

Foundation of Faith

Gratitude

A Blessed Approach Toward Life

A Widespread Disease
Make Gratitude a Habit
We Are So Blessed

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

How alarming that the Apostle Paul's words from 2000 years ago—"although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful" (Romans 1:21)—are still true today.

So many think they are intelligent, learned, and wise, not realizing that their desires and thoughts are vain, perverse, and false. Their hearts are darkened, and Satan has misled them to believe in lies and to resist divine truth. How great is this multitude—almost innumerable—of people who neither glorify nor thank God!

In reality, God is our eternal Creator, Lord, Savior, and Redeemer, and everything we are and have comes from Him. That is why we are called to "offer to God thanksgiving" (Psalm 50:14) and are reminded, later in the same psalm, that "the one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!" (Psalm 50:23 ESV).

Therefore, dear reader, let us thank the Lord with joy! Let us thank Him every day, and not just once—let us be like Daniel, who knelt down three times a day to pray, praising and thanking God from the heart (see Daniel 6:11–12). Let us always thank God, even when things do not go our way. We can be grateful then, too, like the psalmist who wrote, "I will praise You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation" (Psalm 118:21).

My dear Reader, have you experienced how wonderful it is to thank God? It also has great heavenly significance. In Revelation 7:9–12, we read of "a great multitude which no one could number, . . . clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, . . . [who] fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.'"

Yes, let us all thank Him more!

H. D. Nimz

A Widespread Disease

One of the most common illnesses that our current generation suffers from is discontentment. Its symptoms are manifested by constant whining, endless complaining, and a critical spirit. Discontentment causes us to feel sorry for ourselves because we believe we don't have what we want. This attitude can even affect us as Christians if we are not vigilant or neglect our spiritual lives.

But there is an effective remedy for this ailment. The Bible simply states: "in everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5: 18). The treatment begins by making a conscious effort to stop complaining and instead search for the hidden blessing in every situation. This changes the direction of our gaze and leads to the realization that we have been given so much and need to share our blessings with others. This is an essential step towards healing. We should be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4: 10).

Let's look at how this attitude plays out in the everyday life of a wife and mother. When we are tempted to complain about the monotony of housework, why don't we pause for a moment and thank God for the home we are privileged to care for and for the health and strength to do our work? Sometimes an illness has helped a woman to see her work with new eyes.

In the difficult post-war years, our mother was often discouraged by our simple home and the sparse furnishings, as well as the responsibility for three children. But my father had a special ability to change her mood. He would put us all in the car and drive us through the poorest neighborhoods of the city, where the houses were dilapidated and neglected. We returned home each time with the feeling that our home was a palace, and we were grateful for what we had. Then we began to think about how we could help those who had less than we did.

Gratitude often leads us to share what we have with a friend in need. This act of sharing not only eases the

friend's burden but also fills our own hearts with joy and praise. Our work then becomes not a burden but a source of joy and love.

When negative, angry thoughts about our children come over us, when everything becomes too much and tempts us to grumble, we should pause for a moment and thank God that we have a family. Of course, there are challenges and upsets. But we should be thankful that God is a faithful partner and helper in guiding our Christian family.

How quickly we can get caught up in the many tasks we have to do for our children and become so self-centred that we sometimes forget to really see them, look them in the eye and genuinely understand them!

Every meal can become a special moment. We remember that Jesus once revealed Himself to the disciples during the breaking of bread. Recently, we also felt His presence in a special way during a meal. The table was set as usual, the meal was nothing out of the ordinary, but as I sat down and gave thanks for the food, I felt that this meal was especially blessed. I looked at the faces of my loved ones and was struck with the thought of how fortunate we are.

It was a precious moment that I will remember for a long time! We were all together, we were doing well, and God was in our midst. There was no need to long for the past or dream of the future. We rejoiced in the present. We joined hands around the table and thanked God once again.

May God help us to experience joy in this way more often and to consciously enjoy the beauties of everyday life! God's gifts are so numerous if only we open our eyes to see them.

When we feel challenged, irritated, or angry over small things, we should push this bad mood aside. My husband often helped me through such times. He said, "If the big things in life are okay, then let's get the lit-

tle things right, too. If we know that we love God and each other and have important tasks, then we should put the secondary things in perspective and accept them as they are. We must not look at every little thing as if it were the end of the world.” Someone once said, “Why spend ten dollars on a disturbance when it’s only worth two cents?”

There will never be a time when all problems are solved, all debts paid, and all tasks completed. But we can live in this time in such a way that we thank God for His grace, which is sufficient every day. It is a good exercise for our mental and spiritual health to cultivate gratitude and optimism. This attitude will translate into greater devotion to God, our family, the church, and the world. ■

I Was There

Markus had a serious accident with his motorcycle when he crashed into a tree. The motorcycle was completely destroyed, and Markus suffered a skull fracture, which landed him in the hospital. He was unconscious for days until he gradually regained consciousness. Finally, I was able to visit him at his bedside. “Now I have to lie here for weeks,” he said.

It certainly isn’t easy having to lie still, especially when you are young. But Markus did not complain. It is quite remarkable when one does not complain or grumble in such a situation. But there was something else going on in Markus’ heart.

The time when he was able to walk around healthy and ride his motorcycle through the country now seemed like a distant, beautiful memory to him. “I was there, in that beautiful memory,” he said to me. “I was so happy there. But what did I do back then? I just took it for granted. No thanks, no praise to God for it. When I’m healthy again and in a situation where things are going well, I’ll change that! Then I want to give thanks every day.”

Did he keep his promise? And doesn’t Markus have many brothers and sisters, even among us? ■

Ready to Give Thanks?

“Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”
(Ephesians 5: 20).

Ready to give thanks? Isn't that a strange question to ask at Thanksgiving? For years, the grocery stores in our cities have been overflowing with domestic and foreign fruits. Our economy has flourished to an extent unknown to the generations before us. Don't we have reason enough to celebrate Thanksgiving in town and country?

It all depends on the Giver

But are we really prepared to thank God the Father at all times and for everything? It takes more than a good harvest and a flourishing economy; it also takes more than enough money in our pockets and plenty of food in the cupboard. True thanks in one's heart results from recognizing that all comes from God's hand out of pure goodness and mercy without any merit of one's own. But we often don't want to admit this. Or we forget it surprisingly quickly. That's why Thanksgiving is all about the Giver. It is important to recognize Him and thank Him.

Empowered by God!

How do we come to this insight and to the healing of our blindness and forgetfulness? Luther says in his exegesis of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "God gives the daily bread . . . but in this prayer we plead, that he would have us recognize it and that we would receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." Beginning every Thanksgiving with this petition will keep us from demeaning God as just a friendly helper, to whom we allow a kind word, and instead truly honor Him as the "Fountain ever flowing, who good and perfect gifts in mercy are bestowing" (J. Heermann, C. Winkworth).

Precisely in our achievement-oriented society do we need such insight and the ability to be thankful.

Now it is certainly not wrong to rejoice in our successful work and to tirelessly

research and plan how we can provide daily bread for an ever-growing human race. After all, we still have the mission today, as in the past, to subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28).

There is no doubt that there would have been terrible famines in the world if the yields of fields and meadows had not increased considerably over the last few centuries, thanks to new insights and important discoveries.

Is this merely human achievement? Or do the words of Matthias Claudius also apply to what has been discovered in laboratories and carefully tested in research institutes: "We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand"?

