

Thanksgiving: November 23/24, 2016

Measuring Thankfulness

2 Corinthians 9:10-15



For what are you thankful, this Thanksgiving Day? If I interviewed you all today I'm sure the answers would include food on the table, roof over your heads, family who love you, and gainful employment. And these are certainly blessings for which we should be thankful. But let me suggest that thankfulness depends upon the scale you are using. You don't measure liquids with a ruler. You don't measure speed with a thermometer. What measure do you use to measure thankfulness?

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed.

It's a fair question. And it raises some tension. St. Paul says that God, who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and increase your store of seed. By that measure some of you may challenge Paul. For some it's been a bad year. You have told me of employment losses and less than adequate replacement jobs. Health care costs have gone through the ceiling and raises have not kept up. College costs have escalated so much that it has become unaffordable to many. So the "supply and increase" of your store of seed may be challenged. Let me suggest that you are using the wrong measure. Too often we measure "supply and increase" by our wants and not by our needs. Let's be honest. Our wants are infinite. Our needs are finite. We *need* food and clothing, shelter and employment. We *want* steak and Gucci, 5th Avenue and the corner office. God has always been faithful to supply all things needful for this body and life. God grant us eyes to see our abundance even in our limitations that we may be thankful in all circumstances.

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Measuring your thankfulness by God's material blessings is a good starting point today. But it's only the beginning. Paul continues, God "will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness." Now that's a measure that is often overlooked. Material blessings are secondary to spiritual blessings. First and foremost we have been blessed with righteousness. And then we have been blessed to be a blessing, to produce a harvest of righteousness. When I sit with families who have lost loved ones, rarely if ever do I hear treasured memories of material successes or corporate accomplishments. Rather, I hear of connections. How their loved ones impacted the lives of spouse and children, family and friends. And when the deceased is a person of faith, how their loved one impacted them by their love of Jesus. The righteousness of God that comes by faith in Jesus: This is the measure by which we perceive a life to be blessed and for which the surviving family is thankful. So we measure thankfulness today by the righteousness of God. Present in us, who are loved by God in Christ. And extended by us into our families and friends, as we are sent by God into our world. Be thankful for such blessings. Pray for an increase of righteousness in your family and in our community. I pray for such an

increase in my own family. I have one brother praying for a son who has wandered far from the faith of his childhood, and another whose daughter hangs on to faith by a thread. We are praying for an increase of righteousness, as I know many of you are doing as well in your own families.

Where generosity is present,
righteousness is at work.

If we are to measure thankfulness by the harvest of righteousness, what should we look for? In a word, generosity. Where generosity is present, righteousness is at work. In an invitation to someone living alone to join you for your thanksgiving meal. In keeping a supply of alms for the poor wherever that appear, be it at a traffic light or a red kettle. By taking an ornament from the giving tree or volunteering for our Christmas Breakfast next



Saturday.

Personal experience has taught me the truthfulness of the widow's mite. She had little to give but everything to offer. A beggar we observed on an elevated train in Chicago proved to be the most generous person to another beggar on the train. Why are poor people often the most generous? Because they live closer to faith. May we live closer to a faith in God that produces a harvest of righteousness in generosity.

This service that you perform is
overflowing in many expressions of
thanks to God!

Such generosity produces overflowing expressions of thanks to God. One member recently wrote the following. "So many thanks for my joining Christ Memorial, so meaningful. God sent [my husband] and me to Christ Memorial for a reason and I wasn't sure why, but now I know. I have found so many wonderful and caring people that have welcomed me with open arms. I love you all and thank you." This is what Thanksgiving is all about. It is recognizing the hand of God in all circumstances, even in adversity, and thanking Him for his gracious intervention. For in the end, God's gracious intervention is the source of all thankfulness. We don't deserve the abundance we enjoy. He graciously intervenes with more than we need. We don't deserve his righteousness. Yet he freely sent Jesus to take our sinfulness that we might receive his righteousness. We don't deserve our high calling as his sons and daughters. Yet he generously bestows such a title upon us that we might produce a harvest of righteousness. St. Paul summarizes it best when he concludes, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

Because of the service by which you
have proved yourselves, others will
praise God.

So we measure thankfulness by our material blessings. We measure thankfulness by the harvest of righteousness in ourselves, which in turn produces generosity to supply the needs of others. Lastly, we measure thankfulness by those who are drawn to Jesus because of you. The last two weekends, between our Reliant and Christ Memorial campuses, we



have welcomed 39 new members.

Truly a harvest of righteousness!

More have been sent by us into our world through job changes and family relocations. Our thankfulness has been multiplied by many more voices offering similar praise to God. So count your blessings, this Thanksgiving Day. Measure them in many ways. But no more so than in the harvest of righteousness that God has produced in and through you. Much to be thankful for, indeed!

So what are you thankful for, this Thanksgiving Day? It depends on how you measure thankfulness. Join me in a litany of thankfulness to God for the myriad of blessings that he showers upon us richly and daily.

For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea.
We thank you, Lord.

For all that is gracious in the lives of men and women, revealing the image of Christ,
We thank you, Lord.

For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends,
We thank you, Lord.

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve,
We thank you, Lord.

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We thank you, Lord.

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve,
We thank you, Lord.

For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play,
We thank you, Lord.

For the brave and courageous, who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity,
We thank you, Lord.

For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and justice,
We thank you, Lord.

For the communion of saints, in all times and places,
We thank you, Lord.

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We thank you, Lord.

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For the communion of saints, in all times and places,
We thank you, Lord.

Above all, we give you thanks for the great mercies and promises given
to us in Christ Jesus our Lord;
*To him be praise and glory, with you, O Father, and the Holy Spirit,
now and forever. Amen.*

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