

## Monday Morning Rewind – November 24, 2008

Good morning! This Thursday is Thanksgiving, and the official beginning of the holiday season. But the global economic crisis seems to be casting a cloud of gloom that makes many feel anything but festive. On Sabbath we considered the question, how do you maintain a spirit of thanksgiving even in tough financial times? For the answer, we turned to the obscure Old Testament book of Habakkuk. In three short chapters, we read about another nation in crisis.

Judah was in spiritual free-fall and Habakkuk wanted to God to intervene. God told Habakkuk he was going to take action. He was going to send the armies of Babylon to punish Judah. Habakkuk couldn't believe it. He complained and asked God how He could send a nation more wicked than Judah to do His bidding. God's answer led Habakkuk to an attitude of praise in spite of the hardships to come. Habakkuk ends his book with a resounding "Hallelujah anyhow!" moment.

Rewind to Habakkuk and recall the three reasons we can give thanks in hard times.

1. **God is still on the throne.** After letting Habakkuk know that the sins of Babylon would not go unpunished, God gave this revelation to his discouraged prophet: "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him" (Hab. 2:20) The economy may be bad, but the Lord is still good! "All the earth"—nature, nations, economists, kings—must be quiet and in awe, because God reigns.
2. **God is in control.** In Chapter 3, Habakkuk affirms that, "The Sovereign Lord is my strength" (vs. 19). Habakkuk was echoing the praise of Moses who said, "Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword" (Deut. 33:29). We are saved BY THE LORD, not by FEMA. The DOW may go down and the dollar may deflate but "The Lord is in his holy temple," and my life is in *His* hands. He is in control and He has called me to live a life of thanksgiving, by faith.

Thanksgiving is more than a holiday. It is defiant praise rooted in unshakeable trust in the Almighty God. Giving thanks in the face of hardship is refusing to let the devil win! It's spitting in the devil's eye and saying, "The Lord is *my* Shepherd, I shall not want!"

3. **God is near.** The third reason to give thanks in hard times can be found in Philippians 4:4-7. Rejoice in the Lord...[When?] *Always*. [Why?] *The Lord is near*. Even in a bad economy? Yes. Do not be anxious about *anything*? Anything. But what if calamity is coming on the nation? What if the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines? (See Hab. 3:17.) What if the olive crop fails (commodities plunge) and the fields produce no food (food shortages), and there are no sheep in the pen or cattle in the stalls (no GM, Ford, or Chrysler in the garage) ...what then? Habakkuk's and Paul's answer? Rejoice in the Lord *Always*. *Hallelujah Anyhow!* Do not be anxious, the Lord is near.

Giving thanks in times of stress is admirable, but what about the ability to thankfully give? When the going gets tough sometimes we stop giving. But what if God did that? In times of personal crisis we expect God to be a hilarious giver—of healing, grace, employment, or whatever we need at the time. If we're His children, we should do the same. When the going gets tough, the tough give thanks *and* thankfully give.

**The secret of thankfully giving in tough times is to keep putting God first.** Rewind to 1 Kings 17 to read the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. God challenged this poor woman, who was on the verge of starvation, to put His messenger first as an act of hospitality and faith. Because she obeyed, God provided for her way beyond what she would have had if she had put her own needs first. Had she said, "That doesn't make sense" and kept the little she had for her and her son, she would have eaten once and died. Instead, she trusted God and she and her son and the man of God ate many times and lived. By being willing to give her life away, she actually saved it. She lived the principle of self-sacrifice and trust that Jesus would command years later. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matt. 16: 24,25).

