

## Give Thanks Always

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Matthew 6:22-34

### All Saints Day

Today is All Saints day and we have just remembered and celebrated the lives of faithful saints who have gone before us. Our lives have been blessed by Tina Bishop, Janice DiFranco, Don Kennedy, and many other saints in our lives. And we have to give thanks to them. Because of their love, sacrifice and dedication, our lives have been enriched and we experience abundant life. Although we do not often see it, our lives are built on a myriad of relationships with other human beings. Being human means that we are in inescapable relationships with other fellow human beings and God.

[Ppt1] The Chinese character for a human being is 人 (Rén). As you can see on the screen, 人 is a hieroglyph reflecting two persons leaning on each other. Being a human being means to be interconnected with one another. While we often forget this fundamental meaning of being human... as we remember and celebrate saints in our lives, we not only recognize these unbreakable relationships with other people, but we also learn that the only proper response to them is “appreciation.”

### Healthy Eyes

The word, “Appreciation” means a feeling of gratitude but this word also relates to a way of seeing the world. “Appreciate” means “to grasp the nature, worth, quality,” or “be fully aware of.” But appreciation is not just a passive skill, just keeping our eyes open. To appreciate the value in something, we must be attentive to it.

How many of you like to visit art museums to see paintings? My wife and I visited the Museum of Modern Art, in New York City once and we really enjoyed it. Just like many people do, we took a lot of pictures there like this [ppt 2]. Did I see many paintings at the museums? Sure! I did. We ran around all the floors of the museum and make sure we didn't miss any. But did I REALLY see them? Probably not. People who really enjoy

art spend even an hour looking at just one painting so they are able to see the meaning and beauty of the painting. I saw all the paintings, but I failed to appreciate the real beauty and creativity of each work of art because I did not really pay attention to them.

Sadly, we often make the same mistake in our daily lives. We are insensitive to things happening around us and often fail to appreciate God's blessings hidden in plain sight. In today's scripture, Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness." (Matthew 66:22-23) How are your eyes? Do you have healthy eyes to grasp and appreciate God's abundant blessings in your lives?

In the ancient world, the eye was perceived as a lamp that projected light and grasped the external world. Imagine that you are lost in the middle of the forest at night. You have a 3000 lumen flashlight, a very bright one, and a candle. Which one do you want to use? The flashlight, of course, because it enables you see much better in the dark than a dimly burning candle. If our eyes are good, we can see things better and perceive God's grace and discover blessings in disguise. A healthy eye in the biblical sense is an eye that sees the world through the lens of faith, faith in God's love and generosity.

But we do not always discover God's blessings for us. Right? When something happens, which one do you see first, the positive side or negative one? We tend to see the negative side first because our brain is simply built that way. From the dawn of human history, our survival depended on our ability to dodge danger so the brain developed systems that would make us more sensitive to bad signs over good ones. That is why we can easily find more things to complain about than things to appreciate.

### **Scarcity Principle**

Since our brain is built to be sensitive to dangers, we tend to focus more on what we don't have rather than what we do. That is our natural reaction. The problem is that many companies today stimulate our sense of scarcity and danger to sell their products.

How many advertisements or commercials do you read or watch every day? Half of my mail is advertisements. If you watch a tv show, you probably watch at least five

commercials in an hour. Think of how often you see or hear these phrases each and every day [ppt 3]: “Hurry! Limited time offer!” “Last chance sale!” “Sale Extended for one day only!” Reading through the weekly ad for your local grocery store, you notice that several items have a large notation beside them stating “Limited Quantity!” Suddenly, you find yourself wanting to rush down to the market and grab some of the strawberries, honeydew or beef that the store assures you are in short supply.

Have you ever had a similar experience? If you’ve ever felt a sense of urgency to make a purchase before a sale ended or before a product ran out, I assure you that you’ve just been influenced by scarcity marketing tactics. We tend to place a higher value on items that are scarce, while placing a lower value on items that are plentiful.

Psychologists refer to this tendency as the scarcity principle. Marketers are also well-aware of this tendency and often use it to sell products. And such tactics work surprisingly well. (so Sometimes, I wonder if people would come back to church if we advertised, ‘limited pews. only two pews left’ or “last chance for salvation!” “Salvation extended for one week only! What do you think?)

[ppt 4] But if we perceive the world as a place in which resources for living are always limited so we have to compete with other people to get what we need, it is impossible to give thanks always. While Paul said, “give thanks in all circumstances. for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” (Thessalonians 5:18), if our eye is primarily shaped by the scarcity principle, we will not be able to give thanks always and will not discover abundant blessings in our lives.

### **Don’t be Frantic about necessities because God care for you!**

Unlike the commercials on television, [ppt 5] Jesus tells us that the world is not a small place without enough resources. God created the world beautifully and abundantly and God still cares for people. Jesus told his disciples about God’s providential care for God’s people.

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the

body more than clothing? [ppt6] Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? why do you worry about clothing? [ppt7] Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:25-26, 29-30)

Jesus assures us that God knows our needs and God will provide what we need. The world instills fear and worry that what we have will ever be enough, but Jesus Christ assures us that we are under God’s providential care and our needs will be met on time. God knows your needs and God will surely provide what you need as God had done throughout your lives.

### **Gratitude and Gift Month**

We celebrate November as Gratitude and Gift month. Since our brains recognize more keenly what we lack than what we have received, we need to intentionally search for God’s blessings in our lives. Giving thanks to God and other people is an important practice in discovering God’s abundant blessing and grace that is often hidden in plain sight. Some say, [ppt 8] “It is not happiness that brings us gratitude. It is gratitude that brings us happiness.” A simple act of gratitude can change our lives. The season of thanksgiving is a particularly good time to start this practice of gratitude and appreciation.

So we will practice gratitude together throughout this month. As you can see on your left, a bare gratitude tree is on the wall. You have probably already received leaves and fruits when you entered the sanctuary. If you have not received gratitude leaves or fruits, please take them with you when you leave the sanctuary today. Every day, pause for a moment and think of 3 things you are grateful for. And write them down on your gratitude leaves and bring them back. We will attached those leaves and fruits to the tree. This practice will help us to see how much we are blessed by God.

Also, say ‘thank you’ and express your gratitude and appreciation to people around you. Do this gratitude-practice every day until it becomes a habit of our mind. Then, we will be able to see the world through the lens of faith in God’s generosity and discover abundant blessings in every corner of our lives. Then, we can give thanks in all circumstances.

Can we practice it now? what are you thankful for now? I am grateful for my wife, Juhee. I am also thankful for my Asbury family. I am thankful that my English is getting better and I am even more thankful for that your listening to my Korean accent is improving as well.

I am thankful for your love for the church. Some of you come to the church more often than I do. Worship committee meeting on Monday, finance committee on Tuesday, choir practice on Wednesday, Hungry Friday packing on Thursday, church fair preparation on Friday. Your love and your faithfulness to God and the church are the true fuel that moves Asbury forward. And I appreciate that. What else are we grateful for?

Sometimes, we may not be able to perceive God’s blessing. But remember John Wesley’s words. “The best thing of all is God is with us.” God is with us always and God will take care of you and our church. Let us be grateful. Give thanks always! Amen.