

IHOPKC Pastor: What Christians Often Misunderstand About Thanksgiving and Gratitude

When it's Thanksgiving, it's important to focus on what it actually stands for. Oftentimes we're in such a rush during the holidays that we begin to focus on the stress and forget to have an attitude of gratitude. I hope that hasn't been the case for you this week as you prepare for Thanksgiving. But if it has been, Pastor Isaac Bennett says the remedy is simpler than you may think.

Bennett is lead pastor of Forerunner Church in Grandview, Missouri, and serves intercessory missionaries at the International House of Prayer (IHOPKC). He recently preached a sermon on Thanksgiving, which I found to be so profound that I invited him onto my "Strang Report" podcast to talk about it.

One issue that often holds believers back from fully engaging in biblical thanksgiving, he says, is that they wait for feelings and emotions of gratitude to rise up before they give thanks. This is totally backward from the biblical model.

"What I began to see throughout the Scripture is that thanksgiving is in the order of worship—in the Levitical order," Bennett says. "In the Old Testament, it was actually just this outward act where the priests would come before the Lord—or the Israelites would come before the Lord—and they would open their mouths and just begin to declare thanksgiving to God."

Bennett says this revelation is incredibly powerful for Spirit-led believers because it's easy to act on our emotions in an unbiblical way. God doesn't want us to wait on emotion

to well up before we begin to worship Him. Sometimes we have to obey and worship first, and then the emotions follow.

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“So when we begin to declare thanksgiving before God and just begin to thank Him for everything—our friends, our family, our opportunities and provisions in our lives—oftentimes, the emotion of gratitude, which is an internal reality, begins to well up on the inside,” Bennett says.

I wholeheartedly agree with Bennett. In fact, that’s why I’ve made it a yearly practice to write down 100 things that I’m grateful for. I do this during my quiet times and have found it to be an incredibly helpful practice. (I got the idea from my friend Mike Bickle, who founded IHOPKC.)

It’s easy to write down the normal things we give thanks for—our families, our friends, our jobs, our homes and so forth. But having to write down 100 forces you to think outside the box and be grateful for things you perhaps wouldn’t have thought to be grateful for otherwise.

“What happens when we begin to [make a list of things we’re thankful for] is that we begin to be surprised at how many things the Lord has provided for us,” Bennett says. “I think of Psalm 103, where it lists the benefits that we received through the cross and the gospel. So when we begin to declare those things before Him, we often find that our emotions change.”

There’s something powerful about speaking aloud our praises to God. It doesn’t just fill our own hearts with emotions of gratitude, but it also spills out toward others, Bennett says. After all, thanksgiving at its core is an act of faith. Yes, it’s a response to blessings God has given us. But on a deeper level, it’s a prophetic declaration that God is still good and

the best is yet to come.

I hope Bennett's message encouraged you as much as it encouraged me. And if you want others to reap the benefits of thanksgiving and gratitude too, be sure to share this article with a friend. {eo}

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