

The sanctuary is all around us, if we have the faith to enter it. We must have the eyes to see, and the ears to hear, that we are in the presence of our loving Father, the King of Glory, and that he knows all our needs, and is working to bless us with greater riches than we could possibly imagine. Let's start the process this week of having our eyes and ears opened.

Day 1

Relate

Relationship is at the heart of thanksgiving. We do not follow a list of rules or adhere to a system of self-improvement, but we are citizens of the kingdom of God, and children of the Most-High. Both of these statements are statements of relationship. We are citizens who serve the king, looking after His interests, advancing His kingdom, and serving His glory. As citizens of the kingdom, we have rights and responsibilities. We have a purpose, and are pleased to be useful to the King's wishes. Are you thankful for the opportunity for this relationship? Do you look at service as a burden, a chore, something to be feared, or something to love and be thankful for? We are also children of the Most-High. We have not just a formal and submissive relationship, but a loving and informal one as well. As children we are to be like our father in every way possible, including having his spirit. We are to welcome the love He has for us, want his advice and direction, and joyfully participate in family life with our brothers and sisters. We have an inheritance of glory, and we take seriously the love and blessing that is given to us. When we find it hard to be grateful, like the prodigal son did, maybe we are focusing too much on tasks, responsibilities, obligations, and burdens, and not enough on love, blessing, and inheritance. Our Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and we have them as inheritance. When you know the kingdom is yours, maybe it is easier to be grateful for the responsibilities and chores that need to be done to keep it going. Focusing on relationship is a great way of staying thankful.

Verses: Psalm 145:13, Matthew 16:19, Hebrews 12:28

Prayer Topics: Inheritance, Ownership, Responsibility

Day 2

Frame

Often, we are tempted to think that our experiences, the actual facts of what has happened to us, determine our ability to be thankful. The truth is, we do not operate just on the facts of our lives and what happens to us, but on the way we frame what has happened to us. I grew up in a family of pessimists, and often heard of the Williamson luck, that if something could go wrong, it would. I now

often joke with my sons about the Williamson luck when circumstances line up for us in inconvenient ways, but in truth this view of “luck” is incomplete. For example, my wife’s vehicle has had to have the engine and transmission replaced since we have owned it. Is this the Williamson luck? One could frame it that way. Or, on the other hand, one could frame it as confirmation of the opposite, as this is the only vehicle we have ever owned to require such extensive repairs. Is the circumstance you are experiencing a sign of God’s love, that you live in the sanctuary of His presence, or is it a sign of God’s anger or absence? When Jesus was rejected by his people and executed after 3 years of preaching, was this a sign of God’s love for him or a sign of God’s anger? If we are to be grateful people who practice thanksgiving, we must learn to frame our experiences in the proper way. In the book of Genesis, it says that after God created with a word, he saw what He had created and gave a word, he said that it was good. The first task given to Adam after his creation was to name the animals, in essence, to see what God had created and give a word. He was invited to frame what he saw, and to image God by doing it. Be careful to frame your life correctly, because how you frame it leads to frustration or thanksgiving.

Verses: Colossians 3:2, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Prayer Topics: Perspective, Attitude, Thankfulness

Day 3

Focus

When Jesus taught us to pray, he showed us the importance of focusing first on God and His glory before looking at the things we think we need. I find that this almost never happens when people pray. Whether talking to people about their prayers, or listening when people actually pray, or when reviewing my own prayers, it is not all that typical to find the pattern that Jesus gave us for prayer in use when people actually lift up their prayers to God. What I find is that most of the time, most people begin and end their prayers with a list of concerns they have about others as well as themselves, and very rarely is God praised in more than a perfunctory way. The older I get, the more I recognize the limitations of this type of praying. It would be much better for us, and for our relationship to the Father, to begin and spend time in real glorification of God. First, it would remind us that we have so much to be thankful for, and so little of concern. Most of the time our requests are not for life and death issues, because God has graciously provided us with our basic needs. Most of the time, the requests I spend a lot of time on are reflective of my unnecessary worries and concerns, not issues that are vital and seem inevitable. Next, when we do get to our concerns and needs, we would have reminded ourselves of the greatness and glory of our Father, and how over and over he has met our needs and provided for us, so that we would have more confidence in making our requests. Finally, by spending time glorifying God and thanking him, we would remind ourselves that if He says no to our requests, it is for the good of us and the Kingdom. When we change the focus of our prayers from needs to thanks, great things happen in our lives.

Verses: Matthew 6:9-13, Romans 8:26, Psalm 145:18

Prayer Topics: Wisdom, Praise, Requests

Day 4

Communicate

Studies show that almost every conversation we have involves complaining, and that those complaints happen about every minute that the conversation lasts. I find this information shocking, if not unbelievable. And yet, as I think about my conversations, it really is plausible that this is true. How could this fail to affect not only my own outlook, but the outlook of those I speak with? If this is true (and it has been replicated in many studies), our complaining is like a disease that infects us and is spread to others through almost every conversation. It is not hard to understand how this habit would be hard to break if it is so pervasive, but the positive effect of breaking it could be tremendous for us and those engaged in conversation. What would happen if we decided to quit complaining cold-turkey? What would happen if we made a vow to stop complaining, and every time we did complain we stopped and turned our conversations towards thanks? How would our attitudes change? How would our relationships change? How would our view of God and the life he has given us change? I don't know the answers to these questions, and there is only one way to find out!

Verses: Philippians 2:14, James 5:9, Ephesians 4:29

Prayer Topics: Spirit, Intention, Compassion

Day 5

See & Hear

Deuteronomy 6:⁴“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

God is very good, and very wise. He gave the Israelites commands as they entered the promised land, and he told them to put reminders up in conspicuous places so that they would not forget. They were to remind their children, and to make it a part of normal conversation to talk about these commands, making it a communal exercise instead of an individual one. If we are to always give thanks to God, it might be wise for us to set up reminders in spots that we cannot fail to see, and to make it part of our conversations so that others will hear. Put up a reminder today and have a gratitude conversation, make it a regular practice and see what happens.

Verses: Deuteronomy 6:12, Isaiah 46:9, Psalm 119:11

Prayer Topics: Community, Shared Experiences, Confidence