

## INTRODUCTION

Thanksgiving is only four days away. What are you thankful for? Many of you should remember the Charlie Brown cartoon. You are familiar with the main characters: Charlie and his sister Sally, their friends Linus and Lucy, little bird Woodstock and of course, Charlie's dog, Snoopy the beagle. On a Thanksgiving night Charlie brought out Snoopy's dinner. It was his usual dog food. Snoopy looked at his bowl and grumbled, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world is eating turkey today with all the trimmings and all I get is dog food." "Because I'm a dog," he said, "all I get is dog food." He sat there and stared at his dinner for a few moments, then he muttered: "I guess it could have been worse. I could be a turkey." A pastor once said: "Life is a matter of perspective." Who or what you compare yourself to will change your outlook of life. I once read a poem titled "I Am Thankful." The author wrote: I am thankful for the teenager who is whining about washing dishes, because that means she is at home and not on the streets; I am thankful for the tax that I pay, because it means I am employed; I am thankful for the clothes that are a little too snug, because it means I have enough to eat; I am thankful for the grass that needs mowing and the windows that need cleaning, because it means I have a home; I am thankful for the lady behind me in the church who sings off-key, because it means that I can hear; and I am thankful for the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours, because it means that I am alive. Looking at things from one angle we have much to complain about. But looking from a different angle, then we will have a lot to be thankful for. Psalm 103 is a song of thanksgiving to God. In 22 verses, the psalmist repeated six times "Praise the Lord!" Why should we give thanks to God? The psalmist encouraged us to give thanks because of what God has done for us, because of what kind of God He is and because of how He relates with us. In sum, our understanding of God will motivate us to give Him thanks.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. Give Thanks for God's Work 為著神的作為感恩

First, the psalmist encouraged us to Give thanks to God for His work. He said in **verse 2**: Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. What are those benefits? The author brought up a few things in the following verses. He mentioned the forgiveness of sins. When was the last time you gave thanks to God for forgiving all of your sins? When you committed your life to Jesus and accepted Him into your heart as your Savior and Lord all your sins have been forgiven – past, present and future. We have to be forever grateful for God's salvation grace. The psalmist went on to say in **verse 4**: who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion. By redeeming us, God restored our dignity as His children. God did not just assign us a code like a driver license number or social security number. He knows each of His children by name, and He treats us dearly. **1 John 3:1** says: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The verb translated as "lavished" here means to give. The NIV translators wanted to emphasize how much God loves His children. Our Heavenly Father does not just love us frugally. He lavishes His love on us. A few weeks ago, your kids knocked on neighbors' doors to get candies. I went out with my

younger son to hunt for his treasure too. There was a storm and so we had to wait till the rain had stopped. Because of the weather there were not a lot of kids walking around. Therefore, some families still had a lot of candies in their stock. Quite a few neighbors lavished my son with the sweets. They had to get rid of the candies! Our Heavenly Father gives us grace abundantly. The psalmist said in verse 5 that God satisfied our desires with good things. Jesus also told us in **Matthew 7:11** – “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” I know some of you may wonder: “If that is the case, then why am I so poor, why am I still stuck in this trivial job and why am I driving this beat-up metal box with four wheels? It is a life-long lesson of faith when we walk with the Lord. We have to trust that God knows our needs deeper than we do. He will only give us the best things we need according to His perfect plan. The same principle also applies to the second half of verse 3 when the psalmist said that God heals all of our diseases. We should not have any doubt that God can heal every sickness we may contract. The expertise your doctors obtained through years of experience and medical research ultimately comes from God. But why doesn't God cure every patient? We have to keep one word in mind when we think of God – sovereignty. God has the full power to control everything according to His will. We have to trust that God knows what He is doing when He allows some people to suffer, and some other people to pass away in diseases. But He also gives us enough grace to go through difficult times. Think of it this way too: how different our lives would be if there is no God, and He does not save us and we have no one to rely on in our struggles? We may get selfish because we only live for ourselves. We may get bitter when calamity hits, thinking that life is not fair. We will have no hope for the future, because everything we see in this life is all that we have. But God wants us to know that He is there watching over us. He is the ultimately source of all of our blessings. Therefore, brothers and sisters we should take heed of the psalmist's reminder: forget not all God's benefits! We will only give thanks to God when we realize that everything we have is from Him. Give thanks to God every morning when you get up. God still gives you breath of life, you can still see things, you can still hear the birds chirping outside, you have heating in your home, you have food on the table and appetite to enjoy it. If we learn to give thanks for the little things then we will surely give thanks to God for the bigger things.

## 2. Give Thanks for God's Nature 為著神的屬性感恩

Give thanks to God for His work for us, and we also need to give thanks to God for His nature. In essence, we ask what kind of God He is and why it matters to us. In **verse 8**, the psalmist gave us a summary statement of God's nature: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Those four characteristics are further elaborated in subsequent verses. First, God is compassionate. How so? Look at **verses 13-14**: 13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; 14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. God is compassionate to us like an earthly father loves his children. I stumbled a lot learning to be a father. I was often impatient and inconsiderate when my sons were still small. Once I scolded my older son: “How come you made the same mistake again after I told you a hundred times?” Then there was a voice in my heart: “Dear child: you are like that too!” Tears rolled down my cheek. Many fathers among us will agree with me on this: once you became a father, you will have a deeper understanding and appreciation of our Heavenly Father. Besides being compassionate, God is also gracious to us. **Verse 10** reads: He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. If God keeps a record

