

“PRAYING FOR HEARTS TO OPEN”

I. Psalm 24:7-10

A. Thanksgiving has launched 6-plus weeks of holiday get-togethers...

- 1) Times with family; work celebrations; special Christmas events, students home for the holidays-getting with friends, parades, cookies to neighbors.
- 2) Some people can't get enough of this while others dread it all...
- 3) Besides the busyness, sometimes there's insecurity, awkwardness, memories of bad experiences, loved ones now missing from those celebrations...

B. That said, as believers, this season gives us opportunities to share Christ.

- 1) Questions will naturally arise: *“What have you been up to this past year?” “Are you still going to the same church?” “What do you think of the election or the economy or the trouble in the Middle East?” “How bout them Buckeyes!” “How bout them Twinkies?” “What kind of things are your kids involved in?”* Health issues, break-ins, school levy failure, Valero becoming a Circle K, on and on and on...
- 2) At some point you may be asked about your faith or you may be given the chance to direct a conversation to the Gospel. Will you be ready for that?
- 3) 1 Peter 3:15-16; Eph. 5:15-16...

C. The following are some encouragements that might prove helpful...

- 1) Remember, only God can open a heart to respond to the Gospel... (John 6:44 & 65; Acts 2:36-39; Acts 16:13-15) Pray for God to open hearts to respond...
- 2) Peace and patience always trump pounding and pounding... It won't be your apologetic prowess or your persuasion skills that win the day. It will be God!
- 3) Know when to hold em, when to fold em, when to walk away, and when to run... When to let the line out and when to reel it in... Matthew 7:6...
(My witnessing experience at the Gahanna Street Fair back in the 70s...)
- 4) Even if the seed you sow is as small as a mustard seed, trust the Lord of the seed, the Lord of the soil, the One who causes the growth...
- 5) Without avoiding the truth, speak it only when it's saturated in love...

D. There are countless ways of tangibly showing God's love and sharing the Good news in the days ahead. (And these things hold true throughout the year...)

- 1) Visits, calls, cards, emails, tweets, FB postings, texts- can do wonders.
- 2) Food & treats, little gifts, meeting an unmet need, are also powerful.
- 3) Soak all such things in prayer, and the sky is the limit... Gal. 6:9-10...

E. Finally: Let's see what the Lord will do...

- 1) Let's be useful without getting in the way of what our Lord is doing...
- 2) Let's just enjoy being participants as His purpose for others unfolds.
- 3) Reread Psalm 24:7-10... Close with Prayer...

Scriptures & Videos

When God Wants A Witness, He Sends A Witness--John Piper

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyhXDlqd3Zk>

Gospel Sermon Jam--Matt Chandler

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zklg2b_4l_I

Do You Really Love Jesus Christ? --John MacArthur

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHFgCSQzQi0>

At What Point Should I Share The Gospel With My Neighbor? --John Piper

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ohmqk7lb0B0>

Hand Raising In Church--Tim Hawkins :-)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK2_ezOBa2A

Man Gobbles At Turkeys (Thanks Nicole!) :-)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9zvqcOrTtw>

To like us on Facebook go to:

<http://www.facebook.com/millersportcc>

Psalm 24:7-10 (NIV)

7 Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. **8** Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. **9** Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. **10** Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty--he is the King of glory. Selah

1 Peter 3:15-16 (NLT)

15 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. **16** But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.

Ephesians 5:15-16 (NIV)

15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

John 6:44 & 65 (NIV)

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day... **65** He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

Acts 2:36-39 (ESV)

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." **37** Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" **38** And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Acts 16:13-15 (NIV)

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. **14** One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. **15** When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Matthew 7:6 (NIV)

6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

Galatians 6:9-10 (NIV)

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. **10** Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Bonus Stuff

Billy Graham in Cognito

I was speaking at an open-air crusade in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Billy Graham was to speak the next night and had arrived a day early. He came incognito and sat on the grass at the rear of the crowd. Because he was wearing a hat and dark glasses, no one recognized him. Directly in front of him sat an elderly gentleman who seemed to be listening intently to my presentation. When I invited people to come forward as an open sign of commitment, Billy decided to do a little personal evangelism. He tapped the man on the shoulder and asked, "Would you like to accept Christ? I'll be glad to walk down with you if you want to." The old man looked him up and down, thought it over for a moment, and then said, "Naw, I think I'll just wait till the big gun comes tomorrow night." Billy and I have had several good chuckles over that incident. Unfortunately, it underlines how, in the minds of many people, evangelism is the task of the "Big Guns," not the "little shots."

