



Foundation of Faith

I Will Give Thanks

THE JOY OF GRATITUDE

THE SECRET TO GIVING

GOD'S PORTION

GIVE THANKS ALWAYS AND FOR ALL THINGS!

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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The FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a journal of vital Christianity, published in the interest of the Church of God, that takes a clear and decisive stand for full salvation in Christ, the unity of all true believers, and the truths of the Bible.

The editors reserve the right to abridge and edit all materials and information submitted for publication. Research sources are listed for information only and should not necessarily be construed as an endorsement or recommendation.

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www.christianunitypress.com

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH (USPS 9008) is published monthly by Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Flint, MI, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA Volume 21 Issue 10

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Printed in USA.

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is published free of charge. All expenses are covered by freewill donations.

Editorial

Dear Reader,

We all have cause to be thankful to God. All good things come from Him, and His blessings are available to everyone. We only need to accept what He is offering. In a song, we sing:

*Take from the fullness that Jesus is giving;
His hands are open with blessings anew.*

Since we all have so much to be thankful for, why is there so much ingratitude, whining, and complaining in the world? Even people who have plenty of everything are often not satisfied. Was this dissatisfaction not at the root of the evils identified among the people of Israel by the prophet Jeremiah? “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2: 13). Indeed, God is the fountain of eternal life from which springs hope, peace, and salvation.

This is why people seeking joy, respect, and recognition in earthly things are invariably disappointed. They are simply looking in the wrong place. This leaves them with empty hearts, speaking empty words, and chasing empty rewards.

Our Savior said, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). If our hearts are full, we are able to be thankful and joyful, giving God our worship and gratitude. But what if our hearts are empty? Jesus explains, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things” (Matthew 12:35). That is the difference between hearts that are full or empty, between thankfulness and ingratitude.

There is another word from God: “Three times a year all . . . shall appear before the LORD your God . . . and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deuteronomy 16: 16).

Therefore, let us thank God in word and deed and with all our hearts!

H. D. Nimz

Give Thanks— *Always and for All Things!*

Is such a reminder at all necessary at Thanksgiving? The answer to this question is yes, because people today have largely forgotten how to give thanks for their daily bread. The reverent amazement at the mysterious processes of nature has been lost to them; nothing seems wondrous to them anymore. Everything is taken for granted.

For example, we thoughtlessly accept the fact that we can sit down at the table and eat our fill more than a thousand times within a year. And yet it is by no means a certainty for many to always have enough to eat.

Often, we who live in the Western world can learn from the Christians of those countries where the Gospel is relatively unknown.

In the dining car of a train, a woman from Japan stood out. The carriage was full of guests. When the waiter had served this woman, the guests experienced something that astonished them to the utmost. She folded her hands and said grace for the meal. Some of the fellow passengers looked aside, ashamed and embarrassed.

A lack of gratitude is often a sign of thoughtlessness. Thanking cannot be separated from thinking. So today we also want to think about three miracles that the harvest field teaches us.

The entire harvest comes from death.

Jesus said: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12: 24).

Every year, we experience the million-fold miracle of seeds being placed in the earth, dying, rising, and becoming stalks that bear abundant fruit. But the earthly is an illustration for the spiritual. What does not die does not bear fruit.

Much comes from little.

A seed can bear thirty-, sixty-, and a hundred-fold fruit. Jesus says in Matthew 13 that the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds. Indeed, a hundred mustard seeds weigh only one gram. But each seed becomes a tree under whose branches the birds can nest.

This parable is about the spread of Jesus’ kingdom. The history of the revival movement is rich in examples of a person taking a “mustard seed” and sowing it in his field. Johannes Spiess in Germany prayed five years for revival in his hometown. And then the breakthrough of God’s grace was so tremendous that within four years, four bars and entertainment venues had to close.

Who among us is willing to become a seed that goes the way of death to bear much fruit?

Like comes from like.

If you put seed potatoes in the ground, you cannot possibly harvest oats. In terms of species, the harvest always corresponds to the sowing. The apostle Paul is right when he says: “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). If we have sown weeds in our lives, we can never reap wholesome fruit in eternity. So, it is quite impossible to live without God here on earth and then have fellowship with Him in the hereafter.

In view of these three facts, then, we find that the growth and maturation of the harvest is an enduring miracle of God.

A few years ago, I passed by a large piece of land that until then had lain completely fallow. When I recently saw it, suddenly a number of houses and even a church had been built on it. But when in a short time such a completely new part of the city comes into being, it is still far from being as wonderful as when a field of

waving grain ripens to harvest without a sound. Even though in the great miracle work of nature the food for billions of people and animals grows unnoticed every year, we see in it the faithful hand of God our Father. Reflecting on these miracles of God should make us give thanks even more than before.

However, ingratitude can also have other causes. There are people who claim that gratitude is proof of dependence but that this dependence is a weakness of character. But are we not, in fact, totally dependent on the grace of the living God, who makes His sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust?

Many have forgotten how to give thanks because their selfishness and self-centeredness overgrow their whole being. The Württemberg reformer Brenz once said, “We should give thanks for what we don’t have because we don’t need it.” According to Ephesians 5:20, we are to give thanks always for all things to God. In all things of our outer and inner being we want to recognize the gracious hand of our God.

Because all good things come to us through Jesus, we should give thanks in Jesus’ name. He is the mediator through whom God works everything. Without Him, we could not call God our Father.

In the great harvest field of the world, everything is ripening toward the great harvest day of eternity. “[T]here is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” But what will it be like when heaven will echo with thanksgiving and harvest joy of countless multitudes of sinners saved from all nations! The redeemed will praise their Redeemer for this harvest blessing from eternity to eternity. Therefore, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD . . . For His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 118:1).

J. Weber



An Invitation to Praise and Thanksgiving

“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all His praise? Blessed are those who keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times!” Psalm 106: 1–3

It is a wonderful custom to set aside one day in the year to give thanks to God, the Creator and Sustainer of life. Truly reflecting on all the good that God gives us from day to day and year to year, we will soon get into a spirit of thanksgiving, for we see the gracious intervention and care of a benevolent God who gives us so much good to experience.

Our Bible passage calls us to give thanks. It says: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD.” Why are we called to do this? Isn’t it natural for us to give thanks? Unfortunately, it is not. We humans tend to take everything for granted. Because everything is available and we lack nothing, we have become accustomed to not thinking about the Giver. Therefore, giving thanks is often forgotten.

Certainly, it is not our intention to be ungrateful towards God, but too often it happens out of thoughtlessness. We forget to consider how kind the Lord is to us. There is much to be thankful for, but it is not done. Perhaps this attitude should be judged as ingratitude?

Why are we not thankful towards God? Let us face a fact: Ingratitude is a bad habit many people are stuck in, showing itself in discontent, complaining, and grumbling. Things would certainly be better in the lives of individuals, as well as nations, if gratitude was present. “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever” (Psalm 106:1). Try it, and God’s blessings will not fail to abound.

Giving thanks must be a matter of the heart. The mouth may speak beautiful words of thanks, but the heart may be far from the Lord. Such thanksgiving cannot reach God because it is empty. It has value only when man gives himself to thanksgiving. Therefore,

look inward for true thanksgiving, and concentrate your thoughts on everything you are thankful for. The following song emphasizes this:

Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God has done.
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God has done.

We should never forget the things the Lord has done for us since they are all real benefits and therefore worthy of all thanksgiving. Scripture admonishes us with the words, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103: 2). Remember all the blessings of God, and give thanks to Him! Those who do will not be in danger of mindlessly babbling before God. Speak with your heart when you give thanks.

