



## WHY WE ARE THANKFUL

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When we had our own business, at least once a year we would take inventory. Handing clipboards to the employees, we would begin listing everything that we had at that time.

We were a mail-order store so we had to count the contents of packages in their bins. We also carried appliances, electronics and seasonal goods on the sales floor, wrapping paper, staples, string, shipping labels and so on. Everything was counted.

Why did we do this? So we would know exactly what we had and to find out what we had forgotten so we could better prepare for the coming year.

The end of the year is a good time to take inventory of our lives. We should make an effort to count the things that we do have in life instead of complaining about what we don't?

I'm not talking about a shallow 'count your blessings' platitude. But from time to time it would be good for us to sit down and take inventory about all the gifts, opportunities and challenges that God has given to each one of us.

We live in awesome times of technological advances. But many of us barely keep up with it. It is also a time of confusion and bewilderment.

Economically the nations of the world seem to be dissolving before our eyes with one monetary crisis after another. If they don't hurry up and solve their problems it will be too late.

Could it be that God has been left out? Have we forgotten the gracious hand of God? This Sunday following Thanksgiving, have we really, really thanked Him?

God often called His people to a time of thanksgiving. More than 130 times the Bible either calls people to thank God or tells how they should give thanks.

In Old Testament days God designated a special offering of thanksgiving for His people (Lev. 7:13). At every special occasion God called for His people to have a time of thanksgiving.

More than 30 times in the Psalms the texts speak of giving thanks. For instance, Psalms 100:4(NIV) Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Psalms 92:1(NIV) It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High,

Jesus gave thanks before feeding the 5000. He thanked God when He broke the bread of communion at the Last Supper in the upper room with the Apostles.

At the grave of Lazarus He thanked the Father for hearing Him.

The Apostle Paul emphasized thanksgiving in Philippians 4:6 when he said, "With thanksgiving present your requests to God."

Being thankful is a part of the most intimate relationship that exists between us and God. Yet there are thousands today who are not thankful—either as individuals, or as a nation.

Yes we are living in tough times. Some of you are experiencing severe difficulties right now. Maybe you've lost your job. Maybe a loved one is going through challenging health issues. Maybe you are going through a rough patch in your marriage.

Can we thank God even when times are tough? Yes we can. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

This verse does not say give thanks for everything. It says give thanks in all circumstances. We misinterpret it all the time.

Old Matthew Henry understood this spiritual principle. After he was mugged one day, he wrote in his diary, "Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed." (Billy Graham, In Everything Give Thanks)

You don't have to give thanks for the evil in the world. If my children were murdered I would not be thankful. If my wife was sick, I would not be thankful. The Bible does not say be thankful for evil.

But in every circumstance, no matter how bad it is, I can give thanks to God. Here are three “P’s” why:

- 1) His purpose is bigger than my problems;
- 2) His presence is with me in and through my problems;
- 3) He will give me the power to overcome my problems.

Here’s what will happen: through my problems I will grow if I allow God to help me grow. In other words, I am not thankful for evil, but I can be thankful despite evil. Even if you have lost your job, your health, or your spouse, you can be thankful.

So often we take so much for granted—our health, family, freedom, relationships—until something is taken away or endangered. Alice Johnson was a grandmother when she wrote about her life as a young mother.

“When I was a young mother with two preschoolers, I was often overwhelmed. One night I fell into bed exhausted. I poured out my frustrations to God. ‘The kids won’t mind, the house is a mess, my husband doesn’t seem to care...’ the list went on.

“Suddenly, a voice said to my heart, ‘Which one do you want me to take away?’ Everything I was complaining about was precious to me. Immediately, I began to thank God for everything on my list—something I continue to do as a grandmother.”

Remember the song, “Count Your Blessings, Name Them One by One, You Might be Surprised at What the Lord has Done.”

What would happen if we began to make lists of what we are thankful for—salvation, our families, friends, and our ministries— whatever we are thankful for?

I’m thankful for you and that men can wear colored shirts.

No matter what our circumstances, we have so much to be thankful for starting with our salvation, our families and friends. And with the presence of Christ in our lives to strengthen, guide and encourage us, as well as to go through the tough times with us.

Paul’s first wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17(NIV) 16Be joyful always; 17pray continually; then he said, 18give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Talking to Christians—be joyful always, pray continually, and be thankful in all circumstances--Paul is not giving us an order. Joy and happiness are not at our command—they cannot be turned on and off like a tap.

He is reminding us that in the Lord we always have a joy. Philippians 4:4(NIV) Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

This is the meanings of Psalms 95:1(NIV) Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. And Psalms 100:1(NIV) Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

And listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 5:19-20(NIV) 19Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sounds like he's talking about a church service. But he isn't. He's talking about a continual attitude for Christians—an attitude of the heart—how we are to be to each other.

Again, the question arises, “How can I be thankful and joyful in all circumstances?” It is a matter of perspective. A young college student wrote her mother:

Dear Mom,

Sorry I haven't written sooner. My arm really has been broken. I broke it and my left leg when I jumped from the second floor of my dormitory when we had the fire. We were lucky. A service attendant saw the blaze and called the Fire Department. They were there in minutes. I was in the hospital for a few days. Paul, the service station attendant came to see me every day. And because it was taking so long to get our dormitory livable again, I moved in with him. He has been so nice. I must admit that I am pregnant. Paul and I plan to get married just as soon as he can get a divorce. I hope things are fine at home. I'm doing fine, and will write more when I get the chance.

Love, Your Daughter Susie.

P.S. None of the above is true. But I did get a “C” in Sociology and flunked Chemistry. I just wanted you to receive this news in the ‘Proper Perspective.’

If we're going to experience this joy and happiness and be thankful in all circumstances, we need a proper perspective of our circumstances and of our God.

So, why are we thankful? We are thankful because one, it is good for us. We feel better physically, emotionally and spiritually when our attitude is right.

Wednesday's newspaper, the Journal, had an article entitled, Thanksgiving is Good For You. "While it seems pretty obvious that gratitude is a positive emotion, psychologists for decades rarely delved into the science of giving thanks. But in the last several years they have, learning in many experiments that it is one of humanity's most powerful emotions. It makes you happier and can change your attitude about life, like an emotional reset button. Especially in times like these.

"Psychologists used to underestimate the strength of simple gratitude: "It does make people happier ... It's that incredible feeling. One of the reasons why gratitude works so well is that it connects us with others.

"Grateful people 'feel more alert, alive, interested, enthusiastic. They also feel more connected to others. Gratitude also serves as a stress buffer. Grateful people are less likely to experience envy, anger, resentment, regret and other unpleasant states that produce stress." (ABQ Journal, 11/23/11).

We Christians have always known this—we didn't need scientists to show us. But it is nice to see science catching up.

Secondly, because it is God's will—"...for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." If you are not living a grateful life—despite your circumstances—you're out of God's will. It's that simple.

### Application:

Becoming a grateful person can be the healthiest—spiritually, physically, and emotionally—change you make in your life all year long—better than any diet or exercise plan you start on. Love is not the healthiest emotion out there—gratitude is. Develop an attitude of gratitude, not just one time a year, but throughout the year.