



Turning Thanksgiving into Thanks-living

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

—1 Thessalonians 5:18

During this hectic time of year are you getting all caught up in the materialism and draining busyness that often robs Christians of joy? Are you pushing, blowing-up at strangers, or striving in the flesh to claim that coveted place in line just for that sweet deal? Have you taken the time to stop and be with the Lord alone to thank Him for His many blessing that keep coming your way? Back Friday doesn't have to be so black—it can be filled with light and love!

You know how this weekend is typically a very busy one! There's lots of drinking and fights that break out (watch out on the road). It's really "the kickoff of the Christmas shopping season." An estimated 130 million shoppers will crowd into Malls and strip-center stores clumped together tight with each other this weekend.

Besides that.. there are other fun things to take up our time. We've had at least seven football games on TV through this extended weekend ..and more than that with all the college games and the NFL on cable. There are houses, fireplaces and lawns to decorate. I just love all the lights don't you? There are cookies, hams, pies and cakes to prepare, etc. My wife is the best at making pies.

With all of this going on, our real priorities can manifest to others. They can become more than evident to all those around us. So what will you focus on more.. yelling at your flat-screen or jostling for first position in long loud store lines just to gain that excellent bargain widget. Some people feel called to be the line-police in Best Buy ..to keep other people from cutting in front and others feel that they are there to show them they have no real authority. You know how ugly it can all get.

Or will you concentrate on the One who has a birthday soon approaching—the One who died to give you life and popped out of that dark black hole.. to give us all the blessings that we often take for granted? Will we live full-on for Jesus turning Thanksgiving into thanks-living ..all year long or will we simple forget Christ altogether and go our own way? Let's keep Him in the Holidays (especially on the throne of our hearts) even if others work overtime to remove Him.

Did you eats gobs of white meat or dark turkey meat with gravy this weekend or were you suffering lack home all alone? Hey God is there for you and understands how you

feel. Erma Bombeck wrote, *"Thanksgiving dinners take eighteen hours to prepare. They are consumed in twelve minutes. Half-times take twelve minutes. This is not coincidence."* Sometimes we crave a TV marathon and are consumed with our activities while we overlook what's more important—prayer, vertical gratitude and our families.

Psalms 127 talks about the blessings of having a family. ***"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them"*** (v. 3-5). Your spouse is also a blessing from God. ***"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord"*** (Proverbs 18:22). Of course, this applies to husbands, too.

We don't want to put our families first—that's just wrong—but they indeed are a gift from God to you and me. Do you take them for granted because they're around all the time? Are the challenges of dealing with certain relatives—worldly parents, cousins, grandparents, children, siblings—really hard for you to take? Sometimes these people seem so far from being a blessing (especially if they are using this time of year as another excuse to get drunk again).

Perhaps those in your family really do act great for the most part. Enjoy your time with them. I like what John said about his spiritual children in Third John 4. And this should be our hope for our own children as well: ***"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth."***

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not criticizing all the activity—most of it ain't bad in and of itself. It's a part of our Western lives now, but taking time out to turn off the TV to simply be with the Lord ...to discuss what's weighing your heart down is most important! Expressing thanks to Him.. getting brutally honest in prayer and then listening to God's Word keeps Christians healthy. Let's choose to be healthy spiritually this season. Look at these four basic levels with me ..of gratefulness in life.

- **Level One:** *This level is represented by folk who are constantly complaining and grumbling about stuff. Maybe they don't realize how this will affect their lives. But they brighten up a room just by leaving it.*
- **Level Two:** *There are unfortunately individuals who merely exist living lives marked by ingratitude. They don't complain much, but they never overtly thank God for His obvious generosity or blessings. That's a step up—a little better way to live than the former option.*
- **Level Three:** *Then, there are people who thank God for obvious blessings. When something good happens, they're grateful. That's even better.*
- **Level Four:** *This is the higher level... It is to be grateful in Jesus and express it in all things at all times. Now folks when you choose that option, then you'll live a life of joy pleasing to the Lord ..and people will wonder why they like to hang around you.*

Thanking God in all things is perhaps is one of the hardest things that we Christians are called upon to do when the circumstance are very difficult. You know that the Holy Spirit inside of us can help us, because that's His nature. Expressing gratitude to the Lord is basically an important secret for being well-adjusted person, a joyous person and a

productive person in this life. You were created to praise that bless His Name. Besides, what good thing do we really deserve from Him and yet He has given us so much!