If you want to thank God, take time to visualize Him. Think about Who you are standing before. Is He not the creator of all things, visible and invisible? And what are we in His great creation? A very little thing, a nothing compared to the greatness of the created, of the cosmos! But how much greater and more glorious is our God! He stands above all and has the reins of the world government in His hand. Scripture says: “He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings . . . He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what *is* in the darkness, and light dwells with Him” (Daniel 2: 21–22).

Remember, you need to come before this glorious God and thank Him. Apart from all earthly blessings, you should thank Him for reconciliation through Christ, for access to Him, and yes, for the love you find

in Him. He helps and takes care of you out of His loving kindness and goodness. Therefore, “give thanks to the LORD”!

All nations shall give thanks to Him; the congregation shall give thanks to Him; the individual shall give thanks to Him. You are also included. Know Him for who He is, and humble yourself before Him. Surrender yourself, your life, to Him. Know that you owe Him your all. Let your heart overflow with praise and thanksgiving and glory! Glorify Him so that others

will hear and begin to ask about God. Rejoice and praise with gratitude the goodness of the Lord, for He has brought us salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, and acceptance as His child. Give thanks and praise to Him so that all who dwell on the path of discontent may take heed and move to the path of thanksgiving. “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders *his* conduct *aright*, I will show the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23).

G. Sonnenberg

Are You Thankful?

Dear brothers and sisters and friends, do we belong to those who have a desire in their hearts to give thanks to God?

For many it is not so. They view God’s works, but mindlessly. With their own eyes they see the miracle of how a small seed grows into a glorious head of grain, but they do not see the Creator, nor do they think about the fact that billions of people are fed in this way. The time of hunger is forgotten. After all, now they belong to the part of humankind that has enough to eat. Thankfulness often fades away in years of plenty. Thanksgiving is perhaps still something like a formal bow to be polite. We no longer harvest; we just produce and construct every day. Ultimately, that’s what we do. Who still honestly says: “The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season” (Psalm 145:15)?

Wherever natural disasters, wars, diseases, and hardships strike, effective institutions provide relief. For this reason, many people deliberately do not thank God. They say: We have

acquired everything by ourselves!

Can we as children of God give thanks to the Lord? Not everyone feels gratitude to God in their heart, although they would like to. That is because they do not know the Giver. Do you only have an anonymous giver? True, the testimony of God’s love is there for all people: “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good.” God cares for all.

Many know this God of creation. They have experienced His help. But God wants to be more to us than just Creator and Sustainer. God has shown himself to us as “Father” in Jesus Christ. He not only cares for our physical well-being but also for our souls. He gives us bread that we may be filled, and He gave His Son, the Bread of Life, for the entire world. Honor God as your Creator, draw close to Him through Jesus Christ, and experience Him as your Father! Thank Him for everything! You will continue to receive blessings from Him.

Arthur E. Lange
Vernon, British Columbia



The Right Thanksgiving

It is good to look back on the fruits and yields of the season's harvest and quietly contemplate: Have we truly appreciated the bounty of this year's harvest? Was it received with grateful hearts from God's hand? It is a beautiful custom in church congregations when fruits of the field and garden are displayed to illustrate God's blessing. This lovely image encourages us to exclaim with C. F. Gellert, who wrote:

How great, Almighty, is thy kindness!
Is there one whom it not moves,
Who with a hardened heart
Crushes gratitude owed?
No! To grasp His love
Shall eternal be my greatest duty!
The Lord has ne'er forgotten me,
And so, my heart, forget Him never!

Yes, this year God still kept His Word, which He gave to mankind soon after the great flood: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,

winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8: 22).

In His fatherly love and patience, God guarantees the ever-changing and recurring law of nature each passing year. Regardless of mankind's attitude, such a sacred and beneficial provision benefits all people. Matthew 5: 45 states: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." If sometimes a less favorable harvest occurs as a result of unfavorable weather conditions, people should be willing to look after one another and help each other out.

God is primarily concerned with the offering of our heart! How often did His divine voice sound in our ear: "My son [My daughter], give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways" (Proverbs 23: 26). However, surrender of the heart must include recognition of each one's transgressions and failures toward God. Approaching Him in sincere repentance is necessary in fulfilling your vows and then receiving forgiveness to start anew. Oh, how many vows have been made

in times of trouble and distress! But have those vows been kept? Let us examine ourselves this Thanksgiving! God wants us to keep our vows!

We must come to terms with our God and settle old debts, including our vows. The divine promise that we may call upon Him, asking Him to save us in times of need, will only then gain strength. There is a close association here: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15). God’s kind offer to answer our call of distress includes an obligation. This is usually overlooked. People like to call on God as their occasional “emergency helper,” but they often forget about their responsibility when they’ve received His help.

Let us remember one thing today: he who has not kept his vows to God has no promise of being rescued in his distress. Nevertheless, if God helps him, such a person has a double reason to praise the inexpressible goodness and fatherly mercy of God for undeserved gracious help. Let us examine whether all is well between us and our God so that we call out to Him and praise Him for help both in good and bad days!

He who offers thanksgiving to God in this way, consecrating his humble heart as a sacrifice, will not fail to surrender himself completely on the altar of God. As well, such a person will not remain ignorant of the needs in the kingdom of God. He will consequently see himself as a steward of the goods that his God has entrusted to him, which actually already belong to God.

The right thanksgiving must consist of wholehearted surrender of ourselves to God. Only through full surrender can we properly praise God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Through our sacrificial offering, we also contribute to the proclamation of the gospel. The gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations (see Matthew 24:14).

He who offers right thanksgiving from the depths of a humble heart receives assurance of properly praising God. Furthermore, he receives assurance of being on the right path on which God’s salvation is apparent. Psalm 50:23 says: “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders *his* conduct *aright* I will show the salvation of God.” From this we may learn that only those who trustingly come to God with a humble heart desiring salvation with willingness to offer Him thanksgiving, praise, and worship are on the right path to having and remaining certain of their salvation!

Our perception of Thanksgiving is associated with a harvest field and its sheaves. Children of God often think of the eternal harvest when it will be revealed whether they have brought forth enduring fruit in their lives. If we desire to offer true thanksgiving to the Lord, we must also be prepared to work in the field of God’s Kingdom. Our eternal harvest will be in direct correlation to that which we offer for God’s service.

Paul wrote the Galatians this encouraging word: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9). What will your harvest be like? ■

God's Portion

From my parents' home, I arrived in a large city, to help in Dr. A. Stöker's city mission. There I found that most of the staff had a very radical position towards money. They had a system for their giving and donating. They felt quite dependent on God in this area as well. They gave, as the Bible teaches, a tithe of all their combined income.

The thought was quite new to me. Being a person of complete evangelical freedom, I at first rejected it as legalistic. But the matter-of-factness with which even the poorest among my co-workers adhered to their "biblical" ways never quite silenced the question, "Should you start tithing, too?" But my small salary by no means compelled me to agree. Then one day while reading the Bible, my eye fell upon a passage quite unknown to me. It was Malachi 3:10: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you *such* blessing that *there will* not be room enough *to receive it.*"

The word struck a chord with me. God can be tried? He allows us to try Him? Then why not dare try it! You are not risking anything. If you don't get anything out of it, you can just stop.

Now came months of great suspense for my wife and I. Right at the beginning of the month, we had put the tenth part into "God's treasury," and now we were headed into the thirty dark days of the month under this new banner of faith. We did not live any differently than usual, but now, as in the parental home, we had the opportunity to give and to donate when hardship knocked at our door, or when I was allowed to immerse myself in the hardships of alley houses, basement parlors, and attics, and to bring a ray of joy into joylessness with publications, flowers, fruits, vegetables, and so on.

Then an unforgettably long month of January with its thirty-one days came along. On the 28th of that month, my wife asked me, "Do you have any money?" "No, not a penny." "And I have nothing left either.