Giving thanks in the name of Jesus

Are we ready to give thanks? The right answer is not given by our intellect, nor by our religious convictions. God Himself gives it to us because He has revealed Himself in His power and goodness in Jesus Christ.

That is why our thanks on Thanksgiving can only be given in the name of Jesus. It is thanks to Him that we can call God our Father. He has earned us the right to be His children. That is why we can thank God at all times and for everything. Our thanksgiving is pure when it is part of the great song of praise to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for all His blessings.

Are we ready for such thanksgiving, which is

not quieted but brought before God every day? Such includes saying grace, which has disappeared in many homes. We should learn it anew: We live from the giving hands of God. "We thank you, God, we thank you, God, for all your love" (M. Claudius). ■



Make a Habit of Gratitude!

Do we recall the miraculous healing of ten lepers by Jesus? After the ten healed men showed themselves to the priest, nine of them ran home excitedly to tell their families the good news. Only one returned to Jesus to thank Him.

We condemn these ungrateful people. But the question is whether the same percentage of today's generation is grateful for the benefits they have received. It would be difficult to find more favored people than in most Western countries. Of course, there are certain hardships and problems in these countries too. But food, clothing, shelter, and freedom would be heaven for many in this world. And yet so many sit down at a richly laid table even on Thanksgiving Day without a thought of thanking God for the gifts they have received. Some may rattle off a habitual grace that is an insult to God. We would not consider thanking a friend who has done us a favor in this way.

So many of us do not properly appreciate the devout men and women who crossed vast lands and stormy seas with great sacrifice, struggle, and difficulty and suffered great hardship to spread the gospel. Many died under those hardships.

Many today go to work or lie in bed on Sunday and even on Thanksgiving Day without a thought of God or a sense of gratefulness. It is the height of ingratitude to accept the blessings and benefits of a country without properly appreciating this privilege.

We often show ingratitude by feeling sorry for ourselves and complaining about things we do not have. We complain about our work. We think it is either too much or too little. We complain about the weather: it is too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry. The taxes are too high, or the social benefits are too meager. The congregation is too small to share responsibilities and duties. Or it is too big that our gifts and talents receive too little or no attention and recognition. We magnify such insignificant things until they rob us of a grateful

heart and destroy our inner peace.

If today finds us ungrateful, we need a new attitude towards the giver. There is a danger that we slide into the path of self-centered thanksgiving. Some think, "Lord, I thank you that I am spiritually above many others in the church." They list all the bad things they do not do. But they forget that they are proud, arrogant, envious, and carnal. We must remember that God does not favor and protect us alone, nor do we belong exclusively to ourselves or our friends, our social class, our people, or our church.

True gratitude is closely linked to surrender.

True gratitude is closely linked to surrender. Those who have true gratitude lay down their best gifts at the feet of Jesus, as the woman told of in Matthew 26:6-7 did.

Someone once said: "God, thank You for the favors!" Praise and thanksgiving are something that benefits everyone. Gratitude is not only expressed in words. Sincere words mean and signify a lot, but they alone are not enough.

On the first Thanksgiving Day for the immigrants in the New World, America, they held a prayer service to give thanks to God. They also invited their Native American neighbors to share their meal with them.—Sharing is always a sign of gratitude.

Thousands die of hunger every day. "What can my gift buy?" We are often asked this concerning the huge number of poor people—very little! Some say: "If I cannot help a million children, I'm not helping anyone!"—How foolish! The request of the one person we can help is as important as if she were the only one in the world.

What have you written in the big debtor's book of your heart? What has God done for you? What do you give back to God for all the good things He has done for you?

Make gratitude a daily habit!

Paul A. Tanner

Gratitude—But How?

An old legend states that a certain Italian nobleman never left his house without first putting a handful of dried beans in his left jacket pocket. With each small but pleasant experience during the day, he moved a bean from his left to his right pocket. Each evening, as he took out the beans from his right pocket, he recalled all the happy moments of the day and thanked his Creator for them.

The first step to gratitude is a conscious decision

This aristocrat had made a conscious decision to adopt this grateful mindset early in life. He created a model of practicing thankfulness by recalling each beautiful detail of the day with a “visual memory aid.”

How do we categorize our various daily events? Isn't it true that sometimes just one unpleasant encounter can ruin our good mood? Negative feelings spread in our hearts and obscure our view of the many reasons for thankfulness in the day. Instead of consciously cultivating our gratitude, we slip into inner dissatisfaction, which eventually manifests as bitter complaints.

This did not happen to the nobleman in our story, because each evening he would retrieve the visible evidence of God's blessings from his jacket pocket. This regularly put him in a grateful frame of mind. In 1 Thesalonians 5:16–18, the Apostle Paul urges us: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

The first step to a joyful and thankful heart attitude is the fundamental decision to consciously recognize God's blessings.

The second step to gratitude is complete surrender

Deciding to have a grateful attitude does not eliminate the inconveniences of life. But we begin to see them through different eyes; from God's perspective and in view of our spiritual growth. When we can say with the Apostle Paul, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28), it becomes easier to inwardly resist the ups and downs of life.

According to Isaiah 55:9, we understand that God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours. When we

consciously say “yes” to His ways and completely surrender our lives to God, we find reasons to be thankful even under difficult circumstances.

The expressions of gratitude

Complete Surrender

Complete surrender to God not only leads to a gratitude that is independent of life's circumstances but also expresses the highest form of our thankfulness. What more can we offer Him as a sacrifice of thanks than ourselves?

Prayer

“Whoever offers praise glorifies Me” (Psalm 50:23).

In our personal as well as public prayer, we consciously express our thanks to God. It is good to begin our worship by thanking Him. By doing so, we honor Him and immediately direct our attention, and that of our fellow worshippers, to God's greatness, power, and authority, as well as to His infinite love and wonderful deeds. This encourages us to continue entrusting our requests to Him as well as strengthening our trust in God for the future.

Singing

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him” (Psalm 28:7).

Singing is a particularly joyful and emotional form of expressing our thanks. Through a composition of meaningful lyrics and a fitting melody, we convey to others how God reaches down to us humans. Singing songs of thanks expresses our joy in the Lord, and even a troubled heart finds encouragement and is lifted up by it. The Book of Psalms is full of songs of thanks despite the hardships the various psalmists endured.

Public Confession

“I will praise *You*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works” (Psalm 9:2).

We express our deepest thanks to our Lord in private but also in the church assembly. Frequently, this



form of thanks continues to resonate in the hearts of our brothers and sisters. It gives us the opportunity to share the gospel which we have experienced as living truth.

Working in the Kingdom of God

“[We] do not cease to pray for you, . . . that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work.” (Colossians 1:9–10). “[G]iving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Colossians 1:12).

Our thanks to God would be incomplete if we only expressed it with our mouths. A heart full of thanks naturally leads us to action, resulting in service for God’s kingdom. Being saved inspires a desire for others to be saved, while the countless benefits from our Heavenly Father call us to do good deeds ourselves.

Dealing with “lamentable circumstances”

“[B]e filled with the Spirit . . . giving thanks always for

all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:18–20).

What a challenging Bible verse! Give thanks always and for everything? And without complaining? How can we practically implement this passage?

Let’s ask ourselves what the most common reasons for dissatisfaction and complaints in our lives are, and how we can guard ourselves against this inner “spirit of complaining.”

How quickly we are tempted to complain about difficult circumstances, whether they are political, social, or economic in nature. Sometimes, church problems disturb our peace of mind. Or if we fall ill, it may be particularly difficult for us to give thanks.