of our sins and judges us accordingly then we are all doomed. We know what kind of person we are on the inside. Your spouse and your kids can tell me more about you. There may be habits like smelly socks, shopping on impulse and showering only once a week that are unknown to others. We all commit sins that only God knows too. God is Nth times more gracious than how grandparents treat their grandkids. Our God is slow to anger. He deals with us patiently. The psalmist told us in **verse 9**: He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. **Verse 12** also tells us: as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. God, being holy and righteous, has all the right to pour out His wrath on us when we sin. But the Holy Spirit nudges our hearts when we go astray, and He temporarily removes the peace and joy we have until we repent. God is willing to wipe out all the sins when we confess them, as if they had never happened. God chooses not to remember. He will not dig up dead bones and convict us again of the past sins. God is unlike some people when they fight with their spouses. They say: “Do you remember how badly you hurt me eighteen years ago? You have never changed!” Please don’t do that! Your relationship will be much better if you learn to forgive. Other than being compassionate, gracious and patient, our God is also loving. How great is God’s love? **Verse 11** tells us: For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. If we can measure how high the sky is from the earth, then we will begin to realize how rich God’s love is. The secular view of love is: I love you because I can get something from you. It is a “I scratch your back and you scratch mine” kind of deal. But God’s love is unconditional. God loved us when we did not know Him, and even hated Him! When we were still lost in sins our Heavenly Father sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us. That is sacrificial love. As human beings we understand that we have many different needs. We have survival needs like food, water and air. Beyond all the physical needs we also have other non-physical needs. We need to have a sense of significance in what we do. We need to feel fulfilled when we accomplish something. We also need to build relationship with our friends and family members. We want to feel loved and accepted. But on the top of those needs we also need to build an eternal relationship with God. He is not a Santa Claus in heaven who gives us stuff. God wants us to know Him. He is a caring Father who are compassionate to our weaknesses. He is gracious even when we sin repeatedly to Him. He patiently waits for us to repent of our sins. He fills us with His unconditional love. Those are the reasons why we need to give thanks to Him.

### 3. Give Thanks for God’s Promises 為著神的應許感恩

We need to give thanks to God for His work, and we also need to give thanks to God for His nature. Thirdly, we have to give thanks to God for His promises. Let us look at **verses 17-18**: 17 But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children – 18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. God’s love is reserved for those who fear Him. How does a person show that he/she fears God? Verse 18 gives us the answer: by keeping God’s covenant and obeying God’s precepts. In today’s language we say that God loves those who love Him by following what He says in the Bible. Some of you may wonder: “Wait a minute, didn’t you say earlier that God loves everyone, and that His love is unconditional?” Indeed, God loves everyone. For example, Jesus said in **Matthew 5:45**: “...He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” God gives certain blessings to every person, regardless of whether they know God or not. Everyone enjoys sunshine, air and rain. Theologians called those benefits “general grace.” However, there are certain blessings that

only the followers of Christ will appreciate and enjoy. Those who work will receive a salary, we cherish our relationship with family members and those who maintain a good health will usually live longer. However, people who do not know the Lord will attribute those blessings to their own effort. They take God's blessings for granted. Also, it is true God's love is unconditional. However, it pleases God when we obey His Word and live a life that reflects His glory. The parents among us who have multiple kids can testify to the following. While you love all of your children unconditionally and equally, your heart will be glad when one kid listens to your instructions or another kid got an A in his/her exam. The same is true for our God. He will receive glory when we obey Him. The kind of love God has for His children is an extension of His covenant. The Hebrew word for "love" in this passage is the word *hesed*. It appears in verses 4, 8, 11 and 17. This love is based on God's covenant. God had made a covenant with us through Christ. Though we may change our mind, God never does. Sometimes we bought something from the stores and later on we regretted about the purchase and we returned the product. God is the all-knowing God from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, there is no information that is new to God that requires Him to alter His plan. **Isaiah 55:10-11** read: 10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Whatever God has promised, it will be done according to His timetable. Even today we live in God's promises. God promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He is our Protector and Provider. He will continue to bless us when we walk in His truth. That does not mean that we will be wealthy, healthy and happy according to the world's standard. Every word written in the Bible is true. We can quote His Word when we pray to Him. We tell the Lord: "Father, I trust Your Word and I believe that You will accomplish Your will in my life." Whatever that has yet to be fulfilled in the Bible will come eventually true. Jesus will come back in His time. There will be an end to the problem of sin. Jesus will receive all His followers into God's eternal home. We give thanks to God because His promises will stand forever.

## CONCLUSION

Our understanding of God will motivate us to give Him thanks. God is the source of all our blessings. That is why we give thanks to Him. He is the unchanging God. That is why we give thanks to Him. He looks at us as His dear children. That is why we give thanks to Him. A few days later, people will be hoarding stuff in the biggest shopping season of the year. What we truly need is not more things, but an eternal relationship with our Heavenly Father. In 1937 a researcher at the Harvard University initiated a study to examine the factors that lead to human well-being and happiness. The research team selected 268 male Harvard students for the study. They were being tracked for a long period of time to measure factors like physical exercise, health indices, marital status, use of alcohol and smoking, education level, etc. After studying for 72 years the researchers concluded that the clue to human health and happiness can be boiled down to one major factor - relationship with others. This is very fitting to our message today. What we need the most is an eternal relationship with our Creator. When you treat God as your Lord, and enjoy His presence in your life, then thanksgiving to Him is as normal as breathing. Giving thanks to God is no longer a conclusion. It is not like only when you are richer, smarter

and prettier than others then you say “Thank God!” Thanksgiving should be a decision. No matter what life situation you are in, you choose to give thanks.