Our pantry is completely empty. What shall we eat tonight?"

I had no answer to give to that. But another took the floor, the enemy of God, and whispered to us, "You see, it was not enough. God did not keep His word. You should just . . . not tithe. Best leave it to richer ones."

I had visits to make all day, across town, and, having by nature no disposition to worry, had soon forgotten the whole affair under my satisfactory work. My poor wife, however, was worse off. She was, after all, the one who needed to get dinner on the table again. Where would it come from? Should we ask someone for money?

This was a matter you could only talk to God about. And that's what she did. When I came home tired in the evening, she asked me, "Did you ask God for money?" "No," I answered, "I completely forgot that we have nothing to eat."

Beaming with joy, she replied, "But I did! See how He has heard!" And with that, she handed me a money order of 130 francs, anonymous, without a signature, that is, sent directly from God.

This first obvious answer to prayer had a tremendous effect on me. We now had experiential proof for the first time that God lives and personally cares about our personal little affairs. It was clear to us from then on that we could and should tithe. And even if doubts came to us now and then as to whether this had been a coincidence or not, God nevertheless intervened effectively in our lives again and again and let us know in faithful nurturing: I care for you!

Special evidence for us was that all our friends who were serious about their Christian lives had the same experiences that we had. One experience became very striking, that God not only gives those who rely completely on Him enough for themselves, but also gives them money for missions and the poor.

My dear readers, I would like to ask you all, as your brother, to put the tithe into "God's treasury" right

away, on the first of the month or quarter or whenever you receive your pay, not on the last day! If you do it on the last, from what is left over, alas, God could possibly go empty-handed! No, only on the first is it a matter of complete faith and trust, a leap in the dark. Please, dare it!

And now I tell you, an exciting wait begins for you—as it did for us back then: Will it be enough this month?

Do not forget that Satan is also involved in the attempt. He comes with a thousand counter-arguments. Let him talk! Listen to God's voice instead and trust His Word. ■

Let Us Give God Thanks

Thankfulness is an important part of the Christian religion. Someone without this virtue cannot justly claim to be a follower of Christ. An unthankful person does not understand the basic premises of the Christian life. They neither understand the unfathomable mercy of God nor their own dependency on His grace. Whoever has genuinely experienced salvation will never be able to thank God enough for His great love, mercy, and kindness.

People everywhere, even unbelievers, abhor ingratitude or unthankfulness. Nothing hurts parents more than the ingratitude of a son or daughter. How much more is the heart of God grieved by unthankfulness. How sad Jesus must have been, when after healing ten lepers, only one came back to give God thanks.

God puts up with human ingratitude with great forbearance and patience. “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5: 45).

How unhappy God must be when His creation forgets about Him and is unthankful. Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke to His people and said: “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; *but* Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (Isaiah 1: 3).

God is not pleased with sacrifices or acts of worship if they are not done with a loving heart filled with thankfulness. In the days of Isaiah, there were many sacrifices of oxen, bulls, and rams. God did not criticize Israel for that but for having forsaken their Lord. The Lord is pleased with those who have a heart of gratitude and truly honor Him. The blessing of the Lord is upon those who have a thankful attitude. “Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50: 14–15). Verse 23 of this psalm even says it more directly: “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.” Another translation says: “Whoever makes an offering of praise gives glory to me; and to him who is upright I will make clear the salvation of God” (Bible in Basic English).

So, whoever wishes to grow in the knowledge of salvation and drink from the well of God's unfathomable grace, let them first of all give thanks for what they have already received from the Lord. How good it is to meditate on the wonderful ways in which God leads us and has led us in the past. Let us give Him praise with a thankful heart. ■

Works without gratitude
are worthless.

The Joy of Gratitude

There are varied opinions about what is truly delightful. We generally speak of delicious food, exquisite clothes, precious objects. But God's Word speaks of deeper delights, namely the treasures of the heart.

Jesus speaks of salvation of the soul as a "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46). Furthermore, the Bible speaks of the "wonderful way of God," of the "exquisite garment of righteousness," and of the "precious state of a steadfast heart." In Psalm 92:1-2, we read: "*It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning and Your faithfulness every night.*" Let us consider the blessings of giving thanks a little more closely.

It is most worthy to give thanks to God. Luke, for example, recounts in the 17th chapter the incident of the ten lepers who called upon Jesus for mercy and healing. While all were healed, only one returned to offer his thanks. Jesus expressed surprise at the ingratitude of the nine, but He praised the one grateful man, acknowledging his faith. Our Lord was waiting to see if these ten men would be filled with thankfulness towards Him.

God comes close to us when we have thankful hearts. God gives us a wonderful promise in Psalm 50:23: "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders *his* conduct *aright*, I will show the salvation of God." Here salvation refers to divine aid, and this aid is promised to those whose lives are filled with the joy of gratitude. Thus, expressing thanks becomes the path to God's ever-necessary help. In a world filled with challenges and uncertainties, this divine aid is invaluable. And just as we cherish this divine help, so too is our sense of gratitude precious in the eyes of God.

Someone said: "If we keep giving thanks, God keeps blessing." This is a valuable observation which we should be attentive to. Just as we gladly help and give to those who show gratitude, so does God. If we want God's blessings in our lives, we need to have a spirit of thankfulness.

Giving thanks enriches us. It follows that if giving thanks enriches us, then ingratitude makes us poor. With ingratitude, we close our hearts to others and to the heavenly sources of strength and joy. The consequence of this is impoverishment. God's Word continually reminds us to be grateful, for gratitude is like a diamond whose brilliance illuminates our lives and other people's lives. We often have dark days in our lives, but being grateful outshines even the dullest day.

An experienced Christian was once asked about his devoutness to God. "I will gladly reveal it," he said. "Every morning, I give thanks, ask for grace for the day, and begin the day with the deepest joy there is: the joy of God's salvation." For him, every day was a day of thanksgiving.

Giving thanks one day a year is not enough, since daily thanksgiving is precious before God. The Bible states that God's "mercy *endures* forever." Therefore, "Praise be to the Lord daily!" We are all recipients of God's many blessings and benefits. At the center of all natural blessings is the harvest. It gives us food and sustenance for every day of the year, and this daily bread obligates us to give thanks. The gift of daily bread is wonderful, and so it is important to give thanks each day.

Is gratitude part of your life? Know this: Everything we receive should lead to more thankfulness, and all thankfulness leads to more receiving. A poet wrote of this experience:

High above the sorrow of everyday life
Our gratitude rises
And opens the gates in our Father's house
To His many blessings.

So let us pay attention to the gloriousness of giving thanks in our lives, because with it we gain or lose a radiance that cannot be replaced.

*Friedrich Krebs
Edmonton, Alberta*



Where Are The Nine?

An old poem portrays two angels sent down to Earth to collect the prayers of humanity. The first angel was asked to gather only the prayers of petition, while the other was to collect the prayers of thanksgiving. The first angel almost collapsed under the load of requests and reported that he was only able to bring a small portion of the prayers he gathered. The angel tasked with collecting thanksgiving prayers returned as well, deeply saddened with only three prayers of thanks.

God, in His great kindness and patience, “has caused His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and has caused it to rain on the just and on the unjust” (see Matthew 5:45). He has showered His blessings on all without ceasing, and yet so few think to do what the Samaritan, who was healed of his leprosy, did. We read of him, “And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan” (Luke 17:15–16). None of the others who were healed came back to thank Him! No wonder the Lord exclaimed, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine?” (Luke 17:17).

