

Being Thankful Attitudes That Enliven

It seems that Thanksgiving; at least the meaning of it all is being lost somewhere. In many respects we've traded it wholesale for football, turkey, an insane variety of foodstuffs and an excuse for a four day weekend. In a lot of ways it's become more the starting gun to Christmas; a brief celebration with a built-in justification to gorge ourselves the day before we run helter-skelter to the malls, throw up the tree and string lights for another holiday whose purpose has likewise grown dim.

It's amazing how much negative stuff a thankful orientation can override. Let's be frank, being thankful doesn't change the reality of what we're facing, it simply places the emphasis on what we have verses what we don't have. It focuses us on the possibilities, not the liabilities. It's not about making anything different. It's about seeing things differently. When we see things differently, we engage those things differently. And that kind of change can be utterly life-changing.

It seems that our view of life is often tainted by some of the attitudes that we carry around with us. As the Thanksgiving holiday draws near we might want to readjust some of these basic attitudes in order to more fully embrace a profound and potentially life-altering sense of thanksgiving:

A Sense of Entitlement

Being thankful is entirely contrary to a sense of entitlement. The two don't do well together. In some ways we've been groomed and grown to believe that life owes us. That's typically not some blatantly outward belief that we carry around, but it's down there inside of us somewhere. If I'm entitled, there is no need to be thankful . . . why would I be? If I'm owed something and it's legitimately mine, why should I have to be thankful for it? Much less, if it's mine to begin with why would the thought of thankfulness even cross my mind in the first place?

When we live with a degree of comfort and wealth, a sense of entitlement kind of grows. Comfort and wealth is no longer viewed as the result or by-product of exhaustingly hard work, or undeserved blessing, or costly sacrifice, or unrelenting commitment to a goal or dream. It's often not seen as something delivered to us by the work of our own hands or the gift of something or someone. It just is. It becomes not the product of anything that produced it. It is a product of our entitlement. This being the case, it should simply be; and if it should be, and in the being it should be ours, why the need for thankfulness?

Our Lost Sense of Privilege

In abundance, we tend to assume abundance. "Life is just this way," we think. It's natural. It just is. What is in actuality profound blessing is seen as the norm; even the mundane. Food should always be in abundance on the shelves in the grocery. An endless array of products should adorn the aisles of every store we enter. Water and electricity should be there at our beck and call; never failing to respond to a turn of the tap or a flip of the switch regardless of the time of day. Whatever our needs (as complex and multiple as they are) the resources for those needs should be within easy reach or at least easily attainable.

This is all the stuff of privilege. Two-thirds of the world has no idea what it is to live with these privileges. Every day the blow dryer turns on, the toaster toasts,

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the television provide us an endless variety of blurring images; lights brighten our path, computers connect us to friends next door as well as half a world away and the refrigerator provides us numerous options for every appetite. These things and a million more are things of privilege; rich often undeserved privilege. In regaining our sense of privilege, we regain our sense of thankfulness.

Our Sense of Speed

It's always about the next thing . . . whether it's our relentless attempts to achieve the next thing or our dread fear that the "next thing" will never happen. Whatever the case might be, we live in a culture that's programmed for extreme fast-forward. We move so insanely fast that we often forget where we've been and we have trouble keeping track of how far we are from where we want to go. There is no time for reflection or to put down roots. Most of our lives move in a wild fury of crazed momentum, flinging and flailing forward, or in some direction.

We don't have time to be thankful. In the blur of it all, we most often can't even remember the things or the people or the events that flew by us that we should be thankful for. Worse yet, we move in such a whirling fury that we can't even see the things around us that are always there in order to be thankful for them. Slow down, for the riches in life are not seen and cannot be savored at light speed. If we can't see these riches, we're not likely to be thankful for them.

Our Lost Sense of Wonder

We have opted to see life as that which we control and manage, rather than that which moves in mysterious and unexpected ways. We no longer marvel, rather we manipulate. As children, we looked wide-eyed at a world brimming with wonders. Now we analyze, dissect and create action-plans to control it all; sterilizing life into a wondrous oblivion. In the end we control just enough to give us an illusion that we control it all, or most of it anyway. In reality, we don't.

So we lose the miraculous because we only pay attention to it to the degree that we can control it. The truly astounding flows right by us because it's not something that we made or can control so it doesn't hit our radar. The world is brimming with phenomenal wonders that leave plenty of room for a sense of thankfulness if we simply allow the miraculous to be the miraculous.

The Adjustments

We need to adjust a bit. Relinquish a sense of entitlement. Regain a sense of privilege. Recalibrate the speed at which you're living your life. Recapture a sense of wonder and awe. Blend these together vigorously and a sense of genuine thankfulness will begin to permeate every season of the year.