

## Faithful Family Finances 3 – “Thriving Financially in Tough Economic Times”

Today I want to start off by directing your attention to the picture on the screen. Do you know what that is? That picture holds the key to being faithful with your finances and thriving in these tough economic times. Do you see it? Got a guess?

It's written on the face of the man holding the mouse...he's holding it up to heaven and giving thanks to God...because his family will eat tonight.

Thankfulness. Of all the things you can do to help your family and your finances get through these times—and other times—being thankful is one of if not the most important.

Maybe you think I'm over exaggerating things but the more I studied this topic these last couple weeks, the more I saw that thankfulness is critically important to the Christian life.

Let's take the story of the Israelites after they're freed from captivity in Egypt. The Red Sea is parted, they follow a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, Moses goes and meets with God on a mountain top, an experience so supernatural that when Moses returns, the Israelites are terrified of him because his  
FACE...IS...GLOWING.

Then because they're hungry, God makes it SNOW... BREAD. Literally bread fell from the sky for them to eat.

And after all of this, they still whine and complain and are completely ungrateful. So God makes them wander the desert for 40 years...why? Because he doesn't want an unthankful people to be called His people.

So when Joshua takes over and God parts the Jordan River so they can enter the Promised Land—did you know about that? We all hear about the Red Sea but God parted a river at the end of their desert wanderings. Joshua's first order of business is to build two monuments in order to thank God for what he had done for them and to remind later generations to be thankful as well and break that legacy of unthankfulness.

Thankfulness is important.

In fact, in this day's world of more and bigger and better and instant gratification, thankfulness... true, deep thankfulness... is slowly becoming lost. **But it's a vital piece of Christianity and the implications of not being thankful run very deep; deep enough to affect our relationship with God.**

Being thankful reminds us where our blessings come from, and who we are

When Joshua made his monuments to God, it was a defining day in Jewish history, both because of what God had done to prompt those altars—parting the Jordan and delivering his people into the Promised Land—and because it showed a vital shift in the thinking of the Jews who were slaves in Egypt, and their children.

Building altars and monuments to God became a central theme in Jewish culture from then on and you can see it throughout the Bible even up until Jesus' time. It became a staple of Jewish culture... it helped define them as a people.

**And it does the same for us, as well.**

Being thankful reminds us that we are God's children and that He provides everything we have.

This is vital to faithful finances and being a good steward because when we remember that God gave us all we have, it's much easier to do the right thing with what we have.

When every dollar we earn is rightfully recognized as God's dollar, we become less like a millionaire boss spending his cash, and more like a shrewd manager using our master's money to accomplish his goals.

When every breath is rightfully recognized as time given graciously by God, it's easier to spend that time doing things for His Kingdom. We become less like wandering nomads doing what we will and more like a people with a duty and a responsibility to serve the greater good.

We see that our lives are not our own and to spend the entirety of our lives on ourselves is missing the point. **Thankfulness gives our lives purpose.**

**Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers Luke 17: 11-19**

11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance 13 and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." 14 When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; 16 and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

There's a couple of interesting things about this story. First is that the Samaritan was the only thankful one. Now Samaritans were despised by the Jews as half-breeds and less than human. In today's world they'd be the people us 'good Christians' look at and say 'They're nice and all but they're probably not making it to heaven.' And here this is no good, dirty Samaritan is the only one who gives thanks to God for his healing. The other 9—who are presumably Jews—simply go on about their lives.

See the easy thing to do is to relate with the Samaritan in this story and tsk tsk the Jews... but are you positive that's who you are in this story?

When was the last time you thanked God for giving you a mouse to eat? When was the last time you thanked God—like that man thanking God for his one mouse—for anything you ate?

And here's the mindblower: verse 19 is literally translated "your faith has saved you." Not just made you well... saved you. So the healing was more than physical.

Thankfulness is vital to our salvation.

Romans 1:21-23

21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became foolish in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Their lack of thankfulness made them foolish and made them chase futile things.

What could be more futile than chasing money and stuff? Even if your motive is 'security' and not greed, you're still missing the point: our security should come from the recognition that God provides us everything.

When you begin placing your hope for security in other things—**money, your job, etc.**—you become just like the people in this verse: you make idols in the places of your life where God belongs.

Think about it: why did the Romans worship gods—even to the point of having ‘house-gods’ to watch over their house? To feel safe and secure. To know that everything is going to be alright and give them peace.

But those are all things GOD should be doing for us, **not money or wealth**, or any of a hundred other things. When we let other things give us that security, we make them idols in our lives.

I’m not saying don’t plan ahead or be smart with what you have, but the recent months have shown us just how little we can rely on our money and retirement funds and investments to **keep us safe**. If your security is found in those things, then look what a year can do to the thing you’re banking on...*no pun intended*.

But I have thousands of years worth of proof that if God is my security...I’ll never be let down. And when the stocks plunge and the economy looks like it’s going to tank...I can tell you which one I’d rather have my trust in.

Being thankful means putting more in its proper place—understanding the difference between abundance and excess

I know Kermit touched on the idea of more last week, and I won’t retread old ground, but I believe this is a key concept when it comes to being thankful because the lines between abundance and excess are really, really blurry...and living in a consumer driven society doesn’t help.

But it’s vital that we recognize that difference, because one leads to living in the promises of God, and the other leads to “the root of all sorts of evil”

I can’t think of any way to say this besides just being direct: abundance is what God has promised us. **Excess is what greed and a love of money and things gives us.**

Abundance means having plenty...it means having enough dinner to share with guests. Excess means having so many leftovers that we have to throw some away before it goes bad.

