

Being Thankful Goes Far Deeper than Saying Thank You

Ephesians 5:20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.

Job 1:21 And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

The words "thank you" exit our lips almost without thought, as automatic as sneezing when our nose tickles. Being thankful goes much deeper than such reflex responses.

Being thankful rests on the knowledge that God is thoroughly and consistently good. Job knew that. His ability to call God blessed rested on his deep awareness that each and every thing God brought into his life was part of God's goodness. Joys and sorrows. Gain and loss. Each page of Job's story. Each person in his story. (Even his wife.)

Paul knew this truth as well. That's why he could urge the Ephesians to give thanks always and for all things.

*Both delight and affliction are gifts.
Hidden behind both lays God's plan to bring us deep goodness.*

We tend to underestimate what being thankful implies. We look at surface behavior and neglect heart attitudes. Being thankful isn't something we *do* but a willingness to *receive* what God brings our way. It's not a polite, automatic "Thank you!" but the practice of accepting reality. It's not expressive but receptive. Not output, but input. Being thankful requires a heart that's developed the habit of opening wide – to each other, to God, and to each and every thing God brings into our lives.

Sometimes giving thanks is easy. Sometimes not. At times thankfulness seems most unnatural, impossible, inappropriate, even naïve and stupid, and must be learned.

This truth is very current for me. I'm giving thanks today, a Saturday, for news that – when it arrived a month ago – seemed empty, pointless, and useless. But not today. Today its place in God's plans has started to make sense. God's identifying for me shackles I didn't even know I wore. He's showing me lies I never knew I believed. My trust in Him grows. I'm learning that all His gifts are well worth accepting. All of them. Even gifts that look wrong and grate against my soul.

Three times this last month joy has interrupted the empty, pointless, and useless and pushed it to the background. Three times I've been stunned by a sudden awareness of God's presence. It fades, then it happens again - another unexpected surge of intimacy. Tears, good tears, roll down my cheeks as I'm overcome with gratitude at the privilege that the God of the universe would draw so near.

Frankly, I never knew such joy existed. It's been rather wild. I never expected God to interrupt my earthy life with "pre-tastes" of heaven.

I don't mean to be a Pollyanna and minimize this struggle with darkness (which continues). Nor am I suggesting that this new sense of joy continues uninterrupted (it doesn't). But empty, pointless, and useless have less power than they used to ... because, just this month, I've seen God's power to interrupt empty pointless, and useless with joy. And because, just this month, I've learned an important truth I'd not yet recognized: Pain we bring to God uncovers something far better than pain.

A ninety year old dear friend sent me a card at the beginning of this recent good-hard time. I had no idea what she was talking about when I first read her words. She wrote, "*Thank you for receiving from God's hand the many gifts [her emphasis] of [hard times].*" Many gifts? Of hard times? I was clueless. Then I began to understand. She's saying that hard times are as much of a gift as easy times. Perhaps more so. For when we stop resisting such times they move us beyond ourselves to a place where we encounter the presence of God. She's walked that road and knows what she's talking about. And now, just this month, so do I.

*Hard times are gifts that move us beyond ourselves
to a place where we encounter the presence of God.*

Our perfect God weaves a perfect story. Not just in my life but in yours as well. Each paragraph of that story, each phrase, is essential to the good ending He has planned. When we're being thankful we accept and yield to the truth that each part of our story - however it looks - is crucial to that good ending. And while we're waiting for the good ending? During our wait we can trust His heart - for God is good and we are deeply cherished.

A Prayer

Lord, open the eyes of each person reading this.

Show them (and continue to show me) the exquisite goodness of your heart.

Teach us to practice being thankful when laughter bubbles up *and* when tears flow.

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