

Thankful for the Missing Pieces

Air Dates: August 22-26, 2022

Day One

Have you ever met anyone who truly "had it all"? I doubt it; in fact, I'm quite certain that no one has everything they want. I want to talk about the missing pieces of our lives. I have some in my life, and I'm certain you do, too. What are those missing pieces, those things you really want but you don't have?

You know, I've been noticing lately that a lot of people are truly handicapped over the missing pieces in their lives. Whatever it is that is not there in their life's puzzle, they have become obsessed with it, it controls their thought life, and it keeps them from enjoying or appreciating the good things they do have.

I was talking with a friend who has been married quite a few years, and has always wanted children, but she has not been able to have her own. That's a painful missing piece, and she was sharing the pain with me. But even though she recognizes that an important piece is missing, she hastened to add: "But, Mary, I have so much to be thankful for. My life is still full and meaningful," and she began to recite the good things—the pieces that are *not* missing from her life.

I said to her, "Do you realize how unusual you are? While you acknowledge that a key piece is missing from your life, and is likely to always be missing, you are focused on what is not missing." In fact, in all the years I've known her, she has never allowed that missing piece to rob her of joy or to keep her from being involved in helping and doing for others. And she's even able to rejoice with her friends who do have their own children, without jealousy or envy.

How about you today? Have the missing pieces of your life become so overwhelming that you cannot see or appreciate what you do have? For ten years I allowed what I thought was a major missing piece in my life to control me. I felt that I had to be married for life to be complete, so I was consumed with finding the right person to marry. My obsession with this missing piece led me away from the Lord, away from biblical principles, into a life that was self-focused and sinful.

Quite frankly, when we are obsessed with what's missing, instead of being thankful for what we have, we usually do become self-focused and our fellowship with God is damaged.

I can tell you from experience that being obsessed with what's missing in your life is a miserable way to live. I want to encourage you to see those missing pieces from an entirely different perspective. To even be able to thank God for the missing pieces.

Day Two

All of us have something that's missing, don't we? What I've come to learn—and am still learning—is that instead of being controlled by the missing pieces, I can be thankful for them. I emphasize that *I am learning* this principle of being thankful for the missing pieces. But as I've started to grasp this truth, I've found such freedom and contentment.

I'd like to share a poem with you, which really helped me start down this road of being thankful for the missing pieces. I first read it several years ago, and I re-read it quite often. The poem uses old-fashioned words, but the truth is still very relevant:

*An easy thing, O power Divine,
To thank Thee for these gifts of Thine!
For summer's sunshine, winter's snow,
For hearts that kindle, thoughts that glow;
But when shall I attain to this:
To thank Thee for the things I miss?*

*For all young fancy's early gleams,
The dreamed-of joys that still are dreams,
Hopes unfulfilled, and pleasures known
Through others' fortunes, not my own,
And blessings seen that are not given,
And ne'er will be - this side of heaven.*

*Had I, too, shared the joys I see,
Would there have been a heaven for me?
Could I have felt Thy presence near
Had I possessed what I held dear?
My deepest fortune, highest bliss,
Have grown, perchance, from things I miss.*

*Sometimes there comes an hour of calm;
Grief turns to blessing, pain to balm;
A Power that works above my will
Still leads me onward, upward still;
And then my heart attains to this:
To thank Thee for the things I miss.*

-Thomas Wentworth Higginson

When I first read this poem, I began to ask myself, "Where would you be today if you had everything you wanted, if there were no missing pieces in your life?" And it was as though God drew back a curtain to let me see how having everything I wanted could have been disastrous for me.

Did you ever think about that? Without some of those missing pieces in your life, where do you think you would be? Isn't it true that often the missing pieces are the things that draw us into a close and trusting relationship with our Heavenly Father?

Day Three

Do you think it's realistic for us to be able to thank God for the missing pieces of our lives? I believe not only is it realistic, it's the only way we'll know real peace and contentment in our lives.

God began showing me a few years ago that the missing pieces were actually a blessing. Why? Because without them I might have been lulled into thinking I was self-sufficient and never seen my true needy state.

I recognized that the missing pieces of my life had eventually driven me back to God, and as a result, God was able to take the brokenness of my life and use even me for his glory. I could see that it was because of the missing pieces that I now have the ministry I have and the joy of knowing that there is eternal purpose and meaning in my daily life. And I began, slowly, to thank God for the missing pieces.

