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Thanksgiving of the Heart

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Series: In Everything Give Thanks

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Let's begin this lesson in a somewhat unorthodox manner. Let's begin by asking each of you to do the same thing. Okay? Here's what I want you to do:

First of all, I want you to stop whatever you are doing, and say, "Amen". Okay? Now, say it again! "Amen". That was exercise number one. That wasn't too hard, now was it? Okay, now for exercise number two. I want each one of you who can, to stand up. Wherever you are, just stand up. Of course, if you are listening to this message and driving your car, you're excused. But if you can, and you are where you can, stand up. Very good.

Now for exercise number three. I want you to turn to the person sitting closest to you and look at the color of their eyes. I don't care who it is, just look and see if you can see what color their eyes are. Good. Now for the final difficult exercise of the day. I want you, if you can, to raise your right hand all the way up, and while your hand is in the air, say, "Amen" again. By now, if nobody around you knows what you are reading, you must be feeling a little silly. That's okay, life gets a little silly sometimes. Very good.

Now, I am assuming that you were able to accomplish at least three of the four assignments. They were: say, "Amen," stand up, see what color the person's eyes were that was closest to you, and hold up your right hand and say, "Amen" again. If you were able to do those very simple things, I would like you to join me in a very simple prayer of thanksgiving. Let's pray this prayer together. You pray whatever parts apply to you.

Dear Lord,

I want to thank you for giving me both the ability to hear and the ability to speak. These are gifts from you that not all men and women have. I don't have them because I deserve them; they are all of grace. By saying "Amen", I was signifying that I heard the request and was gifted with the ability to speak as well. I have taken them both

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for granted, Lord. Please forgive me.

Thank you for giving me legs that were strong enough to stand on. Not all men and women can stand and walk. By standing up, I was acknowledging that while millions of people in the world will never walk, I have been given that gift. Dear Lord, thank you for the ability to stand and walk.

And Lord, thank you for the ability to see. I was able to look at the person's eyes sitting next to me, and see what color they were. I suppose only if I had once been blind and had my sight restored to me, could I fully appreciate what a wonderful gift the gift of sight really is. Lord, I take it for granted. Please forgive me.

And yes, Lord, I have arms that move. I was able to hold up my hand. I can lift things; I can shake hands; I can write; I can cook; I can drive...because I have arms that work. You allowed me that privilege. Thank you, Lord, for such an incredible gift.

Amen.

Beloved, regardless of what time of year it is, you have just been to a thanksgiving service. It was simple; it was perhaps a bit dramatic; but I want you to never again be able to say "I have nothing to be thankful for." Thanksgiving, you see, is a matter of perspective. And you and I sometimes forget that God doesn't owe us those things we just thanked Him for; God doesn't guarantee us those things we just thanked Him for; God doesn't expect us to presume that we will always have those things we just thanked Him for. They are gifts from the One from whom every good gift comes. The gifts of sight, and hearing, and walking, and speaking are not something we have earned by being born on planet earth. Nor is the right to breathe, the right to have money, the right to have a certain job, the right to have a certain kind of mate, the right to a certain position in life.

Such assumptions are the product of "presumption Christianity," a non-Scriptural kind of religious program that gives man the role of the creator and let's him decide what he, as the creature, deserves or needs. This concept is blasphemy!

Now in case you've not guessed, this lesson is not going to be an easy one for some of us to deal with. But if we are going to continue (and eventually conclude) this study, it's time we got down to the

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real issue of thanksgiving: the issue of the heart.

First we looked at an overview of what God has commanded us to do, which is to “in everything give thanks”. Then, we did a study of how to praise God “just because He is”. We took a look at how to praise God for Calvary, how to praise God for the past, and finally, in our last lesson, at how to praise God from a prison, even the prison-house of circumstances that may envelope you this very day.

At some point in this study, however, we must get down to the issue of the heart. Why is it we are *not* more thankful? And what is it we must do to become that way? Why do we take *life* so for granted, and *God* so for granted, that we assume that before we can be thankful, God owes us some form of mystical standard of living or some kind of preconceived physical blessings, as though they were written between the lines of the contract we signed when we asked Christ to come into our lives?

It is a difficult subject. Let us proceed, then, with caution; but let us proceed, nonetheless. Our title is “Thanksgiving of the Heart!”

