

In Everything Give Thanks

“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”
—*I Thessalonians 5:18*

THANKSGIVING DAY IS celebrated each year in the United States on the fourth Thursday in November, while in Canada it is celebrated on the second Monday in October. Regardless of the day it is observed, we rejoice that

many still pause to give thanks to God for the bountiful blessings which he has given. As the psalmist wrote, “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High.”—Ps. 92:1, *Revised Version*

Jesus “gave thanks” in prayer throughout his earthly ministry. Before food or drink was served, Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father, giving thanks for these provisions. When performing miracles, such as feeding the multitudes or raising the dead, Jesus offered thanksgiving to God for guiding him in the exercise of divine power. In the upper room, when Jesus instituted the Memorial Supper, he gave thanks for the symbolic “bread” and “cup.”—John 6:11; 11:41; Luke 22:19; Matt. 26:27

The New Testament teaches us that we must develop a deeper attitude of thanksgiving than what might seem sufficient to human thinking. In our opening text the Apostle Paul emphasizes that we should be thankful “in everything,” or as the *Weymouth New Testament* reads: “In every circumstance of life be thankful.” Paul expressed a similar thought to the Ephesian brethren, writing, “Giving thanks always for all things unto God.”—Eph. 5:20

Implied in this higher level of thanksgiving is that we are to be thankful not only for the good and pleasant experiences which come to us by God’s providences, but also for the trials and difficult experiences which he permits in our life. Giving thanks for these is not easy to do, especially at first. However, if we develop a faith based upon God’s promises, we will be able to realize more and more that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) These “all things” include difficulties, persecutions, financial troubles, health problems, or the death of a loved one. They may also include being slandered, evil-spoken of, or personally misrepresented by others.

The Apostle Peter spoke about this, saying, “Though for the passing moment you may need to suffer various trials; that is only to prove your faith is sterling (far more precious than gold which is perishable and yet is tested by fire), and it redounds to your praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:6,7, *James Moffatt Translation*

UNTHANKFULNESS IS UNHOLINESS

In society today people are often taught, either directly or indirectly, “believe in yourself” or “promote yourself.” If someone does something good to you, “you deserved it” or “earned it.” Because of such an attitude, thankfulness is lost sight of in many instances. However, this is the spirit of the world which the Apostle Paul warns about, saying, “In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, ... unthankful, unholy.” (II Tim. 3:1,2) We note the implication shown in the final words of this text—that unthankfulness is closely associated with unholiness.

Being unthankful can easily lead to discontent, complaining, and ultimately disobedience to God. Soon after the nation of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, most began to complain, becoming discontent and unthankful to God. The psalmist records, “Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.” “They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel.” “They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.” “They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt.” “They believed not his word: But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD.”—Ps. 106:7,13,16,21,24,25

WHY THANKFULNESS IS IMPORTANT

True thankfulness removes discontent and complaining. Thus, it is impossible to complain and be thankful at the same time. Thankfulness allows us

to recognize and appreciate what God has done, not only for us individually, but also what he has done, and will do, for all mankind. Our attitude should be: “The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.”—Ps. 126:3

In every unexpected trial or emergency in life, let us remember that God has prepared that “cup” of experience for us. As we drink this cup, and as we pass through each experience he permits for our eternal benefit, his promise is, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (John 18:11; Mark 10:38,39; Heb. 13:5,6) Sometimes God may permit our experience to be prepared by blinded servants of the Adversary. This awareness should help us to take joyfully the “spoiling of our goods,” which may include anything we might have deemed precious, including our influence or good name. (Heb. 10:34) We are to learn to treat with kindness and gentleness those whom God may permit to prepare and administer to us the cup of our sufferings.

At the present time, very few have the type of faith necessary to develop and maintain such an attitude of heart. Only a “little flock” have not only believed in the precious blood of Jesus unto justification, but have also made a full, unreserved consecration to the Heavenly Father. These have vowed to walk in Jesus’ footsteps, to “suffer with him,” that they “may be also glorified together” with him.—Luke 12:32; Rom. 8:17; Col. 2:6; I John 2:6

Thankfulness makes trials and sacrifices seem small, and all of God’s promises grand and motivating. As we read, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; ... for the things which

are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (II Cor. 4:17,18) Thanksgiving leads to obedience to God’s principles and to willing self-sacrifice in his service. Let us consider a few examples of this attitude of thankfulness to God recorded in the Scriptures.

DAVID’S THANKFULNESS TO GOD

Israel’s king David wrote a psalm of thanksgiving. Many years prior to this, the Israelites had gone out to fight against the Philistines, which resulted in 4,000 Israelites being slain. (I Sam. 4:1,2) Returning to the camp after such a horrible defeat, the elders of Israel said to the people, “Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.”—vs. 3

The Israelites knew how precious the ark of God was. It was upon the ark, between the two cherubim, where God met and spoke to Israel. (Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89) However, Israel’s elders incorrectly reasoned that if they took the ark with them into a second battle against the Philistines, they would be victorious. They thought that surely God would not allow the ark to be captured by Israel’s enemies. Perhaps the elders were thinking back to the time when the ark was used to lead the people of Israel during the crossing of the Jordan River and also, during the fall of Jericho. (Josh. 4:1-18; 6:1-20) However, on both of those occasions it was God who had given the instructions to Israel concerning how the ark was to be used. Never in their history, though, had God instructed the Israelites

to take the ark with them into battle with carnal weapons.