Of course, one cannot expect a song of praise and thanksgiving from someone who won’t acknowledge the workings of a personal God in the whole universe, but instead attributes everything to blind forces of nature. It is sad when God seeks a grateful heart in vain from those who know that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Often, among these, the ungrateful attitude of those nine can be found. The

psalmist exhorts us in the 103rd Psalm, verse 2: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”

Knowing that God will provide for us from His great storehouse and treasury, there is no need for the tormenting spirit of worry, which anxiously asks, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” (Matthew 6:31). Rather, “he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit” (Jeremiah 17:8).

Whoever places such trust in his heavenly Father and knows he is held by the hand of God will be grateful and satisfied. Blessed is the man who has learned to speak with the apostle Paul: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 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” (Philippians 4:11–13). Yes, through Christ, the apostle was able to live such a life!

We often repeat these words of the apostle but rarely relate it to the seemingly small, unimportant everyday needs of our lives. Our spiritual life may be influenced by the disposition and situation of the people with whom we interact.

How many people, even Christians, are found among those to whom Jesus’ question applies: “But where are the nine?” Therefore, let us join in with the psalmist, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits”! ■

The Twelve Apostles— Philip

Background and Calling

“The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow Me’”
John 1: 43.

Philip is the next apostle the gospels introduce to us. It is a Greek name meaning “fond of horses.” After the conquests of Alexander the Great (about 300 BC), Greek civilization had spread, and in the Middle East many had adopted the language, culture, and customs of the Greeks. These people were known as “Hellenists.” It is possible that Philip came from a Jewish-Hellenistic family and therefore had a Greek name.

Philip grew up in Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Later, Andrew and Peter lived in Capernaum, but they spent their childhood and youth in Bethsaida. Philip probably attended the same synagogue as Andrew and Peter, and it may well be assumed that Philip also knew James and John because they were close friends of Andrew and Peter.

Since Philip knew Nathanael and sought him out first, a clear picture emerges. These six disciples were at that time (John 1: 35–44) in the south of Judea, where John the Baptist was baptizing. They were truth-seeking people awaiting the Messiah and possibly all knew each other even before they followed Jesus.

Philip, then, was the first disciple whom Jesus actively sought out and called to follow Him. “Follow Me.” That was the clear invitation from Jesus. And how does Philip respond? He doesn’t hesitate for a moment. The first thing he does is to take this good news to his friend Nathanael. It is remarkable how quickly and easily Philip believed. He had not yet seen any miracles or signs, and yet deep in his heart he was already convinced: this is the Messiah!

“Follow Me.” Jesus repeats this call a number of times. And that is precisely why He came—to call all to follow Him. Dear Reader, He also calls you to come

and “follow Me.” How have you responded? If you accept this invitation, it will radically change your life. To follow Jesus is to be blessed and have eternal life! What grace, what a privilege!

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

The feeding of the five thousand provides us with good insights into the character of Philip. It shows us what Philip was like as a man (see John 6: 1–13).

Jesus sits on a mountain while His disciples stand around Him and watch as the crowds come to them. What a spectacle that must have been! We read of 5000 men—with women and children there were possibly 10-12,000 people gathered there. At that very moment, Jesus turns to Philip and asks, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” Philip was horrified—bread for so many people? Impossible!

Why did Jesus ask him of all people? Verse 6 gives us the answer: Jesus wanted to test his faith. Perhaps Philip was the one among the twelve who was in charge of administrative tasks. Judas was responsible for the money, so perhaps Philip was the one who provided and distributed the meals, made sure there was enough stock, and organized some other things.

Perhaps for this reason, Jesus turned directly to him and asked, “Where shall we buy bread?” Jesus tested his faith. He knew his thoughts and didn’t really want a “master plan” from him. Jesus just wanted to show Philip how much faith in Him could accomplish.

But Philip was a man of statistics and numbers—a man of facts. “I can only use what I have; anything else is impossible.” He was well suited to his task as an administrator, for he was a good mathematician. With a practiced eye, he surveyed the large crowd and calculated in no time that 200 denarii were not enough to buy even a little bread for everyone. When Jesus tested his faith, he responded with open disbelief, “It can’t be done!” From a human perspective, after all, he was right.

A denarius was the daily wage of a laborer. So 200 denarii was roughly eight months' wages. A lot of money, but too little for so many people. We can imagine Philip thinking, "With one denarius, we could buy 12 wheat patties. Barley is cheaper. Then one denarius is enough for 20 barley patties. What if we take the small patties and cut them in half?—No, it just can't be done!" He quickly calculated that 4000 barley patties would never be enough for everyone. He focused entirely on earthly means and concluded, "It's impossible!"

Philip was missing the perspective of Jesus and His power. He had actually been there when Jesus turned the water into wine, and when Jesus healed many sick people and did other miracles. Jesus expected more faith from him by now. But Philip was completely focused on this world, entirely forgetting the limitless power of Jesus. With Andrew, we see at least a small spark of faith. He also doubted (verse 9), but nevertheless he brought the boy to Jesus, who Jesus could use wonderfully.

Philip had to learn this lesson, learning not to rely only on his small capabilities, but rather to look to Jesus and expect great things from Him.

Philip and Us

Don't we often feel that our gaze is only focused on the material and earthly? The visible world is so real and close that it obscures our view of the invisible world. Even to Samuel, God said, "[M]an looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16: 7). It is exactly the same! We see our circumstances, problems, worries, and challenges.

- Maybe you are facing important decisions in your professional or personal life, and you don't know what the right thing is. You don't know how to decide, and it's giving you a headache.
- Maybe you have financial problems and can't get ahead.

- Your spiritual life is bothering you. You want to serve God, but you can't get rid of some addiction, habit, or sin.
- Maybe a physical or mental illness is burdening you, and you don't know if you will get well.
- Or you might have problems with your parents or other young people, with colleagues or classmates.

This list could go on and on, but the question is, how do we deal with it? When you look at your problems, you are like Philip with the crowd of people. The closer they get, the more impossible it seems to find a remedy. Your problems build up like a mountain in front of you. This always happens when we look only at the visible.

Scripture encourages us to look at the invisible: "Now faith is . . . the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11: 1).

Our faith is based on Jesus, with whom nothing is impossible. We do not yet see any solution or improvement of the situation in the visible world. The five thousand are not yet fed, and yet we know that in the spiritual, invisible realm there are no impossible situations for Jesus. He will give the great multitude enough to eat. That is faith!

Jesus has a solution for your problem too! Do not look at your problems but at the absolute power of our Savior, with whom there are no limits. Do not look at this visible world, but look out into the invisible world, for that is the true and greater reality.

"[W]hile we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal" (2 Corinthians 4: 18).

Believe Jesus, and experience as Philip did how *He* will do miracles in your life and bless you!

*Eduard Albrecht
Eppingen, Germany*



Be Grateful in All Things

Mr. Vladimir, a family man, had gone to town to pick up some boxes and bags of donated items that he was to distribute in his small, remote, poor village in Russia.

After everything had been loaded, one of those helping said, “Here, take this jacket with you. I’m sure someone in the village can use it.” And he handed him a brand-new but old-fashioned children’s jacket.

In the village, he distributed the things among the church family, but nobody wanted the jacket. So, Mr. Vladimir and his wife Anna got it. Since the weather had already become warmer, Mrs. Anna placed the jacket with the rest of the winter clothes in the attic.

The short summer passed quickly and gave way to a rainy autumn with its cold winds and morning

frost. The children were eagerly waiting for winter so they could go sledding and play in the snow. Every morning, they ran to the window to see if it had snowed yet.

Finally, the first snow had fallen, and the children raced outside to go sledding by the river with the gently sloping bank. Only Andrew stood there looking sadly at his siblings. He would have loved to go along, but his jacket from last year was already too small for him.

