

Date: November 22, 2020

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23

Title: THANKFUL

Everybody forgets something. Some people forget names. Some people forget where they put their glasses, even when those glasses are on the top of their head.

Cell phones, shoes, car keys, locker combinations, what is it, that you're most likely to forget? Why do we so easily forget things, especially things that are fairly important to us? I think, it's because, we're not living in the moment. Our mind is someplace else. We're stressed, distracted, rushed. And so . . . we forget. Strange things can happen, when you're stressed, distracted, and rushed.

Back before COVID-19, when air travel was at its busiest, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) reported that, air travelers left behind about \$1 million dollars, each year in loose change, at airport security bins. TSA spokesperson Lisa Farbstein says, security checkpoints can be stressful and distracting, and travelers often forget to, take that last look around, and make sure they got all their items. Their mind is someplace else. But, that little lapse in focus, adds up to \$1 million dollars in loose change each year.

This week, people all over the United States, will be celebrating Thanksgiving. My question is, why don't we thank God continuously, **every day**, for our many blessings? My guess is, it happens because, we're hurried, distracted and stressed. Our mind is someplace else. And so we forget, the incredible blessing of being alive, of having a sense of hope, of having people who love us, of having a roof over our heads, such incredible blessings.

John Kralik was a lawyer in Pasadena, California. Back in 2007 he reached a really low point in his life. He was twice-divorced, out of shape, and having money troubles. He didn't have anything to look forward to! He was stuck in a downward spiral! But in the midst of his tough circumstances, an idea came to John: write one thank-you note, every day, for a whole year. This was John's way, of forcing himself, to notice something positive in his life. He began writing one thank-you note each day, to family members, friends, colleagues, **former** bosses, professors, and teachers.

This act of writing one thank-you note each day, changed John's life. He wrote about it in his book *A Simple Act of Gratitude*. His relationships improved. He left his negative mindset behind. He began to notice dozens of reasons each day to be thankful. As he became more thankful, he became more joyful and hopeful.

The Apostle Paul didn't write 365 thank-you notes. But he did write, about one-half of the letters, that make up the New Testament. Paul's letters overflow with thanksgiving. No matter what challenges he endured, Paul's letters, like today's letter to the church in Ephesus, were filled with thankfulness. They overflow with joy. Joy and Thankfulness go together, like peanut butter and jelly. Today's Bible passage gives us a great example, of heartfelt gratitude, put into action.

Paul was thankful for the faith and love, of his fellow believers. In fact, Paul was so thrilled by the faith and love, of the Ephesian church, that he wrote, “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

That’s some serious gratitude! He was inspired by their faith in the Lord Jesus, and was encouraged by their love, for one another. Their faith in Jesus gave them a foundation of hope, and purpose for their lives. And it inspired their genuine love for one another.

Now, stop and think for a minute, how amazing the church is. Once you claim Jesus as Lord, you become brothers and sisters, with people of every nation, language, culture and race, all over the world, who also claim Jesus as Lord. You gain an instant family of people, who live under the command, to love each other, as much as Jesus loves them. Remember though, none of us lives up to Jesus’ example, all the time. But, if you walk into any Christian church worldwide, and ask people, “How has your church family shown its love for you?” you will get story after story of people whose lives were changed by the love and encouragement of their church.

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the state of Tennessee, was diagnosed in a man named Chris Baumgartner. Baumgartner and his family dealt with the fear of the virus, and the fear that people would find out that he had it. They expected others would shun them, or harass them, like lepers in Jesus’ day.

Instead, when Baumgartner posted his diagnosis on social media, he was stunned by the outpouring of love and support. People brought meals to his family. They sent cards and texts. Baumgartner received hundreds of calls. In his Facebook post, Chris wrote, “Every single act of kindness, every single message, every single call we’ve received, have all ended with the same 5 words: We are praying for you! *All of them!*” Baumgartner ended his post with the hashtag #bethechurch.

Faith in action, means love in action.

Paul put his thankfulness into action, by praying regularly for the church.

How often do you pray for your church? How often do you pray for the worldwide Church? Paul didn’t take the church for granted. He made it a point, to regularly pray, that God would bless the church in Ephesus. The greatest blessing Paul could pray for, was that they would come to know God better. Because as we grow, in our knowledge of God, we grow in our level of love, joy, faith, hope, and peace.

Something happens when we pray regularly for the church. Our love for our fellow believers starts to grow. Our unity with others starts to grow. I can almost guarantee you, that the people who complain the most about their church, are the people who pray the least for their church. The people who start controversies and conflicts in the church, are the people who are least likely, to serve in ministries in the church. When we pray for the church, we start to see more opportunities, where we can serve others. When we pray for the church, God may work all sorts of positive changes in our church. But more importantly, God will work all sorts of positive changes in us.

