

Taste & See that the LORD is Good

A series of meditations on God's Word for Thanksgiving

Devotion #1: Before We Feast

Psalm 34:1-3 (NIV)

¹ I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. ² I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. ³ Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

A whole lot of things might go wrong for your Thanksgiving. You might burn the food or it just all ends up tasting really bad. People might get sick. Other people might have their flight delayed and not make it home in time. Drama can blow up because of crazy Uncle Al's criticism and Aunt Esther's meddling.

But we aren't going to start with what can go wrong. That's a terrible way to start any day, let alone Thanksgiving. No, we start with giving thanks, recounting the good that God has done for us. Before the feast, we start with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Like me, you may have grown up in a household where you always prayed a prayer of thanksgiving before a meal. "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good, and his mercy endures forever." Athanasius in the 4th century testified to that same tradition: "When we sit down to table, and take the bread to break it, we make the sign of the cross over it three times, and return thanks." Jesus gave thanks as he broke the bread before feeding the 5,000 and when instituting his Supper. That "O give thanks unto the Lord" prayer is a line repeated in many Psalms, dating back to about 1000 B.C. The earliest recorded instance of God commanding a thanksgiving prayer is before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, when the Lord gave instructions through Moses that all people should remember that everything that they have, all the good things, all the good food, come from the Lord. Although it's not for food, Eve gave thanks to the LORD for her firstborn son, Cain. Is it that much of a stretch to think that Adam and Eve gave a prayer of thanksgiving before they, as the human race, tasted food for the very first time?

Giving thanks before we feast connects us to all believers throughout the whole history of the world. It's a universal practice. More importantly, it connects us to Jesus who prayed perfect prayers of thanksgiving for us.

Why else start with a prayer of thanksgiving before your meal, especially before the Thanksgiving meal tomorrow? Because it forces us to recall at least some of the good that God is doing for us right now. No matter who you are, no matter what has happened to you, no matter your current circumstances of life, no matter how you feel, you can rightly pray a prayer of Thanksgiving. You are blessed. You have things to thank God for.

It was more recently that I decided that if someone asks me how I am doing and I know I have emotions running up and down and in all sorts of different directions, I can honestly answer, "I'm blessed." Since doing this more actively, I realize that when I say it, I immediately start to recall the good things that the Lord has done for me today. Every one of those blessings that I specifically list becomes one more flavor in tasting and seeing that the Lord is indeed good. Let's relish those flavors given to us tonight, kind of served liked a Thanksgiving meal. So, we start with prayer, giving thanks to the Lord for he is good and his love endures forever.

The Word of the Lord. The choir sings "Blest are They."

Devotion #2: The Main Dish

Psalm 34:4-7 (NIV)

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. ⁵ Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. ⁶ This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

We can be afraid of a lot of things, like all the things that can go wrong at Thanksgiving, but God's Word addresses what we should fear the most: eternal separation from God. Because of our sin, every little and big thing we do wrong or that we fail to do, we should not have any blessings from God, let alone a free pass to enjoy the perfection of heaven with him. We should be cast aside.

Christians have historically cried throughout the centuries. “Lord, have mercy.” God’s answer to that prayer is the whole point of his recorded word to us, the Bible. It is a story of him having mercy on us, specifically you and me. It is a story of how he came down from heaven to live in our sinful world, not to be sinful like us, to be perfect in a sinful world for us. Then, with that full life of perfection, he gave up his life for us, paying the price of our sins that we owed, that we should have paid. He rose from the dead showing that our debt had been paid in full, wiped out. Through his Word, through Baptism, God the Holy Spirit caused us to believe this, covered us with perfection, adopted us into his family, made us heirs of eternal life. The Lord has had mercy on us! He has answered our prayers! This is the main dish, the meat, of God’s Word that we feast upon every time that we are here.

Who else do you know needs to have this prayer for mercy answered for them? Do you pray for them, that they would know how God has answered our collective prayer for mercy, that God would use the people in their lives to share this main course of God’s Word with them? When do you pray for them? If you want a helpful reminder to pray for these people who haven’t yet tasted and seen that the Lord is good and has had mercy on us, I have bookmarks that have 10 empty spots on them. These spots are meant for you to put people on it that you would pray for so that they receive God’s main dish, the God who delivers them for all their sins.

The Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 614 on page 5, “Sing to the Lord of Harvest.”

Devotion #3: The Leftovers

Psalm 34:8-10 (NIV)

⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. ⁹ Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. ¹⁰ The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

For Thanksgiving, Wendy and I shopped so that we would have leftovers, that we would lack no good thing for our Thanksgiving feast. Maybe that’s not your situation, and instead you feel not full. Maybe you feel like God is stingy to you, that you honestly won’t have leftovers tomorrow, that your bank account doesn’t have just enough; there’s an overdraft fee in there; that you can’t have that pie tomorrow because you know it will spike your blood sugar; that God hasn’t given you Mr. or Mrs. Perfect to celebrate with, that you won’t get to be with your loved ones tomorrow. And so you feel a little empty, like you are lacking something good.

We’ve just consumed the main dish of God’s Word, knowing that God has forgiven us, clothed us with his perfection, adopted us into his family, and made us heirs of eternal life with him, that we will partake in an endless feast of his presence, his love, and a rich banquet of the finest of food. God has made you complete right now. He didn’t just bless you with the bare essentials but so much more that he says that you lack no good thing. You are overwhelmingly blessed!

