

Taken for Granted!

Deuteronomy 8:1–10; Luke 17:11–19



Dear Friends in Christ,

Has it happened to you that you give, and give and then you grow weary because you don't hear even a word of thanks, back. When people take things for granted you are affected aren't you, and at some point you reconsider continuing doing what you were doing before, for that somebody. Therefore those who are receiving and receiving ought to stop for moment and think, and consider all that they have received from the donor or giver and say

thank you, at least acknowledge what they have received.

Thanksgiving Day is one of those days in which we stop to count our blessings. Blessings received from God who has given us so much. We have received so much, haven't we for which we need to be grateful. As Erma Bombeck reminds us with this thought: "An estimated 1.5 million people are living today after bouts with breast cancer. Every time I forget to feel grateful to be among them, I hear the voice of an eight-year-old named Christina, who had cancer of the nervous system. When asked what she wanted for her birthday, she thought long and hard and finally said, "I don't know. I have two sticker books and a Cabbage Patch doll. I have everything!" The kid is right." (Erma Bombeck, Redbook, October, 1992.)

Yes we have received so much from the provider and it is good that we would stop and give thanks. It's good that people acknowledge good gifts. So much that God has given. And so much He continues to give.

As Christians, we are taught that all good gifts come from God. We realize that all good things that happen to us are a direct result of God's compassion and mercy. Luther's Small Catechism says it well in it's section on the Lord's Prayer: "We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them" (Fifth Petition). What you are thankful for today is all gifts, all given, many times even without your asking specifically for it. God is simply a good giver.

I. It's easy to take God's blessings for granted.

The problem is that it's easy to take God's mercy and temporal blessings for granted. So often, we get the mind-set to expect the good things God's given. And if He takes something away for some reason, how quickly we can grumble and get jealous of others who aren't in our situation. It's not that you and I don't appreciate the good things God gives. It's just that God's gifts can become common in our minds. We regard things such as shoes, dishes, electric lights as normal things, not gifts. They're certainly not treated as undeserved gifts. At best, they're taken for granted. At worst, we think we deserve them.

The Israelites were like this too. They had much for which to thank God. He had led them out of slavery in Egypt, a vicious land where their babies were murdered and they were forced to work long, tiring hours with little pay and no benefits. And God redeemed them. God rescued these people only because of His great love. His power

alone brought them from the control of Pharaoh and through the Red Sea. In the wilderness, God miraculously gave food—manna and quail—and even made rocks pour out water when His people were thirsty.

Nevertheless, the Israelites quickly forgot God's mercy. When their stomachs grumbled, the Israelites complained against God as if He really wanted them dead. Their garments did not wear out for forty years, nor did their feet swell in the wilderness, but still the Israelites did not count that as a blessing. They took it for granted. Even though God had promised that He was leading them to "a good land . . . in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing" (Deut 8:7, 9), still the Israelites expected that God should have already been giving them these things. How quickly they forgot God's mercy! God and His provisions were taken for granted.

Or take the nine lepers whom Jesus healed. No longer were these men leprosy and sick. No longer did they have to stay away from everyone else. For the first time maybe in a long time, the healed lepers could interact with society, they could live in town, they could do normal things. You'd think all these men should gladly return like the one Samaritan leper and give thanks and praise to Jesus. But they don't, but why?

Somebody ponders humorously on some possible answers: "Why did only one cleansed leper return to thank Jesus? The following are nine suggested reasons why the nine did not return:

- One waited to see if the cure was real.
- One waited to see if it would last.
- One said he would see Jesus later.
- One decided that he had never had leprosy.
- One said he would have gotten well anyway.
- One gave the glory to the priests.
- One said, "O, well, Jesus didn't really do anything."
- One said, "Any rabbi could have done it."
- One said, "I was already much improved."

(Charles L. Brown, Content The Newsletter, June, 1990, p. 3.)