Now, let me assure you that God is not expecting us to celebrate the missing pieces, to leap for joy, to throw a party, to pretend it doesn't hurt or matter. But he is asking us to be thankful even for the missing pieces, to understand that those areas of emptiness and unfulfillment can become instruments of grace in our lives.

I'm sure you've heard these verses before, but we need to be reminded of what Paul wrote us concerning thankfulness:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Ephesians 5:19-20: *Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Please remember that the man who wrote these words had many missing pieces in his life. He was persecuted severely, put in prison, unable to go where he wanted to go—there were many things in his life that were not easy to swallow or understand. Yet, he still says we should give thanks in all circumstances.

I want to encourage you today, if you're struggling with the missing pieces of your life, to just thank God for them. You may not feel thankful but do it anyway as an act of obedience and love to Jesus. That's the first step you need to take in order to find fulfillment in spite of the missing pieces.

Day Four

Everybody has missing pieces, don't we? For some, it's a marriage you've always wanted but don't have. Or a child that has not yet been given to you. Or a job you want, or financial security. These missing pieces are different for each of us.

But we can learn to be thankful even for the missing pieces. Paul advised us to give thanks in *all* circumstances, and we truly need to learn to do that. But if there is some key missing piece in your life right now, you may be thinking, "I don't feel like giving thanks for this missing piece."

Well, isn't it great that Paul didn't tell us we had to feel like it! In Hebrews 13:15 we read: *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.* When we don't feel like being thankful, we can still offer a sacrifice of praise. A sacrifice of praise is, I believe, when we praise and thank God against all our feelings, in spite of our feelings.

How do you do that? You speak words of thankfulness and praise. Words are the fruit of your lips, and this verse in Hebrews tells us to use that fruit as a sacrifice of praise. It's hard to do that, I know. You feel like a hypocrite when you start saying things you don't feel, I know. But you are obeying biblical principles by offering a sacrifice of praise.

When I find myself in that predicament, I begin by telling the Lord that I don't feel like it. But I confirm that I am offering these words of thanksgiving in obedience to Scripture, *by faith* not by feelings, and then I say those words of thanksgiving, even if they come through clenched teeth! God will honor our willingness to obey him; he will see that sacrifice of praise, and he will be pleased.

Interestingly, once I start to speak the words of thankfulness for the missing pieces in my life, then the feelings usually follow. It helps to think of your will as the engine on your train, and your emotions and feelings as the caboose. If the will is out in front of your emotions, you'll be okay. But if the emotions start dictating to the will, then you'll find yourself in constant turmoil.

So, though you may not feel happy about those missing pieces, you still can feel thankful, knowing that the God of all the Universe is in control of your life and cares about you. And he has promised to turn your ashes into beauty.

Day Five

You know, all of us have missing pieces in our lives: those things we really desire and long for but for some reason, we just don't have them. They can be little things or big ones, but they sit there in the back of your mind, always gnawing at you a little, and you feel like something important is really missing. Now the key issue for us as believers is how do we handle these missing pieces? As I see it, you have several options open to you.

You can become obsessed with what's missing and devote all your energy and time to trying to find that missing piece, trying to get what you think is essential for your happiness and fulfillment. When that happens, you become a self-focused person, and if you'll notice, people who are self-focused are usually pretty miserable. And obviously, that self-centered attitude is sinful and will be harmful to your spiritual life.

You may become bitter and angry about the missing piece. Has that happened to you? Let me just briefly remind you that bitterness always backfires on you and turns you into an unlovely and unhappy person. When you start to feel that it's unfair that you don't have what others have and you've been dealt a rotten hand, then you've become bitter.

Or you can learn to accept the missing piece and focus your life on what you do have and the good things God has done for you. Eventually you can even thank God for the missing piece because you realize that through it you have come to know him better.

I can relate to all three reactions, because I've done them all. For ten years I was obsessed with my missing piece, and let me tell you, those were ten tough years. Often I found myself feeling bitter and angry that others, seemingly less deserving, had what I wanted so badly.

But I finally turned the missing piece over to the Lord, and God gave me many other things to fill up the space, and showed me that without that missing piece, I would never have known him as I should. And knowing God better and better is the bottom-line answer to all our missing pieces.

How are you dealing with the missing pieces in your life? Well, I want to encourage you to start learning to thank God for them. And I want to urge you to make getting to know God better your highest priority.