

## Engage with Thankfulness

1 Chronicles 16:8-12

Rev. Brian Bill

November 19-20, 2016

### Welcome

- Upcoming December series (hold up insert)
- Women's Outreach
- Annual Meeting
- [Hold up bracelets if here]
- Welcome to Guests

I'm glad you came this weekend because I just received the latest forecast for Thanksgiving Day.

*Turkeys will thaw in the morning, then warm in the oven to an afternoon high near 190 degrees. The kitchen will turn hot and humid, and if you bother the cook, be ready for a severe squall or cold shoulder.*

BTW, the Butterball Hotline now has a texting feature for turkey cooks who would rather text than talk. The Turkey Talk Line is now open 24/7 at 1-800-Butterball. That was free of charge. Now back to the forecast...

*During the late afternoon and evening, the cold front of a knife will slice through the turkey, causing an accumulation of one to two inches on plates. Mashed potatoes will drift across one side while cranberry sauce creates slippery spots on the other.*

*An indigestion warning has been issued for the entire area, with increased stuffiness around the beltway. During the evening, the turkey will diminish and taper off to leftovers, dropping to a low of 34 degrees in the refrigerator.*

Friends, we can forecast our future faithfulness based upon *whether* (pun intended) we gravitate toward grumbling or we're growing in gratitude for God's amazing grace. We're faced with a dilemma in this regard because most of us are natural born grumblers and a few of us are year-round residents at "Camp Complaining." Many of us whine more than we worship and we gripe more than we express gratitude.

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Chronicles 16. The purpose of Chronicles is to explain the events of history and to set the record for families as they re-entered the land of promise. The Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized the presence and

power of God, was brought back into the center of life. For a long time, God had not been front and center in the life of Israel. I suspect that some of us have drifted spiritually as well. It's time to get the Lord back as the focal point of our lives.

The opening verse tells us that after the Ark was brought back, the people presented ***“burnt offerings”*** and ***“peace offerings”*** to God. Burnt offerings were the highest expression of worship as the entire offering was consumed. After the peace offerings were made, part of what was offered went to the Almighty, part went to the priests and the final portion was given to families for a three-day Thanksgiving feast (as far as I know, no football was included).

We read in verses 2-3 that David ***“blessed the people in the name of the LORD and distributed to all Israel, both men and women, to each a loaf of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins.”*** Because David made these offerings, he was entitled to eat this Thanksgiving meal by himself but instead he shared it with ***“each”*** man and woman. They ate bread, a portion of meat and some fruitcake...and we eat rolls, turkey and pumpkin pie – pretty similar when you think about it.

Verse 4 tells us that they did more than just eat: ***“Then he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel.”*** Verses 5-6 tell us that this praise was intended to be jubilant – lyres, harps, cymbals and trumpets were used (reminds me of our services last weekend and what's coming in three weeks!). Verse 7 tells us that their music was filled with thanksgiving: ***“Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD by Asaph and his brothers.”***

David put a worship team together and they helped the people do three things.

- Pray – ***“to invoke.”***
- Praise – ***“to praise the Lord, the God of Israel.”***
- Proclaim – ***“to thank.”***

Verse 8 tells us what to do: ***“Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!”***

- The Hebrew word for thanks means ***“to throw, or cast.”*** It refers to the openness of the hand after it has thrown something. The idea is that we come to God with extended hands that are empty because we've just “pitched praises” to Him!
- The word ***“call”*** means to cry out properly, with reverence.

- To ***“make known”*** reminds us that we’re not to keep the good news a secret; we’ve been made for a mission to go with the gospel to the whole globe.

Verse 9: ***“Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!”***

- Once we comprehend all that God has done, we can’t help but break out into song.
- ***“Tell”*** carries with it the idea of *“pondering.”* Before we can proclaim, we must ponder.