So, if you feel like you are missing out right now, especially on Thanksgiving, this is a time to count your blessings and to see how the good things that the Lord has done for you just keep adding up, to see that you actually lack no good thing no matter your relationship status, bank account status, or room in the cupboards. Taste and see that God fills you up completely even with more goodness than you can consume, goodness that is overflowing like Thanksgiving leftovers that we consume for days afterwards.

The Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 615 on page 6, “We Thank You for Your Blessings.”

Devotion #4: The Veggies

Psalm 34:11-14 (NIV)

¹¹ Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. ¹² Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, ¹³ keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Technically, this is the direct middle of the psalm. In Hebrew literature, this means that this is the climax or most important point. Maybe I should have called this the main dish.

But these words taste more like vegetables to me. Listen to God. Fear the Lord. Respect him. Honor him. Hold him in awe. Keep your tongue from evil. Stop telling lies. Turn from evil. Do good. Seek peace and pursue it. These are things that are good for me, filled with vitamins and nutrients, but they may not be my go to, or even the highlight of the meal.

Veggies, especially at Thanksgiving, don't have to be forced on me nor do they have to taste bad. Mashed potatoes are veggies. Sweet potatoes are veggies. Green bean casserole is mostly veggies. Veggies at Thanksgiving are pretty tasty.

So are the veggies from this Psalm. Listening to God, fearing him, isn't about choking down a holiness checklist or being afraid of a wrathful God; it's about taking in a God who had mercy on us, answered our prayers, and acted completely selflessly for our benefit. Keeping our tongues from evil and our lips from telling lies is not us trying to hold our gag reflex down on these nasty veggies, but have the nutrition of speaking the truth in love to people, that we share God's truth over our own truth, which people may turn up their noses to but it's still good for them and for us. Seeking peace and pursuing it is not giving well-meaning lies of saying something is good when it's not, but actively trying to repair and reconcile relationships, to avoid needlessly upsetting people. When we do those things, life is generally better.

Yes, holy living, respecting God and his Word, living for good, telling the truth, seeking peace, these taste like veggies. They are good for us. Thankfully, much like at Thanksgiving, these veggies taste good.

The Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 612 on page 7, "Praise to God, Immortal Praise."

Devotion #5: The Wishbone

Psalm 34:15-20 (NIV)

¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry; ¹⁶ but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth. ¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. ¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. ¹⁹ The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; ²⁰ he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

Already with the main dish we know that God answered our collective prayer for mercy and deliverance. Prayer is powerful. Why? Not because of our righteousness or our eloquence or our amount of prayers offered. It is powerful because of the God who answers our prayers.

However, God is not a genie here to grant us whatever wish we have. He's not like a wishbone at Thanksgiving, a 50/50 shot at getting what you want. Interestingly, the tradition of breaking the wishbone dates back to the ancient Etruscan civilization in Italy some 2,500+ years ago. They believed chickens were soothsayers. So, people stroked a bird's forked bone between their neck and breastbone to get the future they wanted, which led it to being called the wishbone.

Maybe we do the wishbone at Thanksgiving for fun, like making a wish when blowing out your candles, or wishing upon a shooting star. But those are wishes, desires. There is nothing that a bone (chicken or turkey) or a candle or a star can do for you.

God hears our prayers and answers them because Jesus has given us access to the Father through his perfect life and forgiveness. It was through his bones not being broken on the cross that led to our access to talk with God, to tell him what's on our hearts and minds, and to then know that he will not withhold any good thing from us, but that he will answer our prayers always and in the way that is best for us and everyone.

How many prayers answered from God have you tasted? Was it enough money for the groceries again this week, or at least enough to have food on the table for Thanksgiving? Was it overcoming your relationship difficulties that you had no idea how you would ever navigate or get through? Was it that your anxious thoughts proved to be nothing more than thoughts, that none of your fears came to fruition?

Taste and see that the Lord is good as he answers our prayers every time in the way that is best 100% of the time, better than a wishbone.

The Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 609 on page 8, "We Praise You, O God, Our Redeemer."

Devotion #6: The Giblets

Psalm 34:21-22 (NIV)

²¹ Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. ²² The LORD will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

If you are making a whole turkey for Thanksgiving, you will, at some point, reach inside that carcass and pull out a bag of giblets – the turkey’s liver, gizzard, neck, kidneys, maybe heart. I’ll admit that we throw those away. They seem kind of worthless, and I don’t want to eat them.

And I’m anticipating that some of you are looking a bit shocked and appalled that I would just discard those things because you use the giblets. Maybe they are even your favorite parts. You use them to make flavor sauces and gravy, mixing them in with potatoes and vegetables and stuffing. You use them to make stock for soups and stews as part of your Thanksgiving leftovers.

Because of this reality, giblets make me think of suffering. It’s the thing that is kind of gross, that a lot of people don’t like, want to get rid of, that we don’t right away see a purpose for it. Yet, with God, nothing is wasted, even what we don’t want or like.

How has suffering, even though you wanted to get rid of it, also been something useful for you? If you have experienced a broken heart because of the death of a loved one, how have you been able to take the comfort that you yourself received and passed it along to others to help alleviate their hurt? Has that suffering led you back to God to find out how to deal with his grief, to get answers as to what happens after death? Has it caused you to cry out to God like an infant, trusting that he will come if I cry long enough, that you lean on him more now instead of your own strength and your own plans? Has going through suffering shown you that God does actually get you through the darkest and hardest parts of life, especially when you can’t?

Amazingly, through suffering we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Evil gets judged in the suffering of Jesus. His suffering for us in our place means that we are made right before God, by God. God blesses us through suffering. It’s a hard lesson, but it’s one more flavor in our lives that we ultimately give thanks to him for it.

The Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 613 on page 9, “Come, You Thankful People, Come.”