets most of the blame when things go wrong. It is an intellectually dishonest posture.

The apostle James instructs us to take up a different posture, where we trust that “every good and perfect gift comes from above.” (James 1:21)

As believers, we need to begin to acknowledge those gifts again, and if we cannot see them right away, we need to look for them.

Practicing Gratitude

1 - In your personal time with Him, enter His gates with thanksgiving.

Start with the obvious blessings. (For example, Are you breathing? Thank Him.

Is it a new day? Thank Him.

Is the sun shining? Thank Him for the sun.

Is it raining? Thank Him for the rain.

Is it still true that Jesus dies for you? Yes. Thank Him again.

Do you have people who love you? Thank Him.

Place to sleep? Food to eat?

If you can’t think of anything to thank Him for, ask yourself, “what blessings do I have in my life that I wouldn’t have had 200 years ago.” Start there.

2 - Practice thanking other people throughout the day

Thank people for the small things: family, friends, even customer service representatives who serve you during the day.

3 - Insert gratitude in your requests

Like Paul said in Phil 4, mix them together. Don't pretend life is easy if it's hard, but don't despair, either. *Present your requests to God with thanksgiving!*

4 - Actively look for the hand of God

Search your heart. Think back on where you have been, and the times where He has worked on your behalf. Bring those times back to mind. Investigate your own history. Look for His hand, and when you find it, thank Him.