

When to Give Thanks

One of my favorite holidays is Thanksgiving. The roots are very Christian and very American. Our Pilgrim forefathers, along with the Native Americans, gathered the best of their food and in peace gave thanks to God. The God-denying secularist has a hard time with Thanksgiving, because, after all, to whom are we giving thanks if not to God? It's truly difficult to have a generic, non-specific spirit of thanksgiving, without an object of our thanksgiving. *"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving"* (Psalms 69:30).

As we enter into Thanksgiving, let us give thanks to God in six different circumstances. Give thanks:

1. In the Secret Place

It is said of Jesus: *"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed"* (Mark 1:35). The practice of the devout Christian is private prayer. This is where we cultivate praise in its truest essence. In the secret place there is no danger of man praising us, people hearing us, or insincerity creeping into our thanks. The man or woman who frequents the secret place is a powerful weapon in the hand of God. *"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"* (Psalm 91:1). God molds a person in their formative months before birth and in a similar manner, God fashions a man or woman in the secret place. *"My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret..."* (Psalm 139:15). In the secret place of our prayer, God gives us the feet to walk in His footsteps, the hands to war against evil (Psalm 18:34), and a mouth to give Him praise! *"Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee"* (Psalm 63:3).

2. In Corporate Worship

Nothing activates a public worship service like spontaneous thanksgiving from the pew! *"I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people"* (Psalm 35:18). Amens are like saying "sic 'em" to a dog for the preacher. *"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy"* (Psalms 107:2). Thanksgiving in the congregation of the Lord is an encouragement to other people! It encourages them to know the God who helped their brother or sister can help them as well. It reminds the congregation that God is alive, active and ready to help succor the weak, embolden the timid and bless the faithful. *"Blessed be the LORD God of Israel for ever and ever. And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD"* (I Chronicles 16:36).

3. Among the Unconverted

Sometimes we think we must keep silence in the public forum where those who don't know Christ are gathered. Yet the Psalmist said, *"Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name"* (II Samuel 22:50). Jesus pointed out when public praise is done to feign spirituality to impress others, the effect is pharisaical phoniness. *"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward"* (Matthew 6:2).

If, however, our praise is truly heartfelt and sincere, there will be a joy that accompanies this kind of thanksgiving. *"Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength"* (Nehemiah 8:10). The heathen will envy for the right reasons the joy you have. A thankful Christian is the salt of the earth causing the unconverted to be thirsty for true

salvation that gives true “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (I Peter 1:8).

4. When We Are Blessed

“I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses” (Isaiah 63:7). It is egotistical and the epitome of unthankfulness to either take the credit for all the good the Lord does for us or to ignore Him as our source for all goodness. The Bible says, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). What can we attribute to the Lord as good that has come our way? Everything! The Bible says, *“I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me”* (Psalm 13:6). The word “bountiful” is translated from the Hebrew word: “gâmal” which means to deal out, to wean a child, to ripen, to reward. It means the Lord will wean us from this world to stand alone on His provision and will give to us liberally that which we need, in due time, in the moment He ripens us to be picked like ready fruit and placed into a horn of plenty for service unto Him. We should therefore give praise to *“...God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not...”* (James 1:5).

5. When We Are Bothered

“At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:62). This appears to be written by a man with a lot on his mind, perhaps unable to sleep. Earlier he said, *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God”* (Psalm 42:11). Do not press the panic button when depression comes your way, give God praise!

6. On General Principles

As I write these words my wife and I are returning from the funeral of Dr. Bob Gray, a mentor to your pastor for many years. He taught me a lot of different things. One thing he taught me early in my ministry was to praise the Lord. Although he was a most distinguished preacher, he had no compunction against just losing himself in a spell of thanksgiving. I have been fortunate to be one of those who has witnessed him unabashedly praising His Lord. There was a story that he told that I dearly love about a precious elderly lady who stood to give her testimony in a service in which he was conducting. The testimonies were eclectic to say the least. Some were praising God for physical healing, others for salvation of loved ones, others still for material benefits. Toward the end of the testimony meeting she stood and asked, “Brother Gray, would it be alright if I just stood to praise the Lord on general principles?” There are times when I believe it is most fitting to praise the Lord on general principles. We should be willing to give Him thanks for everything in every way and under every circumstance. *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (I Thessalonians 5:18).

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