Regarding the instructions God had given as to the proper use of the ark, we note that even the high priest of Israel was not permitted to come before the ark of the covenant at any time of his own choosing, because he would die. (Lev 16:2) One lesson for us is how careful we should be in closely following God's instructions given to us in the Scriptures. We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that we can deviate from them by either trying to improve upon or by omitting them. Let us not mistakenly conclude that "times are different today," or that our particular situation or circumstance should allow us to alter God's Word.

The Israelites heeded the words of the elders of Israel and "sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims." With no instruction or authorization from God, however, they illicitly sent the ark into the battle against the Philistines. The result was disastrous. 30,000 Israelites were slain, and the ark of God was captured by the Philistines.—I Sam. 4:4-11

More than twenty years later, King David was able to bring the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. (I Sam. 7:1,2; I Chron. 15:1-29; 16:1,2) On this occasion he wrote a "psalm to thank the LORD." We quote, in part, David's words: "Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvellous works

that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth. ... Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised. ... Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name. ... Give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.”—I Chron. 16:7-34

DANIEL’S EXAMPLE

The Prophet Daniel thanked God on many occasions throughout his life, especially when receiving help from the Heavenly Father. One notable example of this occurred during the second year of King Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. The king had a dream which greatly troubled him. He called his closest wise men to come before him and demanded that they not only give its interpretation, but also tell the dream itself. The king reasoned that if his wise men could miraculously tell him his dream, which they had never heard, then surely their interpretation of what the dream meant could be relied upon. However, none of the wise men could recount the dream. This angered King Nebuchadnezzar so much that he made a decree that all the wise men in his kingdom be killed. This would include Daniel and his three Hebrew companions—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.—Dan. 2:1-13

When Daniel learned about the king’s decree, he asked the king’s captain why such a pronouncement had been made. After hearing the reason, Daniel asked for an appointment with the king and promised to describe the dream and give its interpretation. After making this appointment, Daniel returned home and asked his three companions to pray to the God

of heaven concerning the king's dream and its interpretation.—vss. 14-18

God revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel in a night vision along with its interpretation. (vs. 19) Daniel then thanked and praised God, saying: "I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter." (vs. 23) The humble heart of Daniel enabled him to recognize and praise the help which God had provided.

THANKFULNESS OF JESUS

Jesus is the best example of having true faith and continual confidence in God. He went frequently to God in prayer and to his Word for guidance. Jesus realized that his every experience was under God's supervision. One example of this is when Jesus was before Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate said to Jesus, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." (John 19:10,11) Clearly, Jesus knew that the Heavenly Father's providential care was supervising all the affairs of his life. The same is true for us. Trials or difficulties which God permits to come upon us should be considered as mercies and blessings, because he overrules each experience we have in order to help us develop and crystalize our Christian character. Let us remind ourselves that we have consecrated our all to the Lord. Thus, by faith, we are able to realize God's providence in all our experiences and render thanks unto him.

When Jesus performed miracles and gave lessons, he acknowledged the Heavenly Father as the source of his power and wisdom. (Luke 10:21,22; John 5:17-43) For example, before performing the miracle of feeding the 5,000, “Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down.” (John 6:1-14) Before Jesus raised Lazarus from death, he thanked God, saying, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.”—John 11:41,42

APOSTLE PAUL’S THANKFUL ATTITUDE

In nearly all of his epistles Paul wrote about thanksgiving. In his letter to the brethren at Rome, he said, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” (Rom. 1:7,8) In his two letters to the brethren at Corinth, the apostle expressed his thanksgiving to God, writing, “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.” “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”—I Cor. 1:4; 15:57; II Cor. 9:15

To the brethren at Ephesus, Paul wrote, “Giving thanks always for all things unto God.” (Eph. 5:20) How true it is that for us every day should be one of thanksgiving. We are to give thanks for “all things”—blessings as well as trials, knowing that all things are working for our eternal good by God’s direction. To his beloved fellow Christians at Philippi, Paul

said, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” —Phil. 1:3-6

In his letter to the brethren at Colosse, Paul wrote, “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” He admonished them to be “abounding therein with thanksgiving,” and that “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.” (Col. 1:3; 2:7; 3:17) Similarly, to the brethren at Thessalonica the apostle said, “We give thanks to God always for you all.” “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God, ... ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” —I Thess. 1:2; 2:13

When the Apostle Paul wrote to various individuals, he emphasized the thanksgiving which he had toward God. To Timothy he wrote, “I thank God, ... that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; ... When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee.” (II Tim. 1:3,5) To Philemon, he said, “I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.” —Philem. 1:4,5

THANKSGIVING EVERY DAY

As we look back through the past year and recall life’s storms as well as its sunshine, its sorrows as

well as its joys, its tears as well as its smiles, we have the assurance of God's Word that the trials, difficulties, and adversities of life are blessings in disguise. If rightly accepted as lessons, they will work out for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" in the life to come.—II Cor. 4:16,17

Being thus exercised, we will be able to rejoice in tribulation, not because we love suffering, but because it helps us in developing our Christian character. (James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-5) "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Heb. 12:11, *New International Version*) Thankfulness will allow us to focus on the lessons we can learn from each experience we have, rather than become disappointed, discouraged or bitter.

Let us be thankful to God every day, regardless of our present situation. In this way, we can have a celebration of Thanksgiving continually. Surely it will not always be easy to do this. However, someone once expressed it in this way: "Gratitude is an attitude, that comes from the habit of giving thanks." May the attitude of thankfulness fill our hearts and minds more and more until the end of our earthly walk.