I- A CLEAR-CUT PROBLEM

I believe it goes without saying that there is a chasm between what the Scripture teaches is a thankful heart and the mindset with which most of us approach the blessings of God. It is to that issue that we will address ourselves in this opening portion of our study.

Resentment or contentment: an issue of the heart

It stands to reason from the past lessons in this study, that as Paul stated so eloquently, “That which we would do, we do not; and that which we would not do, we still do.”¹ In other words, we may be endeavoring to become more thankful, but our natural bent does not seem to be in that direction. Instead of being thankful daily, even hourly, that we have eyes to see with, ears to hear with, water to drink, a roof over our heads, a job to go to, a way to get there, food enough to stay alive, breath enough to live through the day, and strength enough to do what we’re called to do, given half a chance, we are more likely to complain about the color of our eyes, that we have nothing but water to drink, that the roof over our heads sometimes leaks, that the rooms inside our house are not as big as Brother So and So’s; that we *have* to go to that job,

¹ Romans 7:19

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that we *have* to eat what we do, that we *aren't* stronger than we are, or richer than we are, or smarter than we are, or prettier than we are, etc.

Instead of being content and grateful, we tend to be resentful of the very things God has given us to praise Him for. It's a spiritual problem—a problem of the heart. And though we may behave obediently and praise God for the things we've been studying, unless we break the code that Satan has used to program our hearts, it is only a matter of time until the old habit patterns will sneak back into our lives and praise will give way to pessimism. Thanksgiving will give way to murmuring once again, and we will awaken a year from now and find ourselves no more thankful than we were before. We simply can't let that happen.

I believe there are at least three problems to be investigated. The first one is the problem of learning that before you can be give thanks *from* your heart, you must first learn to *be* thankful in your heart. You must learn how to go from an attitude of resentment to an attitude of contentment.

Let's define those two words.

Resentment: a conscious acknowledgment that you *deserve* more in life than you have *received*. Its normal fruits are bitterness, anger, jealousy, hostility and retaliation aimed either at God or man.

On the other hand,

Contentment: a conscious acknowledgment that you have *received* more in life than you *deserve*. Its normal fruits are a life of praise, thanksgiving, humility, gratitude and joy.

If these definitions are accurate, then it ought to be obvious that these two attitudes cannot coexist. Just how important is it that we go from resentment to contentment? Paul, writing to Timothy said,

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

(I Timothy 6:6-8)

What that passage says is this. That God-likeness which results in an attitude of contentment is an incredible blessing. Here is

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how to tell if you are content: take inventory. What did you bring into this world when you came? Answer: zero. Second question: What can you take with you when you go? Answer: zero. Then, if you have food enough to stay alive, and clothes enough to cover your body, you ought to be content. You ought to be filled with a conscious acknowledgment that you have received in this life *more* than you deserve.

There, you see, is the issue. God never promised you a rose garden (as the song goes). God never guaranteed you a good job, or a Saks Fifth Avenue charge account, or a new Lexus, or a life free from sickness, disease, pain, or poverty. God never guaranteed you anything but Himself. And He guaranteed you that He *is* all you will ever need. Even then, you rejected His goodness, went your own way, and being a sinner, you entered into a life characterized by sin.

But God was not about to let you perish. In love, He paid the price. He gave Himself away so that you might never again have to live life apart from Him. Now you have been promised eternal life, both the duration of which and the quality of which are beyond your comprehension. And you have been promised that no matter what happens in this life, a sovereign, loving God will protect you in such a way that nothing will ever happen apart from His permissive will, and nothing will happen beyond His control.

He promised that He would never leave you or forsake you. But, Beloved, He never promised that while you are on this earth, He would change this earth into the likeness of Heaven. He rather agreed that while on this earth He would place enough of Heaven in your heart that this earth itself would have no real appeal to you. His own Son had no place to lay His head, yet we believe that we deserve a bigger house with more rooms and more carpet and more furniture (and larger payments). He *did* promise us a mansion in Glory! If He promised us one on this earth, I can't find it in my Bible. Why would He guarantee us something He did not give His own Son?

He never promised us acceptance or fame, either. His own Son was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief".² Why He would guarantee us something His Son forfeited in order to demonstrate His love for us, I cannot understand. The truth is, He didn't. So where did we get the idea,

² Isaiah 53:3

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that to be thankful, we have to have things?