Verse 10: ***“Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!”***

- The word ***“glory”*** means, *“to shine or boast, to rave, revel, enjoy and celebrate.”* This is part of the word “hallelujah.”
- ***“Rejoice”*** means to *“brighten up!”*

We pray, we praise and then we proclaim our thankfulness. The word ***“thanks”*** appears six times in this passage. Verse 34 serves as a summary of the entire song of praise: ***“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.”*** We throw thanks to God because of His great goodness and His everlasting love.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says that it is God’s will that we ***“give thanks in all circumstances.”*** Our country will do so this Thursday. It’s easy to forget how much the Lord has done for us. We can remember to complain but space out when it comes to having gratitude for His grace in our lives. I love verse 36, ***“Then all the people said ‘Amen’ and praised the Lord.”*** That means that we’re *all* to be praise participants, not just the musicians up here.

So let’s *all* stand and let’s *all* pray, praise and proclaim...

## Prayer

## Worship through Song

- *All My Fountains*
- *In Christ Alone*
- *How Marvelous*
- *Forever*

Does anyone know what the fastest growing religion is in the world? It's not Islam or Christianity. The symbol of this rising faith is not the crescent or the cross, but a dollar sign. This expanding belief system is radical consumerism and it promises transcendence, power, pleasure, and fulfillment even as it demands complete devotion. The consumer culture we live in claims that the material things we long for will lift us above our current circumstances.

At the very heart of consumerism is dissatisfaction and discontentment. One author puts it like this: *"We are constantly searching for the one thing that will satisfy us. Yet each time we trust the promises of our possessions, more barriers are raised between our true selves and God's plain command to love [Him] above all things. It's not that we necessarily want more – it's that what we want is something we can't buy."* (From "Advent Conspiracy," page 24)

Since Thursday is Thanksgiving, we all know we need to become more thankful. As I've thought about why it's hard to be thankful, I realized that it's because we're not content enough. We could say it like this: *If we want to be truly thankful we must become consistently content.*

On one hand, it's much easier to give thanks for what God has given to us. It's another story all together to be content with what we *don't* have. It's far easier to complain and be in conflict than it is to live a contented life.

Society is trying to sell us stuff all the time...and it's not all that difficult to do because we're so unsatisfied with what we have. Would you agree that discontentment is our default setting?

Capitalizing on our inherent dissatisfaction, the worldwide marketing machine spends around \$450 billion annually to make us unhappy with who we are, with what we have, with how we look and with what we do. At its core, most advertising is designed to make us ungrateful and to feed our greed.

And it's all cranking up for Black Friday...

Isn't it interesting that Thanksgiving stands as sentinel beckoning us to be thankful while the rest of the Christmas season focuses on our lack of contentment?

In a study called [Social Comparison, Advertising and Consumer Discontent](#), researchers concluded: *"Consumers encounter countless advertising images during the course of everyday life. Many of these images are idealized, representing life*

*more as it is imagined than as it actually exists...repeated exposure to idealized images raises consumers' expectations and influences their perceptions of how their lives ought to be, particularly in terms of their material possessions. The result of both these processes, for some consumers, is discontent and an increased desire for more."*

Or we could say that advertising simply capitalizes on our coveting hearts.

In a post called, "How to Motivate Your Prospects," we see what ads are designed to do: *"As an advertiser, it is your job to create discontentment inside the psyche of your prospects, and make them desire the change that you're offering."*

That reminds me of something I heard some time ago: *We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like.*

In order to become more content we must become more thankful and the way to become more thankful is to become more content. In order to do that, we must dispel the myth of more.

Jesus said in Luke 12:15: ***"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."***

Here Jesus strongly contradicts the values of our coveting culture. If you have a covetous character, then no matter what you have, it will never be enough. Your stuff will never satisfy. Your relationships will never be good enough. You will always want something that you don't have.

*If we want to be truly thankful we must become consistently content.*

### **The Cure for Coveting**

The cure for coveting is to learn the secret of contentment as found in Philippians 4:10-13: ***"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."***

Here's another thanksgiving forecast – we can predict how thankful we will be by looking at how content we've become.

I see four classes in God's **Contentment Curriculum**.

