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Talking Points Teaching Guide for Turkey Talk

by Christopher Lyon

The following outline is designed to be used with the Turkey Talk Thanksgiving mini movie/sermon starter. Our suggestion would be to show the video, then proceed to teach the following five points in a sermon, Sunday School class, Bible study, small group or youth gathering.

Introduction

Do you ever feel that way? Like everyone is celebrating while you're about to be cooked? Do you ever feel at this time of year that you're expected to feel thankful in spite of the fact that your life seems to be falling apart? What's the answer to the turkey's question? Why should we be thankful even when our circumstances are so clearly and obviously negative?

1) Don't listen to the stuffing! (Psalm 92:6-9)

The stuffing's approach is familiar: Accentuate the positive.

Our culture is in the midst of a new positiveness and happiness movement. You can find lots of blogs and podcasts challenging you to stop focusing on your problems and engineer your life for your own happiness and sense of well being. They sound a lot like the stuffing.

It's an attractive philosophy, but it has a couple of problems. First, it's really hard to keep up during seasons of suffering. Human beings are just not very good at staying positive when we're experiencing pain or don't have enough to eat or when someone is being actively unkind to us. Positiveness for its own sake doesn't work.

The second problem is this: We're all going to die. And it won't be long. Psalm 92:6-9 uses the words "stupid" and "foolish" to describe wicked people who make the mistake of thinking the good things in their lives are going to last forever.

So what's the reality?

2) Life is hard for every living thing. (Romans 8:20-23)

The Bible is honest about this. No amount of positive thinking and life hacking is going to change the fact that every created thing is "groaning" on this sin-savaged planet. We cannot drown out the inner sense that we were made for more than this. Because we were.

Paul writes in Romans 8 that we are all waiting for the same things - for the sons of God to be revealed, for the children of God in Christ to be glorified, for the Father to complete our adoption and bring us home, for the suffering to be over. In other words, we're waiting for the lives we were meant for and we won't feel satisfied until that day comes.

So how can we be thankful while we wait?

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3) Focus on your problems. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

That doesn't feel like a Thanksgiving idea, but it's a good starting place for true thanksgiving - and it's exactly what God's Word tells us to do.

Remember what Peter wrote about casting all of our cares on God because he cares for us? There is not denial in that instruction about how hard our lives are. You can't offload your problems onto God's shoulders unless you take the time to figure out exactly what your problems are.

So don't ignore them - or dismiss the feelings they bring as a shameful lack of gratitude. Say to the Father who cares, "I feel like the turkey on Thanksgiving day, and here's why. These are my problems, bullet-pointed and itemized. And I give them to you to take care of for me. Help me to let you carry them."

Then repeat the next day.

4) Focus more on giving thanks than feeling thankful. (Ephesians 5:20)

A lack of gratitude is not attractive. It turns us off when we catch it in our kids or our parents or - maybe especially - people who are richer or healthier or better looking than we are.

And so we feel more shame about not feeling thankful than not saying "thank you." But the command of Scripture is to give God our thanks, to actually engage our minds and mouths and music in the exercise of identifying the good gifts and telling him thank you for them - no matter what we might be feeling in the moment.

So what good things has he given us?

5) Give God credit for every good thing. (James 1:17)

He's given us all of the good things, literally. Starting with the eternal, those of us in Christ are the heirs of God, with a legal stake in everything he owns, which is everything there is. (See Ephesians 1 and Romans 8.) And according to 2 Peter 1, we're also not missing anything that matters right now. We have everything we need, he wrote, for life and godliness. God will not leave us without anything we truly need.

Finally, moving beyond the eternal and spiritual, James wrote that there is nothing in our lives we can call good that God did not give to us. Becoming a thankful person involves developing the life skill of noticing every good thing we have and giving God credit for giving that to us.

As we do that, even the worst days become jammed with reasons to say thank you to the Father. And - strangely - the more we give to God the thanks we owe him, the more naturally thankful we feel.



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