

I. Intro.: Did you notice some repetition in Deut. text, especially the words “the LORD your God”?

A. Sounded to me like some ancient Hebrew writer needed lessons in how to use basic pronouns

1. Tried highlighting each time God is named ...

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

When you have come into the land that **the LORD your God** is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that **the LORD your God** is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that **the LORD your God** will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, ‘Today I declare to **the LORD your God** that I have come into the land that **the LORD** swore to our ancestors to give us.’ ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of **the LORD your God**, ⁵you shall make this response before **the LORD your God**: ‘A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷we cried to **the LORD, the God of our ancestors**; **the LORD** heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸**The LORD** brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, **O LORD**, have given me.’ You shall set it down before **the LORD your God** and bow down before **the LORD your God**. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that **the LORD your God** has given to you and to your house.

... 14

times in 11 vv.!

2. Only 2 vv. Do NOT specifically name God

B. In order to see a contrast, I decided to have us see & hear the passage w/out all this repetition of God’s name

1. Watch & listen w/ me to this passage when every reference to God is removed

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 (Politically correct version)

When you have come into the land given to you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that was given to you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the chosen place. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, ‘Today I declare that I have come into the land that was sworn to our ancestors.’ ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar, ⁵you shall make this response: ‘A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷we cried out; our voice was heard and our affliction, our toil, and our oppression were seen. ⁸We were brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹we were brought into this place and given this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that was given me.’ You shall set it down and bow down. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that has been given to you and to your house.

2. call it the “deity-neutral” version ... or “politically correct” version

a) Don’t worry if you can’t read it on screen ... listen for how it sounds different ... notice empty gaps on screen where God used to be

b) *Read aloud*

3. Unfortunately, this version looks & sounds much like what the Thanksgiving holiday has become in our society

C. We need to be clear why we’re thankful ... (& more importantly) to whom we’re thankful

II. Screen meant to illustrate how thankfulness has drifted away from its biblical roots

A. Any of you plan to watch TV on T-giving Day?

1. If you’re watching football, during timeouts the camera might zoom in on a roast turkey w/ trimmings ...
2. You may enjoy the beautiful Macy’s Parade floats passing by ...
3. But I bet on TV you WON’T hear the football or parade commentators mentioning God when they’re talking about how thankful they are

B. Ref. to “PC Version” on screen where God is taken out of the picture ... notice again those blanks

1. I’m not one who considers “politically correct” to be dirty words
 - a) I believe there is a place for gender neutral language in the church & in the Bible

b) When I'm referring to all of humankind, both male & female, I try to avoid using the word "man"

2. I think there's a fine line for Xians to walk w/ the language we use
3. I'm not necessarily arguing for us to hear more specifically Christian language in public speech & public places, like schools & legislatures ...

C. I AM naming the effect that this secularizing trend has on our thought & speech habits as Xians

1. How many of us have seen a friend trip & fall down and we've said, "O thank goodness you're OK!?" Is it now easier to say that than to thank God they're OK?
2. I know people are all over the map on this issue of freedom of religious speech
 - a) Some are reluctant to ever mention God or J.C. to anyone anywhere
 - b) Others are constantly spouting off "*God bless you! ... Praise the Lord! ... and Thank you Jesus!*" to everyone, everywhere ... so much that it makes me wonder who they're trying to impress?
 - c) Still others clearly use God's name flippantly, sometimes even defiantly in anger & vulgarity. They are unaware of the disrespect this shows to our holy God
3. The task of Xians is not to publicly push everyone else in our society to hear & use Christian language ... our task is to NOT relinquish our faith in our own discourse among Christians
 - a) In the arena of personal relationships & communication, let us not neglect to give credit where credit is due when we're thankful
 - b) I think it's possible for us to be respectful of others yet also be true to our beliefs

To do this requires both integrity in our own beliefs and sensitivity toward others' beliefs

(a) I heard that while I was gone last summer Pastor Ron Guengerich preached on the book of Job, and he cautioned against dualistic thinking.