**1. Contentment 101: Being Confident that God is in Control.** Remember that Paul is in prison, chained to guards, and he breaks out into rejoicing. Look at the first part of verse 10: ***“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly...”*** The word **“greatly”** is the Greek word *meegas*, and means, *“exceedingly.”* I like how the Puritan writer Jeremiah Burroughs defined contentment: *“Christian contentment is that sweet inward quiet, that gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.”*

Notice that Paul rejoices **“in the Lord.”** Everything is under God’s sweet sovereignty and because His ways are always wise we can find contentment in every condition. That’s why a complaining spirit is ultimately against God. If you’re struggling with discontent today, it may well be because you are not allowing God to be God. Just as God’s people brought the Ark back into the center of their lives, we too must have God at the center. He’s in charge and He is working all things together according to the counsel of His divine will. Write this down: *If something else is at the center of your life, you will never be satisfied.*

One pastor posted this sentence on Friday: *“I am astonished at people who say they believe in God but live as if happiness is found by giving him 2% of their attention.”*

Friends, as bad as things get, as disappointed as you might be, let’s not question the truth that God is in control. Don’t forget that the very first temptation in the Garden of Eden involved Satan sowing seeds of discontent in Eve’s heart. Once she doubted God’s goodness, it was a short step down the slippery slope of sin. We might not have everything we want but if we have Christ we have everything we need. 2 Peter 1:3: ***“He has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.”***

In addition, some of you are not experiencing contentment simply because you are looking in other places for that which only God can provide. In Isaiah 55:2-3 God wonders why we don’t come to Him for contentment while we persist in pursuing those things that were never designed to satisfy: ***“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live...”***

Food and even football are unfulfilling. Possessions don’t satisfy and ultimately people can’t provide what we’re looking for either.

**2. Contentment 201: Developing a Proper Expectation of Others.** Look at the second half of verse 10: “...*that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.*” Paul founded the Philippian church about 12 years earlier and it had been about 10 years since they were able to send any support to him. The phrase “*at length*” doesn’t refer to impatience on Paul’s part, but rather that after this many years, they are now able to give again. The word “*revived*” was used of plants and flowers blossoming again.

Notice how content Paul is with these Christians. He cut them some slack, mentioning that they were always concerned but just had no opportunity to express it until now. How could Paul do this? It goes back to the lessons learned in Contentment 101 – he trusted that God would order the circumstances so his needs could be met. Knowing this truth kept him from anger towards others. It also gave him the freedom to not manipulate the masses just to get their money. *Changing circumstances and the expectations of people did not affect His inner contentment.*

Some of us are way too tough on other people. We expect them to meet our needs, and when they don’t do everything we expect (because they can’t); we get upset and become more discontent. Are you irritated with others? Are you bitter toward someone because he or she let you down? *Don’t allow what has been done to you, or not done for you, to become bigger than what Jesus did for you.*

When we come to the third class in God’s contentment curriculum, we see that Paul was satisfied in every situation.

**3. Contentment 301: Learning to be Satisfied in Every Situation.** Look at verses 11-12: “*Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.*”

In plenty or in poverty, God is still in control and is weaving his ways through both of these conditions. Paul chose to be content “*in whatever situation*” and “*in any and every circumstance.*” These are sweeping statements that cover every condition of life. The phrase, “*I have learned*” is repeated twice and is emphatic. It means to discover by experience, to enter into a new condition. We could translate it this way: “*I have absolutely come to learn.*” The word “*content*” refers to being “*full, replete and sufficient.*”

It would help if we would become more grateful for the good things we already have.

1 Timothy 6:8: ***“But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”***

Some of us need to have our needs reduced not our possessions increased. F.B. Meyer put it this way: *“Contentment consists not in adding more fuel, but in taking away some fire.”* Here’s a practical suggestion. When contemplating the purchase of another possession, ask yourself this question: *“Is this a need or a greed?”*

Here’s something to ponder: *Be satisfied with what you have even if you don’t have everything you want.* This is stated clearly in Hebrews 13:5: ***“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”***

Don’t you love it when someone says they have a secret to share? You might want to lean forward and cup your ear in order to hear Paul’s secret: *God has so ordered your personal circumstances that no matter what situation you are in right now, you have everything you truly need to be content.* It’s a myth that you always need more. Charles Spurgeon put it like this: *“He that deserves nothing should be content with everything.”*

The word **“secret”** carries the idea of being initiated into a secret teaching. Once you’re initiated you’ll join a small club called contentment.

Somehow Paul could say in 2 Corinthians 6:10: ***“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.”***

That’s what strikes me about Christians who are persecuted in other countries – they are filled with joy and endurance as they offer forgiveness to those who are mistreating them. *They have nothing and yet live as if they have everything.* Contentment does not emerge out of what we do; it grows out of *what we go through.* Our deepest satisfaction can only come from God, not from a change in our circumstances.

