

How You Can Thrive and Not Just Survive During This Holiday Season

Entering this special time of the year when we focus on family, friends, festivities and, first of all, the coming of the Christ child, we all have the potential to be uplifted out of understandably challenging 2020.

Two of my sons and their families put up their Christmas trees and lit up the atmosphere when October came to an end.

How many of us have either thought about or acted to accelerate things to get this holiday season underway as quickly as we can? No complaining this year when Costco or malls put up the Christmas decorations while the creepy Halloween stuff was still on the shelves.

Amidst the avalanche of unsettling events of the past 250 days, I, for one, love the fact that I can once again hear Johnny Mathis singing, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

Setting our sights on our Savior's incarnation, praying and planning are all vital components to flourishing in the coming weeks, but if we don't keep a close watch on our attitude and keep a grateful heart, we can quickly slip into negativity, stress and short tempers.

Words of Wisdom Throughout my ministry, I've distributed a framed quotation from a man of God I greatly admire, Chuck Swindoll. I keep a copy ever before me in my study. From 6 1/2 decades of marriage and ministry, he shares his *Insight for Living* in person and on over 2,000 radio stations worldwide. He's now 86 years young, and it will serve us well to take to heart his wisdom at this juncture: **Attitude**

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than success, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we embrace for that day. We cannot change our past; we cannot change the fact that people act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And, so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitude."

Check up From the Neck Up

Many parents correct inappropriate behavior in their children by telling them, "That's a bad attitude." We certainly did with our four. But if we don't get specific and bring it out of vagary, they can remain clueless when told: "Change your attitude."

What exactly do we mean when we talk about checking and changing an attitude?

I believe it refers to aligning thoughts with Scripture, trusting God daily for His guidance and practicing a thankful heart intentionally and consistently no matter what comes our way.

When people ask me to help them find the will of God for their lives, I usually take them to one simple verse and challenge them to start here. "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1Thess.5:18). It's essential that we develop the habit of giving thanks "in" everything, not necessarily "for" everything in our lives.

Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart

“Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart” is not just a classic song with sentimental value from the past. It really is the key for us to live the abundant life Jesus promised (see John 10:10).

God clearly instructs us, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col.3:17).

Developing an attitude where we remain grateful to God and give Him thanks consistently is central to our success in life. It’s a decision not an emotion. {eoa}The language of the world is complaining (not recognizing God or even giving Him a chance to work through circumstances), but the language of the kingdom is thanksgiving (trusting Him that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”) (Rom.8:28).

“Do all things without murmuring [grumbling] and disputing [complaining] that you may be blameless and harmless, sons of God, without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:14-15).

During this holiday season, when plans can go awry and the unexpected occurs, it’s essential that we cultivate a grateful heart no matter what comes our way. It’s not by accident that scripture records the ungratefulness and complaining of the Israelites in the wilderness which resulted in their wandering 40 years and never entering their land of promise.

Anecdotal Application

Let me open a window into my world over the past few weeks to let you know I get to practice what I preach.

Amidst the COVID crisis, my wife, daughter and I—for seven months—experienced smooth sailing, claiming biblical promises and practicing common sense precautions. Then unexpectedly my wife and daughter tested positive, and the aggressive contagion got me too.

Weeks before, I had a freak accident when I fell putting my shoe on and broke my kneecap.

We submitted our tax returns eight months ago, yet we're still waiting for our refund.

Our daughter and her boyfriend were anticipating her 40th birthday celebration with friends coming in from Atlanta and New York, special dinners and a gals' cabin retreat. When COVID came, everything went kaput.

Days ago, I drove to Georgia for my grandson's big end-of-the-year baseball tournament. While there, I bit into a soft piece of pizza and split a front tooth. The dentist said my bill will be over \$1,500 for a crown!

Need I go on?

During this time, I had to be proactive in resisting attitudes of negativity. I had the privilege of drawing upon God's grace to trust Him and remain thankful that He was working all for the good. I stayed in the realm of faith and refused to charge God because He's my heavenly Father who supplies all my needs and guides all my steps.

What did I do?

I counted our blessings. In fact, we made a list compiling over 25 items for which we could be grateful and acknowledge God's divine intervention and surprising provision. Just one was friends of our daughter stopping by on her birthday weekend to give her the keys to a low mileage, "looks like new" Kia for a present! My kneecap healed within one month, and our cases of COVID were mild. Now we're immune and free to go anywhere.

Here's the deal: Let's make a quality decision in this holiday season to draw upon His grace to keep a Christlike attitude and stay alert to and be thankful for the many blessings of

God. May we be like the one leper of the 10 Jesus healed who alone came back to say thanks. Let's avoid any bad attitudes and maintain a grateful heart, trusting totally in Him. Merry Christmas! {eoa}