How do we respond to disturbing political or social developments?

Let us remember Paul’s exhortation to the early Christians to pray, intercede, and give thanks for all people, including those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–2; Romans 13:1). ▶

Even today we are called to obey the law, as long as it does not contradict the Word of God. We are urged to give thanks for the preservation of order and to pray for the decision-makers. Let us thank God if we live in orderly circumstances and express our gratitude by engaging socially and helping where needed rather than complaining.

How do we react to a worsening financial situation?

Let us look back and thank God for the good times we have had. Let us purposely ask and give thanks for what has long been taken for granted rather than complain. Jesus Himself teaches such in Matthew 6: 11. We can trust that God will hear our prayer and meet our needs at the right time, as He did for the father of orphans, George Mueller (1805–1898).

If we are currently better off than our neighbor, our grateful heart will lead us to alleviate their suffering. This too is a reason for thankfulness when we are given the opportunity to share.

Where do we seek comfort and encouragement when illness strikes?

Our health is a precious commodity. When it is taken from us, it often becomes an extreme challenge to our faith and trust in God. Clinging to God's promises and praying together with fellow believers can carry us through this difficult time and help us overcome the temptation to blame God.

How do we cope with spiritual issues and problems in the local congregation?

Since we consider the church to be our spiritual home, our emotional well-being is closely tied to its development. Let us consciously thank God for the church services that are held year after year with dedication and to His glory. Often, a heartfelt expression of thanks has brightened someone's day and motivated them to continue serving. If there are problems, they should be addressed openly but lovingly, and constructive solutions should be suggested. Let us bring everything to God in prayer, get involved, and stand in the gap rather than complain.

How do we deal with challenges posed by others?

Sometimes we meet people who quickly come to enrich our lives. They seem to sense our needs. They are there when we need encouragement, admonition, or

prayer, and they rejoice with us when God blesses us. Their pleasant nature constantly gives us reason to thank God for the gift of friendship.

However, sometimes God also sends us those who challenge and disturb us, perhaps even bringing our weaknesses to light. Does God really expect us to give thanks even for these encounters?

Let us try to see these people as someone who may need to learn about God's love through us or through whom we ourselves might be refined when we recognize our own faults. Then, even such encounters are cause enough to give thanks rather than complain.

Let's give thanks and not complain

This is what the song of the same title by M. Birkenfeld calls us to do. If you look at the text in detail, giving thanks turns out to be a real "cure-all" against the habit of complaining.

Refrain:

*Let's give thanks and not complain,
Praising God when we are down;
For His mercy is unchanging,
And His miracles abound.*

Verse:

*1. There is no blind chance existing;
It is God who's in control.
And when problems are persisting,
He can help us reach our goal.*

*2. He can form us for His glory,
Like the potter shapes the clay.
We don't need to fret or worry;
He is with us every day.*

*3. When God wants to teach us patience,
We get opportunity.
When folks disturb and grate us,
Let's be thankful faithfully.*

*4. As God's children we do confess
He has placed us here below
To be bright lights in the darkness,
That His love the world may know.*

*Brigitte Ress
Herford, Germany*

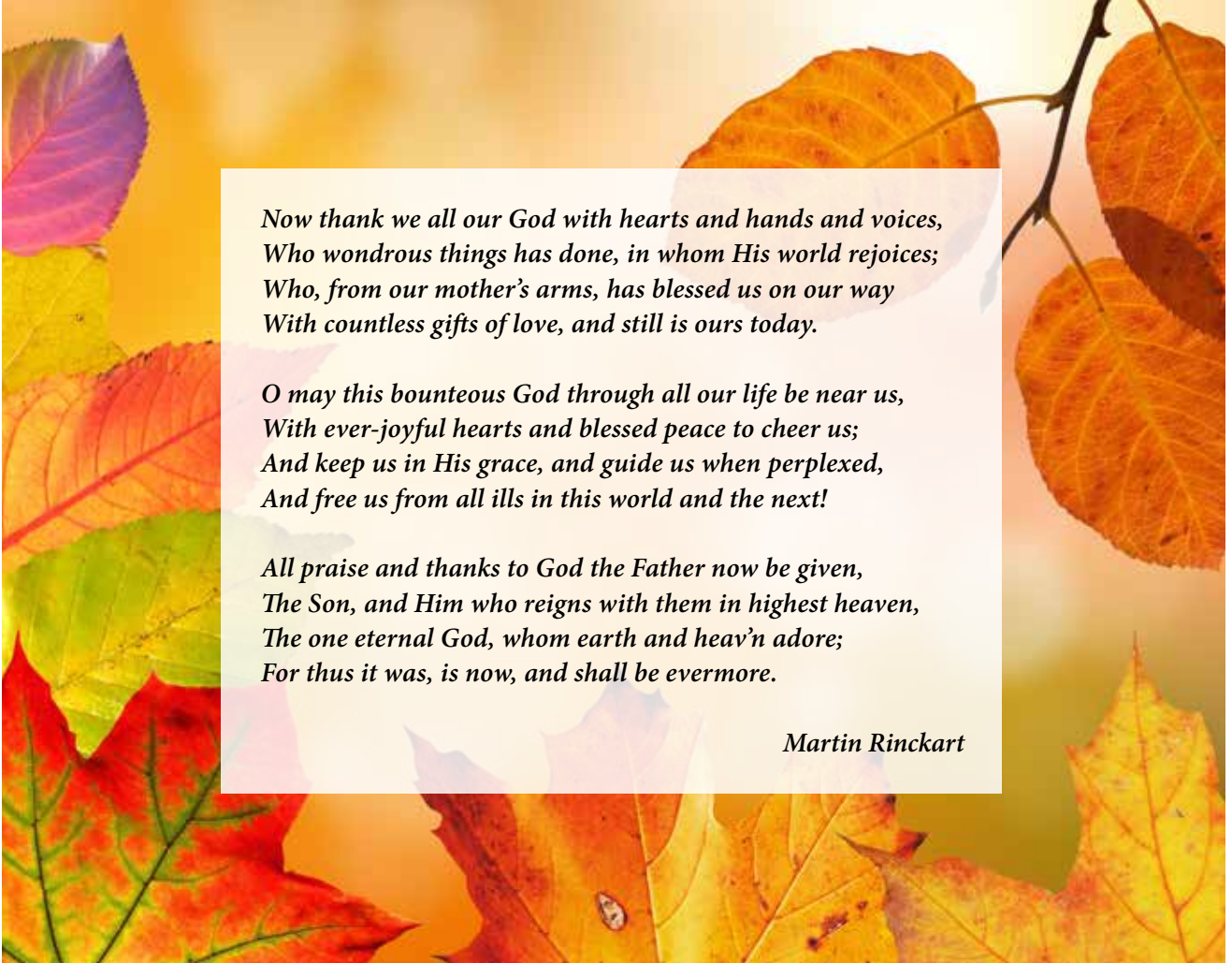
Now Thank We All Our God

Who in the Christian church is not familiar with this wonderful hymn? The poet was Martin Rinckart from Eilenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. It was penned during the terrible suffering of the Thirty Years' War, not exactly a happy time for the poet.