You may be saying, “But how can I be thankful? God took away my health?” Whose health? or “God took away my child.” Whose child? or “God took away my money.” Whose money? Whose friend? Whose mate? Whose job? Whose happiness? Beloved, His is the Kingdom, and His is the Power, and His is the Glory Forever!³ Whatever you have is a blessing. Given what we deserve, we would all be instantly thrown into the fires of hell, there to be toasted for all eternity. Anything short of that sentence, Beloved, is a demonstration of grace and a reason to break forth into a chorus of praise.

The Comparative curve and contentment

A second problem is the problem of comparison. Most of us determine our level of thankfulness based on a comparative curve. And for some strange unknown, reason, we almost always base our comparison on those who have more than we do.

We are happy with our house until we visit someone who has a house twice as big as ours. Then we are no longer thankful. We love our job until we hear about someone making twice as much working half as hard, and then we are no longer thankful. It never dawns on us to base our comparison (if there is to be one) on those who have less...or those who have nothing. When I was in school (4,000 years ago) I had a sign made to put up on the wall of the dormitory room quoting that ancient proverb that said, “I felt bad because I had no shoes; then I saw a man who had no feet.” That kind of comparison, you see, makes us soberingly thankful.

We aren’t thankful for salami sandwiches, because the Smiths next door are having T-bones and baked potatoes. It never dawns on us that there are thirty million people on planet earth who would die for a salami sandwich, and many of them are dying without one. We say thanks; but are we thankful? It also never dawns on us that the Smiths may be bickering and feuding and not enjoying that T-bone because they don’t have Jesus in their lives to give their lives meaning. The Scripture says, “Better a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”⁴ A modern translation would be “better a Big Mac surrounded by love than a T-bone marinated in tears.”

One classic cure for an ungrateful spirit is to consciously spend

³ Matthew 6:13

⁴ Proverbs 15:17

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some time with those who have less than you do. And as you do, look for the character qualities in those people that have come from having to learn to be content.

The “RLE” and why it is wrong!

A third thing to watch for is the “RLE”. We have discussed this before, but it bears remembering. “RLE” stands for “Relative Level of Expectancy”. It means that whatever the highest point in our experience has been, spiritually, financially, emotionally, or physically, that now becomes God’s new minimum standard for us.

No one wants to go back to that old house they used to live in. No one wants to go back to the old clothes they used to wear. No one wants to return to the standard of living they had before “God blessed them with this or that”. No one, that is, but Paul! Paul’s outlook was, “I have learned whatever situation I am in, in that situation to be content. When I had much,”⁵ he goes on “I was happy. Now that I have nothing, I’m still happy.” How, Paul? How? Because Paul’s happiness was not governed by “things”, nor by “circumstances”, but by an inner relationship with the one who *is*. And Paul’s life could move back and forth from riches to poverty without appreciably affecting his level of thanksgiving. The reason? He had learned in all things to be content. In other words, in all things to recognize that whatever I have is more than I deserve; therefore, whatever I have is reason to give thanks.

II- A CLEAR-CUT SOLUTION

So most of us as Christians have a clear-cut problem. We have a difficult time giving thanks, because we have a difficult time being content. In other words, we are not continually facing life from the perspective that whatever we have, God has given us more than we deserve. And in this affluent, “things-oriented” society we live in, the problem becomes greater with each passing day. Even churches get caught up in the pressures of resentment, and begin to be jealous of the buildings, the programs, or the ministries of the group down the street instead of being grateful for what a loving God has given them.

And just as the problem is obvious, so is the solution. Not easy, but obvious. The problem is that we have allowed the computers of our minds to be programmed by the society in which we live until our thought processes, unless we are constantly guarding them,

⁵ Philippians 4:11

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run to patterns of resentment rather than patterns of contentment. We are letting the world, as Paul reminded us, squeeze us into its mold. But Paul also reminded us that God has a clear-cut solution to the problem of the negative thoughts that rob the Christian of a spirit of thanksgiving. He reminded us in Philippians to “be anxious for nothing.”⁶

In other words, under no conditions is a Christian justified in worrying. *The very things you would normally worry about are God’s gentle reminders to lead you to prayer; they are His loving reminders to be thankful.* Paul goes on, “Instead of being anxious, each time you are tempted to worry, begin to worship God, then intercede with God all the while, praising God.” “But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.”⁶ That’s what it means! God will take over from there. As a seal of His faithfulness, He will demonstrate that faithfulness by flooding you with “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”⁷ God will wrap you in a blanket of peace, if every time you begin to be anxious or discontent or ungrateful or fearful, instead of worrying, you begin to pray and to praise.