(b) He said, "*You don't have to be wrong for me to be right.*" which also applies to how we express our faith in conversation with others

Respect for someone else's beliefs doesn't have to mean denying our own beliefs

D. I am very thankful to God for the freedom of speech we have in this country

1. but I want to be careful not to use freedom of speech as a cover

for disrespecting others' beliefs

2. Xian respect & sensitivity tell us that just because we CAN say whatever we want about our faith doesn't necessarily mean we SHOULD

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III.

(From

"help" to "thanks")

A. Deut. 26 passage sounds so repetitive w/ language of "LORD your God" ... but that rep. may be source of our blessings

1. Maybe that's exactly what we Christians today need to hear, to shake us up & shake us free ...

2. Maybe God wants to shake us free ...

a) ... from our warped sense of justice ...

Sometimes we expect that life should be fair ... life should be comfortable

Baloney! That's not a Xian belief & it's not something God promises us!

b) ... from our sense of entitlement

Too often we take the comforts of North American life for granted,

Do you think you personally earned every privilege you have? Most of us benefit from economic & social systems that have historically exploited Native Americans or African Americans

c) ... from how often we pine for more & better stuff BEFORE we remember to thank God for what we already have

3. Here’s a simple challenge to lay before us as we enter the big commercial season of consumption & wish lists

a) What would it be like if we committed ourselves to the following simple discipline?

A Thanksgiving Prayer Commitment

“I will not ask anything from God for myself or others without first spending equal time in genuine thanksgiving to God.”

“I will not ask anything from God for myself or others without first spending equal time in genuine thanksgiving to God.”

So before we would pray, “God, help me to ..” we’d pray “God, thank you ...”

b) Nothing will put our wants & needs in perspective before God more than thanking God for what God has already done & given

c) This simple commitment might have an effect not only on our prayers & spirituality, but on our restless minds and our coveting hearts as well

B. Author Anne Lamott has written an engaging & refreshing little book on prayer, called Help, Thanks, Wow

1. In it, Lamott takes what she’s learned about prayer over the years and distills it into three simple truths: *Help. Thanks. Wow.*

a) Now on a Thanksgiving Sunday like this, it would be tempting for me to skip over the 1st one of those three & jump to the 2nd

b) After all, I just asked you to make a simple commitment to 1st spend time with the Thanks before you go straight to Help!

In general, I stand by that advice, especially for people, like most of us I would dare say, who are not constantly in crisis.

If your life is going pretty well ... if your finances or your house or your mental health or your relationships all feel manageable, then I think you should be uttering Thanks to God just as often as you say to God, Help.

c) But I do have to admit Anne Lamott is right about something:

For some people today life is just a mess (or at least it looks like a huge mess when you're in it)!

Cancer diagnoses ... job losses ... divorce ... death ... addictions ... crippling debt ... overwork

When life is that overwhelming, I recognize the only prayer place you can start at is "Help."

2. The problem comes when our instinctive kind of prayer begins with "God, help me ..." or "God, be with so & so", which is another request for divine help

a) The help prayer is necessary sometimes, & God is always faithful to hear it ...

b) but the "help" prayer can also assume that WE are the center of the world, rather than God who created us

c) Starting with the help prayer also puts us in the habit of asking for stuff from God, as if we're talking to the giant Santa Claus upstairs

d) It becomes a problem if our habitual "gimme" language spoken to God begins to stunt our ability to even recognize and name the blessings we've received from God

IV. I urge us to train our prayer language to lead with thanks, especially in stable & more "normal" times.

A. Anne Lamott describes "thanks" as a huge mind-shift in our prayer life:

1. "Thanks" shifts us from our assumption that God wants our happy chatter ... that God wants a public demonstration ... that God is deeply interested in our opinions of the people we hate.

