

**Sermon – Thanksgiving
Sunday October 10, 2021**

Happy Thanksgiving!

Thanksgiving is a time to gather with family and friends. It's a time to pig out and eat too much food.

This week, I came across a Thanksgiving blessing that I thought would be extremely relevant. It goes:

May your stuffing be tasty
May your turkey be plump
May your potatoes and gravy have nary a lump
May your yams be delicious
May your pies take the prize
May your Thanksgiving dinner stay off your thighs.

How's that for a blessing? We hosted Thanksgiving Dinner last night and I'm still stuffed!

But of course, we all know that Thanksgiving is about giving thanks for the blessings of the past year.

And it's been a crazy year hasn't it! But it's also been full of blessing. What are some things you're thankful for?

As I reflected on this, these are some of the things I'm thankful for.

- Celebrating my oldest daughter's Grade 8 graduation
- My youngest daughter starting Youth Group
- Officiating my brother's wedding
- Having family and friends over regularly in our backyard
- Renovating our kitchen and enjoying our new space
- Driving out to the east coast of Quebec and seeing whales, dolphins and seals

How about you? What are you thankful for?

Turn to your neighbour and tell them one thing you're thankful for this Thanksgiving. If you're online, type your response in the chat.

So what are you thankful for? For some of you, you have many reasons to be thankful.

- A new job
- A new addition to your family
- New friendships
- Joining a new small group or finding a church home

But for some of you, it's harder to be thankful. How can you be thankful when...

- You got laid off from your job.
- Your child is struggling.
- You lost a loved one.

- Your marriage is falling apart.

How do you give thanks when life is hard?

It's been a tough year. We've had:

- a global pandemic
- racial injustice
- a slump in the economy.
- And the Jays missed the playoffs.

Instead of feeling thankful, it's easy to feel depressed, dejected and disheartened.

Yet, throughout the Bible, God tells us to be thankful.

Give thanks *in all circumstances*... (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, *always* giving thanks to God the Father for everything (Ephesians 5:19-20)

I will praise the LORD *at all times*. I will constantly speak his praises. (Psalm 34:1, NLT)

Now when does God tell us to give thanks? Only when things are going well?

No. God tells us to give thanks at all times.

Turn to your neighbour and tell them, "give thanks in all circumstances."

We see this throughout scripture.

The prophet Habakkuk witnessed the destruction of Judah. He saw the Babylonians carry the people into exile. And as he surveys the damage what does he do? He gives thanks. He says:

**Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
*yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.* (Habakkuk 3:17-18)**

How does he do that? How does he give thanks when everything's been lost?

Another example is David. Early in his career, he was fleeing for his life. He lost his family, his friends, his home. Out of jealousy, King Saul is trying to kill him.

So as David hides in a cave thinking about all he's lost, what does he do? He gives thanks.

**Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth. (Psalm 57:5)**

How does he do that? How does he give thanks when he's fleeing for his life?

Another example is Paul. Paul was one of the most important leaders in the early church.

But at one point, he's put in jail for preaching the gospel. And while he's there, he learns that some of his opponents are trying to take advantage of his situation. They figure that while he's in prison, they will promote their own influence at Paul's expense.

But as Paul sits in his cell thinking about his situation, what does he do? He gives thanks.

But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this *I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice...* (Philippians 1:18)

How does he do that? How does Paul give thanks while in prison?

How can you give thanks? How can you give thanks...

- When your loved one is sick
- When your bills are piling up
- When you can't find a job
- When you're overwhelmed by life's demands

How can you give thanks in all circumstances?

Sometimes people will say, *I can be thankful because I know that so many people in the world have it harder than me. There are people who are starving, who are sick, who don't have a family or a home to live in.*

And this is true. Putting our problems in perspective is extremely helpful. It reminds us of all we do have.

We all need to do this. But we also need to go deeper. Because even when we do that, we're still thinking about our circumstances. Yes, we're thankful that we have it better than others. But we're still focused on our circumstances.