Martin Rinckart was a parish pastor at the time. As everywhere else, the plague was raging there too, and he officiated at the burials of 4480 people, some days up to 70. Following the plague came the famine, which claimed many more victims. Filled with compassion, Rinckart went from house to house to comfort the

people. The love of Christ compelled him. His courage and confidence inspired others and proved helpful even during the siege of Eilenburg by enemy armies. Despite unspeakable suffering and famine all around, he prayed daily with his children the blessing from the book of Sirach, chapter 50, verse 22, "And now bless the God of all, who in every way does great things; who exalts our days from birth, and deals with us according to his mercy" (RSV). He then turned these verses into poetic form, giving the church one of the most beautiful hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

K. Lisse



*Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mother's arms, has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

*O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
With ever-joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills in this world and the next!*

*All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns with them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God, whom earth and heav'n adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.*

Martin Rinckart

Contentment

A Way to Greater Gratitude

“How discontented you look today,” said one bucket to the other as they both walked to the well. “Ah,” replied the other, “I was just thinking about how useless it is for us to be filled, because no matter how full we go away from the well, we always come back empty.” “How odd,” said the first again, “that you should look at it from that point of view. I am simply happy about the thought that no matter how empty we come here to the well, we can always return full again. Look at it from this point of view, then you will be just as satisfied and joyful as I am.”

Sin causes us to focus on what we don't have rather than on the many wonderful things we have been given. Sin makes us selfish so that we constantly measure our possessions against those of others. We always want more. Always something new. Once we have it, we already want something else because our heart is not satisfied by all these things. Life doesn't please us. Other people don't please us. There are so many things that should be different and should be run differently. It is a life of dissatisfaction. A sad life. A life without joy and without peace.

Source of contentment

True contentment does not have its source in the gifts that one wishes for and then receives. Rather, its source lies in the Giver. You can only be content when you have found your support and joy in God, the giver of all good gifts. “Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And *there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.* My flesh and my heart fail; *but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*” (Psalm 73:25–26). The one who said this had learned to be content.

If you are satisfied with the One who gives, because you find fulfillment in Him, then you are free from the greedy desire for satisfaction that drives so many. Yes, it is true that your heart only comes to rest when it has found Christ.

Satisfied in every situation and at all times

The pastor and commentator, Matthew Henry (1662–1714), after having been robbed one evening, wrote to this effect in his diary:

1. What reason have I to be thankful to God, that having traveled so much, yet I was never robbed before now. 2. What abundance of evil this love of money is the root of, that four men should venture their lives and souls for about a half a crown apiece. 3. See the power of Satan working in the children of disobedience. 4. The vanity of worldly wealth, how soon we may be stripped of it, how loose we ought to sit to it (“An Account of the Life and Death of Mr. Matthew Henry,” chiefly collected out of his own papers, William Tone 1716 [language updated]).

Would I have been as grateful if I had been mugged and robbed? Satisfaction and gratitude belong together. They are inseparable. Gratitude is not our typical reaction when something goes wrong. We have much to be thankful for, yet we let one unpleasant thing overshadow it all! Have you experienced that? The Word says: “[I]n everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Contentment—a characteristic of faith

If you observe the God-fearing men and women in the Bible, you get the impression that they were constantly challenged or threatened. Nevertheless, they were the happiest people because God was their Father. We know that His way and His plan are good; that He will carry us through. Contentment is a characteristic of faith in a caring God.

“[I]n everything give thanks.” We will never achieve this through our own efforts. However, if we are bound to Christ, it is possible. That's because He is able to make us aware of all the things for which we can give thanks and because He can give us the strength to do so.

“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures forever*” (Psalm 107:1).

The fact is that it can be easier for us to be grateful when everything goes according to our wishes. But how is it when we encounter things in life that we didn't expect? Things that don't fit into our plan at all?

This reminds me of a man who was in a Roman prison. Separated from his friends, unjustly accused, brutally tortured, almost forgotten by others, would



he not have every reason to be ungrateful? Yet instead of complaining bitterly, we hear words of thanks and praise from him! It is the Apostle Paul—a man who had come to know the true meaning of contentment. From prison, he writes to the church in Ephesus: “[B]e filled with the Spirit, . . . speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5: 18–20).

We can be sure that Paul was not only giving good advice to other people but that he was living it within his prison cell. The prison guards and fellow prisoners would have declared him mad. Paul, however, did not care. The contentment of his heart was not dependent on external circumstances but was anchored in God, whom he knew to be good. Thus, he became a person who could be content and grateful in every situation.

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for 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).

Contentment through prayer

Prayer is one of the surest ways to achieve joy and contentment. So much wants to weigh us down. But the best way to bear it all is to bring everything to God in prayer. “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall

sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55: 22).

This has been the widespread practice of God’s children throughout the ages. However, as soon as we disregard this truth and try to carry our worries alone, we inevitably become dissatisfied and unhappy. All we need to do is come to Christ, who is always waiting to help His children. He knows about all the temptations and hardships we face in this world, because He experienced them Himself when He was on earth. Only He can make us genuinely happy and content, whatever may take place around us. Prayer can make the heaviest cross lighter. Prayer can illuminate the deepest darkness. Prayer can give courage in great loneliness and sadness.

Contentment through reminiscence

Don’t forget the good things He has done for you. Ask God to direct your focus to all the things He has given you. You may not have many possessions, you may be lonely or sad, or you may be troubled by suffering and various struggles. Yet, do not forget your Savior, who took so much upon Himself and died on the cross in order to demonstrate His love for you. He died to save you. How could I not love Him? Can I remain ungrateful at the sight of Him? Reflecting on what He did for me, can I remain dissatisfied?

Contentment through acceptance and forgiveness

Many reasons for dissatisfaction lie within oneself. Can you accept the way God is leading you? Can you say: “Yes, Father”? If your life turns out differently ►

than you thought it would, can you accept it? Can you accept others as they are, be it your spouse, your colleague, or the person sitting next to you in the church congregation? Can you bear it if your fellow believer has a different understanding of Scripture on a certain point? Can you forgive those who have hurt you? If you are not prepared to accept and forgive, you will search in vain for contentment of heart. You may say, “I can’t do that. It’s too hard.” You’re right. It may seem impossible. But, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4: 13). It may take a little time sometimes. It may cost you something. But Christ will give you victory and heal your heart, and you will experience true contentment.

Contentment through faith in God’s promises

Have you read the previous Bible passages carefully?

Then you would have realized that most of them contain promises. These promises refer to “today” and “tomorrow.” Will you believe the Word when it says that “He only *is* my rock and my salvation” (Psalm 62:6)? Or if it says that you can be thankful because He makes it possible? When it says that His grace endures forever or that we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens” us? When it says that He will take care of us if we give our concerns to Him? When I believe my Father’s promise, I become calm, I feel secure, and I am filled with contentment and deep gratitude.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You are able to bring about this contentment and gratitude in us! Our eyes may be filled with tears, but our soul rests in Your peace!

*Markus Schmelzle
Pforzheim, Germany*

Those Who Give Thanks Receive More From Life

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on what is called the “work-life balance.” Companies are trying to improve the working conditions of their employees so that they feel comfortable and more content. The number of people traveling abroad and the length of vacations away from home has increased significantly. People seek fulfillment and happiness in careers, money, and possessions. Despite this, many recognize with frustration that all these worldly things do not bring lasting fulfillment and joy. As Christians, we know that what they seek lies solely in Jesus Christ and in knowing Him as their personal Savior. In some developed countries, for example Germany, there is also another problem. It has been said that Germans can never be satisfied. The advantage is that Germany has been innovative, not resting on its laurels. The Germans always tried to optimize and improve things. What was good was never good enough! But there are two sides to every coin. Improving things is advantageous, but being discontented by nature means we always find a reason to be dissatisfied, be it the weather, politics, a superior at work, an employer,

or something else.