*Abundance means having a cellphone, a car that fits our needs and even a large TV. Excess means having a **new** cellphone when our old one is fine, a new car every year and a large TV...in more than one room in our house.*

*Are you seeing the difference? Excess means we have a lot of stuff, a lot of money, a lot of extra. It means we have more.*

*Abundance means we have what we need to live...and do God's work.*

2 Cor 9:6-12

*<sup>6</sup> Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. <sup>7</sup> You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." <sup>8</sup> And God will generously provide all you need.*

--A lot of us stop really paying attention right there...but we're missing the point.--

*<sup>8</sup> And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty leftover to share with others. <sup>9</sup> As the Scriptures say,*

*"They share freely and give generously to the poor.  
Their good deeds will be remembered forever."*

*<sup>10</sup> For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.*

--It doesn't stop with him increasing our resources...it stops AFTER we have a harvest of generosity--

*<sup>11</sup> Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God.*

*<sup>12</sup> So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.*

*Do you see it? Do you see how more gets put in its proper place?  
We put more in its proper place when we understand the only purpose of having more is to give our extras away.*

Why else did Jesus exclaim, "How difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God?" Because if you are rich—if you have excess—and you don't use that wealth to improve the lives of those around you who need help, it shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the kind of love God desires.

It's why Jesus told the Samaritan who came back to give thanks, "Your faith has saved you."

Having excess and not sharing it simply does not align with the heart of a God who made the universe from the very essence of his own being...just to share it.

And having excess—not abundance—shows a lack of true thankfulness. Because true thankfulness seeks to enjoy what it's been given. And you can only enjoy so many things at once.

I want you to get this because everything in our society is aimed at making you think you need more to be happy. It seeks to show you all the things wrong with your life and then offer you a product to fix them. But only God can fix our broken lives.

And the less we're thankful for what we have, the more we will seek excess to fulfill us.

\*And the more excess we get, the further from the heart of God we find ourselves.

\*And soon the thing we sought to make us happy drags us away from the one thing that can ever truly make us happy.

Again...thankfulness is vital to our walk with God.

Being thankful means enjoying what you have—Sabbath

This seems so simple and so easy but it's so often overlooked. We work and toil and work and never take the time to just rest. But even God took time to rest after his creation.

The interesting thing is that after each day of creation, there's this phrase—"and there was evening and there was morning, the blank-day." And that phrase signifies the end of a day—or period—of creation.

But what about the 7<sup>th</sup> day? There's nothing on that day. It simply says "God rested from all the work he had done." So the implication is that God is still resting, even to this day.

But it's not like God is up in heaven watching football and eating hot wings. **God's 'rest' involves interacting with, building community with, loving, enjoying his creation.**

*Lev 7:12-15*

*<sup>12</sup> If you present your peace offering as an expression of thanksgiving, the usual animal sacrifice must be accompanied by various kinds of bread made without yeast—thin cakes mixed with olive oil, wafers spread with oil, and cakes made of choice flour mixed with olive oil. <sup>13</sup> This peace offering of thanksgiving must also be accompanied by loaves of bread made with yeast. <sup>14</sup> One of each kind of bread must be presented as a gift to the LORD. It will then belong to the priest who splatters the blood of the peace offering against the altar. <sup>15</sup> The meat of the peace offering of thanksgiving must be eaten on the same day it is offered. None of it may be saved for the next morning.*

*There were 3 types of peace offering, one for vows, one that is freewill and one of thanksgiving. Now, sometimes when we think of sacrifices and offerings we only think of killing animals. What we don't realize is that the priests—who had no land and couldn't farm or raise livestock—used those offerings so they could eat and feed their families.*

*God basically said, "I want a group of people devoted solely to ministering to the Jewish nation and mediating between me and them: priests. But if they spend all of their time doing that, they'll have no food, etc. So YOU have to provide the food in forms of offerings and sacrifices.*

*There were 3 types of peace offering, one for vows, one that is freewill and one of thanksgiving. With vows offerings and Freewill offerings, the sacrifice could be eaten whenever. **But the thanksgiving offering HAD to be eaten that day.***

*Why? The same reason God made the seventh day a day of rest. So we would ENJOY everything we've worked for. **So we would be thankful.***

*Enjoying is key to thankfulness because when we never use the gifts God has given us, we forget them...and him. Some of you are so caught up in work that you've lost sight of why you're working in the first place.*

**And there's this sort of magical thing that happens when we enjoy.**

*Suddenly...we don't need more...we're content with our abundance and more than happy to give it away. We're **secure and safe in what we have** because we see God's*

hand in providing our abundance. And when we enjoy, excess becomes oddly uncomfortable.

Suddenly...we find ourselves reminded of who it was that gave us what we're enjoying. We are God's children. That's not a burden. It's something to be enjoyed.

When we enjoy...suddenly we're thankful, every day. And no matter what else is falling apart in our world, we can see God in our lives..

We can be God in others' lives and we're drawn closer and closer to him.

And that's the key. Faithful Family Finances aren't really about finances at all. You're responsibility in tough economic times isn't to come out in the black...but to come out in God's will

May you find yourself thankful.

May you find that your worries about having enough are met with abundance.

May you find enjoyment in all that God has given you.

May you find yourself—even in the midst of economic strife—in the midst of God's grace.