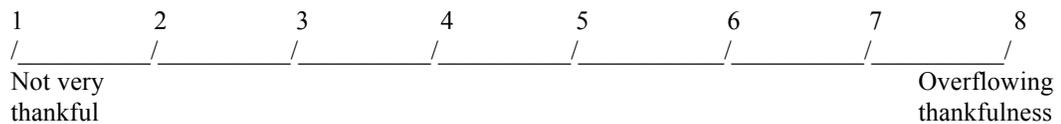


Thank-FULL-ness

On Sunday, we explored why thankfulness, as a way of life, is so important.

1. Warm up question: Jeff began Sunday's sermon by describing a scene from *Shrek 2* where Fiona's father gets into a name-calling food-fight with Shrek that ends with Fiona's mother saying, "It's so nice to have the family together for dinner." When your extended family gets together during the holidays, what's it like? Describe the typical scene.
2. First Thessalonians 5:12-22 is one of the most famous passages in the New Testament because there Paul strings together a series of simple, yet profound, statements that are meant to anchor Christian life. In a moment, we'll read the passage together. When we do, think about which statement in the passage most speaks to you.
 - a. Have someone read aloud I Thessalonians 5:12-22 twice, slowly.
 - b. What statement in this passage most speaks to you – and why?
 - c. Verses 20 and 21 are interesting. What do you think they mean?
3. On Sunday, we focused on verse 18, "Give thanks in all circumstances." In preparing for Sunday's sermon, Jeff surveyed a series of blogs and sermons that expound on verse 18, hoping to better understand why it's so important to "give thanks in all circumstances." Jeff expressed frustration at the two most common answers preachers give. One common answer is: We should give thanks for everything because God orchestrates everything and therefore everything has a divine purpose.
 - a. Jeff questioned that perspective. He reminded us how ISIS terrorists recently beheaded Peter Kassig, a young American who devoted himself to serving as a medical aid in Syrian refugee camps. Would you be comfortable saying that Peter's death was "God's will"? Why or why not?
 - b. Jeff argued that there is a big difference between "giving thanks in all circumstances" versus "giving thanks for all circumstances." Do you agree? If so, what's the difference?
 - c. Name a situation you've experienced that you would not want to give thanks "for." Give us an example of what it would look like for you to give thanks "in" that circumstance, without giving thanks "for" it.
4. Another reason preachers often give for why we should be thankful is: God delights in our praise and thanksgiving, as if God is somehow emotionally needy and needs us to regularly say how great God is. Jeff compared this to a needy spouse who says, "Honey, tell me how great I am." Jeff suggested that the Bible teaches us to give God praise and thanksgiving, not for God's sake, but for our own.

- a. What do you think about this? Do you think God needs our praise and thanksgiving? Do you think God “delights” in our praise and thanksgiving? Why or why not?
 - b. How do you think God feels when we offer praise and thanksgiving?
5. As Jeff prayed about why thanksgiving is so important, the answer he heard in his spirit was: The greatest danger we face in life is the temptation to yield to despair. Despair can be like a black hole that threatens to suck us in and destroy us. Thanksgiving is one of the few weapons available to us that is powerful enough to prevent or reverse despair. Thanksgiving has the power to interrupt a downward spiral of despair and turn it into an upswing.
- a. Jeff told how Robin Herman, who leads Lucky Dog Rescue, constantly has to fight against the temptation to grow cynical and sink into despair because of how people treat dogs and cats. In your own life right now, what situation do you face that could tempt you to yield to despair?
 - b. With that situation in mind, what would it look like for you to “giving thanks in that situation”? Give us some specific examples of some things you could legitimately be thankful for in the difficult situation you’ve described.
6. As you look back over your life the past few months, where would you rate yourself on the following scale:



- 7. What are some practical ways to cultivate and grow a spirit of thanksgiving?
- 8. Thanksgiving is not just a powerful antidote after we’ve begun to descend into despair, it’s also a powerful preventative that can help keep our spirits strong before despair ever comes knocking at our door. So let’s end our conversation tonight with a time of shared thanksgiving. Let’s go around the circle and each share:

Two things you’re thankful for this season of Thanksgiving, and why you’re so thankful for those two things.

*“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is
the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
1 Thessalonians 5:18*