We Westerners often fail to realize how blessed we really are in comparison with the majority of people who live on this planet.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. Yes, you are wealthier than 92% of the people in the world.

If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If your parents are still alive and still married, you are very rare indeed, even in the United States.

If you, Christian, can hold someone's hand, hug them, or even touch them on the shoulder, you are blessed because you can offer a healing touch.

If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

If you can read anything today, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.

When I think about all of that I do feel grateful inside. But sometimes isn't hard to identify a real blessing?

A man named Jim was visiting with his neighbor Kevin at the fence. Jim said, *"My son Bob was recently riding horseback in a gallop on the track on the back forty at our ranch the other day and then our horse got spooked by a snake and Bob fell off the bucking horse and he hurt his leg pretty bad. Now he wears a leg cast."*

Kevin, the neighbor said, *"Oh no Jim, that's bad."*

And Jim replied, *"How do you know?"*

But then an Army recruiting officer came to town, said Jim, to take my son as well as the other young boys of our town off to war, but because Bob had a broken leg at the time, the man didn't take my son away with them.

Kevin, the neighbor said, *"Oh man Jim, that's good."*

And Jim asked, *"How do you know Kevin?"*

Then we heard that the army platoon that Bob would have been in marched up to take the enemy's city and easily conquered it and each soldier in the platoon was given a large piece of land in that city as their booty, but my son wasn't among them.

Kevin, the neighbor said, *"Oh no, that's bad."*

And Jim asked, *"How do you know?"*

Then upon their return, the Tax-man came on the scene to tax all of the soldiers for their newly acquired land and after each soldier paid him there wasn't anything left. They all became broke, but my son got a tax break for lost work.

The neighbor said, *"Oh man, that's good."* said Jim.

"How do you know?"

Another thing about it was that a wealthy philanthropist veteran from New York heard about the soldier's plight and gave billions to reimburse them for the taxes they each paid. But Bob missed so much work that he couldn't even pay his lower taxes.

Kevin, the neighbor said, *"Oh no, that's bad."*

And Jim asked, *"How do you know?"*

But this year Bob has started a new company with a man he met at the doctors office that produces a strong light weight, new kind of cast that Doctors love and Bob is quickly growing rich (..I could go on and on like this, but I think you get my point).

What we often think will be problematic.. a bummer.. something that should only happen to others, could bring us joy and peace instead—it might and even deliver a blessing in surprise. Yes, God sometimes surprises us. What we often think is really bad, sometimes turns out to be good, and visa versa. God is so good, He loves you and me and He has our best interests in mind and Rom 8:28 is still in effect.

Do you know where you will sleep tonight? Do you know where you will eat today? Do you have shoes on your feet? You are blessed!

Is your treasure laid up here on this earth or is it laid up for you in heaven? I say lay it up where politicians in Washington (on in any other country along with thieves) can't mess with it. Christian, you are wealthy in ways that earthly economists can't measure so bless the Lord! You have grounds to express such heartfelt gratitude to God!

Adults often have a hard time clinging to things, to people, to a dead dream, to the past, instead of living in the present with hope for a bright future. They often become inflexible or live for things other than for the Lord. How sad!

When it comes to dealing with some of life's reversals in light of the will of God, we believers really ought to keep a loose grip of perishable items and be grateful. It's like that little enthusiastic cheerful boy who was out sailing his toy boat at the park on the blue lake ...just enjoying every moment of it, even trying to improve his sailing skills.

Then if that super strong gust of wind suddenly comes up; tosses the boat over, and unfortunately sinks the boat right there in front of the little boy's face, we should then take a moment to notice how he will respond. Of course he might feel bad for few moments or shed a few tears, but then he will quickly recover, forgets the negative and the past and with a loud squeal he is up and off again ..over the grassy hill to go fetch his big red kite "Thank God for the wind, mom, what a great day for flying a kite!"

