

Living Thankful to God

1 Corinthians 4:7 | Romans 8:28 | Philippians 4:12-13 | Philippians 4:6-7

Subtract the Pants

The preacher came to visit a family unexpectedly. Wanting to make a good impression, the lady of the house instructed her little daughter, "Please run and get that good book we all love so much and bring it here." The daughter tottered off and then returned in a minute with triumph on her face and the Sears catalogue in her hands!

One of the biggest Thanksgiving killers, is the day after, when Christmas shopping begins in earnest and we stop thinking about what we have and start thinking about what we want.

Today let's talk about living truly thankful for *what God has given* us and *not* as spoiled children.

1 Corinthians 4:7 (NKJV)

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now, if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

A young man was feeling very proud of himself. As a brand new college graduate he had taken the C.P.A. Exams and passed with flying colors. Now he was a full-fledged Certified Public Accountant. His father had been an immigrant to the United States, and now owned his own little business.

Filled with self-importance, the young man began to criticize his father's way of keeping books. He said, "Dad, you don't even know how much profit you've made. Over here in this drawer are your accounts receivable. Over there are your receipts, and you keep all your money in the cash register. You don't have any idea how much profit you've made."

The father answered, "Son, when I came to this country the only thing I owned was a pair of pants. Now your brother is a doctor, your sister is an art teacher, and you are a C.P.A. Your mother and I own our home. We have a car, and we own this little business. Now, add that up, subtract the pants, and all the rest is profit."

That's exactly what we need to do, too! Add it all up. Count your blessings, name them one by one.

We came into this world with nothing but the eternal soul that God gave us.

Everything else is profit.

The story is told of a poor man who was given a loaf of bread. He thanked the baker, but the baker said, "Don't thank me. Thank the miller who made the flour." So he thanked the miller, but the miller said, "Don't thank me. Thank the farmer who planted the wheat." So he thanked the farmer. But the farmer said, "Don't thank me. Thank the Lord. He gave the sunshine and rain and fertility to the soil, that's why you have bread to eat."

We need this reminder this week because it forces us to recognize where all these things we enjoy actually come from.

1. Some Have a Wrong Attitude

The sad thing is that some people have a wrong attitude about their blessings because their priorities are all mixed up.

What standard do you use to determine your blessings?

One morning after a terrible snowstorm, a mother was outside shoveling her driveway. She stopped to wave hello to her neighbor, and he asked her why her husband wasn't out there helping her with the chore. She explained that one of them had to stay inside to take care of the children, so they played 'rock, paper, scissors' to see who would go out and shovel the snow.

"Sorry about your loss," he said. Susan replied, "Don't be sorry, I won!"

An example of a wrong attitude...

A few years ago, the Peanuts cartoon pictured Charlie Brown bringing out Snoopy's dinner on Thanksgiving Day. But it was just his usual dog food in his everyday bowl. Snoopy took one look at the dog food and said, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world is eating turkey with all the trimmings, on fancy china and all I get is dog food. Because I'm a dog, all I get is dog food."

He stood there and stared at his dog food for a moment, and said, "I guess it could be worse. I could be a turkey."

Better, but still a wrong attitude.

Snoopy's thankfulness was based on the fact that he was better off than the turkey.

Therein lies a small lesson in that when we're down in the dumps and full of complaints because life isn't fair, we should recognize that there are so many others far worse off than we are.

We should stop complaining, but when it comes to our thankfulness, the basis should never be, "Whew, am I thankful that I'm not them," or "I am so thankful I don't have to live like that."

Thankfulness is so much more than a comparison of our own situation to someone else's.

Thankfulness is so much more than having enough food to eat, a nice warm home to live in, good health or financial security, because each of those circumstances can be taken from us in an instant.

Thankfulness is a state of being and a way of life, and we usually fail to live in a state of thankfulness because we take it for granted.

Here is another wrong attitude...

Winston Churchill used to tell a story about the sailor who rescued a drowning boy. He pulled the drowning boy out of the water, administered artificial respiration, revived him, and sent him on his way home. That afternoon the boy and his mother were walking down the street and they happened to meet that same sailor. The boy told his mother, "That's the man who saved me!"

The mother immediately turned to the sailor and asked, "Is that true? Did you pull my boy out of the water this morning?"

The sailor replied, "Yes, ma'am, I did." But to his surprise, instead of thanking him, she shook her finger in his face and demanded, "Well, where is his lost cap?"

God provides us with so much, and yet we often demand, "Where is the rest? God, we want more."