“But,” you argue, “I find myself worrying or being discontent or ungrateful before I realize it.” Paul answers, “I know you do, and here’s what you can do about it.” The next verse says,

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Paul goes on in verse 10 to say that he was thankful for what God had done through the Philippians to meet his needs, but he carefully reminds them that even those needs brought him no concern,

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

⁶ Philippians 4:6 New King James Version

⁷ Philippians 4:7

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So the solution to contentment is learning to pray and to praise. The secret of contentment is learning to garrison your mind in such a way that you reject the thoughts that program your mind from the world's perspective. The substance of contentment is that in order for you to become all that Christ wants you to become, it may be necessary for you to experience poverty as well as riches, pain as well as health, sadness as well as happiness, in order for you to see and become equipped to explain to others that your sufficiency is in Christ, and in Christ there is *nothing you cannot handle*. To learn that lesson, Paul said, sometimes he had to be full and sometimes he had to go hungry.⁸ But once he had learned it, he had learned the secret of how to in everything give thanks.

Do you really want to change your mindset so that you can develop a life of thanksgiving—a life that is content, confident that God has given you more than you deserve? A life that so has God's perspective that it rejoices in poverty as well as in wealth? Rejoices in sickness as well as in health? Then, Paul says, put "God's Gratitude Grid" at the entrance of your mind where your thoughts begin to germinate. Then, any thoughts that do not pass through that grid, you simply reject by quoting Scripture. Here is a list of acceptable thoughts from Philippians 4:8:

1- Whatsoever things are true. The best rendition seems to be "whatsoever things pertain to truth"; whatsoever things are of eternal significance; therefore, whatsoever things will last. So long as you are allowing your mind to focus on things rather than truth you are building a mindset on the sand; and the winds of life will blow, and the rains of life will fall upon it, and those things will disappear. Eternal things will not. So guard your thoughts. Here's a good guideline. Measure the things you think about against this grid: if what you spend your time meditating on will perish at the end of the age, you aren't thinking on things that are true.

2- Whatsoever things are honest. The word "honest" here means "that which is honorable; that which invites reverence; that which is of noble character". It excludes that which is harsh; that which is crude; that which is not worthy of quietly whispering in the ear of Jesus. If your idle thoughts run to that which you would not want to share before the congregation of the saints, you are not meditating on God's kind of thoughts.

3- Whatsoever things are just. A better thought might be

⁸ Philippians 4:12

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“Whatsoever things are fair and equitable”, eliminating from our thinking those things that are prejudicial, judgmental, or unfair in the assessments of others.

4- Whatsoever things are pure. The word for pure is “untainted”. It means that anything or any thought that does not exalt the holiness of God must be discarded. It is not worth thinking.

5- Whatsoever things are lovely. If it’s not gracious, and thus grateful; if it’s not precious, and thus priceless, why waste your time thinking about it? Think about the joys of life; think about the blessings of life; think about what you *do* have to be thankful for—that which is true and honorable and just and pure.

6- Whatsoever things are of a good report. Literally, whatever things are attractive, not condemning or bitter. Build your thought life on that which is of a positive nature. It may take a lifetime to retrain your thoughts, but it’s worth a lifetime, because you will have an eternity to live with only those kinds of thoughts.

7- If there be any virtue. This is the only place Paul ever uses this word. It means “that which has to do with excellence; that which does not compromise or tolerate second best.” It won’t settle for thinking on things which are not true and just and honorable and pure and lovely. It holds the standard high and sets the standards high so that the world will not squeeze us into its mold. And finally, Paul adds

8- If there be any praise. This is not an afterthought. This is the ribbon that adorns the package that makes it what it is. In other words, if you want to develop a life of praise, then you filter out of your thinking by a constant, conscious act of your will, continually, those things that are not true, honorable, pure, fair, winsome, or positive. Only allow into your mind that which is worthy of excellence, worthy of praise. Then you will be content. Then you will be thankful. Then you will have the mind of Christ.