If we withhold our praise or gifts in tough times—if, when money is scarce, our thanksgiving is also scarce—perhaps our trust and confidence is more in our bank accounts than it is in God. In order to give thanks and thankfully give, we need the Habakkuk spirit. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the

fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Hab. 3:17, 18). *Hallelujah anyhow!*

This week and beyond, remember that God is on the throne, and because He is, God has it all (our finances, the economy, our world) under control. Rejoice in the Lord always—refuse to let the devil win by giving defiant praise rooted in unshakeable trust in the Almighty God. Why? Because He is near. And keep putting God first. Sounds like a sweet recipe for a Happy Thanksgiving to me. —Pastor Randy

p.s. I received many wonderful responses from you guys last week in answer to the question, How do you maintain a thankful, giving spirit even during these tough financial times? I was only able to share a few of these in my sermon on Sabbath. Your answers really blessed me, so for everyone's edification, I'm posting them here. Enjoy and have a great Thanksgiving.

"I try to keep a long term perspective, and remind myself that I'm a small player in the overall big picture. The only difference I can make comes when I have a giving heart. That takes removing self from the equation, and, well...that's a daily prayer thing."

"There are so many things in our lives for which we should be thankful. Even though my IRA, which had most of my retirement savings in it, are all but gone, I will no doubt not have to pay very much in income tax this year. That the good part.

"But on the other side of the picture, I have family, my health is good, I still have a job, I hope to go on another mission trip before too long. I am so thankful for my Kuna Church Family and pastor that have meant so much to me in these past two plus years of being alone. Every day that go by puts us one day closer to our Lord's return and the first resurrection.

"My life is so filled with so many good things that the small pebbles in the road of life are like grains of sand. All of my life when different things happen, I may not know why, and there have been a lot of these times, but it turns out that the Lord knew best."

"Reading stories such as those in Guideposts raise my spirits a great deal. Spending ten to fifteen minutes at Fresh Encounter reading a Psalm and praising God in prayer is a terrific boost.

"And when I think things are tough, I remember back to Haiti where people can move everything they own in a paper bag. I, on the other hand, am almost overwhelmed with the sheer volume of stuff in my house."

"LOTS AND LOTS OF PRAYER AND TRYING TO MAINTAIN OUR FAITH IN GOD THAT HE WILL PROVIDE FOR US."

"There is only one way: to remember that, to quote Steven Curtis Chapman, '...He is the King of the Jungle...' in which we live.

"Of course it's so easy to be distracted by the negative so I have to keep adjusting my focus. Ways I do this:

1.) Music. Praise when I'm most upset (my Pastor once preached about the Power of Praise and it certainly works! ;-] ) and instrumental, quiet when I need to "turn my brain off" and my heart on.

2.) Scripture. I pick an emotion with which I'm struggling and then find a text to "answer" that issue and have it at the ready whenever those negative emotions grab me.

3.) I started a deal with God that I would always put the largest bill I had in my wallet in the plate at church. I still have that **\*\*gulp\*\*** moment sometimes. And when I do I send up a prayer asking God to make me a cheerful giver (or what's the point in giving?) I have not yet had anything but a totally happy heart after that prayer when I realize God doesn't want the money. He wants the cheerful/giving spirit in me.

4.) Rabbi Mark Gellmann (who writes a column worth reading in Newsweek on a regular basis) wrote a column about the Jewish attitude towards life. He mentioned that weddings have the breaking of the cup and funerals are accompanied by a sweet, honeyed, pastry-type food. This is to remind them that life is sometimes bitter (when you are in the midst of sweet) and that even in the midst of bitter (like grief) there is sweet. Life is both. He then went on to recommend you spend all the time you want/need in recounting the evil and horridness of your life. BUT. You then take the same amount of time to focus on the GOOD in your life. And you must always end on the good. :-)

5.) I have very strong stubborn, defiant and competitive streaks. Sometimes this gives me great grief. Other times it makes me laugh to think God gave me those traits and Satan has a long, hard battle ahead of him 'cause I REFUSE to let him win.

6.) And sometimes you just need to take a long bath with candles, chocolate and a loving spouse to hear you out. :-) Or a long nap/good night's sleep to wake up to a different moment in time. :-)

"I try to give things that don't cost money -- such as my time or my talents."

"This isn't something that pertains to the giving necessarily, but My family has always taught me growing up, that everything we have, during the good times and the bad, was placed in our lives by His Hand."

