

# In Everything Give Thanks

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*The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth* by Jennie A. Brownscombe (1914)

On the fourth Thursday of November, the people of the United States celebrate Thanksgiving Day. Canadians observe a similar day on the second Monday of October. Several other places around the world also celebrate thanksgiving days, and many countries and regions hold harvest festivals, such as Germany's Oktoberfest.

All of these celebrations give thanks for the harvest, the abundance, the blessings, the good things we enjoy. Certainly, that's right and good. But the Bible tells us to give thanks for more: "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus towards you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

As Christians, we understand that we are to give thanks for the things we enjoy. Jesus and His followers gave thanks before eating (see, for example, Matthew 15:36 and Acts 27:35), and I hope that you do the same. We may also express our gratitude to God for other outstanding

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blessings, such as the birth of a child, a financial boon, a new house, getting a good report from the doctor when we feared otherwise, and narrowly escaping a bad accident. We probably don't give enough thanks for the everyday blessings we have—another day of life, our loved ones, the clothes on our backs. And, even more importantly, as Christians, we should remember the spiritual blessings God has graciously given us starting with Jesus Christ our Savior and the justification, sanctification, and glorification He has procured for us.

But, as we've seen, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us to give thanks *in everything*. The *Weymouth New Testament* makes Paul's intent clear: "In every circumstance of life be thankful; for this is God's will in Christ Jesus respecting you." "Every circumstance of life" means the good and the bad, the easy and the hard, the happy and the sad.

Will we *feel* like being thankful when our child is sick or we can't pay the bills or the car is broken down for the tenth time in six months? No, likely not. In fact, we might feel confused, angry, and bitter. But, as Job said to his wife in the midst of his troubles, "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). We are to accept what God has given us and, even though we don't feel like it, do what we are told—give thanks. But how can we do this?

Referring to himself, Paul writes in Philippians 4:

Not that I speak in respect to lack, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content in it. I know how to be humbled, and I know also how to abound. In everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in need.

Philippians 4:11-12

But, of course, this isn't natural. It is not something we feel like doing. To give thanks under trying circumstances requires supernatural power from Jesus Christ. As Paul says in the next verse, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Notice that "all things" again. It is from the same Greek word as the "all things" in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. We can be content, even thankful, in every circumstance of life because Jesus Christ will strengthen or empower (*endunamoō*) us to do so.

This power comes through faith. Ephesians 2:8 tells us that faith is a gift from God. Faith is simply another word for belief or trust (see

"What Is Faith?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/whatisfaith.htm>). Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen." The verses that follow tell us of the people of God who did things like build the ark or travel to another land or live through trying circumstances or even die as martyrs because they believed God, they trusted Him. They had faith in His promises.

In Romans 8:28, God's Word tells us, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." This is one of God's promises. If you are one of God's called elect, if you love Him, then you can trust that all things will work out for good. You can put your faith in this promise. Therein lies the foundation upon which to be thankful.

When we have a trying circumstance in our life, we are often so busy asking Him to quickly take it away that we never stop to think that God, who is in charge of the entire universe, has not allowed this thing to happen by accident. He has given it to us for a purpose. And it will work for good.

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul tells of the special revelations God had given him and then says,

By reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted excessively, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, that I should not be exalted excessively. Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me. He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Whatever Paul's thorn was, he wanted it gone as much as we want our infirmities and trials gone. But he was willing to accept it and even "take pleasure in" it, which is a response that is certainly directly related to being thankful for it. He understood that God had given his thorn to him for a good purpose.

Notice what Peter says:

Beloved, don't be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you, to test you, as though a strange thing happened to you. But because you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy.

1 Peter 4:12-13

I'm not saying that we shouldn't pray for God to heal us or to heal others or to remove trials. Unless or until God tells us not to pray, then we should pray. God may remove the trial or He may not. Either way, we should understand that, for as long as it lasts, God has a good purpose in it. And we should be thankful.

I am not claiming to be very good at being thankful for trying circumstances. Like most of us, my first reaction is fear, frustration, or anger followed by prayer asking God to take it away. None of us likes to have the applecart of our lives upset. But God knows that it is sometimes necessary.

This Thanksgiving Day, and always, I'm going to try to remember the command of 1 Thessalonians 5:18. And, whether or not you will be celebrating a Thanksgiving Day where you live, I hope you will always remember to give thanks to God, not just for the good physical things you enjoy, and not even for just the spiritual blessings God has graciously given you, but for all things, even those things you perceive as bad, a trial, an annoyance, a stress, a delay, and a grief.

*Therefore don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Don't be drunken with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing, and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always concerning all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father.*

Ephesians 5:17-20