In 2001 Mary Parry was homeless. Her life had taken a tough turn. She lived in a tent in Pennsylvania, alongside the Appalachian Trail. Mary began making friends with the dozens of trail hikers, who passed through the area. And as she reached out to help

these strangers, Mary discovered a new sense of joy, and purpose in her life. Her life began to improve, when she focused on helping others, in need.

Today Mary lives in an apartment right off the Appalachian Trail. She has earned the nickname, Trail Angel Mary, from the hundreds of hikers she helps each year. Mary says, "Helping them is my way of thanking God, for bringing those people to me, when I was having a rough time in my life." Mary is just one, of many people, in today's world, who have found that serving others, is the best way to show our thankfulness, to God, for the many blessings.

When Scott Macauley was 24 years old, his parents were going through a divorce. His family was arguing and torn apart by bitterness. Scott dreaded the thought of Thanksgiving. He wanted to share Thanksgiving, with people who wouldn't take the holiday for granted.

So that year, Scott put an ad in his local paper, inviting anyone who might be alone on Thanksgiving Day, to come to his house for dinner. He cooked a big meal, and a few people came, and they all had a good time. So Scott decided, that this was the truest way, to celebrate Thanksgiving. He's done this every year since. He's fed police officers, newly widowed or divorced people, immigrants who are new to the U.S. and still learning English, people who have just moved to his town, and haven't made friends yet.

Scott tells of one woman suffering from Parkinson's disease, who hadn't left her nursing home in seven years. When she heard about his Thanksgiving dinner, she hired an ambulance to drive her to his house. She had a great time at his dinner, and cried when it was time to leave.

Scott says, he wants the theme of his life to be "Brighten the Corner Where You Are." He's a great example of how the spirit of thankfulness, spreads joy to others.

When we put our thankfulness into action, we brighten the corner where we are. We change lives.

And finally, Paul reminded his fellow believers, that the greatest reason to be thankful, is their salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul spent the first part of his life as a religious zealot, but a man whose heart was far from God. Once he understood God's love for us, through Jesus' life, and death on the cross, Paul overflowed with thanksgiving. He endured every kind of suffering and persecution, so he could share true joy that comes from God, with others. Paul is still sharing true joy and thankfulness with us today.

A man named Allan Kerr tells of hanging out with his best friend Steven, at a pub in Katoomba, Australia. A young woman from the Salvation Army came in, and began telling the men that God loved them, and that she loved them too. Allan told the young woman, that both she and God, were idiots. Allan says, alcohol and drugs were his god. He believed he was unlovable, even to God. The young Salvation Army officer named Julia Mann was not put off by Allan's insults. She prayed for Allan and Steven that night.

Allan moved away from Katoomba. But, Steven still ran into Julia Mann a few times, and through her witness, Steven became a Christian. Steven and Julia also got

engaged, to be married. Now Allan was mystified by the change in his friend. He and Steven went on a road trip. Steven took his Bible along; Allan took his drugs. But Steven's newfound happiness was so noticeable, that Allan asked him what drug he was on. Steven suggested that Allan read the Gospel of John. When Allan read John 3:16, it shook him. He says he apologized to God, because Jesus had to die for his sins. Allan says, "I told God, that if he could make me like my friend Steven, then I was prepared to believe in him."

Both Allan and Steven joined the Salvation Army and worked in local missions in Australia. Allan who once claimed that, ". . . drugs were my god," dedicated the rest of his life, to sharing the life-changing love of Jesus Christ, with others. Looking back at his life, Allan comments, "Julia was not an idiot . . . Nor was God. They both knew what they were doing. I didn't go looking for God. God came looking for me. I am still amazed at God's love, that God would come looking for a lost sheep, as I was. I am evidence, that God is for everyone."

The Apostle Paul could have written, "I am evidence that God is for everyone." That was the secret to Paul's overflowing, never-ending thankfulness, and his joy. If we choose, we can make every day Thanksgiving Day, plus we can make a choice to live in this moment, and notice the many blessings of life, that we usually take for granted. Thank God, we're surrounded by other believers, who share our hope, and our joy.

Let's put our thankfulness into action, by praying that others, would know the great gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, and, our fellow believers, would grow in their faith, in the Lord, and their love for one another. Let's also pray together, we can share in a thankfulness and joy, that will draw others to Jesus, and change lives. So, with thanksgiving and true joy, let's Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.