

Before the 70's ended I found myself attending Evangel College, a Christian college, in Springfield Missouri. Evangel was a strict, no nonsense establishment, and one that didn't appreciate the disturbance of the mid-western conservative balance it tried to maintain. Then they made the mistake of accepting the application of a long-haired, out spoken young man from New York.

It was not a good fit...

My friend Alan, who was also accepted, drove out to Missouri together and as soon (no lie) we drove into the parking lot we instantly knew we had made a huge mistake as well. I'm not sure what it was, but the place gave out a vibe of conformity that we knew wasn't going to end well. This was confirmed when we went to settle our stuff into our dorm room. Before even saying hello, the Resident Assistant told I needed to get a haircut...I told him he needed to get a better greeting.

The year didn't get any better from that point on...one run in after another with the RA (we nicknamed him the resident assassin) until at last...Thanksgiving break came. However, neither Al nor I had enough money for the trip home...which was a bummer. Although it was against school policy, the college allowed us to stay in our dorm over the holiday. Before you say "wow...that was a generous Christian gesture by the college", let me add that they turned the heat off in the dorms and it was a very cold November in Missouri.

So they we were, the only two kids on campus, alone on Thanksgiving break with no money and now no heat. Our supplies to get us through to the following Monday was a loaf of Banana bread my mom sent (another story) and a box of Sugar Pops cereal...and tap water from our bathroom sink. Are you feeling sorry for us yet?

Al and I rationed out bowls of Sugar Pops (no milk) and slices of what my mom called banana bread (told you that was another story). We huddled underneath blankets watching the Thanksgiving Day Parade on a small BW TV to pass the time. I remember wishing that the people handling the big balloons would trip on something, letting the balloons get loose and float away...causing the bands to chase after them.

We were not feeling very grateful.

Then there was a knock on our door, which started us since we thought we were alone. When we answered there stood an older student who lived on campus in one of the senior apartments. Somehow he got the word of two stranded New Yorkers without anyone to share a Thanksgiving meal with...so he invited us to his. The apartment was and the meal simple, but it taught me a big lesson on thankfulness...or it taught me about the lack of gratefulness on my part.

That experience exposed my heart and I remember being disturbed by my lack of faith...and giving into a grumbling spirit. What I saw was that I was upset by my loss of comfort more than a loss of intimacy with God...because I was ungrateful. When I was constantly complaining, I was (in my heart) saying that God is not enough to satisfy me.

Is there a way to repurpose our heart to consistently beat with gratitude? To live a life that is centered on being thankful, instead of worshipping my comfort? Yes, I believe there is.

### **First...Let's pray!**

To cultivate a heart of gratitude we must look at our Messiah's heart...what motivated Him to give thanks. There are some powerful examples in Scripture of what Jesus was thankful for...let's turn to John 11.

In this chapter Jesus' friend Lazarus has died. Setting the stage for our Lord to perform one of the most amazing miracles recorded in Scripture. He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, not after he had been dead for 4 minutes or 4 hours. Jesus was going to raise Lazarus from the dead after he had been dead for 4 days!

### **Before He brings life back to Lazarus...Jesus prays this amazing prayer I verses 41-42.**

*"So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard (give me an audience and understand) me. (42) I knew that you always (for ever more) hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."*

### **I love what I see here in this prayer...Jesus is thankful for His relationship with the Father**

Jesus was grateful to know that He was always one with the Father and thankful to know that the Father ***always heard*** His prayers. This powerful prayer sets the tone for this awesome display of Messiah's power and His love for His friend. The miracle goes beyond the benefit for Lazarus (although I bet he was happy) It also teaches us some important lessons on giving thanks.

### **Lesson 1: Difficult times need decisive Thankfulness!**

The death of His friend and the unbelief of other family members and mourners brought tears to the eyes of Jesus. Jesus attacked this difficult moment with a deliberate statement of faith in His Father! He would not be swayed by His grief or the unbelief of others...**He would give thanks.**

**Imagine the level of thankfulness in our hearts when we realize that the Father forever hears us!**

***He gave thanks...so can we...***

## **Lesson 2: Your attitude empowers your gratitude!**

### **Let's go back to John 11:14-15**

*"Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus has died, (15) and for your sake I am glad (to rejoice exceedingly) that I was not there, so that you may believe (entrust yourself to). But let us go to him.'"*

Jesus knew that God was bigger than this moment; His outlook was fueled by the bigger picture of God doing a redemptive work. Jesus said...for your sake I am glad...I am rejoicing because you going see God in a new way...what you believe about Him is all going to change and it's going to enlarge your faith.

**Imagine the level of thankfulness in our hearts when we realize that the Father is bigger than any difficult moment/season we face.**

*He gave thanks...so can we...*

## **Lesson 3: When you lift your gaze, you have reason to praise!**

### **John 11, verse 41**

*So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes...*

Sometimes you have to remove the debris, the rocks, and the barriers to thankfulness. Rolling away the stone was symbolic of their unbelief (Lord...he's dead...he stinks) Jesus knew that if we remove these barriers...life can come forth.

**That phrase...lifted up His eyes...**is extremely interesting. The word lift here also means to weigh anchor and to sail away. When we get our attention off our struggle, our pain, our difficulty and on thanking the Father...that praise, that worship that spirit of thankfulness frees us. Our vision changes and we see our circumstances as God sees them...as something He can bring life into.

True thankfulness is not ignoring the struggles; and the pain and fear that haunt us at times. Thanksgiving is suppose to be a way of life for us...to be like Jesus is to live a life of thankfulness.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:18**

*Give thanks (express gratitude) in (during) all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

**Notice it doesn't say FOR all circumstances...**it says IN, during, through difficult times we reach out, we praise; and we express a heart of worship that confesses our great need of Him.

**Imagine the level of thankfulness in our hearts when we realize that the Father is someone we can always look to...always depend on to speak life into us.**