"As my relationship with God developed I have learned to evaluate past events in my life even revisiting long forgotten histories, appraising them anew in the light I have today. To my amazement I find God never abandoned me, even during my years of rebellion He guided me unfailingly. I know God will always fill my needs, His constant presence in my life is the foundation on which I build my life now. I am grateful to the Lord and I try to do my best."

"My faith is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus blood and righteousness  
All other stocks and bonds just pale  
Including a diploma earned at Yale.

Retirement for me is out of this world  
All 401 K's in the future will be hurled

Into a fiery lake, so why fret?  
My money's on Jesus - He's a sure bet.

Thanksgiving is easy when your vision is clear  
Jesus' second coming is almost here.  
In the time that is left, let the urgent things lie,  
And give thanks to God - We're the Apple of His Eye!"  
-LR

"So what if we've lost part of our 401Ks? Isn't it all God's anyway? The only thing God asked us to do was to be good stewards with what we had and to love our neighbor's as ourselves. Our problem isn't knowing how to keep a thankful spirit. It's knowing how the right way to show we're thankful!"

"I try to have the attitude of who cares about the 'tough financial times' for I know that MY KING will feed the birds of heaven and He always feeds me well....even if I don't really want to eat what is in front of me. He gives me all I need. . . As for suffering I feel that is one of the best ways to give our God glory and show the Enemy that no matter what is thrown at us, befall us, pain on us "We shall not give in, nor shall I ever give up!" BRING IT ON!!!"

"What helps me maintain a thankful spirit with regard to monetary issues is observing how much I have in comparison with the vast majority of my clients. Many of them have no money for housing, transportation--the basic necessities of life. One person told me that she had two pairs of pants and a sweatshirt; that was the sum total of her wardrobe. Typically, my clients are unemployed and have few marketable skills. Also, often, they have no family support--either financial or moral.

Though I've been struggling a bit financially, I know if I really need help, I've got family who've always been there for me when I needed such assistance. Also, I have good credit, and I have options such as refinancing.

Bottom line, when I get really discouraged, I can take a look at the people with whom I work and realize how blessed I truly am."

"I believe that we are richer than 95% of this world *just* because we live in America. We complain about things that the world has been experiencing for a long time (i.e. gas prices) and don't stop to realize how lucky and blessed we are just to LIVE here! God has blessed us so abundantly, even if our checking accounts aren't big. We have more opportunity to change that fact here than anywhere else on the planet!

Also, it's easy to give if you *really* believe that it's **God** who blesses you with all your resources. He will fill in the gaps. If you don't believe it, test Him on it! He would LOVE to show you the surprising and wonderful ways He works miracles in your finances :-)

I think the fact that we are in these "tough financial times" is because of lack of honesty with ourselves about what we can really afford and what we can't. So many people overextend themselves with their finances and are really finding it hard to deal with in the current economy...

Doesn't the Bible talk about money more than any other subject? There is wisdom

there for anyone who wants to find it, and now seems to be a really good time to go looking.”

“Just quickly,

1. getting up in the morning and feeling my heart beat.
2. Knowing that God is in control, and that he TRULY works in mysterious ways, even though it's very hard to see it sometimes with our human eyes.
3. I have the blessing of working with people from other countries that have just arrived here. Refugees, young and old that have seen EVERYTHING. It's a reminder that even though sometimes I feel bad about my own situation, other people seem to be in a worse position.
4. Crazy, but giving back my tithes. I believe 100% in the Bible, and there's the promise of Malachi 3:10. Can't get away from it. Can't spin it. Enough said.”

“For me, it's all about knowing the Father and trusting him. He draws me more and more into fellowship with him; I continue to seek hard after him; the more I see of him the more awed I am and the more I love and trust him. He knows what he's doing with my life and the rest of this planet. I'm certainly not smart enough to know how it should be handled. I'm fully convinced that “God himself, and what he chooses to provide at this moment, are all I need.” Giving is the natural result of gratitude for all he is to me, and obedience to the one I trust.”

Randy