

“Espresso Yourself—What Do You Say?”

Today we continue this series of messages called Espresso Yourself. Espresso is strong, powerful, concentrated stuff. It’s a symbol to remind us that God wants us to have strong, powerful, concentrated lives. Not weak, watered-down decaf lives and faith. So we’re talking about things that will really caffeinate our faith and our lives.

Every year when I was a kid, my Grandma Brown would knit my brother and I a new pair of mittens. I have a pair right here. I cherish these now, but when you’re a kid, 8 or 9 years old, a boy especially, mittens are not tops on your Christmas list. But every year we would get mittens, and the years that we were at Grandma’s house for Christmas we’d open the package in front of her pull out the mittens, show everybody this great gift. And immediately my mom would say, “What do you say to Grandma?” I’d mumble, “Thank you.” Mom would say, we can’t hear you.” I’d say, “Thank you! Grandma!”

Thank you — two powerful words. Thank you — two trajectory-changing words. Thank you — two shots of espresso. At the time, I didn’t realize the power of that phrase. But now, I think I do. I believe God, in a real way, is asking us, “What do you say? What do you say for my blessings?” God is asking, “What do you say for your relationships? What do you say?”

God, in a real way, wants to teach us how to say, “Thank you.” Not because God needs it, but because we do. God wants us to live lives of true and deep appreciation, because some powerful things happen when we’re thankful. Thankfulness powerfully caffeinates our faith.

Let’s get a glimpse of a day in the life of Jesus. **[SLIDE...]** **“As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’ When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him...Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this [one]?’ Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well’”(Luke 17:12-19, NIV).**

Leprosy was, and is, a horribly disfiguring disease. It’s where nerve endings die. Limbs totally fall off. It had a horrible stench about it. It was highly contagious. Lepers had to stay at least 50 yards away from others. They wore bells on their clothing to warn people that they were in the area. They had to live outside the city walls. They were cut off from their family, their friends, their jobs. Jesus heals all ten of these lepers. Dr. Luke says that as these lepers were running to the priest, they looked down and their limbs had been restored. Their skin was perfect. They had experienced a healing and that healing meant they could go home!

Just for a second, put yourself in Christ’s sandals. Here we have Jesus, the Son of God. Here we have Jesus, the man who just healed these people. Now, he is watching them run toward the horizon. I wonder what Jesus was thinking. I’m sure he must have experienced great joy at seeing their joy. But was he also wondering if they would simply turn and say, “Thank you”?

The Bible says that one leper stopped in his tracks. He looked down at his healed body, did a 180, took his eyes off of himself and put them on Jesus. He ran to Christ. It says that he fell at Christ’s feet and thanked him. He said those two trajectory-changing words, those two words that can move the heart of the Lord and did move Christ’s heart. He said, “Thank you. Thank you, Jesus.”

Now, before we dog pile on the nine ungrateful lepers, let’s do what we talked about during our first installment in this series. Let’s make sure, before we dog pile on them, that we yank the plank

out of our own eye. Because Jesus said, “Don’t judge others. Don’t point out the speck of sawdust in other people’s eyes, when you have a big honkin’ 4 x 4, a redwood tree, a crossbeam, in your own eye. Don’t go there. Don’t go rude on people.” Instead look at your own life. Take inventory. Think about **your** level of appreciation. Because I would contend that one of the character qualities of a caffeinated Christianity--of a strong, powerful, concentrated faith--is a life of thank you, a life that literally overflows with gratitude.

So let’s say that you decide to defer to Christ and allow him to work from the inside out of your life, to turn your life into one giant “thank you.” What does that look like? How would my life be different if I really “espressoed” myself in that realm?

A couple of things would happen. Number one — if you decide to live a thank you life, if you allow Jesus to live his life through you, here is what will happen. **[SLIDE: “Living a life of “Thank You”: Takes our eyes off self and puts them on God.”]** You will take your eyes off of yourself, off of your agenda, and you will put them on God. And listen, that is a life of freedom, a life of joy!

Have you noticed that you go where your eyes go? If I look this way, I am going to go this way. If I look the other way, I’m going to go that way. I rarely walk or move where my eyes don’t take me, where my eyes aren’t focused. You are the same way. If we’re thank you people, we’re focused on God and that affects what our lives look like. So where is your focus right now? Are you focused on yourself, what makes you look good, what gives you pleasure, and what gives you that buzz, or do you have your eyes fixed on Christ? If we have our eyes fixed on Christ, we have this vertical thing down cold. We’re right vertically, we’re connected to God. But there is no way that we can be right horizontally (that means with other people and life in general) until, first of all, we are right vertically.

