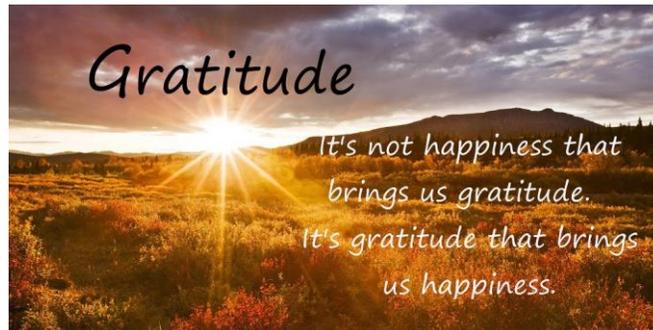


Coronavirus Positives – A Spiritual Perspective

GRATEFUL HEART, BEAUTIFUL WORLD



**“In every thing give thanks:
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (1
Thess. 5:18)**

The coronavirus like all earthly things, will eventually pass. The lessons that God is teaching us at this time, however, can have a lasting effect, if we recognize them and apply them to our lives. There are many positives from this current crisis that we believe God has given us as He works this for our good (Rom. 8:28). Today’s thought: God’s desire for us to be thankful at all times.

One coronavirus positive from this crisis is the opportunity to view all that God blesses us with in a different light. Until a few weeks ago, we found ourselves living a pretty routine, predictable existence. For most of us, life was continuing as it had for many years. We woke up, got ready, got the kids off to school, drove to work, put in 8 (or more) hours at our chosen profession, came home, maybe got in a little yardwork or exercise, perhaps attended a child’s or a grandchild’s ball game, watched a little TV or surfed the internet, before going to bed. We woke up to a new day and repeated. Weekends were a little less hectic, but still busy, with kid’s sports activities, yardwork, housework, hobbies, weekend projects, going out to eat. We attended worship services on Sunday and some of us even saw the necessity and took the time to attend Sunday morning Bible class and mid-week Bible study. Although busy, our lives had, for the most part, become a routine mixture of work, school, hobbies, sports, entertainment, family and church

activities. We were living our lives in a comfortable rut, a rut filled with blessings that we often took for granted. Enter the coronavirus. Suddenly, our lives were shaken up. Our daily routines, the activities of life that we were comfortable with and just assumed would continue as they were, were suddenly drastically changed or halted. Overnight, we no longer are able to attend school, to work, to shop, even to gather for worship as we had before. Suddenly, so many of the blessings of life that we had taken for granted for so long were just not there like they had been before. And, after a few weeks, we were left to wonder, how did we ever take so many of these things for granted without really giving them a second thought?

Working as a physical therapist with patients who have had their health and overall function diminished due to injury or medical conditions can be an eye opening experience for both the patient and the therapist. At some point in the rehab process, almost every patient will make this comment: “You know, I didn’t know how much I used _____ until this happened”. I have heard this statement made about almost every body part, shoulder, wrist, back, hamstring, heel, big toe, little finger included. Something that the patient had perhaps never given a second thought to while functionally normally is suddenly brought to the forefront and maybe for the first time, the patient realizes just how vital it is that this part of the body functions properly and without pain. Having seen this so many times as a therapist, I try to take note and not take my health and function for granted, but like every one else, I often find myself not even considering and certainly not counting my blessings as I should.

Can’t the same thing be said about this current pandemic? So many things have been taken away that we had never really given much thought to before. “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.” (Ps. 68:19) How often have we overlooked so many of the blessings that God sends our way? How often do we forget what God has done and continues to do for us? This is not a new problem, but to forget to thank God for what He daily blesses us with is much like the pigs who are fed by the farmer every day, but never look up to see where their food comes from. It was David’s practice to remember his blessings and from whom they came, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Ps. 103:2). Shouldn’t it be ours as well?

One of the blessings of this current pandemic is the opportunity to slow down and see the blessings of life much more clearly. For most, life had

often been reduced to being busy going from one event to the next, rushing to do so many countless things that seem urgent. We had become near-sighted, our eyes focused on our own little world. Too often, due to our busy lifestyles and this narrow focus, we have missed the big picture of life, including realizing our blessings and the giver of those blessings. Because of the removal of so many of the things that we had taken for granted, God has used this crisis as a wonderful opportunity to allow us to see life more clearly, to appreciate so many of the things, both large and small, that He gives us and that brings so much joy to our lives. Things we had taken for granted for far too long.

Do we view life through thankful or unthankful eyes? Is this a beautiful life filled with loving, caring people and wonderful opportunities or is this a miserable life filled with selfish, evil people dominated by hatred? A life of wonderful possibilities or a life with little to no hope of improvement? A designed world of wonderful blessings given to us by a loving God who has created us for a purpose or, instead, is this world and our existence just a random event with no purpose and no future? Currently, we see a world in panic, fear and uncertainty due to the coronavirus, but I also can look out my window and see a sunny spring day with blue skies and the breeze blowing through the trees. Our short time on this earth will certainly be a mixture of good and bad, but, don't we almost always find in life what we seek? Isn't it true that the hummingbird always finds the flower, while the buzzard always finds the rotting carcass? Doesn't the way we choose to view this life lead to what we ultimately find in it? I'm reminded of the song, Man in the Mirror, "I'm starting with the man in the mirror, I'm asking him to change his ways, And no message could have been any clearer, If you want to make the world a better place, Take a look at yourself and then make a change". Perhaps changing our world and our view of the world for the better is just as easy, and just as hard, as simply changing ourselves.

