



By Dr. Richard Youngblood

***Question: What does it mean to really be thankful?***

I doubt that any of us could ever fully explain what it means to be thankful; but during this traditional “Thanksgiving” time of the year, I have been reflecting on the meaning of thanksgiving. Numerous biblical texts call upon God’s people to give thanks. Some texts call attention to specific blessings for which to give thanks. Since these have often been discussed in other places and times, I propose some simple observations here with the hope that you may be led to reflect upon thankfulness also.

Thankfulness begins with recognition of the God of all creation and his overwhelming graciousness to us. The wonders of creation lead me to think about how it all came to be. These include the splendor of the mountains, tumbling creeks and valleys, fields with flowers and creatures great and small. Along with these are the starry skies by night, daytime’s blue skies with fluffy clouds, oceans deep and the passing seasons: all of these speak of the work of a master-builder. This master-builder continues to sustain his creation and gives meaning and purposefulness to all that exists and happens in our lives. This same God has made his love for us known through sending Jesus his son. These daily blessings are given to unbelievers as well as believers. I have a difficult time even imagining anything but a chaotic and meaningless world and life apart from God. I can’t explain everything that happens, but I know he has never abandoned me even in the darkest and most difficult of times. The more I come to know him, the more I love him, trust him and long to live in his presence forever. Contemplation of these things fills my heart. My cup overflows with thanksgivings.

I am also led to see that thanksgiving is not just words. But it is a way of life. As a child, I learned to say “thank you” even when I did not feel thankful. The words can be easily spoken, but to demonstrate thankfulness toward God and others takes unselfish and sometimes strenuous effort. Genuine thankfulness to God is demonstrated by presenting our bodies to him as living sacrifices, an act of worship everyday (Romans 12:1). We have been told: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). That life of thankfulness toward God will spill over in unselfish giving, forgiving, encouraging and blessing for those all around us. God has given to us that we may give to one another in a way that results in thankfulness to God wherever we are.

In addition, thankful people enjoy life more than unthankful people; and they become a more pleasant people to be around. Thankful people see blessings and good things all around them. They sing and rejoice in all things. The thankful person may have only a dollar in his pocket, but he is glad for it. The unthankful person may have a hundred dollars, but he is still discontented. As a result of the thankful spirit within, thankful people have many friends. Who wants to be around an ungrateful complainer? But thankfulness contagiously spreads joy wherever it goes. “Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2).

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