All of a sudden Mrs. Anna remembered the donated jacket and retrieved it. It fit Andrew well, but was gray and looked like a work jacket. The parents were trying to teach their children humility and were especially happy about Andrew. He was already in the sec-

ond grade at school; however, he never told his parents that he would like to have things like his classmates did.

When the boy went out into the yard, he was surrounded by his siblings. The older ones laughed at the sight of him, as no one would wear such a jacket nowadays, but the younger ones pulled Andrew by the sleeve: "Finally you can come down to the river and go sledding with us!"

Before the children left, the father remarked: "Andrew, you have a good jacket. In my childhood, it would have been the best gift. It is so warm and comfortable. We should be very grateful to the Lord that we received it."

At first, the neighbor boys mocked Andrew's jacket, but he remembered his father's words and payed no attention to the boys, who quickly lost interest in teasing him.

Three weeks passed; winter returned in all its harshness. So much snow fell that even the high fences disappeared under a white blanket.

One evening, when the whole family was gathered for prayer, Father said, "Children, you know that the hay is running out. We cannot feed both of our cows for the entire winter. But the Bible says we should cast all our cares on God because He will provide for us. Let's thank Him for thinking of us and loving us. Let us ask Him for help." The family prayed with all their hearts. The older children cried because they loved their cows and could hardly believe it: Would they really have to sell their animals?

The next day, the children went sledding at the river again. When they came home in the evening,

Andrew handed his mother a few colorful slips of paper: "Mother, look what this is! I found it in my jacket pocket." The mother raised her eyebrows in surprise: "That must be money, son," she guessed.

"It was in the jacket," Andrew said happily. "Look, there's a zippered pocket here that I hadn't noticed before."

"What can you buy with that?" asked one of the boys. "I don't know, I've never seen bills like these before," the mother replied. "But tomorrow Father is going to town and he will go straight to the bank and ask what it's worth."

In town, the father exchanged the bills for Russian rubles. With it, the family could buy much more than just the hay they needed. They were able to buy flour and sugar and even some sweets.

As the family sat together again in the evening, the father looked at each of the children and asked, "Can you remember how we asked God for help two days ago?" All the children nodded; they remembered it well. "God is faithful to His word; He has provided for us. Now I'm going to read you the verse from 1 Timothy 6: 6. Think about why I chose this verse of all things: 'Now godliness with contentment is great gain.'"

The children became thoughtful; the older ones bowed their heads, ashamed. They remembered how glad they were that the old-fashioned jacket fit Andrew and not one of them.

The father asked, "Do you understand whom God has blessed?" The children remained silent; they understood that God values humility and wants us to be content and grateful for all things. ■



Growing Older Gracefully

PART 4

In this fourth part of our series, “Growing Older Gracefully,” we want to share some thoughts that may help make the aging process a time of blessing. These practical suggestions can positively influence not only ourselves but also others around us. In previous articles, we looked at our relationship with God and the importance of gratitude, as these aspects form the foundation for rewarding, golden years.

I had discussed this topic with some older brothers and sisters of faith, and I would like to share some of their hopes and useful ideas:

- On a daily basis, I want to pray for my family and also the people I interact with. Through prayer, I desire to build a close and intimate relationship with Jesus, who is my Savior and best friend. “God, please let me experience a stronger connection to Your Spirit and Your presence. Let my relationship with You be more real than the physical world around me.” This is also my prayer, both for now and for my entire life.
 - I want to keep reminding myself that this world is not my final home. God has prepared a wonderful place for us in heaven where we will be one day.
- This perspective brings joy, courage, and hope into my life and prevents me from losing heart. Instead, I can look to the future with anticipation and be grateful for everything I have.
- I would like to focus less on myself and my problems. Instead, I want to have compassion for others and be interested in their lives and struggles. I want to share in their successes and days of happiness and encourage them.
 - I hope to radiate joy wherever I am. It is my goal to brighten my surroundings so that those who visit or care for me are refreshed and encouraged.
 - I desire to remain adaptable and not stuck stubbornly in my own views or insist that my way is always best. Instead, I want to have the ability to step back, ask questions, and recognize that there are likely a number of possibilities. I want to be able to consider different ideas and be open to new ways of doing things. Listening to younger people is especially valuable because they have experienced so many advances in technology that may be foreign to us.
 - I don’t want to be a curmudgeon! I don’t want to wallow in complaints or assume I’m being over-

looked. I don't want to be the one who says, "Why didn't you visit me? Why didn't you call me? Why can't you stay longer?" I pray for a loving spirit and understanding when my children (including my children-in-law) are busy with their lives and have limited time for me. I hope and pray that they will ensure I am not neglected or rejected.

- I want to be open to my children's advice and suggestions. If they tell me that a dress or other article of clothing looks really dated and worn out, I plan to replace it. I will make an effort to get rid of shabby things and irritating habits. If my actions or words are inappropriate, I hope my children will gently remind me. As much as I am able, I want to have the grace to change.
- If possible, before I am no longer able, I would like to declutter my life, donate things, and downsize. I don't want my family to have to deal with an overflowing dumpster when I'm gone. Instead, I want to leave them with meaningful memories.
- I strive to make it my priority to follow Jesus and fulfill His mission by telling others about Him and making them His disciples. This applies to all of us, regardless of our age. Even though I don't travel to faraway places to spread the Gospel, I see and talk to people from all over the world who live near me. They are our children, grandchildren, neighbors, and even the people we meet in our daily pursuits, such as the doctor or the hearing aid specialist.
- I don't want to talk about others or spread gossip. I always pray for God to help me control my words that I may not sin against Him or hurt others.
- I don't want to be that older person who constantly feels the need to correct others or give advice.

Instead, I would like to listen and share in their lives without interfering. I want to give others opportunities to share their experiences and listen attentively without judging or providing unsolicited advice.

- I wish to be an active senior and not rely on others. I want to guard against loneliness by being involved and taking the initiative. I don't want to passively wait for someone to contact me. Instead, I will pick up the phone and invite some people. I want to stay connected and foster friendships or make new friends.
- May I never be too proud to ask for help, whether I'm facing physical, emotional, or spiritual challenges. Should I need physical assistance, I want to accept assistive devices such as hearing aids, glasses, a cane, walker, or wheelchair. There is no shame in asking for help when I need it. It is important to recognize that such aids serve to make my life easier and more pleasant.
- I wish to use my time wisely by staying occupied and doing things that make me happy. As long as I can, I would like to bake, cook, and create flower arrangements to bring joy to others. I would also like to volunteer, for example at a food bank, to stay in touch with people and help them. Rather than isolating, I want to be involved.

Let us think about how we can grow older gracefully, and set goals to accomplish that. We want to turn our resolutions into reality. In doing so, we trust in God's help and support so that our plans and wishes can come true.

Harry Semenjuk
-Conclusion to follow-



Wayward Children

A Quiet Rebellion

Part 10

M. Schmelzle

Luke 15:25–30: “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’”

When we speak about the parable of the prodigal son, we generally think of the lost son, the one who left home. However, a closer reading shows that the older son—the one who stayed home—was also lost, albeit in a different way. **Even children who do not leave home or the church can be lost to a quiet kind of rebellion.**

This can manifest as unhappiness, a lack of respect, or an absence of reverence for God. We do not need to leave our parents’ house to cause them shame or pain.

The Bible does not tell us why the older son turned out this way and what caused him to rebel. Maybe he

felt neglected. Although his father loved him, he spent his time sitting at the window and waiting for the younger son to return. Even while physically present with his eldest, he was not as light-hearted and happy as before. The father’s depression overshadowed everything else, and the older son could not fail to notice. How would this have made him feel? He was still there, after all. He had not turned away from his father. But his father seemed to mourn his younger son more than he appreciated his older one. Did this mean he valued the absent son more? It is only natural for parents to mourn a lost child, but if the expression of this grief takes precedence over the needs of our other children, they will suffer as a result.