The solution to developing a life of praise is the developing of a whole new way of thinking—God’s way of thinking. It is a supernatural mindset that the Holy Spirit desires to use to replace the mindset that you have been programmed to think by the world. It is more of a filter than anything else. It filters out those things that are temporal, dishonorable, unjust, impure, negative, and compromising, thus leaving room only for the thoughts of Christ to reign and to rule your spirit. Learn to put a watch at the door of

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your thoughts; then you can become a man or woman of praise.

III- SOME PRINCIPLES TO PONDER

Now I realize that we run the risk of losing some when we deal with something as absolute and yet so seemingly elusive as controlling the thoughts and constantly being thankful. Let you be overcome by the magnitude of the calling, let me bring it back down to reality by sharing with you some of the practical principles on praise that will make it more tangible and hopefully, more workable. If you are going to see your life transported from resentment to contentment, from pity to praise, from turmoil to thanksgiving, then you will have to be able to see it in practice.

What I am suggesting is that we begin to see life from the revolutionary perspective of the Scripture. That perspective is this: There is never at any time a valid reason for the Christian *not to be thankful*. If our objectives are spiritual and all the treasures of Heaven are ours, then we would be fools at any moment in this life, no matter the circumstances, not to be filled with anthems of praise. Granted, if we believe for some reason that God owes us that which He doesn't, we'll lose it. Granted, if we begin to use others as our basis for comparison, we'll lose it. Granted, if we begin to accept a rising level of expectancy that sees the best we've ever had as God's new standard for our lives, we'll lose it. But we don't need to lose it. We can develop into saints of praise, men and women who live to pour out our hearts to God, morning, noon, and night in thanksgiving; men and women who see our lot in life as far more than we deserve and who see the physical limitations of this life as spiritual benefits, and who see the spiritual benefits as the only things that will ever last.

We can! We can grow from resentment to contentment, from prejudice to praise, from discouragement to thankfulness. We must not lock ourselves into the grid of the world around us and continue to be murmuring, grumbling, complaining, ungrateful believers. We must break out of that mold and rush into the freedom of a life that is filled with praise. We must. And we can.

Let me just give you some spiritual precepts on praise to consider in the days to come. Your goal, remember, ought to be to find out everything the Bible teaches about being thankful, and then, having learned what we are to do, get on it.

Principle 1- Learn to begin your times alone with God by praising Him.

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Memorize Psalm 100:4.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts
with praise: (Psalm 100:4)

One of the keys in developing a life of praise is learning to begin your time with Him by praising Him. Then, having glorified His name, and having brought your heart into His perspective, make your requests, and wait upon Him for wisdom.

Principle 2- As you develop a life of praise, remember, that one of the most important things you have to praise God for is people.

In Romans Paul says,

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that
your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

(Romans 51:8)

In Philippians he adds,

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

(Philippians 1:3a)

And in I Corinthians 1 he says,

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God
which is given you by Jesus Christ; (I Corinthians 1:4)

If you have trouble thinking of what there is to praise God for, just begin going down the list of people you know that God has saved, that God is using, that God has used through the ages to change the world. When was the last time you praised God for raising up a George Mueller, a Charles Spurgeon, a D. L. Moody, a Billy Graham? Praise Him! When was the last time you spent an hour praising God for every person He has ever used to touch your life spiritually? You'll never stop praising Him for people. Paul didn't. People are what life is all about; and they are God's mirrors, reflecting on earth the glories of Heaven. Praise Him continually for people.

Principle 3- Learn to praise God for what you have, even when and especially when it does not appear to be adequate. Read Mark, chapter 8. Jesus has been ministering to the people, and they have gone for long periods of time without food.⁹ He calls the disciples together and among them, they muster up seven loaves of bread and a handful of fish.¹⁰ Nothing. Not enough to feed *them*, let alone the four thousand people in the congregation. What did Jesus do?

⁹ Mark 8:2

¹⁰ Mark 8:5,7

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And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.

So they did eat and were filled: (Mark 8:6,8a)

Now, Beloved, look for the principle, not just for the story. The principle is Jesus gave thanks for what He had; then it became the Father's business to make what He had adequate. We think we are praying by begging God for more so we can have what we think we need, rather than learning how to thank God for what we have. What a lesson to teach our children, by example as well as by instruction.