The problem with most of us is that we forget to be thankful and we break the vertical connection to God. All we think about is the horizontal element. If we live a horizontal life, it’s a formula for frustration. We tend to see people as objects--objects to be used for our agenda, our pleasure, our advancement. We also feel like the world owes us something when we live horizontal lives. “Yeah, the world owes me. I deserve this. That’s not fair. It’s all about me.” But the moment that we begin to put our eyes on God, things happen. Parts fit. Everything gets in sync with one another. When we’re thankful and our eyes are on God, then suddenly the horizontal stuff of life finds its place. That’s what happens when we’re really thankful. This is what Jesus meant when he said, **[SLIDE...] “Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33, NIV).**

So a high percentage of our prayers should be “thank you’s.” “God, thank you for your grace. God, thank you for your mercy. God, thank you for the cross. God, thank you for my family. God, thank you for relationships. God, thank you for my career. God, thank you for this nation. God, thank you, thank you, thank you.” Living a life of thank you is important. Living a life of thank you takes our eyes off of ourselves and puts them on God, which puts the rest of life in the right place.

It does something else, though. Number two — living a life of thank you **[SLIDE: add to previous...] moves the heart of God and positions us for blessings.** God has feelings, too. I know that might shock you, but the Bible says it. Scripture records it. God has feelings too. What makes God’s heart beat fast? What moves God? Appreciation is one of those things. Think about the healed leper. He showed appreciation to Jesus, and it moved Jesus’ heart.

Zoe is a very thankful child. Sometimes we have to remind her with, “What do you say?” But most of time she spontaneously gives her thankfulness, and that moves our hearts. A couple weeks ago on a whim I said Zoe, come over here, let me see if any of your teeth are loose. She hasn’t lost any teeth yet. She let me wiggle her teeth and sure enough two the bottom ones in the front were

just starting to get loose. She was so excited! She screamed and jumped around and then all evening long and for the next few days she kept giving me big hugs and saying, "Daddy I'm so thankful for you! Thank you, Daddy! Thank you!" It moved my heart. And that appreciation makes me want to do more for her. I believe that our heartfelt thankfulness moves God's heart in the same way.

Did you know the word "thank" comes from the word "think?" It does. So, if we are thinking on the things of God when we think, it should lead us to thank. So, if you are not thanking, then you are not thinking. If you are thankless, then we might say you are brainless. I hate to be that bold, but think and thank — they are synced up. God thinks about you and me. He thinks about you and me 24/7. Isn't it amazing to realize that God of this universe has you and me on his mind? That's how crazy he is about us. And, he is thankful for us. He says, "I'm thankful for you. Be thankful to me." Once you add that, you will be thankful to others.

Being thankful moves the heart of God and it positions us for blessings. A lot of people say, "I'm not really blessed like I think I should be. I feel like I'm kind of missing on the full potential. What's wrong? Is something skewed? Is something out of whack?" Well, you have got to be in the right position to get the best blessing.

The retail world knows this. Everybody knows the three keys to success in retail: location, location, location! It's being in the right place at the right time. Of course that's over-simplified, but there's truth to it. Whether it's racing cars, or playing basketball, or marketing a product, or offering a service, being in the right position is important. When you are in the right position, the right spot, things happen. The same is true in the Christian life. If you are out of position, you are not going to be in the flow of the blessings God is pouring out for you.

But, once I understand appreciation, once I am right vertically, once I automatically give God thanks, and intentionally give God worship and appreciation, then I am in a position to receive the mighty blessings of God. I'm putting myself in the flow, because God **wants** to bless our lives. I want to bless my children's lives and you want to bless your children's lives. That's a reflection of the fact that God wants to bless our lives. Appreciation puts us in the flow of those blessings.

Let's get specific here. The Bible talks a lot about money and possessions. I can talk about money now, because we have already received the offering. So just chill. Why does the Bible talk so much about money and the motivation of money? Money is not evil. It's the **love** of money is root of all evil. Money is a tool. Money can be used to do great things. But for some reason when we make money, we think it's ours, don't we? But, God clearly says, "I'm entrusting it to you, but it's not yours. It's mine. I blessed you with it. I gave it to you to use in certain ways."

Money and blessings are linked. If I am stingy with my money, then I am walking away from God's blessings. If I am generous with my money, then that puts me in the flow of God's blessing.

This is what God said in Malachi 3:8-10, **[SLIDE...]"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings."** (What's a tithe? Ten percent. The first 10 percent of everything you make or I make.) **"You are under a curse — the whole nation of you — because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Test me in this."** (This is the only place in the Bible where God says to test him.) **"And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Malachi 3:8-10).**

I didn't say it. God said it. God said, "If we are not giving a minimum of 10 percent (I'm talking to Christians now) to the local house of worship, then we are not going to be blessed to our full potential." That's just the way it is. So, don't wander around going, "I wonder why I'm not really

blessed. I wonder why I am not experiencing the power of God,” when you’re throwing a little pocket change God’s way.