In his own way, the older brother rebelled as well. His rebellion was less apparent, being expressed as a lack of empathy and compassion, as growing anger toward his brother and their father, and as an expectation of favorable treatment in exchange for his obedience and good behavior. Caught up in a sense of self-righteous entitlement, he was unable to rejoice in his brother’s return. Toward his father, he was defiant, rebellious, accusing, proud, and arrogant. His father’s reaction made no sense to his hardened heart, and he was unwilling to change and let it soften. He was too full of rage.

In his father’s place, he would have ensured that his brother got what he deserved. It only seemed fair,

“Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.”

after all. Instead, their merciful and forgiving father was thrilled that his younger son had returned. The returning son needed his father’s grace, just as we all need grace, whether at the height of our success or in the depths of grief and despair. Acceptance, empathy, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation all arise from grace—and grace arises from love.

We know that society at the time placed great value on honor. That is what made the younger son’s actions so damaging. By violating the family’s honor, he brought shame on them all. However, the family’s dishonor could not be laid entirely at his door: His older brother brought shame on their father as well when he refused to take part in the celebration of his brother’s return. Just imagine the father setting up a party to welcome his younger son back home. As the guests flood in, he sees neighbors, friends, and business associates—but not the guest of honor’s elder brother. He had remained out in the fields, perhaps working out his anger and frustration on the soil or the weeds. One guest after another would have asked the father, “Where is your other son?” With no good answer, the father did something that would have been unimaginably rude at that time, abandoning his duties as a host and leaving his own party. In their culture, this was simply not an option! But he did so nonetheless, choosing to go after his eldest son to remind him that he loved him

very much and that everything he owned belonged to him.

The older son did not say much, but his choice of words reveals a lot about his feelings toward his brother and father. “This son of yours,” he spat at his father.

“Your brother,” reminded his father him gently.

“These many years I have been serving you,” he accused his father (“slaving for you” in the New International Version), although they had actually worked together as partners since the father had already split his inheritance between them (verse 12). Two thirds of the estate already belonged to the eldest! By this point, the father himself only lived there. Everything the father had once owned now belonged to the older son, the younger one having already wasted his portion. It is even possible that he had already bought out his brother’s share and now owned the original estate in its entirety. And now that brother just showed up, expecting to live here even though he had no claim on the property any longer! That was probably part of the problem. The older brother saw all too well that every cent spent on his brother came out of his own inheritance. All this money was just being thrown at his brother—the one who had chosen to renounce them! The funds for this party were coming out of his pocket, and no one had even asked his permission. If they have to hold a party for someone, he thought, why couldn’t it be me?

- To be continued -

Fruitless Branches

| *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.” (John 15: 2)*

These words of Jesus show us a condition that is unhealthy. This raises the question: Are we dealing with unproductive followers, or with those who have never been truly born again? Or what kind of people are we referring to when we speak of branches that bear no fruit? Let us examine the matter somewhat closer to determine the spiritual condition of those whom Jesus refers to as fruitless branches.

Jesus says, “Every branch in Me.” This indicates that they have at one time experienced true salvation, that a conversion of their heart and life has taken place. Otherwise, they would not have become branches in Christ, the true vine, at all. For someone to say that these are only dead and graceless professors of Christ is not at all in accordance with the words of Jesus.

The fruitless branches Jesus is talking about are those who have experienced and witnessed the new birth. They have been placed in Christ Jesus through this glorious experience. By being born again, they have become a new creation. For, “if anyone *is* in Christ, *he* is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Although these people were born again, they are atypical in one essential point. Although they have been born into Christ Jesus, they do not bear fruit. Since Jesus Himself spoke these words, we know that there is indeed such a condition: a person can be a branch in Christ, the vine, and yet bear no fruit. God wants to see fruit in the lives of His children.

Now the question arises as to the cause of fruitlessness. We are fully aware that in the natural realm, there are distinct reasons that prevent a vine or a tree from bearing fruit.

1. There are instances where the vine or tree has been damaged. The outer bark may be fractured, and as a result, the sap cannot flow through as it should. The result of this is often barrenness. The same is true in the spiritual realm. If the new Christian is not given the proper care, or if they are instructed incorrectly, they can easily get into a diseased state where they are unable to bear fruit. These individuals are often quickly overcome when something comes their way, and then they lose the victory. These should repent as soon as possible, just as Peter did after he fell. Some new Christians also experience defeat through accusations and discouragement. Not

knowing how to face these things, they become unfruitful.

2. Many vines and branches have stopped bearing fruit because they have been damaged by frost. This is a common cause of barrenness in an orchard or vineyard. Usually, the frost does its damage in the flowering period. We find a spiritual analogy here as well. In some local churches, the temperature is below freezing, and new Christians feel the frost soon after their spiritual birth. If the spirit of fault-finding exists in the church, as well as a lack of trust and dead formality, children in the faith can hardly be expected to stay alive in Christ and make progress spiritually. They can hardly be expected to bear fruit.

Also, in many pulpits not enough spiritual food is offered to keep God’s children—the branches on the vine—in a fruit-bearing condition. In some places, so many worldly things have crept in that it is not at all surprising that the fruitfulness of some branches ceases. We can easily understand that under such circumstances young children in Christ suffer particular harm.

3. In addition, there are many harmful insects that harm the vines or trees by either sucking out the life-giving and fruit-bearing sap or otherwise making them incapable

of bearing fruit in some way. Similarly, there are many things in the spiritual realm that suck out the inner sap of spiritual life. This then results in the absence of any fruit. Some of these harmful things are complacency, lukewarmness and inactiveness, neglecting prayer and the reading of the Word of God, and staying away from worship services and the gatherings of believers. Some suffer immediately after their conversion by being unwilling to be baptized or to observe the other New Testament ordinances.

If the new Christian fails to seek and attain sanctification, he cannot but suffer harm to his soul. Other harmful things are loving the world or things of the world, stinginess, and self-love. All these and many other things are pests of the spiritual life. If they are not removed, they will not only hinder the bearing of fruit but also destroy the spiritual life in time.

There is only one sure antidote to all these pests of spiritual life, and that is the whole, pure, and unadulterated truth of the Word of God. One thing is certain: if the things that hinder fruit-bearing are not removed, the spiritual life will be lost. The branch will then be cut off, causing it to wither.

H. M. Riggle



The Secret to Giving

A pastor in the countryside had a visitor in his congregation who suffered from severe stinginess, and who believed that constant giving would drive people out of the congregation. To address this attitude, the pastor gave him a balance sheet. On one side was what God had given him for his farming—rain, sunshine, wind, dew, and other things. On the other side was what the man had given for the church treasury and mission.

Maybe you should think about what you owe God. What would He charge for your healthy body, talents, and abilities? What value do you place on God's gifts like sleep, appetite, food, clothing, and a home? And how much does the precious Word of God, the forgiveness of your sins, and the peace of your soul mean to you?

Yes, God is the giver of all good gifts. He created the sun, moon, and stars and placed them in the sky to shine on the Earth. The animals were created for man's benefit, and the Earth gives its fruits and treasures. In all this, the character of the Creator is reflected. God Himself is the most generous giver.

Can we not say that human beings were also created to give to others? As the greatest creature, made in the image of the Creator, we are designed to give, and find our greatest joy in imitating our Creator in this realm.

God gave His best, His only begotten Son, because He recognized our great need. And Jesus gave by laying down His life for us. Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). One of the most important teachings He gave His disciples was to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and not to worry so much about food, drink, and clothing. He encouraged His disciples to give and even asked them to sell their possessions and give to the poor (Matthew 19: 21; Luke 12: 33).

