

*Deuteronomy 8:10-18 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. 17 You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.*

Gifts from God

1. God gives abundance for our enjoyment
2. The danger of wealth is pride
3. God gives trials for our good

When you hear the word "Thanksgiving," what do you think of? Turkey? Football? Pumpkin pie? Cranberries? Family? It used to be for us the annual ping pong tournament, which Daniel always won. In a lot of ways, though, Thanksgiving is an overlooked holiday. It's not the big deal. For a lot of people Thanksgiving is just the forerunner to the big one: Christmas. People wait for Thanksgiving to get over to put up their Christmas trees. There's black Friday and cyber-Monday after Thanksgiving. With so much other stuff going on, we tend to forget what Thanksgiving is all about. Moses knew that would be a problem and so he tells us several times to remember. Remember all the gifts of God.

We could simply walk through the Apostles Creed and find plenty to be thankful for. The Father created us and gave us everything we need for body and life. The Son redeemed us. He gave himself as the sacrifice for our sins by suffering under Pontius Pilate. He died and was buried. But he also rose again for our justification. The Holy Spirit has gathered us into his church through Word and Sacrament. He has worked faith in our hearts so that we have forgiveness of sins. He has given us the sure hope of the resurrection and eternal life.

Moses said, *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God.* We live in a land where food is easy to produce. The percentage of income we spend on food is the lowest ever in all the world. Like Israel, our nation has been blessed with success. We live in relative safety. We import goods from all over the world. We have a strong workforce.

The God we worship is a God of abundance; not a God of scarcity. God miraculously and abundantly provided for the children of Israel as God led them through the wilderness to the promised land. God fed them with manna, brought them water out of solid rock, caused the clothes and shoes to never wear out. And God was bringing them into a land described as flowing with milk and honey, a land of abundance.

Certainly, God has also blessed us abundantly. At Thanksgiving we want to remember these gifts of God. Think about all the things we so often overlook. Pure water. Fresh fallen snow. A sunny day. Moonlight on the water. Fresh fruit. A steak done just the way you like it. Yes, think about all these gifts of God.

There is a danger to all this abundance. *When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God.* We must confess that we have often taken God's gifts without being grateful. We have rebelled against his ownership of all by so often calling it mine.

More often than not, wealth and comfort lead us away from a relationship with God, rather than drawing us closer. Most of us know that this is true because we have experienced this in our lives. We forget our dependence on God. We look upon our little kingdoms as something that we have created by our own hard work, astounding intellect and shrewd decisions. Our ego begins to inflate. We become self-centered and selfish. We begin to believe that the world revolves around us. Our prosperity brings with it enough things and opportunities that God is nudged out of the center of our lives. We get too busy for prayer, devotional reading and Bible study.

Praise and thanksgiving dry up in our lives, because it is counter to the path we are walking and the goal we want to achieve. To offer thanks is to confess dependence, to acknowledge that God has the power to benefit us and make our

lives better. Martin Luther reminds us, “Blessings come to us through our labors and at times without our labors, but never because of our labors.” It is always and only because of God.

In the Lord’s Prayer we pray, “Give us today our daily bread.” Do you know why Jesus taught us to include that in his prayer? Because on our own we wouldn’t even have bread! That’s how incapable we are to provide for ourselves. But, so often we believe that we are the reason for our success in life. We believe that we are the ones who built our houses and bought our cars and are the reason our kids have their lunches at school. But, we’re not. God made the trees grow so they could become the lumbar for our houses. And who made the ham that you use in your kid’s lunch? Oscar Mayer? No. God. He was the one who watched over the pig and made it grow.

How do we respond to all that God does for us? We forget. We watch a parade, eat a big meal, watch some football, and fall asleep on the couch. We spend time with family and friends. When all the traditions have been observed, many people haven’t given God a thought.

Martin Luther had this to say to Christians who forget God: “We who are called [Christians] and desire to be considered such should take this to heart: We should receive our gifts from God almighty with reverence and thanksgiving and not go to the table as pigs to the trough and leave the table, after we have taken our fill, without thanking our good God with the slightest little prayer or whisper, nay, without ever thinking of our Lord God, who feeds us ingrates out of pure mercy and kind benevolence. So we forget our good God, who richly offers us all sorts of things for our enjoyment.” ([What Luther Says](#) #3459)

Ten lepers were healed in our gospel lesson. How many came back and thanked Jesus? One. Nine forgot. It’s easy to forget, to take for granted all the things God provides for us. Indoor plumbing, hot water and even toilet paper. Spice aisle and fresh produce all winter, ice cubes in the summer. Asphalt, tires, microwave ovens. Soap, shampoo and toothpaste. What about plastic wrap and microchips? We know we should be thankful for family, friends, food and nation, but what about everything else. The more we list, the more we realize how much we forget to be thankful for. So let us not only today, but every day, thank God for the gifts he abundantly provides for us.

But there are some gifts from God we may not want. *He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.* His cup is empty. One gallon of milk sits close by. A child sees the challenge. The child determines that one who has graduated from sippy cups surely is ready to pour his own drink. He moves for the jug. Dad reaches to help. “No, I do it.” Under fatherly observation, tiny arms try to lift. Many attempts. Repeated failure. Finally the child asks for help, seeing his weakness and appreciating Dad’s strength.

You may have strength to pour from a heavy jug. Yet challenges remain. Cars break down. Thieves break in. Children test patience. Parents disappoint. Disease steals one you love. A hated temptation assaults. Guilt threatens with despair.

What mercy when God humbles us. What mercy when God permits challenge that drives us finally to our knees. What mercy when God shows the lie of a proud heart and opens our eyes to the eternal consequence of complaint, that what God owes us is far worse than any hurt we are feeling. God humbles that he might lift up. (adapted from Stephen Geiger, “Forward in Christ, May 2006 p. 7)

He lifts out of the mire of our self-centered pride by leading us to the cross. He lifts our eyes to see how much Jesus was humbled to pay for our pride. We see how much Jesus gave to pay for our selfishness. We see that Jesus didn’t forget us and we have forgiveness in his shed blood. We see that God gave his all for us so that we could live with him in eternity.

So even in this crazy year of pandemic, facemask and shut downs, we can be thankful – thankful for all the gifts of God, the blessings and the challenges he gives for our good.

Thanksgiving is the life of the Christian. May our work, our play, our speaking and singing, praising and serving be done with thanksgiving for the abundant gifts of God.