



Giving Thanks in All Circumstances

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Introduction:

If you want to do God's will, learn to give thanks in all circumstances - not for all things but in all circumstances. We choose our attitude and how we respond to circumstances. When it comes to giving thanks, we determine whether we will do God's will in the good and bad times or not.

I want to relate to what happened to me one day. Julie and I and Brian had been on vacation and had come home. We were living in Wisconsin and it was winter. The gas in our car was just about gone, but we made it home. I determined that I would get gas the next day. The next morning I got up and got dressed and bundled up with Brian and we started out to the gas station. We did not get even one block away and we ran out of gas. So I thought, "No problem. He and I will walk home and get some gas from the gas tank for the mower." We trudged home in the snow, I had to carry Brian part of the way, and we made it all out of breath. I looked for the gas can, found it but it didn't have any gas in it. The nearest gas station was about 2 miles away. So I thought "OK - I'll get on my bike and ride it to the gas station." When I started to get on my bike, I saw that one of the tires was flat. So I got out the tire pump and filled the tire with air. I put on my gloves, skull cap, sun glasses and boots and jumped on my bike with the gas can on the handle bar. I was quite a sight going down the road to the gas station. I rode carefully because there was snow and ice on the road and I didn't want to fall off my bike. I got to the gas station and there was only one pump operating. I got my gas, went in to pay for it, and came out to start home. I had on sun glasses to keep the glare from the snow blinding my eyes. I happened to look down at the ground as I started my trip home, and just at that moment one of the lenses from my sun glasses fell out onto the ground. I picked up the lens put it in my pocket and biked to the car. I put the gas in the car, the bike in the trunk and started the car. During this saga, I could have gotten upset. Things definitely were not going my way. It wasn't the happiest day of my life, but I did my best to give thanks through it. I was thankful I had warm clothes so I could be outside. I was thankful I had a gas can to put gas into. I was thankful that I didn't run out of gas the night before. I was thankful I had a bike and a tire pump. I was thankful I had money to buy gas. I was thankful I could walk home when the car died. I was thankful for a home to go to and be warm in when it was all over. At any moment during that series of events, my attitude could have changed to anger and ungratefulness, but I determined that those events were not going to dictate my attitude, and they didn't.

I Thess 5:18 - Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God

I want to share with you three different scenarios from the Bible this morning that will help us, when we encounter difficult situations, to remember and give thanks at those hard times.

I. When you are in danger and things are not safe (Daniel 6:10)

The story of Daniel is an interesting one. The king was looking for someone to promote and put in charge of the entire kingdom. Daniel was the only one of all the leaders he felt would do the job. (Daniel 6:3)

Daniel was trustworthy, not corrupt, and not negligent (6:4). The others, who were jealous of Daniel, could not find anything wrong with him either.

Daniel was a man of integrity. He was honest, truthful, conscientious, and could be trusted with responsibility. As followers of Christ, our integrity speaks out loudly as people watch our lives and listen to our words.

The only way these individuals would be able to smear Daniel was to do so on the basis of the law of God versus the law of the king.

They set a trap for Daniel and the king fell right into it. After the king had signed the decree which would land Daniel in the den of lions, he became very disturbed. He had seen in Daniel's life the consistency of character and faithfulness to God.

Daniel, on the other hand, was not disturbed. His life was in God's hands. His future was in God's hands. The decree did not change his lifestyle, his relationship, or his consistency. He continued three times a day to pray and give thanks to God.

If we are going to be devoted followers of Jesus Christ, it takes a consistency. We dare not try to serve God in an "on again off again" casual relationship. Be consistent. People will see and take notice. Even when things look like they are going the wrong way. Even when you face unpleasant odds or when it looks like you are not safe, *give thanks*.

Daniel gave thanks when it looked like there was no protection. He was no longer protected because he was breaking the law of the land. He was no longer safe because of the lions – naturally they were hungry and should have eaten him. There was no escaping the lions and their den, but God was there, and Daniel continued to offer thanksgiving in the face of danger. God rescued him.

The king saw such consistency in Daniel. The law had been signed and the decree had gone out. Daniel was doomed to a night with ferocious lions.

The king did not sleep all night, but early the next morning he went to the den and called out to Daniel. As a result a new edict was issued that the God Daniel served was the true God and could do anything. Everyone should serve Daniel's God.

II. When you don't have enough and things are limited (Mark 8:6)

In the following story, we see that even though things were limited, thanks were offered.

The crowd had been with Jesus for 3 days. They had nothing to eat. Four thousand people were present. Jesus did not want to send them away hungry. Since some of them lived so far from where he was ministering, He thought that they might pass out on their way home. Jesus asked the disciples, "How many loaves do you have?"