God has given all people a common psychological basis. We all have different character traits and behaviors. But we all have similar basic needs. The need for companionship is one. This is becoming more problematic in our society. More and more people are living alone, some rarely if ever have visitors, and others feel isolated. The consequences are alarming and mean that illnesses, both physical and psychological, are on the increase. Humans were not created to be alone. Already in the first chapters of the Bible we read that community is a principle established by God on which His blessing rests.

Another principle upon which God’s blessing rests is gratitude. He is pleased with gratitude. The blessing of gratitude is apparent in both believers and unbelievers. This was confirmed by a study done back in 2003. In the study, people were divided into three groups. The first group was asked to keep a diary in which they wrote down the things they were grateful for. The second group was asked to list neutral experiences in the diary, and the third group was asked to enter their neg-



ative experiences. After ten weeks, there was a huge difference between the first and the other two groups. Group one was more optimistic about the future, had fewer illnesses, had better sleep patterns, and had a much greater zest for life.¹ There are a number of other studies that also show the huge benefits that gratitude brings. As Christians, gratitude should come naturally for us. We should be able to get up every morning and shout for joy, because through the blood of Jesus we are delivered and saved from eternal damnation, judgment, and hell. Unfortunately, we so easily allow ourselves to be negatively influenced by the things of this world. It is not without reason that the Bible admonishes us to be thankful. Paul repeatedly urges his readers to be thankful (Colossians 2:7 and Colossians 3:15). He also points out that in the last times, ingratitude is a trait of those who do not have Jesus in their hearts. Paul never tires of giving thanks to God in his letters. He gives thanks for salvation, for his fellow believers, for his helpers, for God's help in their lives, for preservation, and much more. There is one scripture that I find particularly meaningful, for it describes the heart condition that we as Christians should have. We often think that thanksgiving is dependent on external circumstances, but Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:20 that we should be thankful to God at all times, regardless of our outward circumstances.

"[Give] thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

A brother in the congregation I attend often said this: "Thankfulness keeps from wavering; praise pulls you up." I experienced this myself. Once, when I was not feeling well, I knelt down and began to give thanks in prayer. I focused on the blessings that I had received time and again, both physical and spiritual. Within five minutes, my state of mind had changed. Again and again, we can see that gratitude enriches and changes our lives.

Many centuries ago, the man of God, Asaph, was able to discern which offerings please God. In Psalm 50:23, we read: "*Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.*"

Gratitude is a key to the knowledge of God. This attitude of heart is pleasing to God, and His blessing rests upon it. Let us be encouraged anew by His Word, and make sure that ingratitude and dissatisfaction find no place in our hearts. Though common in the world, let this never be our attitude or determine how we live. May God bless you and give you a heart filled with gratitude!

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¹<https://emmons.faculty.ucdavis.edu/gratitude-and-well-being/>



Preparing for Winter

It's fall. The days are getting shorter, and it's getting very cold at night. The fall flowers are still blooming in the garden, but the leaves on the trees are no longer green and are now yellow, orange, and red. Mom told the children today that nature is preparing for winter. The leaves are colorful because the trees are storing their nutrients in the branches, trunk, and roots. Over the next few weeks, the leaves will fall from the trees. This helps the trees to survive the winter and protects them from damage caused by snow and ice.

While playing in the garden, Laura sees something interesting—a squirrel near the hazelnut bush. It scurries back and forth, up and down. When Laura looks closely, she notices that the squirrel always takes a nut from the tree and then disappears for a while. She tells Nicholas about it, and he says: “Yes, we talked about squirrels in science class last week. In the fall, they collect lots of nuts, seeds, and berries and hide them under leaves, in tree burrows, or under the ground. Because they have a good memory, they can remember where their supplies are in winter. They search for their supplies throughout the winter and move around a lot. This keeps them healthy and fit.”

Then the children talk about how people are also preparing for winter. A few days ago, they helped their father stack the wood supply. This morning at breakfast, Dad told them he had ordered winter tires for the car. Their parents also said they needed to buy new winter jackets for Nicholas and Laura because they had outgrown their old ones. Only the food supply is different. The nearby supermarket allows their parents to shop regularly so the fridge and pantry are always full.

The children realize how good they have it. They have parents who love them very much and care for them. And they have a heavenly Father—God, who looks after them and gives them everything they need. Nicholas and Laura realize that they have many reasons to be grateful. Have you already thanked God and your parents today for all the good things?

Helene Rotfuss

Preparing for Eternity

God gives people many good things because He loves and cares for them. He gives sunshine, wind, and rain at the right time so that the grain grows in the fields. When the grain is ripe, the farmers harvest it with combines and tractors. The grain is then taken to the mill and ground into flour. The flour is then used to bake bread, rolls, and other delicacies. It takes six to ten months from sowing to the finished bread, while God blesses the work of the farmers and bakers. We want to thank Him most sincerely for this!



God has given us life and holds us in His hand. No one knows when God will call us into eternity. But we should know that our sins are forgiven, that we are God's children, and that we are ready for eternity through faith in Jesus Christ. Do you have this certainty? If not, you can ask God for it today. He is faithful, forgives sins, and cleanses from all unrighteousness (see 1 John 1: 9).

Helene Rotfuss

But life is not just about food, clothing, and a home. Every person has a soul that longs for God and needs His forgiveness. Jesus Christ died so we can have peace with God and become His children. He wants us to be ready for eternity and to spend it with Him in heaven. Eternity has no time limit; it lasts forever. That is why preparing for it is much more important than preparing for winter.



Jesus once told the story of a rich corn farmer whose land had borne much grain and fruit. To have enough space to store the harvest, he planned to tear down his old barns and build larger ones. He then wanted to gather the rich harvest into the new barns and say to his soul: "You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry." But God said to him: "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (see Luke 12: 16–21)

*"[G]iving thanks
always for all
things to God"
Ephesians 5:20*

In God's CLASSROOM

For many, September marks the start of a new school year. Perhaps you have started a new apprenticeship or course of study. When it comes to further education, you often have the choice between different schools or universities. For us as followers of Jesus, however, there is a very special school that surpasses every school or university in the world. It is the school of God.

Why is this school so special?

- Here God prepares us for eternity and leads us on the way.
- Jesus Himself is the teacher in this school. Nicodemus, who was one of the spiritual teachers in Israel at the time, once came to Jesus during the night and confessed: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3: 2). Through His life on earth, Jesus not only imparted theory for living, but also left us a very practical example. He tirelessly taught, whether on the mountain, in the desert, or from a boat on the lake. In addition to many parables, He particularly tried to illustrate and bring clarity on the kingdom of His heavenly Father. In the same way, He also gave His disciples practical, visible exercises of faith, for example through the miracle of feeding the 5000, Peter sinking on the water, fishing, and in many other ways. In some cases, He had to shape their character traits and take corrective action, for example, when they wanted fire to come down from heaven out of a sense of revenge or when a dispute of rank arose among them. It should be emphasized that He did everything with much love and compassion and was always ready to help people. What a teacher! We can still have Him as our personal teacher today.

- Today, Jesus teaches us through the Holy Spirit. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14: 26). The beauty is that the Holy Spirit can teach each individual according to their personal needs. A teacher who teaches a class of 30 students cannot guarantee long-term individual support. But the Holy Spirit is always there for each individual!

What can this school look like in practical terms?

