

Thanksgiving Eve November 22, 2017

Deuteronomy 8:10-18 (EHV) – ¹⁰Then you will eat, and you will be filled, and you will praise the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. ¹¹Be very careful so that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and ordinances and his statutes that I am commanding you today. ¹²When you eat and are satisfied, and you build nice houses and move into them, ¹³and your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold increase, and everything that you have prospers, ¹⁴watch out so that your heart does not become arrogant and forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. ¹⁵Do not forget the LORD, who led you in the great and terrifying wilderness, where there were venomous snakes and scorpions, where the thirsty ground had no water, but the LORD made water come out of a flint rock for you. ¹⁶Do not forget the LORD, who in the wilderness fed you manna, which your fathers had not known before, to humble you and to test you so that it would be good for you later on. ¹⁷You might say in your heart, “My ability and the power of my hand have earned this wealth for me.” ¹⁸But then you are to remember that the LORD your God is the one who gives you the ability to produce wealth, to confirm his covenant that he promised to your fathers with an oath, as he does to this day.

Introduction

How do you remember the things you need to remember?

Maybe it just comes naturally, and you have the so-called “mind of an elephant.” You process things once – or repeat them to yourself a time or two – and your mind has an internal alarm clock that goes off when it’s about time to do something or to be somewhere.

Maybe you’re the kind of person who ought to own stock in 3M, simply for their line of Post-It products alone. You write everything down on sticky notes – they’re on the bezel of your computer monitor, the top of your desk, your fridge, your bathroom mirror, the pages in your textbooks and binders.

Maybe you write things down in a day-planner – either one of the little freebies that you might get from your bank or insurance agent, or the fancier leather-bound ones that provide a new set of inserts each year. Or you have a 12-month calendar hanging at home somewhere handy where you can record all the upcoming events and appointments for each family member. Or you have a school agenda where you can record the due dates of all your assignments.

Perhaps you use the electronic version of the day-planner and record to-dos and appointments in your smartphone. Maybe you even sync calendars between your phone, home, and work computers and/or share them with other family members or coworkers, so any additions or updates are immediately accessible and everyone stays in the loop.

Maybe you’re finding it less and less weird to talk to your phone: “OK, Google. Remind me to get beer and pizza at Festival.” And *voilà*, there it is! The next time I drive into the Festival parking lot, my phone will ding and vibrate to remind me what I need to get.

Theme: Thanksgiving Is Also a Time of Taking.

Technically, there shouldn’t be anything out of the ordinary about Thanksgiving. “**Each day is a gift of God’s grace; his mercies are new every morning.**” That means it’s no stretch to think that we’d want to take time each and every day to ponder God’s amazing blessings.

But since it's become tradition in our circles to gather together either on or the night before the festivities of the secular holiday, let's take this time to remember together the things that are sometimes so easily forgotten.

Thanksgiving is a time of giving thanks. Some of you are probably thinking, "Wow, Pastor, did you figure that out all by yourself?" But Moses and I would like to remind you this evening that **THANKSGIVING IS ALSO A TIME OF TAKING. Take time to remember your blessings. Take time to remember where they come from.**

Part 1: Take time to remember your blessings.

After forty years of wandering around in the Sinai desert, it was a little difficult for the Israelites to remember how truly blessed they were. They probably didn't feel that the pros of the land ahead of them – supposedly flowing with milk and honey – could even come close to outweighing the cons they'd just experienced. Remember how they'd frequently "reminisced" along the way about how nice it was back in good ol' Egypt? Remember how a dozen of them had seen the Promised Land firsthand, but ten pairs of eyes were blinded by the size and strength of the inhabitants?

It's with that background in mind that Moses mentioned some pretty important blessings, as he spoke to the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan River, shortly before his death and their entrance into Canaan. As he pointed them ahead to the years to come, he said that...

- **they'd have full bellies.**
- **they'd live in a good and productive land.**
- **they'd live in fine houses.**
- **they'd have large herds and flocks.**
- **they'd enjoy wealth.**
- **they'd enjoy freedom from slavery.**

They were, in fact, tremendously blessed, even though that fact went unnoticed by a great majority of the people.

If I were to draw a line on a dry erase board with Ebenezer Scrooge on one end and the most optimistic person you can think of on the other, where would you fall? Do you tend to find and focus on the blessings, even in the midst of all the troubles? Or are your thoughts continually drawn to focus on the inevitable – woe is you... it's only a matter of time until you find yourself on the south side of the grass?

The unfortunate thing is that, no matter where you and I fall on that continuum, we fall far short of what God expects of us. There are so many blessings we don't even recognize, and there are so many more that we simply take for granted. And what we might call shortsightedness or simply overlooking, God calls sin.

I personally don't like to view Thanksgiving as *the* day for us to remember all our blessings. That seems to imply that we don't really have to give thanks during the other 364. Instead, I like to think of Thanksgiving as the day when we devote a special worship service to be encouraged to daily remember the countless blessings that we have. Just think of 'em all – physical, material, spiritual! Think of the blessings you have in your family and in your church and in your community!

Transition

Some things I don't mind forgetting. I don't have a problem forgetting embarrassing things that have happened to me. I'd rather forget some of the stupid arguments I've had with people over the years. Do you ever intentionally forget something? You're supposed to clean the house and catch up on all the laundry before your wife gets home from visiting family, but you conveniently "forget." Besides taking time to remember your blessings, it's also important to take time to remember where they come from.

Part 2: Take time to remember where they come from.

Could you ever forget God? We're quick to say no, but I think it's easier than you might imagine. Because of our sinful natures, we're filled with attitudes of pride and self-accomplishment. We have no problem boasting of our achievements and the awards we earn.

Moses warned the Israelites of that sinful attitude well in advance. **"Be very careful so that you do not forget the Lord your God... Watch out so that your heart does not become arrogant and forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt... Do not forget the Lord, who led you... Do not forget the Lord, who fed you... You might say in your heart, 'My ability and the power of my hand have earned this wealth for me.' But then you are to remember that the Lord your God is the one who gives you the ability..."**

One of the best examples of this is found in the book of Judges. The people were caught in a vicious cycle. They got themselves in trouble, so they called to God for help. God helped them, but after a short while they forgot all about God until they needed him again.

Isn't that so often true for us, too? God becomes our go-to-guy only when we need something from him.

- Money's tight – "Provide for me, God!" He somehow gets us through and then we store him back somewhere near our wallet until it runs dry the next time.
- Health is failing – "Heal me, Lord!" Things don't get much better or work out according to our time frame, so we put him aside and go on to something else.
- Rocky relationships – "Help us get along better, Jesus!" We do and then place him back in the junk drawer until the next time sparks start to fly.
- Burdened with sin – "Savior, take away my guilt!" He does, but then we use our freedom to indulge our sinful natures instead of living a life of obedient thanksgiving.

Our prayers are often pitifully out of balance between asking and thanking. We do forget about God all too often.

So don't just remember that your blessings come from God. Take time to remember what sort of God he is. He's, as Moses says, the God **"who confirms his covenant."** He's faithful to all his promises. He's brought us out of the deepest darkest slavery to sin and death, he feeds us with the most bountiful banquet of salvation, he gives us living water to drink, a mansion in the Promised Land of heaven, and the priceless treasure of full and free forgiveness.

Conclusion

So, **give thanks to the Lord for he is good! His love endures forever! Amen.**