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, much was given, and there was a time of refreshing in God's presence. The believers sold their possessions and shared them with all who needed something (Acts 2: 45), "and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). Here we see how grace and giving go hand in hand. Through grace, believers could see great needs and respond with great generosity.

It is obvious that the law of giving is also the law of grace. If we want to be blessed with all spiritual blessings through Christ, we must give.

God asks workers to give a portion of their earnings. Many do not give a set amount. When there is a need or when the offering plate is passed around, they give some money. Some are selfish, unconcerned, or do not know how to give better. However, there are also brothers and sisters who fully understand the importance of giving, and give not only their share, but

far more. Who will receive the blessing? "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Proverbs 11: 25).

Maybe you should think about what you owe God.

Some may say that they cannot give anything because they are too poor. But even the poor should contribute. Often, however, those who are most difficult to convince of the message of giving are the rich. Many are looking for salvation of their souls but not for their wallets. I have found most generous givers among the "middle class."

I am not saying this to condemn anyone. Some have not yet received light on the subject. But the light has come, and it is time to proclaim it. It is in agreement with the Bible, and a sincere soul will accept it. I knew a man whose giving was random and haphazard until he realized the principle of systematic giving Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 16: 2. Since then, he has set aside a certain amount for God every week. He has been giving in this way for years and confirms that giving a fixed amount of his income makes him more satisfied. The Bible says:

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The day will come—it is not far off—when we will all stand in God’s presence. Only our “treasures in heaven”—in the heavenly bank—will be of use. This earth and everything left behind, all our earthly pos-

sessions, will pass away. Some want to be rich on that day. Are you one of them? Some will never enter the eternal city because a golden wall will be blocking their way, namely all the money they have withheld from the Lord’s work.

God gives us all our money. Should we refuse to share it with Him? ■

Sowing and Reaping

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” (Galatians 6:7)

Those who go to the trouble of sowing also expect a harvest. If a farmer sowed seed in the spring without intending to harvest it in the fall, one would consider him foolish. In reality, a farmer looks ahead with anticipation to the time of harvest when he can gather in the reward for his labors. A young person who prepares for his or her career by going to school for a long time expects that to pay off when they have finished their studies. A person can only expect to harvest that which they have sown. If you sow wheat, you cannot expect to harvest oats. If someone learns the trade of a carpenter, he will not expect to be a watchmaker when he is finished.

A farmer had a worker named Lukman. He told Lukmann to sow barley in his field. Lukman went and sowed oats. When the farmer went out to see how his harvest was doing, he found that he had oats instead of barley. He called his worker and said, “Didn’t I tell you to sow barley? Why did you sow oats?” Lukman answered, “I was hoping that barley would grow from the oats seed.” He retorted, “What kind of fool are you? Has anyone ever heard of such nonsense?” “Well,” said Lukmann, “you do the same thing. Every day you do things that are not right, and you expect that on the Day of Resurrection all will turn out well. So, I thought I could sow oats and expect barley as well.” The farmer was so shocked at the practical lesson Lukman tried to teach him that he began a new life with Jesus and was a changed man from that day on.

If a person lives a life of sin, it will not take long until sin starts bearing fruit. There are consequences. The harvest will come. It is only a matter of time. A

person may be doing wrong without fearing the consequences, yet one day he or she will be astonished by the unexpected negative results.

King Saul persecuted David and tried to kill him. But the day of disaster came for Saul, and Saul, having no way of escape, even took his own life. King Herod, who persecuted the disciples, relied on his power until he succumbed to a horrible illness that ended his life. Those who cause tears will reap tears. Much wind produces storm. “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:8).

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). In the narratives of the Bible, we see this verified over and over again. What we sow is important. If we look into our own lives, maybe we too should be shocked. We should cry out to God and ask Him to be merciful and show us grace. We can ask God to forgive us and save us from the evil intentions of our hearts so that from now on we sow good seed in the soil of our lives.

How foolish it is for people to think that they can conceal the wrong that they have done and keep it a secret. The day will come when it will surely come to light. “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Unforgiven sin will keep on sowing seeds of malice. Those who allow evil to have room in their lives will become enslaved to it. Do not allow unforgiven sin to remain in your life. There is forgiveness for everyone. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from ▶

all unrighteousness” (1 John 1: 9). Do not delay to come to Jesus Christ in order to be saved from sin. Come to Him while there is time.

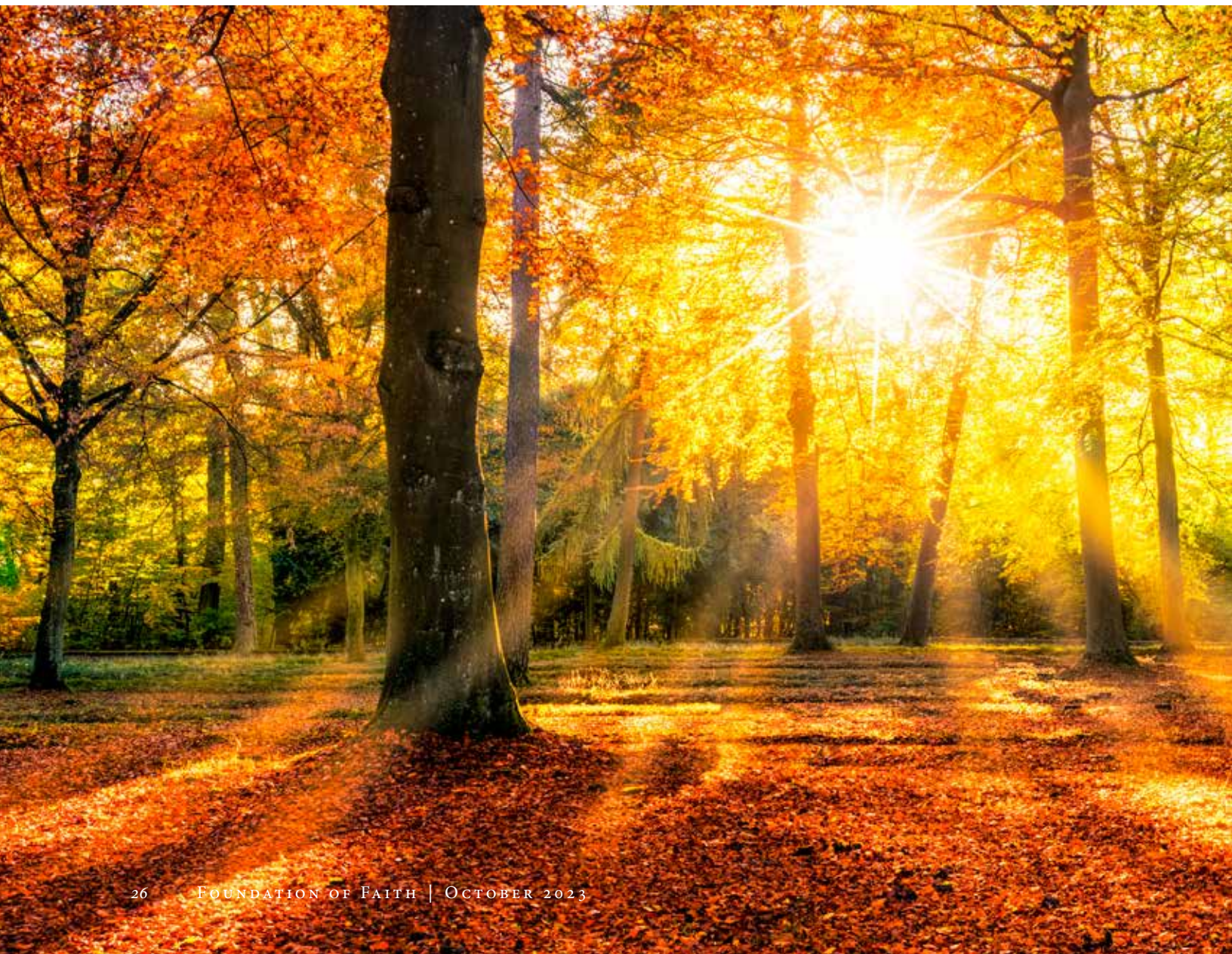
We do not reap merely that which we have sowed. Whoever sows a handful of seed will reap a much greater amount than what was sowed. It is no different in life. We reap much more abundantly than that which is sown. Isn't that serious? How can we expect to stand before the judgment seat of God when every evil word spoken bears fruit?