We learn:

1. *Through the sermons in church services*
Always go to the service expecting to learn something. Pray before the service that God will speak to you personally and that you will be able to understand what He wants to say to you. You will be amazed at how clearly, understandably, and personally God speaks when you come to the service with a special expectation. The heavenly teacher knows exactly what you are going through and what you need.
2. *Through personal Bible reading and study*
Pray before every devotion or Bible study. Deepen the content you have read through questions, parallel passages, further translations, etc. Think about it again and again and try to internalize it. Mark the verse that particularly spoke to you. Devotional notes can be very helpful here.
3. *Through focused prayer*
When we become silent in prayer—by this I mean without time limits, time pressure, and distractions (cell phone off)—we can have a personal conversation with God. Through this “silent conversation,” God can lead you further and show you where or precisely how you can implement the lesson you have learned in your life. While short, concentrated prayer should by no means be spurned, “fleeting prayers” should not be the norm either. In order to progress in the school of God, we need more time for silence and focus.

4. *Through our practical life experiences*

If we are attentive, God gives us opportunities to practice what we have learned. These are often life lessons! Do not despair in the school of difficulties or challenges. In spiritual school, you may find yourself in situations where you suddenly feel like you’re on your own—like during a school exam—and think you can’t do it! But it is precisely in such situations that you can know that your teacher is with you and will help you through the exam. Trust Him! Don’t dwell on situations in your life that you can’t understand right away, but move on.

5. *Through correction*

What use would it be if we received a test back, in which we made many mistakes, with the comment “Very good!”—but without any corrections? Don’t be discouraged or resentful about corrections and reproofs in your life, even if they are not pleasant and can often hurt. Humbly ask God to help you improve in the area in which you have been corrected. He has much patience with us!

Learn until the end

If you have been saved, then school has only just begun for you. Don’t sit back in your spiritual life. Don’t stop somewhere in “elementary school,” and don’t stop learning. In the letter to the Hebrews, it says: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Hebrews 5: 12). God wants to train us to be “masters” in His service—each in the area He has entrusted to us.

On the other hand, let us remember in humility that our knowledge and insight remain only piecemeal, in contrast to God’s infinite wisdom.

May God grant us all success in reaching the goal, where the prize and reward await us!

*Dina Grötzinger
Eppingen, Germany*



Found While Decluttering

I've been dealing with my filing cabinet for some time now. It contains everything I've collected over the years, filed alphabetically from A to Z. Three drawers full of papers. Organizing it will be a lengthy process. However, it's better I do it now rather than leaving the task for my children to deal with down the road. And so, I started this morning. The alphabet begins with "A." One folder is labeled "Aging—the Last Years." The folder has lost much of its color. Yellowed and worn out, it lies on my desk. I smile. I created it about 40 years ago to collect information related to aging. I was much younger then. Over the years, additional articles found their way into the folder. Now I'm going through them. Articles copied from books, advice clipped from newspapers, calendar pages, poems, handwritten letters, and even songs. Some of the collection is no longer relevant. It's outdated, like an article about mowing with a scythe. Who in this day knows what a scythe is? Combines have long replaced the usefulness of the scythe. However, other articles

are timeless. They still say something to us today. Here are a few I've chosen to highlight.

"Now I am 88 years old . . ." (Daily Calendar, 1986)

Many things have become difficult due to my health. I often sigh. The body just can't keep up. It can no longer be repaired. The process of dying has been going on for years. Strength is declining. Life has become an effort. But the true foundation of life remains: Jesus Himself. Without Him, I couldn't write an article, "Aging Joyfully." Getting old makes that too difficult. But with joy, I have discovered and confirm that Jesus is the enduring, solid foundation. He is and remains the One Who walks beside His people, even as the body deteriorates. This is our unique privilege: to grow old with Jesus. (Erich Schnepel)

An Old Person's Prayer (Daily Calendar, 1985)

Thank you to everyone who shows understanding for my faltering foot and my trembling hand.

Who understands that my ear strains to catch everything that is said.

Who seems to know my vision is limited and my thinking delayed.

Thank you to everyone who has a warm smile and takes time to chat a little with me.

Who doesn't say: "You've already told me that story twice today."

Who makes me feel that I am loved, valued, and not abandoned.

Thank you for each person who graciously encourages me on the remaining days of my journey to my eternal home.

He Had a "Senior Moment" (Daily Calendar, 1999)

I first met him after his prime, when he was already an old man. But I could still appreciate his gifts. Many current church workers were indebted to him for his motivation. For fifty years of children's ministry and decades of working with youth, he had proclaimed Jesus as Savior and Lord. And then he was old. He struggled with various ailments. Memories of the war came to mind. Not good ones. And eventually his cognition declined; he had "senior moments." Sometimes he told the same story three times, and other times he couldn't get it straight at all. But it was during this time that he impressed me the most, because he could say "yes" to God's way. He said "yes" to his current limitations: "I accept them from God's hand." "Yes" to his past: "I know Jesus has forgiven me." "Yes" to his "senior moments." "If God allows this, then He knows what He is doing. I will praise Him even for that."—Oh, how often I complain when things don't go my way. I want to learn to accept from God the things I cannot change and praise Him.

Bible Reading: Luke 2: 36–40 (Daily Calendar, 1972)

We read of the elderly prophet, Anna (84 years old), of how she praised God and spoke of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. That old people often enjoy talking a lot may be linked to their increased isolation. Generally, they talk about themselves and the past. They find today's world incomprehensible, and the future looks dark and dreary. The underlying tone of their speech is often a lament: "Everything was better before; now it's all over, and things

keep getting worse." This outlook is understandable when one realizes that life is winding down and physical ability continues to decline. And when life's failures keep surfacing, it's no wonder that regrets lead to despondency. The autumn of life brings an epiphany of the futility of striving. It magnifies the moral depravity around us and the rubble of a ruined life. But it brings no comfort and no hope.

The prophetess Anna is old, but she exemplifies how to age well. She lives in the moment with an awareness of what is happening. She sees the hand of God and praises God, not singing songs of lament. She is joyful and looks to the future with trust. She does not talk about herself but about Him, the Son of God, and encourages others to believe and hope. A senior with this mindset is a gift from God. It's another reason she is called a prophetess. This cannot be done without the Lord's help. Even today, there are people who age gracefully with God, knowing their future is not death but everlasting life with the Lord. (Walter Paulo)

I Have Seen Your Goodness (Daily Calendar, 2004)

Lord, I look back. I revisit the path of all my years. I don't consider my achievements. They are few. Nor of the good I have done. It has little value against the things I wished I would have done.

I think of Your goodness and all You have done, and I thank You. For those who walked with me, for all the kindness and love which I have received, far more than I even know. For every pleasant day and every restful night. For the grace that protected me in times of fear, guilt, and loneliness. I recall the hardships I have endured, the sorrow and struggles whose purpose I fail to see. I place this in Your hands and ask You: When I meet You, show me the reason why. I look back, Lord, on all those years. My work is done, my dreams are gone, but You are constant. Now let me go in peace and home to You, for I have seen Your goodness. (Jörg Zink)

My file has shrunk a bit. I enjoyed reviewing the articles. They have encouraged me. But more importantly, I have made resolutions for going forward.

*Harry Semenjuk
Wetaskiwin, Alberta*



I Will Be With You

Part 10: Going Home

by Salomon Weissburger (1887-1968)

In the previous chapter, I mentioned how God told me in a dream to travel with some people who had built a boat to go home in.

