

In Everything, Give Thanks

“Give thanks in everything, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

There are scriptures that sometimes just take one’s breath away. Paul says to give thanks to God in *everything*. It’s easy to give thanks when we have just eaten a bountiful meal, when we are in a warm house during cold winter days, when we can afford to pay our bills and taxes, and when the old car starts. But how do we give thanks in Jesus’ name when the world around us is not so pleasant?

What about losing a job? How do you give thanks to God when there are bills to pay and a family to feed? This is something that can really strike hard. But we can be thankful we live in a country where it really is hard to go hungry. It may not be easy to ask for handouts, but that is just pride (and we are generally better off without it anyway). Still, it’s a hard situation—but we have a God who desires to bless us and brethren who encourage and pray for us. Losing a job is hard, but imagine going through such times without God and the brethren. We should give thanks for such fellowship.

The fact that we *can* work is something to think about, too. What if we become sick or injured and cannot work? We should be thankful for good health—for a sound mind and for the strength to walk and move. Imagine life as a paraplegic or quadriplegic or being bedridden or having to be fed through a tube.

So, what about those who are sick or injured? What about the teenage girl who suffered brain damage in an auto accident, the man with crippling arthritis, and the woman who had surgery to remove a golf ball-sized brain tumor? What about the man who has 70% damage from a heart attack? There are those who have to go to a facility three times a week and spend seven hours on dialysis, or those who spend a day each week at the hospital getting chemotherapy—and another two days so sick they cannot leave the bathroom.

What is there to be thankful for then? Maybe the fact that we live in a country with an incredible medical system is worth a small prayer. Then there are family, friends, and brethren who provide transportation, spend time listening, or who just talk about unimportant things to distract us, even if for a moment, from the pain or suffering.

Then there are those whose spouse or child or mother or father has died. Some have lost their whole family. How can anyone be thankful in times of such tragedies? Where do we find words of gratitude when we are flooded with tears for a loved one whose voice we no longer hear or whose touch we long to feel? When we are engulfed by silence and loneliness, where can words of thanksgiving be found?

Perhaps, it is just this simple: the blessing was to know them for whatever time was allotted. Maybe it’s the realization that we were able to love them that much. Yes, the tears will come, sometimes in private and sometimes in the presence of friends or strangers. Either way, tears are evidence of a loving heart and *that* in itself is a blessing. Tears are never shameful, and we can thank God through those tears for such a love and the time we had with them.

The Bible speaks often of orphans. Most tend to think an orphan is someone whose parents have died. But these days, most orphans were abandoned or abused. How can God expect someone to be thankful whose parents abandoned them and they ended up in system of foster care? I know just such a person; one of many who came through my home. He was only four years old. But one day, years later, he stopped by the house—as a young man. He said he did not

have much time but wanted to say that he was now out on his own, employed, and soon to be married. He was thankful because we had made a difference in his life. I hope he also thanked God.

This young man made a difference in my life as well, along with all those I have known who have lost jobs, endured illnesses or injuries, and lost loved ones. It's easy to be thankful when we are comfortable, but God doesn't promise us easy times in this life. In fact, He promises us trials so He can test our hearts. Those who find ways to give thanks to God while enduring trials not only please Him, they are a blessing to all those around them.

How can that be? Because God's children find ways to let *agape* be shed abroad from their hearts. They pray for those who suffer (James 5:16) and find ways to provide whatever relief and comfort is possible (James 2:14-18), whether it is physical or spiritual. Those who suffer trials and are yet thankful to God are inspiring examples to others because they demonstrate the power of God working in them and remind the rest of us to be thankful to God for jobs, good health, and loved ones. Through their suffering they share the hope that lies within, and that helps prepare others for trials.

"Do not be anxious about anything; but **by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God in everything; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). The promise to us is peace which "surpasses all understanding"—*if*, in everything, we are thankful to God. This is from the Creator who watched hateful men torture His son to death, the one He has known for all eternity. Even so, God has not destroyed mankind; instead, He calls us His children and tells us He is our Father. Such is the *agape* of our Father, and Christ, toward us.

"But God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in *our* trespasses, has made *us* alive together with Christ. (*For* you have been saved by grace.) And He has raised *us* up together and has caused *us* to sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that **in the ages that are coming He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us** in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-7).

Knowing this, how could we not give thanks to God?