Principle 4- In the same way, learn to thank God for victories you have not yet experienced. In II Corinthians 2:13, Paul is sharing his distress in coming to Troas and not finding Titus. Then, in the next verse, he breaks into this chorus of thanksgiving,

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. (II Corinthians 2:14)

In I Corinthians 15:55, he concludes that death will one day be swallowed up in victory, then triumphantly shouts,

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 15:57)

How often do you praise God for heaven? How often do you praise God for the end of sin and the end of pain and the promise of glory that awaits you? How often do you stop to praise Him for the ultimate fruit of that experience you are now going through, even though you cannot see the fruit or even imagine at this time what good could come from something like this? It frees God to honor your faith, and it strengthens that faith in you. Learn to go through the Scriptures and find those promises that are yet to be fulfilled, and praise Him regularly that they *will* be fulfilled. It will magnify the concept of praise in your life.

Principle 5- Another way to generate praise is to give. Paul says it clearly,

(As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.

Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)

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Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;

Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men;

(II Corinthians 9:9-13)

Let's see what that passage says when paraphrased:

It is as the Scriptures say: "The godly man gives generously to the poor. His good deeds will be an honor to him forever."

For God, who gives seed to the farmer to plant, and later on, good crops to harvest and eat, will give you more and more seed to plant and will make it grow so that you can give away more and more fruit from your harvest.

Yes, God will give you much so that you can give away much, and when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out into thanksgiving and praise to God for your help.

So two good things will happen as a result of your gifts—those in need are helped, and they will overflow with thanks to God.

Those you help will be glad not only because of your generous gifts to themselves and to others, but they will praise God for this proof that your deeds are as good as your doctrine.

(II Corinthians 9:9-13 The Living Bible)

In other words, another way to generate praise is to give. Paul says not only are people blessed, but they turn around and praise God, so God is blessed, and then the next verse goes on to say, they pray for you, so you are blessed. No one loses when God's people give. It is another way to generate praise.

Principle 6- Learn to praise God for the simplicity of the Gospel.

Jesus did. That ought to be all the example we need. Remember, He said this:

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

(Matthew 11:25)

Jesus was grateful that the Father had made the Gospel so simple a child could understand it. And, Beloved, you and I should stop daily and thank God for that. It is that utter simplicity that

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allowed us, the childish, the untaught, the unskilled to be saved.

Principle 7- Learn to praise God regularly, that in spite of your past, He has placed you in ministry. Pray through I Timothy 1 with Paul. He said this:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy... (I Timothy 1:12,13)

God is in the business of taking less than nothing and fashioning it into more than man can understand. He will take the vilest of sinners and polish their tarnished souls into vessels of grace, then place them in ministry to magnify that grace to others. He did it for Paul; He did it for you. Paul thanked Him. Have you?

We could go on and on. The principles of praise in Scripture are as endless as Scripture itself because there are as many reasons to praise Him as there are words to speak.

The issue is simple. Either you and I become satisfied with a life that is tainted by resentment, the constant gnawing in our spirits that is angry with God for not giving us what we think we deserve; or we can allow Christ in us to develop in us lives characterized by contentment, constantly breaking out into a chorus of thanksgiving because He has continually given us so much more than we do deserve.

The choice is ours. We can praise Him morning, noon, and night for every breath of life; for every ray of sunshine; for every touch of grace. We can learn to praise Him for life, for light, and for love. We can learn to praise Him for the simplest things of life—the rain, the flowers, the ability to see, the ability to walk, the ability to hear, the ability to move. We can learn to praise Him for people—for our children, for our parents, for each believer who crosses our path whose life transmits the signal of grace into the lives of others, for those who have ministered to us, and for those He has allowed us to minister to.

We can learn to praise Him for what we have, rather than simply begging Him for more, knowing that He will take what we have, and in His hands it will be enough. We can learn to thank Him for victories promised but not yet experienced, for those who give, for those who pray. We can learn to praise Him for taking us, of all people, sinners that we were and sinners that we are, and

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putting us into ministry. We can praise Him for the simplicity of the Gospel, a supernatural miracle by which He literally hides its wisdom from the wise and reveals it to the simple, a simplicity that made it possible for the likes of us to be saved.