Whatever was the reason, it is as if the nine were so preoccupied with what they could now do with their lives, that that's all that mattered. It's not like they didn't appreciate what Jesus had done for them. I'm sure these nine lepers greatly appreciated not having leprosy. But with each step they took away from Jesus, His miraculous healing became more and more common to them. With each step, the nine lepers became more callous to this great and merciful Savior. One might say they took Christ's healing for granted. Now, if when what you did for others went unnoticed or you were taken for granted, imagine God who not only is your Creator but also provider?

"In his book FOLK PSALMS OF FAITH, Ray Stedman tells of an experience Harry A. Ironside had in a crowded restaurant. Just as Ironside was about to begin his meal, a man approached and asked if he could join him. Ironside invited him to have a seat. Then, as was his custom, Ironside bowed his head in prayer. When he opened his eyes, the other man asked, "Do you have a headache?" Ironside replied, "No, I don't." The other man asked, "Well, is there something wrong with your food?" Ironside replied, "No, I was simply thanking God as I always do before I eat." The man said, "Oh, you're one of those, are you? Well, I want you to know I never give thanks. I earn my money by the sweat of my brow and I don't have to give thanks to anybody when I eat. I just

start right in!" Ironside said, "Yes, you're just like my dog. That's what he does too!" (Ray Stedman, Folk Psalms of Faith.)

II. Repent that you are not always a thankful receiver.

God is a great giver, dear friends. Are you a thankful receiver? Are you mindful of how you do not deserve any of the blessings of God, but He gives them all by grace? Do you remember to return to God and acknowledge Him with your lips as well as your heart for His mercy to you? Is your life characterized by giving of thanks on more than just one day, before one meal?

Dear people of God: Repent and return to the Lord your God. Acknowledge that everything you're given is out of God's great mercy and love. You have not merited or deserved anything you have or any meal you've eaten.

III. But God is still the great giver on account of Christ.

But God, who is the great giver, gives on account of Christ Jesus. Jesus is your mediator, the one who stands between you and God the Father, the one who has turned God's heart toward you. On account of what Jesus has done, meriting eternal salvation by His innocent suffering and death, God the Father is well pleased. God is well pleased with the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross. God was pleased enough with Jesus' sacrifice to raise Him from the dead at Easter. And because God is well pleased with Christ, who lives and reigns forever, God is also well pleased with all who trust in Jesus. God's heart is moved by our prayers so that He pities us and helps us.

God also feeds and cares for us. Certainly, God gives daily bread, indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked. That means people can have good meals, a nice turkey and delicious pumpkin pie, but still be without the salvation of God through faith in Christ. How much different is God's mercy to those who fear Him! To those whom He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies, God is well pleased to give eternal salvation. He gives a cleansing forgiveness that removes the impurity of sin, which is far worse than leprosy. On account of Christ, God leads us by His Word and Sacraments to a better place than the Promised Land of Canaan. For Christ has secured a place for us in heaven—and that alone is something for which you should thank Him.

IV. If you could be aware of this, you would be moved to give thanks.

If you could be aware of how much God gives to you that you do not deserve, you would be moved to give thanks to Him. If you were aware of how much God withholds from you because He knows it will be bad for you, you would be moved to give thanks to Him. If you were aware of how God intends to use all things for the good of those who love Him, even those things that drive you to your knees and make you afraid, you would be moved to give thanks to Him. There is so much to be grateful to God for that no one could sufficiently thank Him enough.

As it is, giving of thanks is due God for all things, and not just on this day but every day! How greatly you're pleased when someone shows appreciation for what you've done for them. How glad it makes you, and how willing you are to do more for them and perhaps do more for others too. All that happens when someone shows thanks and appreciation to you. Now consider how much God is moved by our thanks and appreciation for what He does for us.

Consider how God must be pleased when His children acknowledge Him.

Consider then how eager God is to keep giving what is good to those who thank Him.

So it is, dear people of God. With our hearts as well as our lips, let us give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever. Amen.