

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

68. Living as if Thanksgiving Is More Than a Day

You are listening to episode 68 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, "Living as if Thanksgiving Is More Than a Day." Welcome back to the podcast today! Well, it's Thanksgiving week at the airing of this episode, and it's a favorite holiday for many, including for me. I'm glad we have a day set aside to give thanks, because it forces me to pause and think about all for which I'm grateful. But does Thanksgiving have to be just a day? What if we took the idea of Thanksgiving and lived it out every single day of our lives? Would it make a difference? I think it would. In this episode we're pondering the idea of living as if Thanksgiving is more than a day. Because I believe it is, and you might too. So, let's hang here together for this next short while and we'll ponder this idea together. We'll find some hope and encouragement along the way. So, let's get to it.

Thanksgiving. It's a day in November we in the States celebrate with food and thankfulness to God. And it's one of my favorite holidays. Our family has celebrated this holiday in all sorts of different ways through the years, usually enjoying our noonish meal at a Cracker Barrel. Yes, at the restaurant, Cracker Barrel. I know, that may sound strange to some and very non-traditional, but some of my fondest Thanksgiving memories were made sitting at the table with all of us together at Cracker Barrel.

We've also traveled multiple years to St. Louis, Des Moines, and Wisconsin Dells for a Thanksgiving weekend away (close to a Cracker Barrel, of course), in other years we've been known to drive to a Cracker Barrel one and one-half hours away just for our meal, and still in other years we've stayed home and either catered in or cooked our Thanksgiving meal.

But no matter where we've celebrated, we're about making memories together and thanking God for our many blessings.

What's your favorite way to celebrate Thanksgiving?

One thing I like to do is watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on TV. It's something I remember doing from my childhood, I've been known to can get caught up doing other things that morning that I miss it all together. I'll eat more food than I should, enjoy my homemade pumpkin pie more than I should, and feel like I need to curl up on the couch for a cat nap by 2 p.m. All the while football is consuming the TV. At some point throughout the day, we share what we're thankful for, and my heart swells with gratefulness to God for His continued goodness and grace. Thanksgiving is a day I look forward to, and yet it's a day that flies by way too fast each year.

But is that all Thanksgiving is about? Eating turkey and pumpkin pie and curling up on the couch? Is it just about watching football and thanking God in passing (if we remember to do so)? Because am I the only one who ever has forgotten to do that on Thanksgiving? Is it just about making memories around the dining table? Sure, all these things are good, (except for forgetting to thank God for our many

blessings). But I believe Thanksgiving is much more than all of this. I believe there's more to it than just one day out of the year.

Dictionary.com defines the word thanksgiving as *a day set apart for giving thanks to God, and an expression of thanks, especially to God.*

So, this says that Thanksgiving is a day to thank God, yet it's also an expression of thanks, especially to God. It's a day, but it's also a way of life.

And we can choose how to live this out. Do we reserve our thanks for one day a year, or do we live in this expression of thanks all year long?

I want to live as if Thanksgiving is more than just a day.

Maybe you do, too?

I desire to be more intentional about cultivating thankfulness into my own life. Not just on Thanksgiving Day.

Maybe you do, too?

But how do we do this? How do we live as if Thanksgiving is more than just a day?

I believe it starts with a grateful heart.

Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings. -William Arthur Ward

Do you and do I have grateful hearts? Or do we have grumbling hearts? Let's do a check. What have you and I been thinking about today? What has filled our thoughts? Because whatever is in our hearts is evident in our lives. If our hearts are grateful, then so are our thoughts, our words, our actions. If our hearts are ungrateful, then so are our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

When we look around and peer into our real lives, do we see God's goodness or do we notice everything that's wrong with us, others, and our lives?

When something goes wrong, do we believe good will come from it or do we complain and see only the worst-case scenario?

What we think, what we say, and how we act are all indicators of what's in our hearts. This reminds me of two passages in scripture.

Above all else, watch over your heart; diligently guard it because from a sincere and pure heart come the good and noble things of life. Proverbs 4:23 VOICE

You can know a tree by the fruit it bears. You don't find figs on a thorn bush, and you can't pick grapes from a briar bush. *It's the same with people.* A person full of goodness in his heart produces good things; a person with an evil reservoir in his heart pours out evil things. The heart overflows in the words a person speaks; your words reveal what's within your heart. Luke 6:44-45 VOICE

Of course, we each struggle at times with what we think, what we say, and what we do.

We are a fallen people, living in a fallen world, and on this side of eternity, we will each continue to sin and fail and mess up. But the thing about our hearts is this, God can change our hearts if they aren't filled with all the gratefulness, we'd like them filled with. He can change hard hearts into soft, receptive ones. In fact, God tells us this regarding Israel in Ezekiel 36:26. He says in the Voice translation, "I will plant a new heart and new spirit inside of you. I will take out your *stubborn*, stony heart and give you a *willing, tender* heart of flesh."

God can change a person's and a nation's heart. He's good at doing that. And I'm living proof He has changed mine. But it still needs help. So, this is a prayer I usually pray daily. "Change my heart, O God. Help it to be the heart You desire for me, because I can't change it, but You can."

Because I desire my heart to be full of gratefulness and thankfulness. And to be filled with the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. I can't muster up any of them on my own. I assume you desire a heart full of God's goodness too.

Change our hearts, O God.

God's Word is full of verses about thanking God and making it a way of life. Here are three:

Always give thanks to God the Father for everything. Give thanks to him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:20 NIRV

I thank you from my heart, and I will never stop singing your praises, my Lord and my God. Psalm 30:12 CEV

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 ESV

God desires for us to live a life of Thanksgiving, not just one day of it.

In fact, I compiled fifteen Bible verses that point us to thankfulness as a lifestyle. Not only are they perfect for Thanksgiving Day, but they point us to living a life of thankfulness. You can find these verses in a printable in my Free Resources on my site. You can print it off and soak in God's Word as you make thanksgiving a part of your everyday life. The link to this printable is in the show notes.

This week we're discussing this truth that Thanksgiving is more than just a day over in our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. Come on over and join in the conversation. You'll find this group to be an encouraging and uplifting space. The link to this group is in the show notes.

If you found encouragement in living a life of thanksgiving in this episode, I invite you to rate it and/or review it on whatever space you're listening from today. Be sure to subscribe so you never miss an episode.

Will you pray with me today? I can't think of a better way to close out this episode.

Father God, we praise You for the hearts you created within us. We know everything we do comes from them. We've filled our hearts with other stuff besides Your goodness, and what's in our hearts always comes out. Lord, change our hearts. Make them be more like Jesus' heart. Transform our hearts and fill them with gratefulness and thankfulness. We desire to live lives of thanksgiving, because we know thanksgiving is more than just a day. We want it to characterize our lives. To be people of thanksgiving.

We can't do that without You, God. We need You. Thank You for who You are and all You do. We love You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Friend, may your thanksgiving be blessed... the day and the life! God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre