

Giving Thanks Always

By Dr. Manford George Gutzke

Do you realize there is one thing a believer can do that will qualify him to receive glorious blessings from God?

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). No doubt many believers want to obey God. We realize that unbelievers do not have that inclination, but believers want to trust God and be well pleasing in His sight. For some this would seem to imply personal service, perhaps some suffering. They feel that they would like to do something for God's sake, even to the point of hurting. For some it may be undertaking special work like teaching a Sunday School class, or sponsoring a young people's project, or starting a visitation program. Believers would be willing to do any of these that they might be well pleasing in the sight of God and ask God's blessing upon them. It may be that some believers are inclined to think that if they want to please God they should pray regularly and even organize prayer groups that they might please God.

In recent times some seem to feel they should exercise some gift of God – some charisma – because that would mean that they would be well pleasing to God. But note the Scripture: "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you," and what is that? Giving thanks. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of giving thanks. In Matthew 11:25 we read: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . ." We know that when Jesus of Nazareth fed the multitudes He thanked God. When the Apostle Paul was among pagans on a ship while he was being taken as a prisoner to Rome, a terrific storm came up and everybody was panic stricken. Paul stood out strong and courageous and guided the people. They had fasted because of their fear, but he prepared food and had them sit down to eat. It is interesting to read that before they shared the food he thanked God. He thought thanking God was very important. This was also characteristic of Jesus of Nazareth. We read in Luke how He walked with two disciples to Emmaus and they did not recognize Him. They asked Him to spend the night, and He sat down with them at the evening meal. He took bread, blessing it and giving thanks to God. Their eyes were opened and they knew who He was.

There are many reasons for giving thanks. It is the kind of thing we would expect a good person to do; as we think about this whole matter in the Thanksgiving season we have in mind that giving thanks to God is the proper thing to do. God is the giver of everything. James said every good gift and perfect gift cometh from above; so that everything, good and bad, and everything that happens, comes from God. We could stop right there. How much burden would be taken off my soul, and how strong I would be made to face anything that comes up, if I would just remember that God is the giver of everything!

Paul says "in everything give thanks:" give thanks to God for whatever happens. One reason why it is proper to give thanks is: God is worthy. His kindness to us is in spite of our record. We do not deserve such treatment. There may be some good people who might be blessed and I would think they deserve it, but I can tell you right now, I know I do not deserve it. God is gracious and He gives to me far more than I realize. His benevolence extends in all directions. Nothing that is good is going to happen to me by chance and when good things happen I can give God thanks. "Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above."

There are other reasons for giving thanks to God. I am very dependent. I am only a human being. I could not live one moment without His help. If my heart were to stop beating, that would be all. I could not make it beat, yet it does for twenty-four hours a day, every moment of the day. I need air to breathe – He provides it. I need water to drink – He provides that. I need food for my body and He

provides that. Everything that I really need to live on day in and day out, is given to me, and I am dependent upon God. I should be humble, and that is another reason why giving thanks is proper. I am reminded of a cartoon of a man in a boat and underneath it was the caption: "The Fisherman's Prayer." It said, "The sea is so big and my boat is so small." It is enough to make us humble. I should have sense enough to realize on the one side "How great Thou art" and on the other side "I need Thee every hour." It is not only proper, it is wise to recognize that everything comes from God.

We are prone to praise men, and of course, every now and again we praise ourselves. We may not think we are praising ourselves but we take credit for what happens. After all, we were doing it. It happened to us but giving thanks to God keeps the record straight. Now praising men and praising myself is one thing, but in a sense it is misleading and could easily lead me into a vanity which would be harmful. But blaming men is so easy. Everybody else is at fault and finally it could get around to where I am at fault, and that could be discouraging about other people, and depressing to myself. All of that is inspired by the fact that I am anxious to flatter myself. I would like to build it up that I am somebody big, and I know big people. Giving thanks to God will help to cut all of that surplus proud flesh out of our consciousness. If someone should be used to bless me I could give that man thanks but I would know right well, that if God had not blessed that man he could not have done anything for me. It is God's business and it would be a wise thing to keep the record straight by thanking Him.

I am not talking about making up your mind about something so as to maintain a position in your thinking that would be good, as if that were some artificial thing. The facts are just that way, and so far as we human beings are concerned, we are dependent upon God, and giving thanks to Him reminds us of that. We can be grateful to people and we can be grateful to God for such people, but underneath is the fact that God makes it all possible. So it is wise to thank God not only because it keeps the record straight, but it is wise because it keeps me humble and keeps me honest. It is not natural for me to be humble. The natural thing for me is to be proud. It is not natural for me to be honest. The natural thing for me would be to hide anything if I were caught doing something that was embarrassing. I might be honest about money. I might be honest about many things, but it is the natural thing, the human thing, to be a deceiver with people about many personal things. Is that not realistic? I am talking about myself because I have to confess that I want to be acceptable to God, and if I would practice thanksgiving it would keep me as I ought to be: humble and honest.

It will do many other things, too, and I will be talking about them. There is another aspect of this I would like to share with you. Thanking God qualifies me for more blessing. If I thank Him today for what He did yesterday, I can expect Him to bless me tomorrow for sure. There is no question about that.

A few years ago a friend came to me in distress. He regretted that in his personal life he had so little joy. He felt that things were not as they ought to be; and he was right. He asked me if I could help him. I wondered what to say; and I am satisfied this came into my heart from the Lord when the Holy Spirit led me to ask him, "Have you thanked God for what He did for you yesterday?" Sadly the man said, "That is the problem. He didn't do anything yesterday." Then I felt that I knew what to say to him, "Well, I am sorry. He is not going to do anything for you tomorrow. You have nothing more to look for." He then said, "But God is good. He is gracious." I replied, "I know. He was good and gracious yesterday but you didn't thank Him for a thing He did for you yesterday. You don't need to expect anything tomorrow." I think he looked upon me as if I had suddenly turned hard, but I was opening his heart and mind to something. I told him that if he would thank God for what God did for him yesterday, he would qualify himself to expect God to do things for him tomorrow. I also said, "By the way, you have two hands?" "Yes." "Are you glad you have them?" "Well, yes." "Would you rather have only one hand? You

could have no hands at all. Why don't you thank God? Many good men have only one hand. You have two eyes. You can be glad. Thank God. You have two ears. They work. Thank God. You have two legs you can walk on. Thank God." I may add this man was helped to become grateful to God, and soon began to have the joy he wanted to have.

This leads me to emphasize something else. It is very, very important that I should thank God, because if I thank Him for what He has done it will strengthen my faith. "Count your many blessings, name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." In Ephesians 5:18-21 we read,

"Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

This remarkable passage outlines how to be filled with the Spirit. The very gist of it is that believers should be giving thanks always for all things. It will help any person to be filled with the Spirit. This is something a person can do. If I give thanks to God for everything I find my heart filled with joy; and the joy of the Lord is my strength. I will then be strong in faith, giving glory to God. We should not be surprised, then, that Paul also points out giving thanks is involved in having power in prayer.

Be anxious (or careful) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

What is there for me to do? I am not to be worried and not to get anxious about things; but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let my requests be made known unto God. As surely as I give thanks to God when I am praying I will have power in prayer. It will help me to be a blessing to others. The Scripture tells us "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine;" so the way I go about things affects others. The Lord has been good to me, and He will be good to other people. When I am strong in faith I will be filled with joy and find myself with a merry heart. And a merry heart is good, like medicine. It is good for other people.

Something of the great importance of this line of truth about thanksgiving is to be seen in this passage:

". . . so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:20-23).

What caused this degeneration? How did it ever come to be that way? Did you notice in the passage? They "glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." The failure to give thanks opens the door for all kinds of deterioration. You know what I mean by that? I will spoil. Inside I will spoil if I do not give thanks to God. I am thinking about deep down in my heart recognizing that God is the giver of everything and that I can trust Him. I need to keep in mind that God wants me to thank Him for everything that happens to me, because He is going to work these things together for good. In this revealing passage we see that the deterioration, the spoiling, the actual destruction of the human heart,

begins with being unthankful.

Paul says another word in a rather obscure passage. A good many of us will scarcely know how to understand this, but we read in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 about the man of sin. We may have wondered about him.

". . . that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

The connection with our line of thought may seem to be farfetched but it isn't. If I don't give God thanks for what happens, where does the thanks go? To me. If I don't give, God credit for every good thing, who gets the credit? I take it. That will always be wrong. I will always be deceiving myself. None of that is true. All things come from God, but it is characteristic of the man of sin that he opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. So I want to say to you: it is as much as spiritual life, spiritual health, spiritual power and spiritual joy is worth, to give thanks to God in everything.

I want to think with you and share with you ways in which you can give thanks. I know there may be exceptional, unusual things, but let me draw your attention to some of the things you may miss.

When you awaken in the morning, and you get up, what do you do? Turn on the electric lights? Did you invent them? Did you wire the house? You go to your washroom and turn on the water faucet. How did that get to be there? How is it that you can turn on the water and have cold water to drink right there, or you can turn on the other tap and I have hot water? Did you invent the water heater? Perhaps breakfast was prepared on an electric range. Did you invent the range? Or, if a gas range is used, where does the gas come from? When you start for your office you may call a friend on the telephone. Did you invent it? When you get in your automobile, did you invent that? You go out and drive on paved streets. Did you pave that street? Perhaps you work in an office building. Did you build it? You see, you are constantly receiving and using something that has been prepared for you.

Today I want to suggest to you: be thankful for such things. Thank God for everything. If you work in an office you have office equipment; you have a typewriter. Did you invent it? Would you rather write long-hand? Do you have other equipment there? You may say you paid for it. Would money alone have prepared these things for you? If people were to go to some foreign countries, or to some desert place, with money, could they get any of that material just because they had money? Someone has to invent it, to prepare it and produce it. The things you use, things you are surrounded with, all have been prepared and given to you.

Now we shall consider that you are going out into the community. You will stop at a gas station. If the gas station were not there, what would you do? You go to the post office to send mail which will be going over a thousand miles and it will go in just a few hours because of the arrangement of things. How long would it take you to go there with that message? When you go into a store and see all of the things that are prepared there for you, have you ever considered what you could do without that store? There are many services that are all arranged for us. If there is sickness in your home, or an accident, you call a doctor. You didn't send him to school to study medicine. And if you go to the hospital, you didn't build that hospital, yet it is there and you can enter it. You send your children to school. You may pay some taxes but they would be a long way from building a school. Perhaps on Sunday you go to church, and how many times it is true that you will go into a church building that you did not help to build. On every

side you are surrounded by things that are given to you. I would remind you of that old song "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done."

Consider the matter of Providence. You make a certain turn and things turn out well. Will you take that as a matter of course? Do you think it just happens that way? Why not give thanks for it? Let me talk about your family. Do you have a husband or a wife, as the case may be? Have you ever considered how much is brought to you by that other person who shares with you? Perhaps you have children or relatives. Ask yourself if you would be satisfied to be without them. Oftentimes the way in which you can really appreciate these folks is to ask yourself how you would get along without them.

There is an old saying "You never miss the water till the well runs dry." That is oftentimes the case with our friends. We take them for granted until something happens and they are gone; then there is a void where they were, and we suffer a big loss. Consider the people who care for you: those who pray for you; are you going to take them for granted? Why not give thanks for them? What about your neighbors? I know that every now and again there are neighbors who give us concern, but there are many who share with you and you can count on them in case you need them. With that in mind, why not give thanks to God for them?

I am talking about giving thanks always to God for all things and so far I have tried to touch on the things you would face every day – the things right around you. Far more than that is true. For instance, living in this country – do you think that is just "for free," so to speak? I often feel in my own heart and mind what a wonderful thing it would be if every person living in this country should in the Providence of God be obliged to leave it for six months and live where other people live in the world until they could begin to see how wonderful this country is. I have never been away from this country for any great length of time, but I have been away from it for a matter of weeks. I can remember the first time I was in another country for a short time, and when I came home I was so impressed with the many blessed experiences we have here which we take as a matter of course. The history of this country; the things we emphasize; the things we appreciate; the traditions we have and the way the public feels about taking care of children, the poor and sick make it a unique country and a blessed place to live.

Let me pursue another line of thought from what I have been talking about. I have been talking about the things that pertain to your daily life right where you are and the things that are around you. Now what about the Gospel? What about the reality of God? Have we ever thought about thanking God for being what He is? And who He is? Have we ever realized why it is that the Bible encourages us to "Praise God from whom all blessings flow?" Stop and think about it. We can thank God every day for being in control no matter how things go and how mixed up they are. It is wonderful to know that all is in the hand of God and under His control in spite of the way it looks.

Think about the Lord Jesus Christ. If you know the Gospel and if you know about the grace of God that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, what a wonderful thing to live in a universe and in the world where the Creator of the universe sent His Son to die for you. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor that we through His poverty might become rich. We can thank God over and over again for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about the Holy Spirit whom God gives to help us. We don't send for Him, so to speak. But He comes. He stands at the door and knocks. He wants to help us and He will help us.

What about the Bible? Have you ever thought about thanking God for the Scriptures? Do you realize there are people in the world who do not have it? We have one. We can read the Bible and in it we can learn the ways of God and of the grace of God. It is a wonderful thing.

While we are thinking about that, let me bring something else to your mind: think about the church. I

know much is going on in the church that is disturbing, and I know that many times church troubles can be very real, but stop and think: where do you go to hear God's name praised? In the church. Where do you go to hear God's Word read? In the church. Some churches are imperfect and the way they do will oftentimes leave much to be desired, but still, you won't go into any sanctuary without being blessed by the very presence of the Spirit of God, who will be there to bring to your mind all of the other people who collaborate to put that church in its place.

There is much criticism of the church but there is no other group of people organized together for the express purpose of praising God and helping other people. It is doing more than anyone else is doing to help the needy. When you think about the poor and the orphans, the aged and the infirm, while there may be many agencies and many places where these people can be helped, the inspiration to help them comes from the church of the living God. We can think about missions having a share in that. You and I can do something: we can give a bit of money; and the money we give can go help those people come to know about God. Think about the evangelists. You and I could not have started off any one of these men who work in public evangelism. We could not have trained them; we could not pay their salaries. This is all done under the providence of God. We give Him thanks for these men and women who carry on their work in such a way that the hearts of people are turned to God.

It would not seem proper if we did not mention Heaven. Do you have the blessed hope that when you are through with this world that is where you will go? Even though you may know right well you are not worthy? If you are a Christian, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have heard Him say to you,

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"(John 14:1-3).

May I put it to you very bluntly? You can't pay for that. You can't buy your way in there. Heaven is free, given to you of God. It is something for which you thank God.

While I have been going over all these things that are all positive and helpful you will know, of course, that I have just been reading one side of the page. There is another side. You can turn the page over and think about your troubles. Has it ever occurred to you to thank God for the trouble that you are in, for the things that happen that are distressing? This is not easy to do. It is almost more than a human being can be expected to do; although Paul did it. Paul said he gloried in tribulations because of what they did for him. So far as you and I are concerned, when we have trouble I suppose we cannot see this truth so well until we are some distance away from it, but after you are some distance away from any particular trouble and you look back on it, isn't it true that in that day of trouble you drew near to God? Isn't it true that in that time of trouble you realized how dependent you were upon God? Wasn't that a good thing? You may not always have seen it. It may be true that the Lord will say to any one of us, "What I do thou knowest not now but thou shalt know hereafter."

You can be real sure that nothing by any means shall hurt you, that everything that happens to you is under control. We have an Almighty God who watches over all things, and because of this we can be thankful. Even in the midst of trouble, even in the dark days, we can be thankful to God that we have Him and that we can turn to Him. There are times when you have to count some persons in the world as your opponents. I don't like to use the word "enemy," but actually they do act as if they were your enemies: people who seem to like to do things that are a hindrance and hurtful to you. Has it ever

occurred to you to thank God for those opponents, those "enemies?" It may not seem as though you could do that; but I want to urge upon you very soberly: you could, really. You could, because you can believe God and know that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Actually, those opponents – those people who do things that hurt, can develop you and draw you out in the very way you need to go.

It may be that you have been inclined to be irritable. You have been "uptight" about things, and something happens that affects everything that you are doing. It is like a calamity. Under those circumstances the very troubles you have will draw you nearer to God. It may be that some of the trouble you have may cause you to give up some things; things that should have been given up. It may be that sometimes God will arrange to take away from you certain things. His taking away those things will leave you with what God wants you to have. In other words, you can feel this truth in everything I am saying: I am indicating to you that Almighty God being as He is, and His grace and His providence being what they are, you and I can give thanks always. That means in every situation we are to remember God with gratitude.

We take everything that happens as from God and we look to Him to work things out. We do not like everything that happens. Not everything that happens pleases us; but we trust God at all times and so, in everything give thanks.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction: who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's"(Psalm 103:1-5).

Praise the Lord!