Here's the thing. **Biblical thanksgiving isn't based on our circumstances. It's based on the conviction that God is a good God.** He delights in giving good gifts to his children. And he gives these gifts in good times and in bad.

Thanksgiving is our way of acknowledging God's goodness. We thank God for his gifts. But more importantly, we thank God for being the great Gift Giver.

In many churches, including at Cornerstone, we have a liturgy for declaring God's goodness together. Here's how it works.

I'll say "God is good." And then you respond by saying, "all the time." And then I'll say "all the time." And then you'll say, "God is good."

Are you ready?

God is good. (All the time.) And all the time. (God is good.)

Amen!

What I want to do today is talk about thanksgiving. How can you give thanks in all circumstances? How can you give thanks not just when things are going well. But how can you give thanks even when you're hurting, lonely and confused?

The passage we're going to look at today is Romans 8:28-30.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Jonathan Edwards, an influential preacher during the Great Awakening once preached a sermon on this passage. He shared three points which we're going to use as our outline today.

So this morning I'd like to share three reasons why you can be thankful in all circumstances.

- 1) Our bad things will turn out for good.
- 2) Our good things can never be taken from us.
- 3) The best things are yet to come!

The first reason to be thankful is **Our bad things will turn out for good.**

Verse 28 says, "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

Many of you know this verse. It's one of the most famous verses in the Bible. Why is that?

It's because it contains a special promise.

And the promise isn't that bad things won't happen to you.

Many people think that when you become a Christian, bad things won't happen to you anymore. After all, you go to church. You read your Bible, you pray, give and serve.

It's like because you're doing all these things for God, God somehow owes you.

But is that really true?

Jesus, the One whom our faith centers on suffered and died on the cross. He tells us to take up our own cross and follow him. He even says that in this world you will have trouble. (John 16:33)

So why would we think that our lives would be any easier because we're Christians. Sometimes when we suffer as Christians, I wonder how much of that suffering comes from the suffering itself or the fact that we're surprised that we even have to suffer.

No the promise in this verse isn't that bad things won't happen to you. The promise is that God will take those bad things and use them for your good. How does he do that?

A great example is found in the story of Joseph. Joseph is the favourite son of Jacob. As a result, his brothers are jealous. They sell him into slavery which begins a series of bad things happening to him.

- He's taken from his family.
- He's accused of rape.
- He's thrown into prison.

Joseph experiences betrayal, suffering and imprisonment.

But later, Pharaoh has a dream. Joseph is brought to interpret it and he explains that there will be a famine. He comes up with a plan and is then given authority over the whole country.

Eventually the famine reaches Canaan where his family lives so they go to Egypt. There Joseph provides food for them to eat and the best land for them to live in. Because of everything that happened to him, he came into this position, he saves his family and preserves God's people.

When his father dies, his brothers are terrified. They fear that Joseph will take revenge on them. But what does Joseph say? He says,

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20)

Joseph certainly wasn't happy about his circumstances. He hadn't done anything to deserve them. But Joseph saw how God used even these horrible circumstances to bring about good.

God didn't make these things happen. God wasn't happy that these things happened. But he leveraged them to advance his purposes.

It might not have worked out overnight, but over time, God uses these bad things to bring about good.

So why can Christians be thankful when bad things happen? Because our bad things can turn out for good.

Take the pandemic for example. For over a year, we couldn't have in-person worship services. And this was really hard.

But do you know what? God was working through a bad situation to accomplish his good. Because during this time...

- Many new people connected with our online services.
- Many people found healing through our online support groups like Freedom Session and GriefShare.
- Many people found community and a place to belong by joining a small group.
- Many people in the community experienced Jesus' love through our outreach initiatives.

Can we thank God for that?

In fact, we're growing so much that we're planning a second service. But in order for that to happen, we need **xx** new volunteers to help out in various roles.

So if you're interested in learning more about these opportunities or you'd like to sign-up, please visit our webpage on the screen.

[PPT/Online Host: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/serve]

You may be going through a hard time right now. But you can still give thanks. Why? Because with God, our bad things will turn out for good.

