

Thanks-Living

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I Thessalonians 5:16-24, Psalm 100 NLT

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It is a joy to be together—to gather in gratitude as believers – to worship our God and give thanks. This is our purpose every time we gather, but particularly at this time of year we are mindful of our blessings. I'd like for us to take a few moments, and turn and tell someone nearby about at least one or two things you are thankful for this year. (Turn and talk.)

The first known "American" Thanksgiving was celebrated in 1621 by pilgrims, that is, by immigrants to what was yet an unformed nation, along with their native neighbors.

Having experienced their first successful harvest, they gathered to give thanks and to party, for not just one, but for three days. It was not until 1863 that President Abraham Lincoln declared that Thanksgiving become a nationwide celebration.

Centuries earlier the Apostle Paul, a pilgrim on a journey of faith, wrote the following:

*<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray continually, <sup>18</sup>**give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

*<sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not treat prophecies with contempt <sup>21</sup>but test them all; hold on to what is good, <sup>22</sup>reject every kind of evil.*

*<sup>23</sup>May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

*<sup>18</sup>**give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

A few moments ago some of we shared what we are thankful for this year. And as each of us reflect, we no doubt have experienced many blessings for which we are grateful.

But if we are really honest, we will admit that it is **not easy** to give God thanks **for everything, in all circumstances...!**

## **Let's get real!**

**I don't know about you, but I find it hard to be thankful for some things.**

***Turn to your neighbor and share one thing you are NOT thankful for...***

An article in the Thanksgiving Day issue of the Seattle Times, front page, below the fold, was entitled: [How do you give thanks after experiencing so much sadness?](#)

(by Jack Healy and Julie Turkewitz, The NYTimes)

The article profiled five different families, in five different locations, who have suffered five different tragedies:

Sherri Pomeroy's fourteen year old daughter died in the assault on the First Baptist Church on Nov. 5th in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Her faith in God is sustaining her through this unspeakable loss.

Raymond Ortiz and his family has suffered immense loss and separation from family and home, after the devastating hurricane in Puerto Rico.

Megan Condron and her family are one of the 9,000 families whose homes burned to the ground in Santa Rosa, CA. They are safe and well, living with her husband's parents for now, but feeling "dislocated, unmoored". She is having a hard time giving thanks this year.

Lance Miller has an empty chair at his family's table, as his sister Hannah, died in the mass shooting at the country music festival in Las Vegas last month. He's grateful for the times he shared with her, more mindful of appreciating each moment of life as the gift that it is.

Aracely Martinez-Ramirez went to church on Thanksgiving, to share about hope in the midst of despair. In August, 20 year old Aracely led her three little sisters to safety through rising waters, as Hurricane Harvey flooded their home. As a Dreamer, she doubted her future; deportation was a possibility. But FEMA came through, and the family was able to get another home. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services renewed her visa, allowing her to stay. She and her family were recipients of food, clothing, furnishings and more. "We were in need and others gave from their hearts", not caring or even asking about [their] immigration status. "This is where we see grace this Thanksgiving."

None of us are immune to loss of various kinds, difficulties that challenge our faith and cause us sometimes to wonder if God is asleep at the switch, distracted or somehow unaware of human suffering.

Perhaps you are familiar with [The Hiding Place](#)—the book turned into a movie, the real life story of Corrie Ten Boom and her sister who hid Jews in their home during the war, when the Netherlands was occupied by the Nazis. Eventually they were caught and the two of them were taken captive and sent to a series of concentration camps.

Upon being transferred to Ravensbruck, notorious among the camps, they settled into their crowded, flea-infested barracks. Immediately Betsie insisted that they read from their Bible, and as it happened, they read this text from I Thess. 5.

So Betsie further insisted that they give thanks.

For what? One, we could have been separated, but we are together.

For the crowded barracks? More people with whom to share Jesus.

Ok. Corrie agreed. BUT Corrie was adamant about one thing: She could NOT give God thanks for those awful fleas!

I have difficulty giving God thanks...

...for poverty, homelessness, and the fact that too many children in the USA go to bed at night both cold and hungry. If they have a bed. I recently went with my husband Rob, to take some assistance to family that had just moved into an apartment. The mother was laying sheets and blankets on the floor, getting the children ready for bed. We had brought several grocery sacks of food.

Two cooking pans and a few miscellaneous plates and utensils were the extent of her kitchen supplies. ...You can bet that as I went home to prepare a meal for my family that evening, my gratitude took on a new dimension. We had more than enough. She had so little; yet her gratitude was immense.

I don't know about you, but I find it hard to give thanks for senseless gun violence, and natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes.

I find it hard to give thanks for infertility, miscarriages and birth defects. I cannot say I am thankful for mental illness, for cancer in all its forms, Alzheimers, and so on, which rob loved ones of memory and personality.

I struggle to give thanks for divorce, and the resulting damage of broken relationships that impacts each generation within a family.

And last but not least I most certainly am not thankful for terrorists who act in total disregard of human life, often including their own. And for those who would attack even Suni Muslims worshipping in Egypt. No one should fear going to worship.

I could go on, but you get the picture. You could probably add a few things to my list from your own personal experience.

**What could the Apostle Paul been thinking of??**

***<sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

**Paul was no stranger to difficulties or hardship...here are a few circumstances he endured...**

*I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup>Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup>Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup>I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. <sup>27</sup>I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

And, as if that was not enough, Paul adds:

*<sup>28</sup>Besides everything else, I **face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.***" 2 Corinthians 11: 23-28

Give thanks **IN** all circumstances" **not** Give thanks **FOR** all Circumstances.

A psychologist today might have a field day with Paul, because either this guy was absolutely crazy, OR he knew a secret survival skill for facing the most challenging circumstances that life can offer.

I believe the latter is true.

Paul was able to give thanks *in* all circumstances, because he knew "the rest of the story". Paul knew that Jesus' suffering and death was not in vain. Paul knew that Jesus didn't remain cold and dead in that tomb, but conquered death once and for all, rising in order to give us eternal life.

Paul and Silas were able to sing praise songs to God while in jail...because they viewed this earthly life from a heavenly perspective. That is to say, Paul wrote in

## **2 Corinthians 4: 16-18**

*<sup>16</sup>Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.<sup>18</sup>So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

**Giving God thanks *in* all circumstances is a spiritual survival skill because:**

**1—it is a reality check—and puts things in the correct perspective, on the eternal realities, vs. the present, temporary ones. So we do not lose heart.**

**2—it gets our minds off of ourselves and focuses on the Sovereign God who works all things together for good,** for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Giving God thanks *in* all circumstances is a spiritual survival skill because:

**3—it reminds us that Jesus' suffered in order to redeem us and secure our salvation.**

**4—it reminds us that "this too shall pass".** This present circumstance is only one stop on a pilgrimage that culminates in eternity with our Savior.

**5—it reminds us that God never leaves us for forsakes us, but is our constant companion, no matter what our circumstance.**

THAT is why Paul, a pilgrim on his faith journey, and you and I on ours—can **"Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."**

Remember those flea-infested barracks?

Betsie insisted that Corrie give thanks, yes, even for the fleas!

During the months they were imprisoned there, they were amazed that they could openly hold Bible studies and prayer meetings in their barracks without interference from the guards. *Why? The guards refused to enter those barracks...because of the fleas!*

**If we ever wonder about God's will for us, it is spelled out right here:**

**Give thanks in all circumstances...!**

**Now that's "Thanks –Living!"**

Let us pray!