

## **In Everything Give Thanks** *Marshall Reid*

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

On Thursday, most in this nation will pause, even if just for a part of the day, and be thankful for what they have in their lives. We celebrate with family, friends, and plenty of food. It’s a tradition going back to some of the first European settlers in this land as they gave thanks for the bounty the land provided for them.

It’s vitally important that we take time to be thankful to God who provides every good thing, but not just on one day a year. Being thankful should be part of our nature, part of who we are. But unfortunately, being ungrateful has been a plague of mankind for thousands of years.

For instance, when Jesus healed 10 lepers (one of the absolute worst conditions and circumstances one could find themselves in in the first century), only one returned to Jesus to give him thanks, and it was a Samaritan at that (Luke 17:11-19). And in Paul’s diatribe of the Gentiles of his day in Romans 1, one of the first things he accuses them of is not being thankful (Rom. 1:21).

In a culture so driven by materialism, greed, and consumerism, we must be counter-culture. Instead of clamoring for more and more things and being concerned with whether or not we have the latest or newest \_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank), we are commended to be content and thankful with what we have (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

Consider what it means to go along with the materialistic culture we live in.

First, an inordinate emphasis on material things displays improper priorities. Paul encourages us to not dwell on the earthly things, but on spiritual things. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). And John helps us keep things in the proper perspective: “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17). When we place the emphasis of our life on things of this world, it leaves little time or money or energy to spend on those things that really matter, that will last forever, that have eternal ramifications.

Secondly, an inordinate emphasis on material things displays a lack of faith in God’s promise to provide us what we need. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus inextricably linked one’s emphasis (or lack thereof) on worldly treasures with one’s faith in God. His conclusion to his argument was, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). If we’re faithful to God and have our priorities in order, then we will not lack what we need. We may not have everything we want, but we’ll be taken care of by our God who is faithful to his word.

Thirdly, an inordinate emphasis on material things displays an ungrateful heart. When our minds and hearts are on worldly matters, then our minds and hearts aren't on God. And when that's the case, we forget from whom we received all the physical blessings we enjoy in the first place.

In Deuteronomy 8, Moses commands the people to be thankful when they enter the land and are given all the food and blessings that God was going to give them: "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you" (Deut. 8:10). But he also recognized there was the temptation for them to forget that it was God who had blessed them, and they would end up saying, "My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17). Unfortunately, the very thing Moses warned them not to do, they did. They forgot their God, they were ungrateful to the one who had blessed them, and they turned away from him and focused more on material things and pleasures than on serving God.

The warning is for us, also. This time of year is a good time to remind ourselves that the only reason we have what we have is because God loves us and is taking care of us. It's a good time to remember that our focus shouldn't be on earthly things, but on heavenly things. That demands we give most of our time, money, and energy to those efforts that have eternal rewards instead of spending most of our time, money, and energy on things that will pass away with the world.

We have much to be thankful for, and regardless of what circumstances we find ourselves in and what hardships we may endure, we can rest assured that God loves us and is providing for us. Most importantly, he is providing for our spiritual needs. "In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18).