- Who knows how God may be working in your situation?
- Who knows how he may be revealing his love to you?
- Who knows how he may be deepening your faith?
- Who knows how he will ultimately use this for good?

But what we do know is that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

The second reason you can be thankful is because **our good things can never be taken from us.**

Pastor Tim Keller says that God never promises better life circumstances; he promises a better life.

Better life circumstances are about:

- Comfort
- Health
- Status
- Success

These can be gifts from God. And when we receive them, we should be thankful. But God never promises better circumstances. He promises a better life.

What does that look like? It looks like Jesus.

This life looks like his love. It didn't matter how much people annoyed, frustrated or attacked him. Jesus was always full of compassion, grace and forgiveness.

This life looks like his peace. It didn't matter how much he had to do or what people expected from him. Jesus was never frantic or rushed. He was always full of joy and made time for God and for other people.

This life looks like his determination. Even when things got hard, even when he was betrayed, even when he suffered all by himself, Jesus knew who he was and what he had to do. And nothing could stop him from living out his calling.

We all know this is how Jesus lived his life. But how many of you know that God is committed to developing this life in you?

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (v. 29)

When you decide to follow Jesus, Jesus gives you his character. You might not realize you have it, but it's there - in seed form. God helps you through his Spirit to grow that seed. And as your partner with him, God shapes you and forms you more and more into the image of his Son.

Now this isn't something you can do on your own. Only God can do it. That's why he gives you everything you need.

Peter says,

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature... (2 Peter 1:3-4)

God is committed to helping you become who you were meant to be. And he won't let anything get in the way. He'll use good circumstances to do it. He'll use bad circumstances to do it.

John Newton, who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace puts it like this, "everything is necessary that he sends, nothing can be necessary that he withholds."

Think about that. Do you realize what this means? It means that right now, you have everything you need to do everything God's called you to do. That's why you can be thankful. Because our good things can never be taken from us.

The third reason to be thankful is this: **The best things are yet to come!**

In verse 30, it says, And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

God's glory is one of Paul's favorite themes. It comes up a lot when he's encouraging Christians who are going through hard times.

Earlier in verse 18 he says, **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)**

In other words, even when you're suffering, as long as you're focused on God's future glory, you can give thanks in all circumstances.

Because as a Christian, you have:

- God's forgiveness
- God's all-sufficient grace,
- God's Spirit living inside of you.

And even though you have all these things now, which is reason enough to be thankful. Paul says, the best is yet to come! There is a future glory waiting for you. And if you understand this glory, you can deal with anything.

So what is this glory?

The Bible says that one day Jesus will return. And when he comes, he'll judge evil and set the world right once and for all. Sin will be defeated. Creation will be restored to its original purpose. Human beings will be raised to life never to die again. You and I will receive glorified bodies, free from sin and corruption. And we'll enjoy complete and inexpressible joy in God's presence forever.

Now that's something to look forward to!

When you understand this future glory, you can deal with anything. Paul says it's like:

- A mother who endures the pain of childbirth because she knows a baby's coming.
- An athlete who trains his body because he knows there's a prize.

So even though right now you may be going through a hard time, you can be thankful. Why? Because the best is yet to come! When you think about this future glory, you can deal with anything.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Jesus lived this out throughout his life. But never more than when he was preparing for his death.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he shared a meal with his closest friends. He took the bread – which symbolized his body, and broke it. He thought about how his body would soon be brutally broken. How he would suffer. How he would be separated from his father.

And in that moment, what does Jesus do? He gives thanks.

How can he do that? Jesus can do that not because of his circumstances. After all, he was about to be tortured and killed. Jesus can give thanks because of the glory of undeserving sinners like you and me being made right with God through his sacrifice.

That's why the writer of Hebrews says,

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

So this Thanksgiving, whether you're:

- Full or empty
- Rejoicing or mourning
- Dancing or weeping
- Healthy or sick

You can give thanks in all circumstances because:

- 1) Our bad things will turn out for good.
- 2) Our good things can never be taken from us.
- 3) The best things are yet to come!