Normal children don't dwell on the negatives or on the past. They don't allow the slip-ups or blunders of others to hinder them. What *"should have been, could have been, might have been"* doesn't get in the way or slow them down a bit. And Jesus said, ***"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of heaven"*** (Matt. 18:3, nkjv). Please rejoice always and be optimistic like a child!

"...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." —Ephesians 5:18-20

God is never less than generous, even when we are less than grateful.

—John Blanchard

"Now it happened as He [Jesus] went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' So when He saw them, He said to them, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well'" (Lk. 17:11-19, nkjv).

Worship and worry cannot live in the same heart. They are mutually exclusive. —Ruth Graham.

Notice the time when we should be thankful. You and I are to give thanks always.. even when we don't feel like doing so. If the apostle Paul had said that we do this *sometimes*, wouldn't that be hard enough? But no, he says we are to be giving thanks always.

Everyday ought to be Thanksgiving Day for Christians! Let's turn Thanksgiving into thanks-living! The Psalmist wrote, "***Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits...***" (Ps. 68:19). He loadeth me up big-time every single day! Wow, how can I ever pray to Him without giving him heartfelt thanks?

God doesn't owe us anything good, but so many people around us feel that he indeed does. It's time to extract complaining and self-pitty and insert some praise the Lord comments to Him. Remember all that he has done for you. Hallelujah, that He hears and answers the Christian's prayer!

If our loving heavenly Father is sovereign and allows both blessings and trials into our lives, it must all be for a reason. That's why we can express thanks in all things! When God allows something really hard into our lives—OUCH!—even though He does feel for us and He weeps with us, there is potentially great good that can come out of it. Is God selfishly looking for personal gain then? A thousand times "No!" but He is looking to bless and help a whole lot of people—yes, whoever will allow Jesus entrance and control! It was beyond hard to thank God when my sister died young. It wasn't God's will how it happened. I still don't understand everything about it, but some people repented and made firm commitments to Jesus because of that tragedy. That's why I could thank God in and during that whole uber-painful ordeal.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! —Psalm 118:29

He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me. —Luke 22:19

*My life, my love I give to Thee, thou Lamb of God who died for me;
O may I ever faithful be, my Savior and my God!* —Hudson

I thank God for simple relationship with Him, for faith and family, for dear friends and fellowship, for your good food, water and freedom! I thank God that you are reading this. There's no time to pick weeds when you are busy picking flowers. But you might ask, "Do I really have to thank the Lord for that all the dirty clothes or that lawn that needs to be mowed?" No, you get to. Many people are cold and cramped—they don't have clothes or a yard to tend to and they would love to have those things. But maybe you say, Kurt, I don't even have enough to pay all my bills. Well then, thank God that you are not your creditors then (come on, lighten up and praise your Maker. Just do the best you can to pay what you owe people as soon as you can).

Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. —1 Timothy 6:8

They did not believe His word, but complained in their tents. —Psalm 106:24-25

Philippians 4:6 says: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." We are to give thanks in the Spirit. He says, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." You see, to be Spirit filled is to be thankful. If you're not thankful, you're not Spirit filled. In contrast, there is no way you can be Spirit filled and be unthankful. The mark of a Spirit filled life is gratefulness.

So give thanks in the Spirit, and verse twenty says to give thanks "unto God and the Father." James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Don't think negatively about God. God is good. He is your Father.

So, in the Spirit ... unto the Father ... and through the Son. Verse twenty also says to give thanks "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." You thank God in the name or with the authority of Christ. You don't have to understand all that God is doing. Even if you don't understand it, you can just say, "In the name of Jesus, I thank You."

Make it your daily habit, as I do, to lift your heart to God in praise as you get out of bed each morning. Just say, "Lord God, I love You, and I praise You." What a great way to start your day and to live your life!

I'm thankful for Jesus today—what a real Friend! Do you have a prayer request? Would you like to share with us what God is doing in your life? [Contact](#) us today!

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