2. "Thanks" shifts us to feeling quiet gratitude, humbly and amazingly, without shame at having been so blessed. (Anne Lamott, [Help, Thanks, Wow](#), Riverhead Books, 2012, p. 60)

B. My father-in-law is well-known for proverbial sayings he tends to repeat, which sum up his Christian outlook on life

1. Even his grandchildren can quote numerous phrases out of the mouth of "Easy Ed", such as

a) *If at first you don't succeed, skydiving's not for you. ... or*

- b) *When riding a dead horse, it's important to dismount. ... or*
- c) *As you wander through life, no matter where you go, keep your eye on the donut and not on the hole.*

2. But I also recall Janette telling me that when she & her siblings were small and they used to whine or complain about something, their dad would ask them, *"Do you have an attitude of gratitude?"* And of course, it instantly stopped the whining, don't you think?

3. Even though you can't manipulate people to be grateful, hearing this "attitude of gratitude" language from my father-in-law as I married into the family, has rubbed off on me over the years, especially as I've seen how he models gratitude & generosity.

4. I admit I have a long way to go toward internalizing and living out this "attitude of gratitude"

C. But another way I have grown in this attitude comes from my experience living in Egypt

1. Egypt is a very religious country, +/- 90% Muslim, 10% Christian
 - a) Unlike Western societies, secularism has made fewer inroads there, so you often hear religious language in everyday speech
 - b) The most common example of this is probably "elhamdulillah" which in Arabic means "thanks be to God"

Both Muslims & Christians say this multiple times a day

If your friend tells you his sister just gave birth to a healthy baby, your relieved response will be "elhamdulillah"

If someone asks you the obligatory "how are you", if you don't feel like spouting an automatic "fine", the acceptable thing to say is simply "elhamdulillah" ... because there is always something to be thankful for ... And in truth, it could always be worse

2. Even though Janette & I left Egypt 23 years ago, hardly a week goes by that we do not find ourselves thinking or saying aloud, "elhamdulillah" when we become aware of a gift or a blessing

V. Conclusion: We're heading into a holiday weekend that is supposed to be dedicated to the giving of thanks ... not merely a weekend to let us get the best Black Friday deals ...

A. Let us be clear that because of all that God has blessed us with, "help" comes after "thanks"

B. Let us also be clear to whom we are thankful, in a world that increasingly cuts God out of the picture

1. I wish I would hear "Thank God" more often in people's conversations ... but only if it's genuine

- a) If you're not really following God in your life ... If this is just a phrase you use by habit, out of respect for a loving and generous God ... out of respect for your friends who love this God, please stop saying this!
- b) If you're only saying it to strengthen your pious image around other people ... If you're trying to make others think like you do, then stop saying it!
- c) But if your thankfulness comes out of a heart that genuinely recognizes where all good and perfect gifts come from, thank God as often as you can!
- d) If gratitude to the Almighty just wants to flow from you when you receive an unexpected gift, by all means joyfully say it: "Thanks be to God!"

2. As Xians, we're not just thankful, we're thankful to God!

C. Please join me in speaking together one of the most thankful of all the Psalms ... Ps. 136

- 1. I will call for your thankfulness, and have you respond with the refrain, "... for his steadfast love endures forever." PPT:

Psalm 136 Response:

*... for His steadfast love
endures forever.*

- 2. In the middle, the Psalmist names many of the Old Testament saving acts of God, to which the refrain is the same. But since this goes on for 26 verses, I will shorten & summarize this litany of what God has done

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
(for his steadfast love endures forever.)

²O give thanks to the God of gods,

(for his steadfast love endures forever.)

³O give thanks to the Lord of lords,

(for his steadfast love endures forever;)

[God alone does great wonders ... who created heaven & earth ... who brought out Israel from bondage in Egypt and divided the Red Sea in two ... who remembered us in our low estate & rescued us from our foes ... who gives food to all flesh ...]

O give thanks to the God of heaven,

(For his steadfast love endures forever.)