We can praise Him for Calvary. We can praise Him most of all, just for who He is, for His perfect faithfulness, His perfect love, His perfect power, His perfect grace. We can praise Him for who He is in us, as we thank Him, one by one, for each of the fruits of the Spirit which are resident in us because He is in us, waiting to change us into His likeness.

The question then, is not, "What shall we praise Him for?" The question of questions is, "Is there ever a moment in our existence, either on this earth or in the endless eternity yet before us, when we shall have anything better to do, or anything other to do, than simply to spend our time praising Him?"

Are you overwhelmed at what God has done for you? Would you like, in some way, to sacrifice by giving back to Him something that would please His heart? Two Scriptures come to mind:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

(Hebrews 13:15)

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

(Psalm 50:14)

Perhaps you cannot envision yourself as a masterful preacher moving the multitudes with the power of words. Perhaps you cannot see yourself singing songs of praise before thousands, moving their hearts with your music. Perhaps you cannot, in your wildest dreams, picture yourself as a missionary trudging through unknown lands to share your faith. I do not know. I do know there is one thing you *can* do, and there is nothing you can do that will please the heart of God more. You can spend your day praising Him. You can make melody in your heart all day long, allowing your heart to become a fountain of praise that pours out thanksgiving morning, noon, and night. You can teach your children to praise Him. You can teach others to praise Him. You can literally live a life of praise.

You will be offering a sweet-smelling sacrifice that will touch the heart of God and bring Him joy. Is that not your reason for living? Must we not then purpose in our hearts, beginning now, to guard our thoughts against all that would intrude and build a spirit of resentment against all that would dare to imply that God

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has given us less than we deserve? Ought we not rather to fall to our knees hour after hour in awe that a loving God has given us so much more than we ever dared to imagine we could deserve? And ought not that awe to issue forth in a literal lifetime of praise?

It must. And it will, provided that we learn to make every day of our lives for the rest of our lives, thanksgiving, because we have come to experience thanksgiving—thanksgiving of the heart.

A Challenge to Additional Study and Application

1- Make a list of the things you feel that you have taken most for granted in life. You might consider including some of the things mentioned in the lesson, plus others that God brings to your mind.

2- Add a “praise” page to your prayer list and add those things to your regular times of praise.

3- Make a family project out of finding new things to praise God for that you once took for granted.

4- Examine your own heart and try to determine what things you might have become resentful over because your friends or others seem to have more than you do. Spend some time as a family thanking God for those very things. If you are resentful because others have bigger houses, spend some time together thanking God for the house you have.

5- Plot out your “RLE”, your “relative level of expectancy”. What standard of living have you assumed God owes you? Take a pencil and lower that standard until, like Paul, you are available to God to have either much or little, either plenty or want. Discuss as a family the spiritual benefits that accompany both conditions.

6- On your own, do a study of Philippians 4:8, using the information in this lesson as just a jumping-off place. Look up the meaning of each word and try to determine how that gate to your mind might affect your ability to be content, and thus to live a life of praise.

7- Using the Scriptures on the following page, try to find additional principles regarding praise that will help you establish a more consistent life of thanksgiving. (*An example is given to help you get started.)

8- Take the principles found in this lesson and examine each of them in the light of your own life of praise. Ask God for wisdom in applying those principles until they are a regular part of your life.

Thanksgiving of the Heart
Additional Verses To Study

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Principle</u>
* I Chronicles 23:30	Consistent daily praise morning and night
I Chronicles 16:4	
II Chronicles 5:13	
Psalms 69:30	
Psalms 71:22	
Psalms 86:12	
Psalms 118:19	
Psalms 118:21	
Psalms 139:14	
Psalms 147:7	
Nehemiah 12:31	
Nehemiah 12:40	
Jonah 2:9	
Matthew 26:27	
Luke 2:38	
Luke 22:19	
John 6:11	
John 6:23	
John 11:41	
Acts 27:35	
Romans 1:8	
Romans 1:21	
Romans 14:6	
I Corinthians 1:14	
II Corinthians 4:15	

(continued)

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Passage

Principle

II Corinthians 8:16

II Corinthians 9:15

Ephesians 5:20

Colossians 2:6,7

Colossians 3:15

I Thessalonians 2:13

I Thessalonians 3:9

II Thessalonians 1:3

II Timothy 1:3

Revelation 4:9

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