

Adventuring with God

By Jeanne Hedrick

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Exceedingly Thankful?

This is the time of year when we turn our hearts towards giving thanks. The poor atheist has a hard time finding someone to thank for all of his blessings, so he makes due with thanking himself for all his hard work and accomplishments. For myself, I look to God first when I want to express thanks for the good things in my life. That's because I understand that everything good comes from His hand, and everything I have at the present moment is because He has been merciful to me.

Sometimes we think we should wait until our circumstances are favorable before we offer thanks. After all, we want to be sincere about it, don't we? But that misses the point of true praise. We can be thankful to God for who He is (kind, merciful, all powerful, compassionate, fair, just, true, and an "ever present help in time of need") and for what He has done for us in Christ. Our circumstances have nothing to do with either of these.

Whether we are currently enjoying life or struggling to keep our head above water, we have a Savior who paid for our sin by His precious blood, and we have the promise of spending eternity with Him and all those He has redeemed once this life is over! Death cannot change or destroy anything we have in Him, and nothing in all creation "**will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Romans 8:39). These are such profoundly amazing blessings that they eclipse the day-to-day blessings we generally occupy our minds with and pray to receive.

At any moment of time we can rejoice and be exceedingly thankful... if we turn our hearts towards these awesome truths that never change. If we are waiting until all our life circumstances line up with our goals and desires, we'll never get around to thanking Him. Heaven is where everything will be as it should be all the time. In our present life, we can expect tribulation, trials, and loads of disappointments. That's because this is a time and place where sin abounds, and we know what sin produces.

But Christians can always offer thanks, because Jesus promised to give us His peace in the midst of all our tribulation. "**I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world**" (John 16:33). The people of the world would love to be able to buy or otherwise obtain this peace, but in Him we have it freely given to us... isn't this wonderful blessing worth our most sincere praise?

We have another reason to give thanks, too—for the extraordinary people who have graced our lives, the people who have made a difference in our walk with God. Often we don't fully appreciate them until they pass from this life, but it's never too late to thank the Lord for what they brought to us, taught us, and modeled for us. One such person in my life was my grandmother. Married at 16, mother to five children, she lived on a subsistence farm in northern Arkansas. She and my grandfather bought the farm a year before the banks collapsed and the Great Depression lowered the interest rates. So the timing couldn't have been worse. It was a real scramble for

them to meet the mortgage every month and keep their family fed.

My grandmother never had running water in the house, and the outdoor toilet was several yards from the back porch. Besides her household chores, which included making 3 meals a day on a wood stove and sewing on a treadle sewing machine, she had a large garden to tend and livestock to look after. So her life was far from glamorous or fun. Yet, I remember her as a very joyful person, full of life and good humor. When we went to visit her, she always took time for my brother and me, no matter what. From her, I learned to love the Bible (especially the book of Revelation), and she made me want to know God in a more personal way.

In his reflection on Christian perfection (December 2nd) Oswald Chambers writes, “It is a snare to imagine that God wants to make us perfect specimens of what He can do; God’s purpose is to make us one with Himself. I am called to live in perfect relationship to God so that my life produces a longing after God in other lives, not admiration for myself.” How beautifully my grandmother lived this out.

She wasn’t a well-educated person like my grandfather was. She was simple and childlike in her approach to spiritual matters, and I’m sure seminary students could have thoroughly confused her about many things in the Bible. But she had what she needed: faith in Jesus that translated into simple obedience performed out of love and joyful expectancy. She shared her life of joy with me and made a lasting impression on my young soul.

Who and what are you thankful for? Do you find yourself breaking out into spontaneous praise as you consider the many and awesome blessings of God in your life? Or are you like me, more likely to complain about the miniscule problems that are always present in the midst of the manifold blessings?

Is your glass of life half full, or half empty? It’s a

choice we get to make, whether to focus on what we have or what we *don’t* have. Remembering to thank God for the gifts He has given, often through His people, serves as an antidote to the cynicism and despair that we see all around us.

I want to be a person who points others to the Lord, like my grandmother did. But in order to do that, I must focus on my relationship with Him, not the day-to-day struggles I face. I figure if Paul and Silas could sing in prison after being flogged, and Mary, the Lord’s mother, could rejoice in her Savior in the midst of an unplanned, inexplicable, and highly inconvenient pregnancy, I can certainly learn to **“be joyful always, pray continually, [and] give thanks in all circumstances”** (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

The act of praise actually makes our blessings sweeter and our burdens lighter. It buoys up our spirits in a way that’s hard to understand with our minds, but our hearts can sense the difference when we offer **“the sacrifice of praise”** mentioned in Hebrews 13:15. This is a sacrifice we are to “continually offer” through Jesus. Because of Him, we can be thankful in every circumstance, if not for the circumstance itself, then for the fact that He is in it with us. If our glasses of life are half full, we always have something we can be grateful for.

On the night Matthew Henry was robbed he prayed this prayer: “I thank Thee first because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse they did not take my life; third, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.” He found the bright spots in a tough situation and created a song of praise. In every circumstance we face, we can do the same!

It’s so much easier for me to find the dark spots and complain about them, but if I’m smart, I’ll train myself to turn my attention to God’s blessings instead, especially the ones that will last into eternity. If I can learn to live a life of thanksgiving and praise, I might—as my grandmother did—produce a longing after God in someone else’s heart.

SING PRAISE TO GOD

Sing praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation.
The God of pow'r, the God of love, the God of our salvation,
With healing balm my soul He fills and every faithless murmur stills:
To God all praise and glory!

What God's almighty pow'r hath made His gracious mercy keepeth,
By morning glow or evening shade His watchful eye ne'er sleepeth.
Within the kingdom of His might, Lo! All is just and all is right:
To God all praise and glory!

The Lord is never far away, but, through all grief distressing,
An ever-present help and stay, our peace and joy and blessing.
As with a mother's tender hand He leads His own, His chosen band:
To God all praise and glory!

*Thus all my toilsome way along I sing aloud His praises,
That men may hear the grateful song my voice unwearied raises.
Be joyful in the Lord, my heart! Both soul and body bear your part:
To God all praise and glory!*

Written by Johann Jakob Schutz (1640-1690)