

THANKS-LIVING IS EVANGELISM



"A picture is worth a thousand words." So picture this: A group of co-workers (some believers and some non-churched) come together to the home of a Christian for a festive event. The home is filled with various art pieces. Among them is a picture of a person in prayer with the caption: "Give us this day our daily bread." Another is a majestic picture of a mountain, a stream and a bird chirping with the words of Psalm 100:4, "*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.*" Someone breaks the ice

with the invitation to conversation, "Wasn't today a wonderful day God has given to us?" In the background, someone lets loose with a raucous sneeze only to be greeted with a chorus of, "Bless you" but also "God bless you!" When dinner time arrives, the host offers up a prayer thanking God for the fellowship, the hosts, and all the good received from His bounteous hand. The evening is filled with laughter, conversation, and groups of people engaged in games. Intermingled into this evening is the occasional acknowledgment of God's activity and thanksgiving to Him. Even some intentional verbalization of salvation by grace alone through faith alone is shared. One by one, as the guests leave, the farewell bidding from the host is a warm, "Good night! God be with you."

Would you call this picture an "evangelism" event? No one quieted the gathering to offer a persuasive speech to believe in God. The hosts didn't target the "non-churched" guests to intentionally proselytize them. Even though very few words from the Bible were spoken - God's Word was intentionally spoken and the Holy Spirit accompanied each Word. ("*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*" Romans 10:17.) But the picture was absolutely one that bore witness to God and the difference He made in the lives of the Christians. The picture, the bold witness in this case was one of **thanks-living**. And this thanks-living, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, Word and action, had a profound impact on the non-churched. Picture one of those non-churched couples discussing on the way home, "What a wonderful night. I want what they have. I'm going to ask them what makes them tick." As you prepare for your own celebration of Thanksgiving, **please read more** about how your life can continually be one of thanks-living.

Thanks-living is a lifestyle of gratitude to God.

Thanks-living is *“living, moving and being”* (Acts 17:28) in relationship to God with gratitude, thanksgiving, and joy for all He has done, does now and has promised to continue doing. We see this described in the early church in Acts 2:46-47, *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”* That’s thanks-living - and it’s a powerful way to share the Gospel. They were helping each other live in relationship to God by acknowledging Him (actions accompanied with praise) with thanksgiving for all things. I call “actions accompanied with praise” as “sharing the disclaimer of your life-changing relationship with Christ.” That’s your lifestyle accompanied by the verbalization of the Gospel. Day by day souls were being changed for Christ.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency, even among Christians, (and yes, Lutherans) to be reluctant to share the Gospel and even to avoid anything to do with evangelism. “That’s not me. I’m an introvert by nature.” “I’m not going door to door.” “I don’t want to be one of those people. Those Bible-thumpers.” “That’s the pastor’s responsibility. He’s a trained theologian. I’m not.” “I don’t know my Bible well enough for that. What if they ask questions?” “Love my neighbor? I’m not sure I even like them that much.” Those are all valid concerns - very real, in fact. But actually, evangelism is for everyone – that is, every Christian. God’s Word clearly proclaims, *“You will be My witnesses”* (Acts 1:8). Our every thought, word, and deed along with all that we do and don’t do bears witness to something. Thanks-living isn’t easier than intentionally sharing the Gospel. It’s not an alternate way of evangelism. **Thanks-living is living out the Gospel** as a new creation in Christ. Jesus inferred thanks-living in His sermon on the Mount, *“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). Good works are bearing the fruit of Christ who lives in you just as thanks-living is bearing witness to the One living in you with thanksgiving and praise.

Thanks-living doesn’t come naturally

But please do not get the impression that thanks-living comes naturally whereas evangelism does not. Giving thanks, in any form, doesn’t come naturally. That makes sense when you spend your entire life as a parent or grandparent saying, “Now, what do you say to Mr. Smith?” and the forced, “Thank you” comes out as a knee jerk response to the stimulus of the question. The sinful nature does not express thanks to God because the sinful nature separates us from God who desires us to be in His presence. Thanks-living is praising God for the redeemed and restored relationship with Him that flows from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thanks-living is pure Gospel. Therefore, thanks-living is evangelism 24/7, a bright light giving glory to God the Father as the Holy Spirit equips and empowers the Christian to be His witness for Christ.