At times we forget to be thankful for what we have even if it is limited in relation to what the need is. We all have the tendency to look at the need rather than the resources and trust the supplier.

The disciples responded, "We have 7 loaves and a few fish." "Have the crowd sit down" was the instruction. As Jesus is about to distribute what was there, he gave thanks. This is *an important lesson!*

Being thankful for what we have is the proper attitude to have. Having a thankful attitude helps us approach things with faith, confidence and obedience.

Little is much when God is in it. Think of David and his stones and sling shot when he went to meet the giant. Think of Gideon and his band of 300 men who came against the armies of Mideon and defeated them.

These were incredible odds and overwhelming challenges, but God made the difference and these were people of faith who gave thanks.

III. When you face your greatest challenge and you must sacrifice (Luke 22:17-19)

Jesus was facing the greatest challenge of His life. He is about to be rejected, humiliated, beaten, tried and falsely accused. He was about to bear the sin of the world, endure the ridicule of those who mocked him, and be crucified.

He comes to the last supper knowing who would betray him, knowing the closest to him would deny him and forsake him, and yet He had been eager to sit down with them for this Passover meal.

He would be called to make the sacrifice of his righteousness for our sinfulness, of his wholeness for our sickness, of his purity for our filthiness, of his divin-

ity for our humanity, and he faced it with thanksgiving.

He took the cup which represented the pure blood and his life and gave thanks that he would pour out his blood and face the darkness of Calvary. He took the bread which would speak of his broken body and gave thanks for it also, that He would be able to offer Himself as the lamb of glory who would take away the sin of the world.

So often when we face a sacrifice, when something is really going to cost us big time, we are unable to be thankful in light of what sacrifice we will make. Sacrifice is not something that is fun. It is not something we do lightly. It is something that costs and hurts, but if we can be thankful as we make that sacrifice, the credit for it will go to God.

IV. When you feel trapped (Acts 16:25)

There are times when we are doing the work of God and ministering and serving, and we get into a place of bondage. We are not there by our own choice but we end up there.

Paul and Silas were doing God's work. They were ministering, serving, and being used by God. In fact, a girl who had told fortunes by evil spirits found deliverance because of the Holy Spirit that worked through Paul and Silas. As a result, her owners saw their income was going to be diminished and they stirred up the crowd in the marketplace and through the uprising, they had Paul and Silas arrested.

Paul and Silas were beaten and put into the inner prison, and at midnight, they gave thanks and sang praises. As a result, the foundations of the prison were shaken and all the prisoners were loosed from their chains, and the jailor eventually came to accept Jesus as Savior.

We don't always see the impact of our thanksgiving like Paul and Silas did, but even when we are trapped or imprisoned, we can give thanks, and God will be glorified in our life. Perhaps others will find Christ there in that place because of our testimony and praises.

V. Observations:

God wants us to give thanks in the good times because thanksgiving promotes God's glory and develops humility in us. Each of us has a tendency to usurp the credit for the good things that God does. We must give thanks in the good times because it reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from above. We call a child that takes without giving thanks, a spoiled child.

God wants us to give thanks in the difficult times because it is an act of faith. When things are tough, it takes faith to thank God for our circumstances. We must really believe that God has a plan we do not see. We must really believe that His wisdom is beyond our own. We must believe that He only wants the best for us. Giving thanks in difficult times requires something more than superficial faith.

God wants us to give thanks in the difficult times because He wants us to learn to walk by faith and not by sight. We can't always understand what happens in life. If we depend on our senses, life will be like a roller coaster. If we learn to depend on God, life will be steady. We can know peace even in the confusing times. Remember John Maxwell said and I quoted him last week "What really matters is what happens in us, not to us"

Give thanks that God is working beyond circumstances. This is certainly a declaration of faith. In the midst of devastating times we usually don't see anything God could possibly be doing in our circumstances. It seems shallow to quote verses about God working for the good. All the evidence tells us that the situation is NOT good (at least not from our perspective).

Give thanks because we affirm, trust, and celebrate, the character of God. . . . even when the circumstances make no sense. We give thanks that God is good. He is not evil. He is not arbitrary. God has a reason for everything He does, whether we understand it, or not. We give thanks that the world is not as chaotic as it often seems.

Conclusion:

For some of you, life is going really well. Everything seems to be falling into place. Sometimes these are the most dangerous times of life. When times go well it is easy to take things for granted. The simple pleasures are overlooked. Blessing is expected rather than received with gratitude. Have you ever thought about how many things we take for granted every single day?

For some of you life is not going all that well. Everything seems to be out of place. Things seem to be falling apart, such as your relationships, your finances, the things that belong to you, your marriage, your job, your health. These are times to be thankful as well. When there are sacrifices, when there are limitations, when things don't look safe, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God.