

A thankful heart is the key

Dan Nelson - pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

It seems that so many people are stressed this time of year. As the holidays have come upon us, you can see it in people's faces. While some people seem to be lifted, more joyous and carefree during this time, for others smiles have all but disappeared. As lines at the grocery store grow longer, traffic jams thicker, and patience seems to grow thinner, holiday cheer is the farthest thing from the minds of so many.

The Thanksgiving holiday is meant to be a time of reflection and appreciation, a day of gratitude. A day set aside to remember what is important, to foster thankfulness in our hearts for the many blessings that we enjoy every single day. But I think that if we are not careful, we miss it. As a child, preparing for thanksgiving meant school projects of craft turkeys and centerpieces joined with history lessons about pilgrims. We especially loved getting out of school for a couple of days. Then, on Thanksgiving Day, with cousins we hadn't seen in a long time, we would stuff ourselves to the top with the most delicious feast of the year. I remember sitting with the other children, each of us sporting an olive at the end of every finger, as we eagerly waited for someone to lead a prayer and the feast to begin. The amazing aroma of turkey and mashed potatoes, hot bread, fresh pumpkin and apple pies all coming out of the kitchen at the same time was pure paradise. We giggled as Aunt Margaret brought out her famous dish that none of the kids ever had the guts to try because we didn't even know what it was. We laughed together as we delighted in the sheer fun of it all. As though icing on the cake (or should I say whipped cream on the pie) we loved Thanksgiving because to us, this was the official launch of the Christmas season, the most beloved holiday of all. We were thankful and enjoyed every minute of it.

I am sharing this with you because I think you might be able to relate to me in this. I believe there is a common thread of experience in the holiday of Thanksgiving that many of us share that ties in with a valuable life truth; a thankful heart is a key to happiness. The Bible tells us to come before God with an attitude of thanksgiving, to praise and worship Him with a heart of thanksgiving, to ask Him for the things that we need with thanksgiving (Psalm 95:2, Psalm 147:7, Philippians 4:6). In other words, our approach to God should always be with a grateful heart, recognizing that we are - blessed. It seems that we shouldn't ask for

more until we appreciate what we already have been given.

We truly enjoy so much every day to be thankful for. So before we get upset, angry or bitter because of the scheduling challenges, financial strain and, dare I say, difficult people that we sometimes encounter, let's take some time to count our blessings. Let's not take for granted our freedoms, prosperity, and the people who make this life so special. Let's also remember from whom our blessings flow; the Bible says that all good gifts come from God (James 1:17). So if you feel that Thanksgiving came and went and you missed it, don't worry, and make today Thanksgiving Day. You see, for a Christian, every day should be a day of thanksgiving.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View