Living a lifestyle of thanksgiving is not easy but it is what God desires to work in and through you - for you and for the good of others. Martin Luther put it quite frankly: "We live on earth only so that we should be a help to other people...For this reason, however, He lets us live that we may bring other people also to faith as He has done for us...Everything then should be directed in such a way that you recognize what God has done for you and that you, thereafter, make it your highest priority to proclaim this publicly and call everyone to the light to which you were called." (*The Church Comes from All Nations*, 20; cf. *Luther's Works* 30:11) You are right where you are this moment for the goal and purpose of sharing God's Word. You are His witness in every aspect of your life.

Thanks-living is faithful to the Great Commission

The Great Commission directs us to bear witness - "*As you are going*" (Matthew 28:20). The early church attracted unbelievers with their thanks-living lifestyle and with their "disclaimer" of praising God. What does giving a "disclaimer" look like? There is a poem that goes like this: (Author Unknown) "I am thankful for the teenager who is complaining about doing dishes because it means she is at home, not on the streets; for the taxes I pay because it means I am employed; for the mess to clean after a party because it means I have been surrounded by friends; for the clothes that fit a little too snug because it means I have enough to eat; for a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, and gutters that need fixing because it means that I have a home." You get the picture. The thanks-living "disclaimer" re-frames every situation in life in relationship to our God who is always good and worthy of our thanksgiving.

Thanks-living evangelism stresses that witnessing is done by ordinary people in the course of their everyday life. It stresses a relationship won through the healing blood of Jesus Christ for broken people like each one of us. When we have thanked God for being our Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Provider, Savior, Comforter, Sustainer, Living Word, Guide - then and only then should we say, "and for everything else, thank You, God." But as sinful people, we tend to put created things before the Creator; we tend to put our works before the Cross; and we claim independence from God rather than dependence upon Him. Even with all the challenges our own sinfulness and our sinful world present, God has a plan for you to be His witness: "*...we had boldness in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in the midst of much conflict*" (1 Thessalonians 2:2).

Thanks-living and intentionally sharing God's Word goes hand-in-hand

Thanks-living isn't a replacement for intentionally verbalizing the Gospel. Actually intentionally sharing God's Word and having a lifestyle of thanksgiving to God go hand-in-hand. We have God's promise that it won't return empty (Isaiah 55:10-11). We can be thankful that the Synod's Office of National Mission has produced such excellent material to equip us for verbalizing the Gospel where God has placed us in our vocations, in our mission field (work, Christmas card

list, phone contacts, golf league, etc.) and in our neighborhood. On the Synod website, you will find the equipping tool, *Every One His Witness*, which is accompanied with modules for speaking to various groups of people in the course of our thanks-living. You will also find Witness and Outreach sentences for your church bulletin, *Making Disciples for Life* resources and conferences. *Re: Vitality* modules offer your congregation an assessment tool along with instruction on relating to the world. CPH offers the book authored by Rev. Mark Wood, *“Connected to Christ - Witnessing in Everyday Life”* that will encourage, equip and empower your witness. You are exactly where God placed you with the witness to fellow broken people with the saving truth of the Great Physician who heals hearts and lives for eternity.

Thanks-living is literally thanking God every moment of every day knowing He alone has given you the privilege, joy, and opportunity to walk in relationship with Him. Thanksgiving allows you to openly confess your sinfulness and need for God and the opportunity to give verbal testimony as you give all glory to God for His saving grace. Yes, a picture is worth a thousand words - not a replacement for them. Thanks-living is evangelism. It's not polished speakers or renowned theologians but ordinary people, like you and me, relating to the world around them that as they live and move and have their very being, they share that Christ is one's life (Colossians 3:4). Picture this: You are His witness. 2 Corinthians 6:2 tells us, *“Now is the time of God's favor, now is the Day of salvation.”* Don't let a single moment go by without thanking Him for changing your life for eternity. Because, then you will be “thanks-living” and serving as a powerful witness in Word and deed for the furthering of His Kingdom. What could give your life more significance and purpose than offering it as a “psalm of thanksgiving” for the good of helping others to believe? The world is watching. The world will inquire of you, “What is this hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15); I want what you have” and you can simply reply, “I have Jesus.” Yes, thanks-living is evangelism, and so much more!

The Evangelization Team is praying that you all have a happy and blessed Thanksgiving celebration. We pray that it's a special time to celebrate with all those whom you hold dear. If you are not planning a family celebration, please know that you are never alone as the Lord is present with you as you share the thanksgiving which flows from your heart. If you would be so kind, share with us how your holiday celebration turned into thanks-living and intentionally sharing God's Word at the email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org To you and to all those whom you hold dear, have a happy and blessed Thanksgiving Day. May your celebration be filled with the joy of thanks-living each day of your life.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20