

A Thanksgiving dinner spread featuring a turkey, carrots, and a pumpkin pie. The turkey is in the background, slightly out of focus. In the foreground, there are several carrots and green leafy vegetables. A pumpkin pie is in the bottom foreground, with a slice missing. The text "GIVING Thanks" is overlaid in the center.

GIVING

Thanks



GIVING *Thanks*

THE COMMAND TO GIVE THANKS

The beginning of this verse, “In everything give thanks,” is a decree from God, recorded by Paul. It is a divine expectation. The psalmist says: “It is good to give thanks to the LORD” (Psalm 92:1). Psalm 100:4 says: “Give thanks to Him, bless His name.” Psalm 103:1-5 says: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies your years with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.” We were dead in our sins, but God renewed us and gave us life. Isn’t that a wonderful reason to thank Him?

In fact, the Bible goes so far as to say that it is evil not to thank God. Paul says in Romans 1:21 that unrighteous men “did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” God is the entity that is the most taken for granted in the universe. There is absolutely nothing we can do that

is not dependent on God. Every breath we take depends on Him to provide the oxygen and to make our lungs work. Everything we have is supplied by a source beyond us. The money in our wallets was printed from the paper from a tree that God made in the ground that He owns. The cars we drive were fitted together from the metal that God placed in the earth. The gold jewelry we wear around our necks or wrists or fingers is from a deposit God provided. Scripture says over and over that God is the source of all good things, so we know He doesn't want us to forget the fact that He gave us everything we have. It is all His. Yet we are all ungrateful at times, unhappy with what we have and wanting more of what we don't have, and these attitudes prevent us from focusing on God's graciousness.



One example of this ingratitude is found in Luke 17, when 10 leprous men approached Jesus and asked: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (v. 13). Jesus replies: "Go and show yourselves to the priests" (v. 14). As they walked to the priest, all 10 were healed. Then, "one of them, when he saw that he had been



healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him” (vv. 15-16). Jesus asked him a very provocative question, saying: “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they?” Only one of the 10 men came back to thank the Savior who healed him. The others were off enjoying their blessing, and they had already forgotten about the Blessor.

This ingratitude also occurs in the Israelites while they wandered in the wilderness (Numbers 11). God sent down manna from heaven for them to eat every day, and on the weekend, He sent enough for two days so that they wouldn’t have to collect manna on the Sabbath. God took care of every detail. But can you guess what the Israelites did? They complained that they were tired of the manna; they wanted some meat. So God sent them quail to eat—and then they were greedy with it!

The best antidote for ingratitude is to recognize God’s blessings, large and small. When I was growing up in church, we sang a great hymn called “Count Your Blessings.” It said, “Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God has done.” This is such an important principle. When you count your many blessings, it will surprise you how much God has actually done for you. What good things do you enjoy in your life? You might be saying, “I have too many problems to try and focus on any blessings right now.” Well, life is always made of good and bad, so shouldn’t we try to focus on the



good? Sure, you may have one or two big, looming problems, but think about the many little everyday goodies that God sends your way.



THE CONTEXT OF GIVING THANKS

First Thessalonians 5:18 commands us to be thankful in everything. Let's focus on this part: "in everything." Notice that Paul does not say, "Be thankful for everything." There is a distinct difference. He says to give thanks in everything. When things go wrong, we are supposed to give thanks to God in the midst of the trouble.

One of the most poetic, glorious passages in Scripture is Habakkuk 3:17-19: "Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the



vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places." Even though all your worldly efforts and pursuits may fail, even though you may have nothing to your name, and even if you are in the worst season of life, you must still praise God for all He has done. Even though you can't praise God for your circumstances, you can praise God that He is with you in those circumstances.

Do you remember what Job says when he finds his whole life collapsing around him? His wife tells him to curse God. But Job says: "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Should we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10). Job is saying that we can't measure our relationship with God by the good things He gives us. Job says: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Job praises God even at the lowest point in his life. He has lost his children, job, workers, income, health—everything has gone haywire for him. So why does he thank God? Because Job knows that you can't lose what wasn't really yours to begin with. Job understands that all he had belonged to the Lord, and he recognizes that God is supreme over all of his life. God can give and take because He is in control, and Job trusts that fact.