Having set out in the boat, we alternately rowed and let ourselves drift in the water until we reached Ufa, in the Urals, where we were forced to leave our boat due to local unrest. Thankfully, we were able to switch to a Volga steamer, in which we travelled via Kazan to Nizhny Novgorod. The steamer was overcrowded with people and heavily loaded with goods. I shared space with a fellow traveler, sleeping in a narrow hallway. From Nizhny Novgorod, we continued our journey by train to Moscow, where the German consulate found us accommodations in a house. After about two weeks, we were able to continue traveling, and finally came to a camp on German soil.

In the camp, we were examined, and I was given eight weeks of leave before being drafted into the artillery, Germany still being at war with France at that time. While on leave, I went to see my family in Freudenstadt, Christophstal, in the Black Forest.

During my absence, my wife had taken care of the children and accepted a job as a train conductor. She had learned so quickly that she even taught other women.

On my journey to my family, our train stopped at a small station in the Black Forest. Suddenly, I saw my wife standing on the footboard of another train that was being shunted. I called my wife's name, and although I was lost in the crowd surrounding her train, she immediately recognized my voice! However, she could not leave her post because she had duties to see to. Only after everything was done could we finally greet each other. It had been almost four years since our parting. What a reunion!

Thank God for His grace, which protected and preserved us during the time apart. A psalm had become particularly important to me: "While I live I will praise the LORD; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being" (Psalm 146:2). Neither of us had anything to be ashamed of, because we had remained faithful to each other. We could also hold our heads high before God because He knew our heart; that I can say to the glory of God.

The time of internment became a great blessing—not only for me but also for the others I was with. It was rewarding to serve God faithfully, even during this difficult time, and I would not want to have missed this part of my life. To God be all honor for His wonderful guidance.



*“Come and hear, all you who fear God,
And I will declare what He has done for my soul.”*

Psalm 66: 16

Back Home

I had eight weeks of vacation before I was due to be drafted into the military. However, when only four weeks had passed, my wife was able to use her connections at the railway to get me a job as an assistant stoker on a locomotive.

After about two weeks of working in a repair shop for locomotives, I became very sick. It was the Spanish flu, which claimed many lives in various countries at the time. I became deathly ill with this pneumonic plague, which often needed only a few days to take the lives of healthy, strong people. It was said that twice as many people died of this disease as in the war, totaling 8 million deaths.¹

After lying sick in bed for two days, I was called up, but a doctor confirmed that it was medically impossible for me to obey the order. God spared my life, and the war ended in October 1918. In this way, the Lord had led me through the difficult years of war unscathed. Although I remained sick for a long time, the Lord gave me enough strength to attend the 1918/19 camp meeting in Essen. I then stayed in Essen to resume my activities there in the service of the Lord.

After the war ended, my wife and I were both employed by the railway, and we were very well off. Between

my wife’s earnings and my sick pay, our finances were better than ever—until God instructed me to leave earthly considerations behind and go back into the ministry in Essen and the surrounding area. What lay ahead of us?

With the war lost, inflation was rampant. We could not count on receiving a preacher’s stipend because that was not done by our churches at that time. We had to ask for support on our knees. But to the glory of God, I can say that the Lord never let us down. For a preacher who had faith, this was not a problem, but an incentive to pray, and it kept us mentally healthy. In this respect, much was different from today. People did not go into service in the Kingdom of God for money or financial benefits, but that does not mean that this state of affairs was necessarily right; after all, the congregation is supposed to provide for the preacher. However, it was a step of faith for us to disembark from the boat of security and material prosperity and to give up our good earnings in order to stand on the promises of the Word like Peter once did.

By 1919, we had three living children, as our fourth child had died during the war in West Prussia. Nonetheless, the Lord rewarded our faith and kept us afloat.

¹Since then, estimates have varied widely.

We Are So Blessed

(Ephesians 1:3 and Psalm 107:1–9)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for a dwelling place. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness” (Psalm 107:1–9).

The apostle Paul, writing to the saints in Ephesus, wishes to remind them that they are indeed blessed. We often sing a song that is in our hymnal which goes like this: “We are so blessed by the gifts from your hand, I just can’t understand why you’ve loved us so much.”¹ These words are based on the two passages mentioned above. The Apostle says: God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” We are indeed spiritually blessed. It is for that reason that the psalmist calls upon the redeemed of the Lord to “give thanks to the LORD, for He is good.” We are to give thanks for the greatest blessing known to mankind. We are redeemed! Bill Gaither once interviewed Jessy Dixon and asked him what he would want people to say at his funeral. He answered that question with one line, “I am redeemed.”

The blessing of redemption

Have we ever really paused to consider what that really means? Most people today feel that they are entitled—the world owes them this and that. But the Bible says, “the wages of sin is death.” Our deeds earned us eternal separation from God—death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus. He redeemed us

from the bondage of sin. No one, but no one, could free us from that bondage, but Jesus called out to us all: “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He has forgiven our sins and set us free. He has given us rest in a very turbulent world. He has given us abundant joy in a disgruntled society.

The blessing of health

He has also blessed us with health. Health is indeed a gift of God. We can swallow all the vitamins and supplements that are available to us, but if God does not sustain our health, we will get sick. The prophet of old says that the Lord took our sins and our sickness upon Himself (Isaiah 53:4). That simply means that He controls our life in every area. How often have we been able to come to Him when we were sick and He healed us? Does that mean that He will always heal us? Definitely not. I remind you of the time Jesus approached a poor, sick person at the pool of Bethesda. The Bible says that there were many sick there, but He singled out one man and healed him and left all the others in their predicament. Could He not have healed them all with one phrase? Absolutely. But He chose to heal only one. Why? I have no answer for that question except that He heals whom He chooses to heal and when He chooses to heal, but He definitely can heal today even as He did then. That is a special blessing promised to the redeemed.

The blessing of God’s provision

God has also provided for us so lovingly, which also is a blessing from above. Jesus once asked His disciples, “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?” (Luke 22:35). “Nothing,” they answered. He always took care of their needs. He has also taken care of our needs, and that is a special blessing. I can testify that I may not always have had what I wanted, but I always had what I needed. There is a difference. Jesus has promised to take care of our needs, and He will do it. When we recognize that millions go to bed hungry every night, we simply must thank God that He has chosen to bless us so abundantly.

The blessing of protection

The Psalmist says He has delivered us from distress and trouble. When we become aware of our surroundings and realize how many are suffering because of famine and floods, we need to give thanks that He has saved us from such disasters. I have seen homes washed away with all their belongings inside. Others have been destroyed because of tornadoes or hurricanes. What did we do to deserve such protection? Did these people not work hard to obtain what they had? I believe they did, and yet they lost it all. I am reminded of the people who lost their homes because of forest fires which claimed many homes in our area as well, yet He has protected us. I am so humbled and choose to thank Him for His many blessings.

The blessing of freedom of thought

He has blessed us with the liberty of expression. We should not take this for granted. It is becoming more and more evident that some people are being censored. That should cause us to give thanks that we can still gather together and proclaim the Word of God as it is written. We are so blessed to have multiple copies of God's Word in our homes, which we can transfer to

our hearts and minds by reading it daily and making it our blueprint for living.

The blessing of marriage

He has blessed us with a marriage based on the Word of God. How blessed we are to know we have a marriage partner who will remain faithful and loyal in good days and bad days—in sickness and in health—in riches and in poverty. We have promised to forsake all others for our partner alone and will walk the path of life together until we will one day see our Redeemer face to face.