Since Janet and I have been married we’ve been giving 10 percent to our local church for almost 13 years. Now we give a more than 10 percent. One of the reasons I believe that we are such a blessed family is because of that decision. But let’s be clear about this: we don’t give to God so that we get something in return. You’re not buying God’s love or blessings. We give to God out of obedience and thankfulness. But when we’re generous with God, like he’s been generous with us, it puts us in the right position, right in the middle of the flow of the blessings God is pouring out. But it’s your deal; you get to choose.

Appreciation – we take our eyes off of ourselves and we put them on God. It moves the heart of God and positions us for blessings. There is a third thing that occurs. Living a life of thank you **[SLIDE: add to previous...] increases our spiritual depth and it advances the cause of Christ.** It increases our depth and it advances the cause of Christ.

Let’s go back to the healed lepers in Luke 17:15-16. **[SLIDE...] “One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.”** (I call that devotion — praising God in a loud voice.) **“He threw himself at Christ’s feet.”** (He displayed it.) **“And thanked him.”** (He described it, put it into words.) That is 3-D depth — devotion, a display of the devotion and a description of the devotion. That’s what the healed leper did, and that’s what we should do.

Let’s talk about these 3 D’s for a second. First, devotion. Psalm 100:4 says, **[SLIDE...]“Enter his gates with thanksgiving.”** This is saying to come into God’s presence with thanksgiving. Where is God’s presence? Everywhere! So the challenge here is to walk through your ordinary day, doing the ordinary things you do, with an extraordinary sense of appreciation. This means opening your eyes to see the blessings, the beauty of creation, the treasure of your family and friendships, the power God gives you in the face of difficulties, the peace he provides through adversity, the food he puts on your plate, the clothes on your back, good books you can read, the good thoughts you can think, the wonderful conversations you can have, the abilities and skills we possess, and the list could go on. Everything in your ordinary day can become a point of worship and devotion. A source of thanks and praise to the God who is the source of it all. Psalm 92:1 says, **[SLIDE...]“It’s good to give thanks to the Lord, and sing praises to Your name, O most high.”** That’s devotion.

Mature people have another aspect of this 3-D living. They are people who display their appreciation. Think of this as taking thanksgiving and putting it into action some how. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, **[SLIDE...]“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God.”** God is a gift-giver. As we mature in our thankfulness we find ourselves wanting to give gifts to others. So are you a gift giver? You should be. It’s a good thing. It’s a God thing. We should give gifts — gifts of meaning, gifts of power, gifts of appreciation — to others, because it energizes them. It’s one thing to say, “Yes, I’m devoted,” but show it—display it. Are you giving to others? Because, when we give to others, it helps to loosen our grasps on the things that we think are ours.

How about description? That’s the third part of the 3-D life. Do you describe how you feel to others? “Well, they know how I feel, Aaron. She knows how I feel. I don’t have to tell her. If I told this person, they might get the big head and go on an ego trip. Man, I can’t do that.” Listen, I have never met somebody who’s on an ego trip because people displayed and described their appreciation

to them! I have never met that person. People are on ego trips because they are just selfish and sinful. It's not because people show the appreciation.

The right words are so potent. God knew this. That's why we have the Bible. He's gone on record in black and white. God has said, "Here's what I feel about you. Here's how much I appreciate you." Over and over and over God has described his love for you. Do you do that to others? Writing those notes and writing those "thank yous." I don't do as good at this as I should. But I try. And I know how it feels when I'm on the receiving end of someone's appreciation. It's powerful. Just last week I got a birthday card from a man in the church and he described how much I had meant to his faith journey and his life. It made my day! You think, "It doesn't mean that much." Yes, it does. There is power in a "thank you." Two trajectory-changing words, two words that are like two shots of espresso.

What is "thank you?" "Thank you" is basically a present action for a past transaction. When we say, "Thank you," it's a present action for God's past transaction. What's the transaction? The fact that Jesus was nailed to this cross, the fact that he died, and that he spilled his blood so we can know God. We can confess our sins, turn from our sins, ask Christ to come into our lives, and we can know God.

So, against the backdrop of all these blessings, against the backdrop of this cross, I ask you and myself, "What do you say? What do you say for all of this?" If you want to espresso yourself, if you want to caffeinate your faith, then grow your gratitude, amplify your appreciation toward God and others. And for today that is the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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