Another example of praising God in everything is found in 2 Chronicles 20. Israel was invaded by the enemy, and King Jehoshaphat was terrified. He called all the people together, and “Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshiping the LORD” (v.18). The next day, the King told his army: “Give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting” (v. 21). And when the army began singing and praying, the Lord sent ambushes against the enemy, and the enemy was defeated. King Jehoshaphat knew that the most important thing he could do as he faced his enemies was to give God praise for His lovingkindness. Even though it looked like the Israelites were going to be defeated, Jehoshaphat wanted them to praise God. And God saw fit to save Israel and defeat their enemies! This is an awesome example of giving thanks to God no matter what your circumstances are.



A man named John Wesley was robbed at gunpoint. The gunman took everything John had and ran off into the night. But after he was robbed, the first thing John did was fall to the ground and thank God. Why would he do such a thing? What could he possibly be grateful about in this situation? John thanked God that he had never been robbed before. He thanked God that the man took his money and not his life. And he thanked God that he was the robbed and not the robber. He wasn't thankful for being robbed, but He found reasons to praise God in these circumstances. There is always reason to give thanks.

BE CONCERNED WITH GIVING THANKS

So what is the benefit of giving thanks? Why should we do this? First Thessalonians 5:18 says that giving thanks "is the will of God concerning you." When you give thanks, you are in the will of God. When you are grumbling, you are outside of God's will. To give thanks is to position yourself smack-dab in the middle of God's will. This is critical because "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). We know beyond doubt that God is working out His will in the lives of believers, and He is using the tough times for a purpose.

As finite creatures, we find it hard to see the big picture; we tend only to see a piece here and a piece there. But our Father sees the whole picture and



how everything interconnects. He is stitching all the pieces together so that all things work together in the process of accomplishing His bigger agenda.

Consider the story of Moses. His mother didn't know that when she placed Moses in a basket on the river, Pharaoh's daughter would be bathing in the river at the very same time, would rescue Moses from the water, and would ask Moses' mother to be his caretaker. God saved Moses' life and allowed him to grow up in the Egyptian royal home, learning the ways of Egypt. Then 80 years later, God used Moses to save the Israelites from the pharaoh and lead them out of Egypt. God had a big picture for Moses' life, and every circumstance worked together to accomplish God's ultimate purpose.

The same is true of Joseph. His brothers hated him and sold him as a slave. But God got him out of prison and made the pharaoh show Joseph favor. Joseph went on to become second in command in the land of Egypt, and he eventually provided food for those same brothers when they were starving. God was working it all for good.

This Thanksgiving, I'm assuming that I'm going to eat some good dessert. I'll probably eat at least one piece of a nice, rich cake. When I watch someone make a cake, I see all the ingredients they put in there—flour, sugar, butter, milk, eggs, vanilla extract—a variety of ingredients. I would never sit down and eat, say, a stick of butter, or a cup of flour. That just doesn't sound too appetizing. But if you



put all these ingredients in a bowl, mix them up, and bake them for an hour, they turn into this beautiful, delicious dessert that I will eat until I'm stuffed! Each individual ingredient plays a part in making a cake taste just right. If you forget to add the flour, that cake is not going to taste right. If you forget the sugar, that cake won't be sweet enough. Each ingredient is an important part of the whole.

It's the same way with the circumstances of our lives. Each is an important piece of the process. God puts everything together in His time and in His way, mixes it all together to meet His divine purpose, and all those things are stirred together to achieve something far greater. God is cooking up something with your life, and He is set on accomplishing His purposes in and through you. Let's give Him thanks on Thanksgiving and every day for the way He works in our lives.





THE URBAN *Alternative*

The Urban Alternative (TUA) is a Christian broadcast ministry founded over 30 years ago by Dr. Tony Evans. At TUA, we seek to promote a kingdom agenda philosophy designed to enable people to live all of life underneath the comprehensive rule of God. This is accomplished through a variety of means, including media, resources, clergy ministries and community impact training.

The Urban Alternative's daily radio broadcast airs on over 1,000 radio outlets in America and in over 100 countries worldwide. Find us online at TonyEvans.org.

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