If we reap what we sow, then where does the grace of God come in? Did Jesus not die for the sins of the world? Yes, He died for all of our sins! And whosoever believes in Him will be saved from the eternal wrath to come. But that does not negate the fact that here on earth we will reap the consequences of what we sow. Psalm 103: 10–11 says, “He has not dealt with us accord-

ing to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.” When we have received God's forgiveness, He does not deal with us according to what we deserved but, nonetheless, there may be reminders and sometimes remaining consequences of sin while we are yet on earth.

The law of sowing and reaping is not a fantasy but a reality, both physical and spiritual. Therefore, let us flee from sin and find our refuge in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, who saves from sin. Then the seed we sow from now on will yield a good harvest. Then we will not be ashamed on the great day of the Lord. And even if we must sometimes sow with tears, we await a day of harvest, which will be a day of inexpressible and unimaginable joy.

D. L. M.



God Heard

One day, the Swiss professor Durand from Lausanne went for a walk with a young student. They discovered a pair of old shoes at the edge of the forest. These obviously belonged to a man who was working barefoot in a nearby field. He had taken them off to spare them, for they were already very worn.

The young man decided to play a prank on him and hide the man's shoes in the bushes. That would be great fun, and he wanted to see how the man would react.

"I have a better prank," the professor replied. "You are rich. Place a coin in each shoe." The young man accepted this advice, and then both of them hid in the woods waiting to see what would happen next.

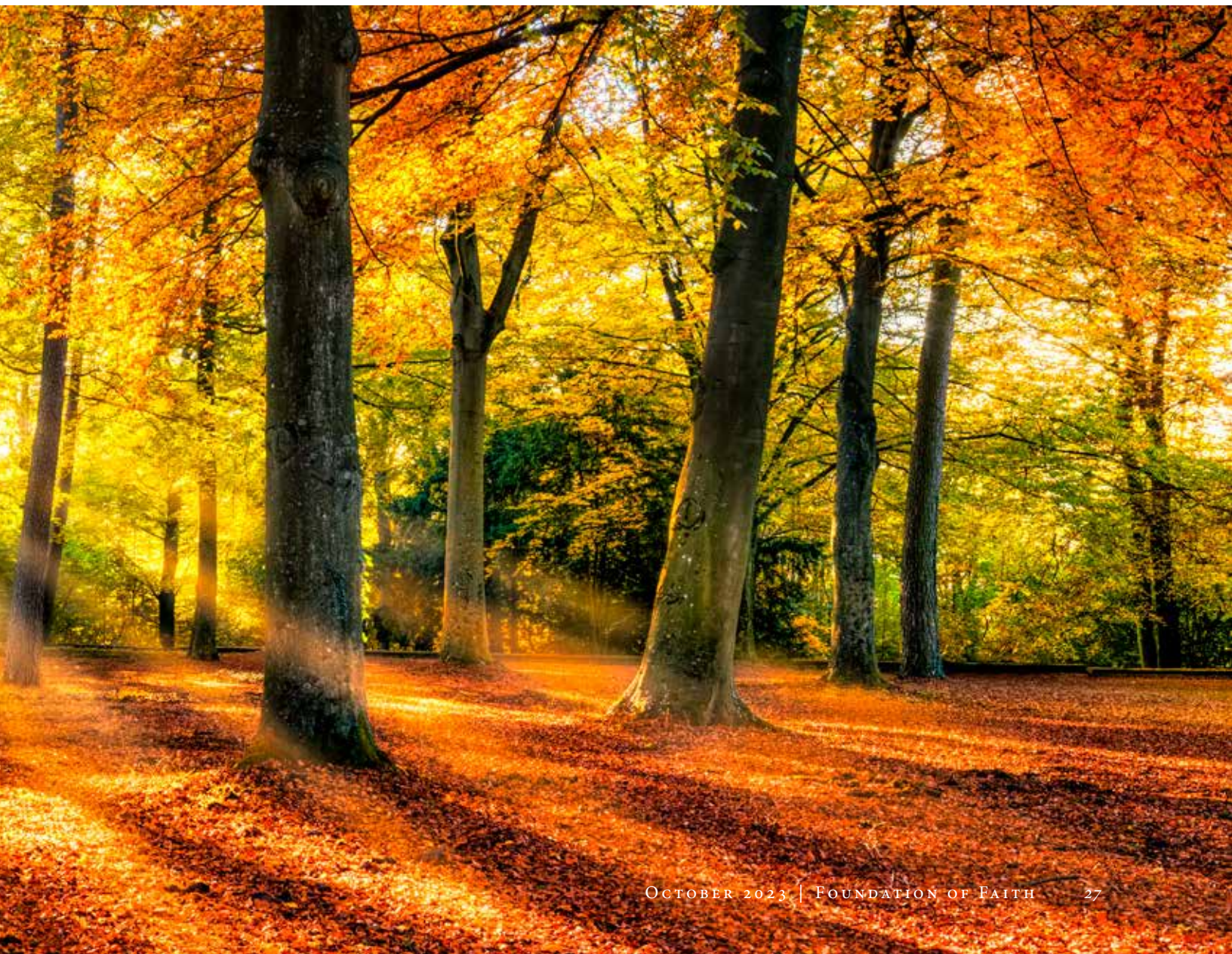
Soon the man had finished his work and went to

put his shoes back on. But what was that? A hard object hurt his foot. When he turned the shoe over, a coin fell out. The same thing happened with his other shoe.

Now the man fell on his knees, stretched his hands up to heaven, and prayed in a loud voice: "Dear God, You know that this very morning I brought You my need for a new pair of shoes that I cannot afford to buy. Now you put exactly what I need into these old shoes. Oh, bless the good man who has done this!"

The young student who heard this was deeply moved. He sincerely thanked his professor who had encouraged him to play such a "successful prank."

The writer to the Hebrews also exhorts: "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). ■



Song of Thanks

I give God praise, and with grateful heart I bring
Thanks for the earth and all that is on it.
Thanks for all creation and for birds that sing;
They sing His praise and to His will submit.

The sun and moon and all the stars of heaven
In all their glory shine to show God's might.
The sun sets time for us; how could we even
Exist at all without its warmth and light?

I give God thanks for every hour He's given,
For all my days and weeks and years of life.
I thank Him for the strength for holy living,
For victory in times of peace or strife.

I give God thanks; He is my firm foundation.
This all-wise God created me for love.
In all I do it is my obligation
To set my view on higher things above.

I thank my God; His undeserved salvation
Is freely given by His loving grace.
He gives us strength when we are in temptation
Until in glory we shall see His face.

I thank my God for every precious flower
That thrills my joyful heart with fragrant bloom.
God nurtures them with sunshine and with showers
So they can flourish morning, night, and noon.

I thank my God and praise the Lord who loves me;
He has been faithful throughout all the years.
If days are bright or dark storm clouds form above me,
Through joys and tears the Lord is always near.

I thank my God for I am His forever;
He saved my soul and gave me life anew.
Oh, nothing from His love my heart can sever;
I'll praise Him more when heaven comes in view.

Wilhelm Nürnberg