A grateful heart is a choice, a choice to acknowledge God's power and His wonderful gifts to us. This choice of gratitude has the power to change us completely. There is power in gratitude to heal us spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. An attitude of gratitude opens our hearts to God, enabling us to really see the world the way it is, to experience life to its fullest and enjoy each God-given breath. That's the power of thankfulness. We become fully aware of the details of the life we love, the simple things that delight us, and perhaps, most of all, the people God has placed in our lives. Gratitude expands our capacity to enjoy life. Perhaps that is why Cicero

observed, “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.” Perhaps this is why, as God’s people, we are commanded on multiple occasions to be grateful (Col. 2:7, 3:15, 4:2, Eph. 5:20, Philp. 4:6,7, 1 Thes. 5:18). 1 Thes. 5:18 states, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” The will of God is that his people choose to be grateful, therefore, for the Christian, gratitude is not optional. To be grateful is to be obedient, to be ungrateful is not.

What are some of the benefits of gratitude? Gratitude glorifies God. This alone would be reason to give thanks to God. Our thankfulness glorifies God as we exalt not the gifts, but the Giver. Gratitude helps us to realize that all we have comes from God. “All of this is for your benefit. And as God’s grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.” (2 Cor. 4:15, NLT). Gratitude helps us to see God, it opens our spiritual eyes. The more we thank Him, the more we see Him working in us and around us. Thankfulness helps us sense God’s presence, His personal care and His perfect timing. “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.” (James 1:16-17) Gratitude puts us squarely in God’s will. We often make God’s will for us out to be some grand, mystical plan, when sometimes, it’s just simple obedience that He seeks. And part of His will for us is to be thankful, not just on sunny days, but on the hard days as well (1 Thess. 5:18). Gratitude for the magnitude of God’s undeserved kindness draws us to Him. When Jesus healed the 10 lepers from a life of misery and isolation, all 10 were happy, but only one was thankful. And that thankfulness brought him back to Jesus, where he fell at His feet and glorified God. (Luke 17:17-19) Thankfulness brings contentment (1 Tim. 6:6-8), as well as joy (Ps. 126:1-3). Gratitude opens our eyes to the simple beauty of ordinary days. It lets us see this day and this moment as gifts and to take in their abundance right now. (Eccl. 7:10) Gratitude acts as a testimony. When we thank God openly and acknowledge what He’s done for us before our fellowman, we proclaim a caring God to the world around us and show that contentment and peace come not from what we have, but instead, Who we know. “Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done.... Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.” (Ps. 105:1,2 NLT).

While gratitude blesses us, ingratitude has the opposite effect. It causes our hearts to shrink and become colder. It blocks the flow of God’s wisdom and

blessings in our lives. It makes us bitter and petty people. God has shown us ample evidence of Himself and his goodness in this created world, yet many fail to acknowledge either Him or His blessings. The refusal to acknowledge and thank God for what He is and what He does leads many to ingratitude, to vanity and to hearts of darkness, “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful: but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:21). May this never be said of God’s people.

So many sweeping changes have taken place since COVID-19 arrived just a few months ago. All the recent health, social, economic, religious and governmental changes have completely shaken up our usual routines. So many things that we have taken for granted for so long have been effected. Hopefully, this pause will open our eyes and give us a new sense of appreciation for God’s wonderful gifts, both large and small. God instructs His children to give thanks, to speak thanks, not just “feel” or “think” thanks. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good....Let the redeemed of the Lord say so....” (Ps. 107:1,2) So often we don’t miss things until they are gone. What blessings have you and I taken for granted that this current crisis has brought to light? I don’t know your list, but here’s a small part of my list of Mt. Carmel blessings: the special bond of our church family, the joy of worshipping the Lord with like-minded brethren, the strength that we draw from our Christian brothers and sisters when we come together to worship, when we meet in one another’s homes and when we face the difficulties of life, the edification we receive from congregational singing, Bible class discussions, meeting regularly with those whose sole desire is to use their God-given talents to serve God and their fellowman, standing out of respect when the Bible is read in worship service, our stand for the truth, the spiritual fellowship we enjoy when we collectively partake of the communion each week, meeting up front to encourage one who obeys the gospel or is restored, the capability of technology to bring us together even when physically apart and those who make this possible, the hugs and handshakes as we greet and when we leave worship and go out into the world, the encouragement of the church as decisions are made and we move through uncharted waters, the wisdom, spiritual maturity and experience of the other elders, talking with church members before and after our worship services, fellowship meals, the wonderful cross section of members of all ages, from infants to ninety year olds and the diverse talents that we enjoy, the efforts of so many to fulfill the mission of the church, including teachers, deacons, those who clean the building, those who prepare the bulletin, those

who prepare communion, prepare bulletin boards, deliver communion to those unable to attend services, our minister and his family, those who work with the youth, the security team, each song leader, those who perform building maintenance and keep everything working smoothly, the food group members, those who support our food pantry and other outreach efforts, the care, concern and love we have for one another and a world lost in sin, our visitors to the worship services and the opportunity to get to know them as well as those that view our services online. So much to be thankful for, so much that had been taken for granted. This virus will eventually pass, but may we continue to remember and be thankful for God's blessings upon the church here at Mt. Carmel.

Psychologists tell us that it generally requires about thirty days of repeated activity to develop new habits and change our behavior. Beginning today, why not give God thanks for 5 of His blessings that you have taken for granted up to this point in time? Tomorrow, thank God for 5 more blessings that you had overlooked. Repeat this for the next month to further develop your habit of gratitude. While this may take a few minutes of your time, the power of gratitude will far outweigh the few minutes it takes to practice it. From this day forward, regardless of the circumstances of life, may we all allow eyes of gratitude to effect how we view and experience all the blessings of life, both physical and spiritual, that God, the giver, daily loads us with.