

(11-24-24) The Essentials (8)

Community of Thanksgiving  
Psalm 100:1-5

Today is the last Sunday of our sermon series, *The Essentials*. For the last two months, we had time to think about our identities as God's community.

*We are a community of Sabbath.* We must remember who God is, who we are in His grace, and those who have lost their Sabbath. *We are a community of worship.* We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Wherever our body is, that is the place of our worship. *We are a community of fellowship.* We are called to share ourselves and participate in our church family's lives together. *We are a community of reformation.* We have to constantly reflect on ourselves and the teachings of the Bible and follow God's grace because, in His grace, we can be reformed. *We are a community of communion.* In our communion, we need to remember Jesus Christ's loving sacrifice for us and that we are united with the universal church and must proclaim Jesus Christ's death until he returns. *We are a community of servanthood.* We must honor and cherish the weaker parts of the body. By doing so, we can overcome any conflicts and challenges in Jesus' body. *We are a community for non-members.* We are not supposed to lose our focus on the hungry, the sick, and the victims of human inhumanity as a community for non-members. As we focus on those identities, we can faithfully carry out our missions as a foretaste and shadow of the Kingdom of God in a troubled world.

Finally, we are a community of Thanksgiving. You must be curious about how my family celebrates Thanksgiving day. *Let me show you a picture on the screen.* After living here in the United States for 26 years, we also prepare a traditional American-style meal on Thanksgiving Day. My wife, Somi, used to cook a special food from my hometown, Chuncheon, a hot and spicy stir-fried chicken BBQ called "*Dakgalbi*." According to *Taste Atlas*, a global food ranking website, *Dakgalbi* was ranked as the second best stir-fry dish last year. But my kids complained about not having turkey on our Thanksgiving dinner table. After some conversations, we made a decision to have an American-style Thanksgiving dinner going forward. However, we have kept chicken as the main dish on the table.

As we enter the season of Thanksgiving, let's take a moment to reflect on the reasons we give thanks.

**First of all, our thanksgiving originates from the Lordship and goodness of God.**

“Know that **the Lord is God**. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture ... For **the Lord is good**; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.” (Psalm 100:3 & 5 NRSV)

The foundation of our thankfulness is from God’s identity as our Lord who shows His goodness through His steadfast love and faithfulness to His covenant people. The Hebrew verb for “thank” is “yada (יָדָה).” In the Bible, “yada” is also translated as “confess” and “praise.” When translated as “confess,” yada’s focus is always Israel’s sin, transgression, and iniquities. Also, when translated as “praise,” yada’s object is always God, God’s name, God’s wonders, God’s goodness or wonderful works. So, the biblical concept of thankfulness includes the honest confession of our sins and mistakes and also our praise of God, God’s wonderful name, and God’s wonderful character and work.

So, if our thankfulness is based on who God is as our Lord and His goodness, showing His unfailing love and faithfulness, we can understand the following Scripture easily.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NRSV).

How can we give thanks in all circumstances? First, we need to remember that it is because God’s goodness, enduring love, and faithfulness to His covenant people never fail in our lives. Secondly, all the commands in the Bible are God’s hidden blessings for us, which can be revealed only when we obey them. God has already provided us with reasons to be thankful. We should strive to view our lives through the lens of God’s sovereignty, which reveals His steadfast love and faithfulness to His covenant people. This is why a grateful heart is closely linked to a heart of faith. A heart filled with gratitude is unwavering, unconditional, and can be thankful in all circumstances.

**So, how can we define a heart of gratitude?**

**It is a heart that recognizes and appreciates God’s grace, not only in our lives but also throughout history, in future generations, and even in God’s creation.**

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, **all the earth**... For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures **forever** and his faithfulness to **all generations**.” (Psalm 100:1 & 5 NRSV).

Here, the psalmist’s grateful heart is centered on God’s grace, which is effective throughout eternity, across all human generations, and within all creation.

King David was able to reflect on God’s glory and God’s marvelous works found in creation. He could clearly discern the silent proclamation of heaven, the skies,

and the day and night, all testifying to God's wonder and greatness, even though they did not produce any sound. Let us read Psalm 19:1-4 on the screen.

**"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun."** (Psalm 19:1-4 NIV)

Even though we do not know the specific situation David was in, it's clear he endured many challenges throughout his life. Despite these hardships, he maintained a heart of gratitude to God. By meditating on God's creation, David found the strength to sustain and persist in his life.

**According to the Scripture today, our thankful response to the Lordship of God and His goodness, everlasting love, and faithfulness is to worship and serve God with joy and gladness. "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing."** (Psalm 100:1-2 NRSV). Our service or ministry is our worship. And our worship is an expression of our grateful heart.

As you prepare for a special Thanksgiving dinner with your family, I heard that we have to be very careful not to bring political issues to the table. I remember when I visited my in-laws in South Korea, Somi's younger brother talked negatively about the then-previous Korean president whom I had supported at that time. While giving us a ride, he criticized the president for almost an hour. Somi and I felt very uncomfortable. I thought I should have rented a car. I was so upset but didn't express my frustration. Instead, I said, "Hey brother, you know I really like and support the president you harshly criticized. But you know what? I love you much more than the president." Since then, he didn't say anything about the president and we could have a very peaceful trip together.

The word "family" derives from the Latin word **famulus**, meaning "servant" or "domestic helper." As a family, we are to be servants to one another and to be helpers to one another without expecting anything in return. We believe that is our worship and praise for God's grace in our lives.

Please open your bulletin and take out the insert of the order of family Thanksgiving worship. As you have Thanksgiving dinner with your family, please take some time to thank and express your gratitude to God and also to your family members. This season is about God, His unwavering love, faithfulness, and provision for us.