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He was six years old and visiting grandpa and grandma’s house on Christmas Day with mom and dad. After they went to church in the morning, they gathered around the Christmas tree to unwrap gifts. He had opened his gifts from mom and dad the night before, so he really wasn’t expecting to have more to open. He was handed a wrapped present, and eagerly opened it. Inside was a wooden train engine that grandpa had carved himself. Well. It didn’t beep. It didn’t run on batteries. It just sat there. He looked at it with disappointed eyes and didn’t say anything. His mom then prompted him with the question that every parent knows “What do you say, son?” And, he knew what he had to say. “Thank you, grandpa”, he muttered because he had to.

Today we gather in God’s house to give Him thanks. Are we here because we have to, or because we want to? As we remember all the blessings that the Lord has poured into our lives this year, may we wholeheartedly and enthusiastically say “**THANK YOU, LORD!**” Thank you for your blessings and the ability to thank you with our whole being. Thank you, Lord!

### ***Part One: For all Your blessings***

Once again we visit the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, written by Moses. In a very real sense, this book is Moses’ own personal obituary. 40 years of wandering in the wilderness was coming to an end. He was standing at the border of the land of Israel, and took one last opportunity to tell the people of Israel what he felt was most important. It lists what Moses witnessed. It lists what Moses believed. It lists what Moses considered to be the ultimate duty of every believer. Listen to the Lord and thank Him for absolutely everything.

He reminds them that everything they have and everything they would have in the Promised Land comes from God. Moses reminds them of how the Lord looked over them while they wandered the desert. He reminds them of the great things that God had done for them. Looking into the future, he sees all the gifts that the Lord would give to His people. **“when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied.”** Oh, the Lord would bless them tremendously. Time and time again Moses reminds them to thank the Lord for absolutely everything they have and will have. Say “thank you, Lord!”

But notice where their thanksgiving had its start. It wasn’t when they saw all the stuff they had that prompted them to say thanks to God. Oh, no. Saying thank you to God starts from faith. Look at what Moses puts in front of his encouragement to thank God. **“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.”** Because if they didn’t, spiritual disaster would strike. **“Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 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.”** Faith comes first, then thanks to God. Focus on the giver, not on the gift.

Now, at first you might picture Moses as a cranky grandpa, giving advice to the young ‘uns. And perhaps a few Israelites looked at it that way. “Oh, Moses, of course we’re going to remember to thank God. After all, we saw what He did for us. We saw the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. How could we ever forget the Lord?”

We might say the same thing. Of course we’re always going to thank God for what He has done for us! We hear His Word every week. We read about Him in our daily Bible devotions. Our parents and friends will remind us if we forget. There’s no way I’ll ever forget to say thanks to God. Right?

God knows us better than we know ourselves. We’re physical beings. We touch, taste, see and smell. Physical things are integral to our daily lives. Every second of every day we are in contact with the physical blessings that God gives to us. Food, drink, house, tools and toys. We use and

enjoy them. But God knows that they have the ability to over-ride our spiritual side. We can get so caught up in the physical blessings of our Lord that we forget to thank the One who gave them to us. Today is a day to remember Moses' warning to the Israelites. ***"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."***

So today, we first remember the Lord and His spiritual gifts. We thank God for His gift of faith. We thank Him for His presence and love. We thank Him for the gift of a Savior from sin and eternal life with Him. And then, and only then, do we begin to thank Him for the physical gifts that fill our lives. The gift of life and family, of food and drink, house, tools and toys. Thank you, Lord!

### ***Part Two: For the ability to thank***

Now, it's easy to thank the Lord for the good things, the pleasurable things in life, isn't it? Who doesn't enjoy the love of a spouse, the beauty of a sunset, the satisfaction of a well-running car or a fulfilling job? It's easy to thank God for those things.

But can we, do we, thank Him for the challenges in life? Do we thank Him for accidents, for disease, for job losses and death? If I could look into your head for a moment, I bet a few of you would say "Are you nuts, Pastor? Who would thank God for the bad stuff that happens to me?" You know who would? The apostle Paul, and so should every Christian.

A believer can praise God, can thank God in every happening of our lives. First, let's remember what a blessing is. I define a blessing as something from God that is good for us. All of God's blessings are good for our spiritual life, but not all of God's blessings are good for our physical life. When we lose our job, or contract a disease, or lose a loved one to death, we can thank God.

How? By remembering the reality of our lives with God. We know who is in charge of life. It's our Lord, and He is making sure that everything that happens to us is intended for our spiritual good. He uses His power to bend and shape the events of life - including the painful ones - to grow us in our faith. As Paul say in Romans 5:3-4 ***"... but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."*** God sometimes allows suffering into our lives so that we can be blessed, so that something good can come to us or through us. Sometimes God allows suffering so that we will learn to trust Him more. Sometimes He allows suffering so that someone else might be encouraged to lean on God. And sometimes He allows suffering so that His name might be honored in the world. In all the events of life, even the suffering ones, we can say that we are blessed by God. Sounds counter-intuitive, doesn't it? But if we remember that a blessing is anything that is good for our spiritual lives, we can thank God for everything, even the painful events of life that causes spiritual growth.

And where does that strength to endure come from? It comes from the Lord. Through our contact with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to endure and grow. Through the blessings of Communion, the Holy Spirit does the same. Oh, what a joy it is to know that our sins are covered by the blood of Christ and we have a renewed relationship with God!

It is that contact with the Word this morning that causes us to say thank you, Lord! Thank you for all the blessings You have poured into our lives, both good and bad. ***"THANK YOU, LORD!"*** from the bottom of our hearts. As we sang just a few minutes before,

Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, In whom his world rejoices,  
Who from our mother's arms Has blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love And still is ours today.

AMEN