We are truly blessed by the Lord, and the psalmist encourages the redeemed of the Lord to say so and share it with others. While the majority of people are grumbling and complaining about anything and everything, may we exhibit an attitude of gratitude for the blessings He has bestowed on us.

*Your blessed friend,
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Kelowna, BC*

¹William Gaither, Gloria Gaither, Greg Nelson

Blatant Ingratitude

In a large European city, a man gave a lecture in a public park on a Sunday to prove that there is no God. At the end of his speech, he confidently invited his audience to refute him. A simple man pushed his way through the crowd and stood close to the speaker's podium and said the following:

"I am, as you can see, only an uneducated man and do not understand any of these scientific things that we just heard about. I can only tell you a short but true story.

"I am a fisherman in this province. One day in my hometown, a mighty storm rolled in like I had never experienced before. I was very worried about my boat on the shore of the river, in which I was permitted to fish. So I went to go look at my boat.

"When I reached the shore of the river, I saw a man sitting in a boat in the middle of the wild, raging waters. He had lost both of his oars. The terrible, desperate cries of this man were louder than the storm, and

I can still hear them when I think about it. The man prayed: 'O God, do not remember my sins! O God, you can do all things. Send a savior! Do not let me go under!' he cried.

"I thought of my wife and child but then also of Him who had given His life for them and for me. I briefly cried out silently to God for help for this rescue mission. Mustering all of my strength, I reached the man and brought him safely to shore. Then I took the man, completely soaked and nearly paralyzed, into my home, where my wife prepared a hot drink and food for him. This weakened man had to stay with us overnight. The next day, he left. Today, for the first time since then, I see him again. He holds lectures to try to prove that there is no God!"

The fisherman pointed to the speaker and left. At once, the man tried to distance himself from the disgruntled murmurings of the crowd. ■



Victory Through Praise

Many Christians are not aware of the importance of praise and therefore do not practice it at all, or very little in their daily lives. Very few are aware that gratitude and praise are the key to victory in their lives.

First, let's look at what praise actually means. Praise means to express admiration or approval of the achievements or characteristics of a person or thing. Through praise, we exalt and honor and show our appreciation. Someone who has really accomplished something extraordinary is praised, for example, a general who won a great battle and thereby saved an entire nation from destruction. Saul and David were praised by the people when they returned victorious from their battles. When we talk about praising God, we are talking about reverence, exaltation, and worship.

Praise means to lift up, honor, exalt, and worship God with all our heart. We praise Him for His goodness and love and glorify Him for His redemptive work accomplished through Jesus Christ.

We can express our praise and gratitude in different ways such as through prayer, through a tes-

timony, or through songs and music. We can thank God in thought and in words, silently or publicly. We thank Him through our inner attitude and mindset. It should be only natural for us to thank and praise God always and everywhere by simply talking to Him.

God's Word encourages us to continually praise and glorify God. Here is just one psalm as an example (Psalm 66):

1 Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!

2 Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious.

8 Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard.

16 Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul.

17 I cried to Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue.

Victory through Praise

Praise, thanksgiving, and worship honor God, lift up our souls, and bring victory in various battles at the

decisive moment. The story of Jehoshaphat shows us this truth very clearly. Please read this story carefully in 2 Chronicles 20: 1–30.

Jehoshaphat found himself in a hopeless situation. Three kings had joined forces to destroy him and, humanly speaking, he didn't have a chance. But Jehoshaphat took his problem to God, and how he did it is absolutely instructive.

First of all, he brings his situation to God and asks Him for help. He exalts God and takes Him at His word. He relies on God's promises and assurances: "You will hear and save" (2 Chronicles 20: 5–9).

Shortly afterwards, Jehoshaphat receives a promise from God through His Spirit. It is a word from God! Often God used a person, guided by the Spirit of God, to pronounce the promise. Today it can just as easily be a person, but it can simply be the Word of God, which the Spirit of God opens up to us and makes clear. In any case, it is a promise from God, and Jehoshaphat believes this promise (2 Chronicles 20: 14–18).

Now Jehoshaphat begins to praise and thank God with all the people of Israel. Yes, he even orders it and encourages the people to believe in the Lord (verse 19). The solution to the problem was not yet visible; the situation had not changed, the three kings were still marching in their direction, and yet Jehoshaphat began to praise God with a loud voice.

Praise is an expression of our faith. When we thank and praise God before the solution is visible, we demonstrate our faith. In this case, praise and thanksgiving is a step of faith.

And now something really strange happens (2 Chronicles 20: 21). Jehoshaphat prepares his army for war, but instead of putting the strongest soldiers at the front to repel the attack and put the enemy to flight, he puts the singers and players at the front to praise the Lord. It must have been a very unusual sight. There is a whole army of soldiers, and it is led by a choir! This act proves once again that Jehoshaphat believed the Lord. He believed the word that he did not have to fight because God would fight for him.

The key verse of this story is verse 22: "Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people."

Here we clearly see that victory came the moment they began to praise and thank God. Did they already see what was going to happen at that point? No, they only saw what happened when they got to the lookout point and were surprised to see that there were only corpses lying there (verse 24). God intervened when they began to praise and thank God, and this intervention

only became visible when they arrived on the battlefield.

For us, this means the following: We don't always see the result right away, but we still know that praise and thanks triggers and activates something in the spiritual world that will

help us. We can praise and give thanks in faith and expect a solution to come, whatever the problem may be.

We live in a fallen world and face problems, difficulties, and temptations. Whatever it may be—illness, financial difficulties, depression, problems with your children, neighbors or work colleagues, fears or other worries—bring it before the Lord. Do as Jehoshaphat did, praise God, lean on His promises, believe, and trust in Him. He keeps His word!

And then start praising and thanking God! That is the right reaction and an expression of your faith. And God responds to it! Are you wondering why? David opens a window into the heavenly world and shows us why: "But You *are* holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22: 3).

God is enthroned among the praises of Israel. He dwells in the praises. That is His home, His special abode. And when you start praising God, you come into His special abode and claim what He has promised you.

"Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders *his* conduct *aright* I will show the salvation of God" (Psalm 50: 23).

*Eduard Albrecht
Eppingen, Germany*

*Praise God,
lean on His
promises, believe,
and trust in
Him.*

Song of Thanksgiving

I thank God that all of creation is His,
The whole earth and all that moves upon it.
His glory is shown by everything that is;
Praise Him with song, thanksgiving, and sonnet.

Sun and moon and stars shining bright with glory
Demonstrate His might, greatness, love, and power.
Far from earth, showing creation's story,
They honor God by shining hour for hour.

I thank my God for ev'ry day He gives me,
For every gift and blessing from above.
Upon a firm foundation He did lift me
And lets me stand by faith within His love.

I thank the all-wise God for His provision,
For leading me and giving me His Word.
He's helping me to make the right decisions,
For I was born to glorify the Lord.

I thank my God from whom all things are given
That bless my life and satisfy my soul.
I know He wants to take me home to heaven;
Through grace and love He guides me to that goal.

I thank my God for all the lovely flowers
That fill the air with fragrances so sweet.
Creation shows God's majesty and power;
By trusting Him my joy can be complete.

I thank my God for ev'ry situation;
He always leads and guides me with His hand.
In joy and sorrow, fear or tribulation,
I know He'll keep me and help my feet to stand.

I thank my God, forever I will praise Him
For I am His for all eternity.
He saved my soul, my sins have been forgiven;
I praise the Lord for what He's done for me.