- Lieghton Ford, Good News is for Sharing, 1977, David C.Cook Publishing Co., Page 67.

Radical Gratitude: Grateful in Tough Times

By Chuck Colson

A few years ago, university psychologists conducted a research project on gratitude and thanksgiving. They divided participants into three groups. People in the first group practiced daily exercises like writing in a gratitude journal.

They reported higher levels of alertness, determination, optimism, energy, and less depression and stress than the control group. Unsurprisingly, they were also a lot happier than the participants who were told to keep an account of all the bad things that happened each day.

One of the psychologists concluded that though a practice of gratitude is a key to most religions, its benefits extend to the general population, regardless of faith or no faith. He suggested that anyone can increase his sense of well-being just from counting his blessings.

As my colleague Ellen Vaughn wrote in her book, *Radical Gratitude*, no one is going to disagree that gratitude is a virtue. But, Ellen says, counting our blessings and conjuring an attitude of to-whom-it-may-concern gratitude, Pollyanna-style is not enough.

What do we do when cancer strikes -- I have two children who have battled it -- or when loved ones die, when we find ourselves in the midst of brokenness and real suffering? That, she says, is where gratitude gets radical.

While they often mingle together in the life of a follower of Christ, there are actually two types of thankfulness. One is secondary, the other primary.

The secondary sort is thankfulness for blessings received. Life, health, home, family, freedom, a tall, cold lemonade on a summer day -- it's a mindset of active appreciation for all good gifts.

The great preacher and American theologian Jonathan Edwards called thanks for such blessings "natural gratitude." It's a good thing, but this gratitude doesn't come naturally -- if at all -- when things go badly. It can't buoy us in difficult times. Nor, by itself, does it truly please God. And, to paraphrase Jesus, even pagans can give thanks when things are going well.

Edwards calls the deeper, primary form of thankfulness "gracious gratitude." It gives thanks not for goods received, but for who God is: for His character -- His goodness, love, power, excellencies -- regardless of favors received. And it's real evidence of the Holy Spirit working in a person's life.

This gracious gratitude for who God is also goes to the heart of who we are in Christ. It is relational, rather than conditional. Though our world may shatter, we are secure in Him. The fount of our joy, the love of the God who made us and saved us, cannot be quenched by any power that exists (Romans 8:28-39). People who are filled with such radical gratitude are unstoppable, irrepressible, overflowing with what C.S. Lewis called "the good infection" -- the supernatural, refreshing love of God that draws others to Him.

And that, more than any words we might utter, is a powerful witness to our neighbors that God's power is real, and His presence very relevant, even in a world full of brokenness as well as blessings.

- This article published on June 29, 2011 by the late **Chuck Colson**. His *BreakPoint* commentary continues to air each weekday on more than one thousand outlets with an estimated listening audience of one million people. *BreakPoint* provides a Christian perspective on today's news and trends via radio, interactive media, and print.

Quote From Martin Luther

There are some of us... who think to ourselves, "If I had only been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby. I would have washed His linen. How happy I would have been to go with the shepherds to see the Lord lying in the manger!" Yes, we would. We say that because we know how great Christ is, but if we had been there at the time, we would have been no better than the people of Bethlehem... Why don't we do it now? We have Christ in our neighbor?

This Is My Church

Author Unknown

This is my church

It is composed of people just like me.

It will be friendly if I am.

It will do great work if I work.

It will make generous gifts for many causes if I am generous.

It will bring others into fellowship if I bring them.

Its seats will be filled if I fill them.

It will be a church of loyalty and love, of faith and service if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these.

Therefore, with God's help, I dedicate myself to the task of being all these things I want my church to be.