The fourth offering in God’s contentment curriculum provides the power to live out the other three.

**4. Contentment 401: Finding Strength in Christ.** Philippians 4:13 may be one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, and possibly the most misused as well: ***“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*** The word **“strengthens”** means, *“to make vigorous, to make stable.”* This verse is not promoting positive mental attitude or a “name it, claim it” theology. In the context, the meaning of **“all things”** is this: *I can be content in whatever circumstance because of the strengthening work of Christ in my life.*

*Once you allow the Savior to be your full satisfaction, there's nothing more that you need.*

*You can have everything you think you want and if you don't have Jesus you have nothing.*

*But if you have Jesus you have everything.*

*Unless Jesus is enough you'll never have enough! The reason many of us are discontent is that we really don't believe Jesus is enough. Let me say it strongly: There is no way to be content apart from Christ!*

As C.S. Lewis has said, *"God cannot give us peace and happiness apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."*

Let's summarize...

1. Be confident that God is in control
2. Develop a proper expectation of others
3. Learn to be satisfied in every situation
4. Find your strength in Christ

## **Homework**

Every good curriculum involves homework. This assignment will help improve your CPA – your Contentment Point Average.

**1. Declare your dependence on God.** When something bad happens this week or you're struggling with a circumstance, say this out loud: *"God, because you are in control I will be content."*

**2. Guard your heart.** Sometime during the winter last year the chimney flu on our fireplace got stuck. I took a look at it but thought it was way too hard to fix so just procrastinated, even though icy cold air cascaded into our den all winter. Finally, a couple weeks ago I found a bright light, laid on my back and studied the situation. I made an easy adjustment and was able to close it rather quickly. I got dirty but it was worth it. I wonder if you have a leaky heart today? Is frigid air freezing your fulfillment? Allow God's word to shine on your situation and ask Him to make some adjustments. Don't procrastinate any longer.

Proverbs 4:23: *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”* Be alert and attentive. Mute commercials this Christmas season if you need to. Be happy for those whom God blesses.

**3. Hold what you have with an open hand.** [open your hand] Admit that places, possessions or people won't satisfy. Ecclesiastes 5:10: *“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.”* At its heart, coveting is an attempt to improve upon God. Find your satisfaction in God alone.

**4. Give your way out of covetousness.** Nothing cures discontentment like giving because coveting can't live in a generous heart. Acts 20:33-35: *“I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

The best way to live is to give. If you're not tithing (giving 10%), determine to start doing so. Pray about how God would have you respond to our end-of-the-year offering that will go toward ministry to Hispanics in Fresno and for the *Anchor for the Soul* Spanish printing.

**5. Tell your family and close friends that you don't want a typical Christmas present this year.** This won't work if they weren't planning on giving you anything in the first place! But if someone asks you what you want this year, redirect them to a ministry here in the QCA or to a ministry like Voice of the Martyrs. Our Growth Group is filling an “action pack” through Voice of the Martyrs.

**6. Count your blessings.** *Make a list of everything you have that you don't deserve. Now make a list of everything you deserve but don't have.* 1 Thessalonians 5:18: *“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”* Don't ask God for anything more until you've thanked Him for what you already have.

Earnestly desire Jesus Christ. If you're not yet a Christ-follower, what are you waiting for? Repent and receive Jesus as the full satisfaction for all your sins. If you are a believer, find your contentment only in Him. Pursue His glory in all you do. Do whatever it takes to gather, grow, give and go.

Listen. We can be thankful because we have everything we need. And we can be content because Christ is all we need.

Let's not get caught up in the consumerism of Christmas this year. Determine this side of Thanksgiving that you will be truly thankful and consistently content.

It doesn't really matter whether the weather forecast is fair or foul on Thanksgiving; what matters is whether we're going to be thankful for the cross and content in Christ. Only then can we have a thankful Thanksgiving and a contented Christmas.

**Closing Song: Thank You Jesus for the Cross**

**Baby Dedication – Devries (Ed)**

**New Members - John and Joan Miller (10:45)**