Four Ways to Say Thank You to God

Second in the series: “Christian Thanksgiving”

# Scripture: 1 Chron. 16:23-36

# Key Question? “What shall I return to the Lord for all His goodness to me?” (Psalm 116:12) – 4 Mental Pictures

# Intro:

I invite you this morning to ponder the question of the Psalmist, “How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? Ps. 116:12 NIV

On one hand we could too easily say, “That’s a rhetorical question. It’s not possible to repay God.”

That’s true, it’s not possible. God’s generosity to us is beyond our puny ability to comprehend, say nothing of repay. But that is not the line of thought of the inspired writer. He immediately begins to answer the question in that chapter as well as in places like the two we read from this morning.

It’s as if he says to us. “Of course, you can’t fully repay God, but how would you begin?”

Or maybe we should think of it like this. “Of course, you can’t fully repay God, but does that mean you shouldn’t attempt to do at least something in return for his goodness, simply to show your gratitude?”

Now when you put it that way, I think all of us would agree that we must start. We must try to give thanks to God – to “bless the Lord.” But how?

This morning I am suggesting four mental pictures to help us get started.

# Using your Tongue

## Visual–A children’s choir singing praise to God

In our text today, David begins by giving us instruction to praise the Lord with our tongue. For him, such praise involved singing and giving testimony to God’s salvation and mighty works.

Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. 1 Chron. 16:23, 24 NIV

This last week at Bible study we were studying Psalm 16. One of the expressions in Psalm 16 (v.7) is, “I bless the Lord.” You probably recognize the expression from Psalm 34 that we read this morning. We had quite a discussion over what that could possibly mean – to bless the Lord. The list of answers that we came up with is very parallel with the outline of our sermon this morning. Later I was studying more and discovered that the expression “bless the Lord” occurs in 18 different verses in the Psalms and in five of those verses it occurs twice. It also occurs in six other verses in the Bible. I figured out from looking at some of the other occurrences that the number one way that we need to understand this phrase, “to bless the Lord,” is that we would use our tongue in various ways to bring honor to our God.

Modern versions replace the word bless with the word praise which gives us the first big hint as to what it might mean to bless the Lord. In Psalm 34:1 the phrase “to bless the Lord” is used in synonymous parallelism with the idea of praising God. That gives us another good hint that we are on the right track. A third affirmation that this is the primary idea is found in Nehemiah chapter 9. The leading Levites instructed the people to “bless the Lord.” Immediately thereafter, we find words of praise to God both from the Levites and from Ezra.

Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise."  
And Ezra said: "You are the Lord, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you. Nehemiah 9:5, 6 NIV

The image of children singing praises to God is a good one to help us remember that singing praise is a great way to give thanksgiving to God. The New Testament confirms that singing praise and thanksgiving go together.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Col 3:16 NIV

So, telling someone else about the great things that God has done for you is a great way to put thanksgiving into practice.

# Using your heart—From the Heart

## Visual–A valentine heart with a picture of a child kneeling in prayer

The second picture that I have chosen is that of a big valentine heart with a child kneeling in prayer in the middle. I chose this picture to remind us that Thanksgiving needs to be a worship from the heart to God--an adoration out of hearts filled with gratitude. When we were studying that phrase at Bible study, “I will bless the Lord,” we discovered that the root idea behind the Hebrew word which is translated “to bless” relates to the posture of kneeling. So, it speaks to us of heartfelt worship.

As David worshiped God in poetry in 1 Chronicles 16, we sense the close relationship between Thanksgiving and worship in verse 34.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.   
1 Chron. 16:34 NIV

Thanksgiving to God by its very nature involves humility before God. To be thankful to someone for something is to acknowledge the help of that person. When we are thankful to God, we acknowledge God’s help, God’s beneficence, God’s graciousness to us. There is an underlying sense in our Thanksgiving that we needed the assistance that God freely gave us. God has poured out his amazing grace and our response is Thanksgiving from worshipful hearts.

# Giving Offerings

## Visual–A child putting allowance money into a Salvation Army kettle

In answering the question posed as our key thought, the Psalmist in Psalm 116:17

I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord.

In 1 Chronicles 16:29 David admonished;

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come before him.

In 1 Chronicles 1:20 David instructed the people to “Bless the Lord.” The next day the Israelites offered many sacrifices to God. Because of the mention in that context of “eating and drinking before the Lord,” I am quite certain that many of the sacrifices were specifically “thank offerings.”

Today, our thank offerings also express our praise to God. Spiritually, they open the way for God to work in our lives in new ways.

“He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God." Ps 50:23

Some offerings that we give to God are tithes which are offerings that we give out of basic stewardship of that which God gives to us. These are our offerings toward the goal of 10% given to charity that God holds out for us in Scripture-- or if we’re not there yet, the offerings we give as we stretch toward that goal. These are the offerings we are instructed in the NT to bring each week according to the way God has blessed us. There’s a sense of holy obligation about such offerings.

Other offerings we give to God, not because we’re counting or because we’re worried that God is, rather these offerings are given just because we want to – because we are thankful to God for his goodness to us and want to say thank you in a tangible way. Our hearts are overflowing because of God’s benefits to us. These offerings are given in loving generosity more than out of a sense of duty. These are our thank offerings. They might be given to your church or they might be given to a non-profit working with the poor, or to someone in need that you know personally. And Thanksgiving is obviously a great time of year for thank offerings.

I have used a child in my picture for us to remember because children are just as capable of giving thank offerings as adults are, and maybe more so. By nature, they are not bean-counters as we adults often are, a tendency which often restricts our thankful generosity.

Some of you brought Thanksgiving gifts today by contributing to the Thanksgiving baskets for this year. I believe our Compassion Sunday next week will help. There will be two special opportunities for Thank offerings. We will be collecting offering for UMCOR disaster relief. There was another natural disaster this past week in California. And we will be collecting food for the local food banks. If you thank God because you eat well, please bring something next week for those who are food-insecure in our three towns. I hope to pile our food gifts right up here in the front. Let’s fill up Judy’s truck.

# “Thanks-Living”

## Visual-A child in a T-shirt with the logo, “Property of Jesus”

During the time when I was serving in my first pastorate, I drove by a church sign on Maple Avenue in Elmira, NY. The word on the sign looked like a misspelling but I know it was not—it was intentional. The word read, “Thanks-living.” Only one letter had been changed from the usual spelling of the celebrated November holiday. But the purpose of the intentional misspelling was immediately apparent.

I discovered the idea was not original with them. Albert Schweitzer had a philosophy of “Thanksliving” which he stated like this: “In gratitude for your own good fortune, render in return some sacrifice of your life for other life.”

What might this look like?

If we really want to show thanksgiving to God, we need to live our whole lives with a thankful attitude, giving praise and honor to God every day for his many gifts. If we are thankful to God, we can express our thanks every day by living in ways that please God. If we are truly thankful to GGod, we can express our thanks by serving others. For Jesus reminded us that if we have done something for one of the “least of these” it is as if we have done it for him. If we are truly thankful to God, it should go without saying that God has our allegiance and worship every day. In these ways, it will not just be a Thanksgiving holiday in November, but a Thanks-living all year long.