

INTRODUCTION

The following article was written by Nancie J. Carmody in the *Family Circle Magazine*:

I am thankful for....

...the mess to clean after a party because it means I have been surrounded by friends.

...the taxes I pay because it means that I'm employed.

...the clothes that fit a little too snug because it means I have enough to eat.

...my shadow who watches me work because it means that I am out in the sunshine.

...a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning and gutters that need fixing because it means I have a home.

...the spot at the far end of the parking lot because it means I am capable of walking.

...all the complaining I hear about the government because it means we have freedom of speech.

...my huge heating bill because it means I am warm.

...the lady behind me in church who sings off key because it means that I can hear.

...the alarm that goes off in the early morning because it means I'm alive.

...the piles of laundry and ironing because it means my loved ones are nearby.

...weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day because it means I have been productive.

As Paul closes out his first letter to the Thessalonians he gives them several brief, but powerful commands and priorities for successful Christian living.

Rejoice always. ("Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!" Phil. 4:4; NKJV)

Pray without ceasing. (Be in a continual attitude of prayer).

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

(No matter what might happen in life, the believer is to give God thanks).

Do not quench the Spirit.

(Don't do anything that would extinguish or stifle His sanctifying work in our lives).

Do not despise prophecies.

(Today we would say, "Do not despise the proclamation of God's Word").

Test all things; hold fast what is good.

Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thess. 5:16-22)

So how does such thanksgiving which Paul describes, come about? What is its source? Is it possible to develop such an attitude within ourselves? Do we need to take the Norman Vincent Peale approach through “The Power of Positive Thinking”?

As always, the best and only place to go for the right answer is the Word of God. So let’s see what God’s Word has to say.

THANKSGIVING IS AN EXPRESSION OF A CLEAN HEART

In Ephesians 5 Paul begins the chapter by instructing us to “be imitators of God as dear children” (v. 1). He also instructs us to “walk in love, as Christ also loved us” (v. 2). He then mentions several things such as fornication and covetousness that should “not even be named among believers.” Such things, he says, are not fitting for saints. He then says, “But rather giving of thanks” (v. 4b). Thanksgiving is an expression of a clean heart.

After all that God has provided for us through His Son, the natural response should be thanksgiving. Although once dead in trespasses and sins, the believer is now made spiritually alive through Jesus Christ. Although once under divine judgment and condemnation, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1a). We once were blind, but now we see. Although once under Satan’s dominion and the power of darkness, we now have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God (Col. 1:13). Although once separated, we now have been reconciled through the death of God’s Son. Although once strangers and enemies of God, we now are the sons of God. Although headed for an eternal hell, we now are citizens of heaven! Praise the Lord! Our hearts should be filled and overflowing with thanksgiving. We have every reason to rejoice with “Joy unspeakable [inexpressible] and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8b).

On the other hand, *ingratitude is a sign of an unregenerate heart or sin in the heart.* In Romans 1 Paul gives a very vivid description of man’s sinful depravity. He makes it clear that man is actually devolving not evolving. When man rejects God and rejects the truth of God Word, there’s only one direction left to go: DOWN. Paul writes:

Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, *nor were thankful*, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom. 1:21; italics added).

Not only is ingratitude sin; sin is the cause of ingratitude.

THANKSGIVING IS AN EXPRESSION OF GENUINE WORSHIP

As we approach the Lord, we should always do so with thanksgiving.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. (Ps. 100:4)

THANKSGIVING IS THE RESULT OF A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, *giving thanks always for all things* to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Eph. 5:18-21)

The Psalmist wrote, “It is good to give thanks to the LORD” (Ps. 92:1).

A clean heart, a proper focus in worshiping God, combined with thanksgiving is:

- The remedy for worry and anxiety.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6, 7; italics added)

1. When praying, as a child of God I can be thankful that I know the God of this universe as my heavenly Father.
2. I have the right to enter into His presence anytime, anywhere, no matter the need.
3. I have His full and undivided attention.
4. He actually knows what I need even before I ask.
5. He knows what I need better than I do.
6. The Holy Spirit searches and knows my heart better than I can, and even sorts out my prayers and brings them to the Lord in an orderly fashion “according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26, 27).
7. Because He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin, Jesus, our High Priest sympathizes with our weaknesses. Therefore we can “Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15, 16).
8. He ultimately works all things for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28).

THANKSGIVING IS A SACRIFICE UNTO GOD AND IS ACCEPTABLE UNTO HIM

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, *giving thanks to His name*. (Heb. 13:15; italics added)

THANKSGIVING BRINGS GLORY TO GOD

For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound for the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:15)

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:17)

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ. (2 Cor. 2:14)

Thanks to God that we are freed from sin and its dominion (Rom. 6:17; paraphrase)

CONCLUSION

Let's close by looking at Psalm 100: A Psalm of Thanksgiving.

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the LORD, He *is* God;
It is He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name.
For the LORD *is* good;
His mercy *is* everlasting,
And His truth *endures* to all generations.

Based on this Psalm, because He is God...

...He is Creator
...He is rightful Owner
...He is Sovereign Ruler
...He is Bountiful Benefactor
...He is the God of infinite mercy and goodness.
...And He is worthy of our thanksgiving and praise.

Every believer is to be characterized by a life of genuine, biblical, Christ-honoring thanksgiving. This is not some sort of false Pollyanna-type of optimism, but a heart filled and overflowing with thanksgiving from sins forgiven and a new life in Christ. Even in the midst of the most difficult trial, we have the assurance that He is in control. He's never caught by surprise. He knows what He is doing. He never makes a mistake. He never has to click the "un-do" or "re-do" buttons. What a joy to know we are in his hands.

What a tragedy, however, when some professed Christians always seem to be in the "dumps." They always seem to have this black cloud hanging over their heads. Instead of the life of the party, they are the death of the party. Now I'm not being unsympathetic here. You know what I mean. They're always critical and complaining. They always seem to be grumpy and grumbling. Now how can that be as a child of God? How can that be as a Spirit-filled life? We all have our setbacks. I understand that. I'm not exempt. But there should be some degree of joy in our hearts. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!"

Tim La Haye writes:

This fruit of the Spirit [joy] is woefully lacking in many Christians today, which keeps them from being fruitful in the matter of winning people to Christ, because the world must see some evidence of what Jesus Christ can do in the life of the believer today in order to be attracted to Him.

If genuine thanksgiving is a missing element in your life, just remember, thanksgiving is the result of a clean heart, a contented heart, and a Spirit-filled life.