

JOYFUL, PRAYERFUL and THANKFUL

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"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Plainly it is God's will for us to be joyful, prayerful and thankful!

Taking God's Blessings for Granted

Dr. Martin Luther observed that we exhibit a degree of thankfulness in life in reverse proportion to the amount of blessing we have received. In *Tabletalk*, Dr. Martin Luther declared: *"The greater God's gifts and works, the less they are regarded."* The blessings of life, health, freedom and food are not really appreciated unless they are lost, or threatened. Because sunrises and sunsets occur daily, they are taken for granted.

Consider the Stars

Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that *"If the constellations appeared only once in a thousand years, imagine what an exciting event it would be. But because they are there every night, we barely give them a look."*

The Blessings of Being Hungry and Lonely

Similarly, the blessings of rain are barely appreciated unless one has been through a drought. We in Cape Town barely noticed what a blessing rain is until we were placed under severe water restrictions. A hungry man is more thankful for his morsel than a rich man for his heavily laden table. A lonely woman in a nursing home will appreciate a visit more than a popular person who has a party thrown in their honour. A Christian who has suffered under persecution for decades and receives his first copy of the Holy Scriptures, will be more thankful for this one Book than we are for all the Christian books, Bible translations and magazines that overflow our shelves. As we have heard in the field. *"This is the greatest gift anyone could ever ask for – the Word of God in my own language!"*

You Should Experience Blindness for a Few Days

Helen Keller said: *"I have often thought that it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days for some time during his early adult life. It would make him more appreciative of sight and of the joys of sound."* In my experience, imprisonment in Zambia and Mozambique and Sudan, greatly enhanced my appreciation for food, water, a clean pillow, soap, safety and freedom. I may appreciate a warm shower and clean sheets more than most, because over many years, I have spent many accumulated years sleeping on the floor, in mud huts, in caves, in bushes and prisons. That dramatically increases one's appreciation of simple comforts and cleanliness.

A Biblical Command

There are at least 138 passages of Scripture that deal with the subject of thanksgiving. We are commanded: **"Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His Name."** Psalm 100:4.

"Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" Psalm 107:8.

"Give thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of light." Colossians 1:12.

*"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And **be thankful.**"* Colossians 3:15.

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but **in everything**, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving** present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:6-7.

A Sacrifice of Praise

"Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name." Hebrews 13:15.

Count Your Blessings

*"Count your blessings,
Name them two by two.
Count your blessings,
Name them four by four.
Count your blessings,
Name them by the score.
And it will surprise you,
That there are millions more."*

Our Duty

"No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks." Ambrose

A Good Habit

"It ought to be as habitual for us to thank, as to ask." C. H. Spurgeon

The Parent of All Virtues

It has been said that a thankful heart is the parent of all virtues.

The Root Sin

It is also true that a lack of gratitude is a root sin:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness... for although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." Romans 1:18-21. Here, failure to give thanks to God is the root sin that leads to futile thinking and foolish, darkened hearts. Charles Dickens's historic novel "A Tale of Two Cities" and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's books document how foolish and darkened hearts can immeasurably worsen life and destroy the lives of millions through futile revolution which began with a lack of gratitude and an attitude of entitlement.

The Sin of Ingratitude

In Luke 17:7-19, we read of the ten lepers that were healed by the Lord Jesus. When one of them, a Samaritan, threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him, the Lord Jesus asked: *"Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"* In our missions' experience we have also found that barely one in ten of those we help, or sponsor, will bother to express their gratitude either verbally, or in a letter, or card. Evidently gratitude is something of a rarity.

One of the Worst Sins

In 1 Timothy 3:1-5 the apostle Paul gives a list of some of the most terrible sins including: *"People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents,*

ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, traitorous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness but denying its power." Here **ingratitude** is listed in the middle of a litany of horrible sins.

A Fruit of Character

One of the first lessons good parents seek to teach their children is to say *"Thank You"*. It takes character and courage to admit being in debt to others. It is humbling. However, those who cannot admit their indebtedness to others cannot learn, nor can they seek forgiveness. *"Count your obligations. Name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord wants done!"*

A Rich Heritage of Faith and Freedom

Failure to express gratitude is more than immaturity and rudeness, it is ungodly. We are commanded to honour our parents, our elders, our teachers and our leaders. It is a sign of maturity to acknowledge indebtedness. Anyone who has learned anything is in debt to somebody else. We are all in debt, firstly and mostly, to God Himself, for our life, health, food, talents, family, friends, opportunities and for our salvation itself. We are also in debt to past generations who have sacrificed for the freedoms we now enjoy: Reformers, martyrs, pioneers, missionaries, soldiers, parents, teachers, pastors and so many others have sacrificed for our benefit.

Maturity

Only once we experience the incredible responsibilities of parenthood, do we really begin to appreciate the sacrifices made by our own parents for us. Only since I began to venture into the mission fields of Africa, did I begin to really appreciate the dedication and sacrifices of missionaries like Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, Mary Slessor and C.T. Studd, who opened up Africa for the Gospel, laying solid foundations for us to build upon. Only since we have witnessed the compromise and cowardice of so many church leaders, have we come to appreciate the conviction and courage of Reformers like Professor Martin Luther, defying pope and emperor to make his bold stand on the unchangeable Word of Almighty God. Only since observing those busy breaking down civilisation, have we come to really appreciate those diligent pioneers who established the Rule of Law and built up civilisation in wild and savage lands.

Pride, Ingratitude and Unteachability

Those who do not take advice do not think they have anything to learn. They are often the same people who have a problem expressing a genuine heartfelt gratitude to others. It is a sign of pride to be ungrateful - it reveals an unwillingness to acknowledge a debt to others. That is why it is so important to sing the great hymns of the Faith. These excellent tried and tested hymns remind us of our heritage and our need to thank and praise God.

An Attitude of Entitlement

Instead of the Christian character of gratitude, our present culture prefers to promote an attitude of entitlement. This is the very opposite of gratitude. It builds on pride and covetousness. It is fuelled by bitterness, greed and envy. All too many in the present humanistic society take things for granted, demand to get, rather than seeking to give. ***"One man gives freely, yet gains even more, another withholds unduly but comes to poverty."*** Proverbs 11:24.

The Ungrateful are a Cancer Who Break Down Civilisation

What we sow is what we will reap. The ungrateful and ungodly will reap ruin. Zimbabwe is a vivid example of the national destruction an arrogant and deceitful man can cause. The *RhodesMustFall*, *FeesMustFall* and other mobs of agitators, evidence an evil heart and foolish mind that can be so dismissive of the great heritage and many benefits they have received from those they so ignorantly dismiss, slander and attack. Higher education is not a right. It is a privilege. Those who show no respect for the lives and property of others forfeit their own. Civilisation requires respect for life and

property. Those who riot, burn, disrupt and destroy, have no place in civilised society. They are like a cancer which contributes nothing constructive to the health of the body, but only break it down.

An Attitude of Gratitude

A grateful mind is a great mind. *"Be thankful, therefore, for the least benefit and thou shalt be worthy to receive greater."* Thomas a Kempis.

Morning and Evening

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to Your Name, O Most High; to declare Your loving kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness every night." Psalm 92:1-2

Make Known Among the Nations What He Has Done

"Give thanks to the Lord, call on His Name; make known among the nations what He has done... Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever." 1 Chronicles 16:8,34

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