A woman was visiting some people who lived on a farm, and she noticed a pig limping in the backyard with one wooden leg. She asked the farmer, "What happened to that pig?" The farmer said, "Oh, Betsy is such a wonderful pig. Actually, one night our house caught fire and she oinked so loud she woke us up and we got the fire department here in time to save the house." The woman said, "That's really something!" The farmer continued, "That's not all, one day my youngest fell in the pond and Betsy oinked so loud that she got our attention and we were able to pull my daughter out of the pond in time." The woman said, "That's really amazing! But I still don't understand why the pig has a wooden leg?"

The farmer said, "Well, when you have a pig that special, you don't want to eat her all at once!"

God gives us life filled with so many blessings that we can't name them all. But too many times, instead of thanking God for all we have, we are complaining about wanting more. All too seldom do we tell God "Thank you for all our blessings."

2. Others Have a Right Attitude

Out of the history of Napoleonic France, is a story of a political prisoner by the name of Charnet.

Charnet was thrown into prison simply because he made a comment that offended the Emperor. Cast into a dungeon cell, presumably left to die, as the days and weeks and months passed by, Charnet became embittered at his fate. Slowly but surely he began to lose his faith in God. And one day, in a moment of rebellious anger, he scratched on the wall of his cell, "All things come by chance," which reflected the injustice that had come his way by chance. He sat in the darkness of that cell growing more bitter by the day. There was, however, one spot in the cell where a single ray of sunlight came every day and remained for a little while.

And one morning, to Charnet's absolute amazement, he noticed that in the hard, earthen floor of that dirty cell, a tiny green plant blade was breaking through. It was something living, struggling up toward that shaft of life giving sunlight. It was his only living companion, and his heart went out in joy toward it. He nurtured it with his tiny ration of water, cultivated it, and encouraged its growth. That single green plant blade became his friend. It became his teacher in a sense, and finally it burst through until one day there bloomed from the little plant a beautiful, purple and white flower.

Once again Charnet found himself thinking thoughts about God. He scratched off the thing he scribbled on the wall of his dungeon and in its place wrote, "He who made all things is God."

Somehow through the guards and their wives and the gossip of the community, this story reached the ears of Josephine, Napoleon's wife. She was so moved by it and so convinced that a man who loved a flower that way could not possibly be a dangerous criminal that she persuaded Napoleon to release him. So Charnet was set free.

You can be sure that he dug out his precious little prison flower and took it with him and cultivated that plant in the years to come. He also pondered in his heart a verse that he put on the little flower pot holding the plant. What would that verse be?

Luke 12:28 (NKJV)

If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?

I believe we have a hard time being thankful because we take too many things for granted. So at this Thanksgiving time it seems wise to take inventory, add it all up, subtract the pants, and realize just how much we have received from God and begin to live thankful lives in Christ.

A king was said to have suffered a terribly painful sickness. His medical advisor told him that his only cure was to locate a contented man, ask for his shirt, and to wear it night and day. Immediately royal messengers were sent through the whole kingdom to look for such a man and to bring back his shirt. Months passed when finally, all messengers returned empty-handed. The king was exasperated. "Do you mean to tell me there was not even a single man in all my realm who is content?" One messenger replied, "We found only one such man in all they realm."

"Then why did you not bring his shirt for me?" "Master," the servant replied, "the man had no shirt."

Thanksgiving is so much more than food and football. It's about realizing how blessed we really are.

3. God Has Given Us Some Tremendous Blessings

Even though Thanksgiving is a national holiday, it was originally sanctioned by the federal government, it was a day set aside to offer thanks to God for the blessings of our nation.

Hear some of the words of George Washington in 1789, proclaiming the first day of public thanksgiving and prayer,

"Whereas, it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; Whereas, both the houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness!"

Now therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th of November next, to be devoted by the people of the states to the service of that great and glorious being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection..."

I consider being an American a blessing from God.

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Not everything that happens in our life is good. But God has promised that if we love Him, and if we'll let Him work His will in our lives, "in all things" God will make our circumstances work for our good.

The Apostle Paul makes this tremendous statement about living thankfully even in trials.

Philippians 4:12-13 (NKJV)

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

You have probably heard this (Annie Flint) poem before,

*"God has not promised skies always blue, flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God has not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
But God has promised strength for the day, rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love."*

What a tremendous blessing it is to be content. To be able to rejoice, to be able to pray, and to be thankful regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Knowing God is in control and working ALL things for our good.

So wherever you are and whatever you are facing, thank God and learn to be content in the love of God and with the blessings that He showers upon you day by day.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus.

The greatest blessing that we and this world would have ever received is the indescribable, immeasurable gift of Jesus Christ, as our Savior and our Lord.

It is His blood that covers our sins and gives us the assurance that after we depart this life, after all the things we have accumulated have been taken out of our hands, that through Jesus we will receive the greatest gift of all – eternal life in the presence of our Savior and our God.

That is His promise to us.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.