

Giving Thanks in Bad Times

By

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Come Thanksgiving Day and millions of people will sit down to a table laden with turkey or ham and all the trimmings, surrounded by family and friends. Thanks will be given for the abundant feast, for health, for freedom, and many other blessings.

It is natural to be thankful when all is going well. But how can we give thanks in the bad times, times when everything seems to be going against us? What about it when you have had a traffic accident and the patrol cars fill the street while the cops close in to fix the blame? There you sit with a patrolman writing out a ticket while you wonder if your insurance will pay for damages. How are you going to obey the injunction of Paul: “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

You just received notice that you have been terminated from your job. The income stops but the bills will keep coming in. Can you give thanks?

Or take the time when you or your spouse has just been diagnosed with cancer. Giving thanks may be the last thing on your mind at a time like that.

Christians are not exempt from having to go through bad times. But there are blessings and advantages that Christians have that enable us to give thanks even in the midst of such bad times. I will mention a few.

I. The Forgiveness of Sin. In the stress of the traffic accident while the cop writes out the ticket, I remember that even if I am guilty of a traffic violation, and must pay dearly, I am one for whom Jesus died, and therefore have been forgiven of all my grievous sins. I may have to pay a steep fine, but I will never have to pay the penalty for my sins, because Jesus did that when he bore my sins in his body on the tree. Here is freedom that cannot be taken away by any accident or any authority. Thanks be to God.

So I have lost my job, I have not lost my salvation. God’s mercy did not protect my job, but it has protected life for eternity. As I seek employment, thank God that I’m not under the burden of Guilt, for my6 sins are forgiven.

Paul didn’t say “give thanks *for* everything” but “*in* everything.” We are not thankful for cancer. But the cancer of sin is more deadly than any cancer of the body, and while we fight the physical disease, we rejoice that Jesus has already won the fight against the devil, and we do not have to worry about failures and sins. They are all forgiven. Thanks be to God.

II. The Abiding Presence of God. God is famous for being present in bad situations. He was with Moses, Gideon, David, Daniel, right in the midst of their worst times. He made this promise: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Deut 31:6-8; Heb. 13:5). Then Jesus, with his parting words, said, “Lo I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20)

Sometimes you may feel isolated when surrounded by the world of unbelief and hostility to your faith. You may feel out of place, a minority of one, and terribly alone. But by faith you know that God is there, even in our darkest hours, and what is needed is the faith to trust His presence.

The times of trial and testing are beneficial, as they teach us our weaknesses and focus our faith. David wrote, "It is good that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy ways." James wrote, "Count it all joy," for such hardships develop faith and patience that work toward our perfection. In the midst of trial and affliction we give thanks that God is present, not only to give strength to endure the affliction, but also to use it for our spiritual growth and to bind us closer to him.

III. Assurance of Resurrection Victory. Abraham, Job, David, in the midst of bad times, all found comfort in the hope of a resurrection. Jesus never let his disciples forget that he would raise them up in the last day. "For the hour is coming in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life: and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29).

God's purpose for your life will not be fulfilled until you have been transformed from mortal to immortal, with a body that is incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-44). John wrote, "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that has this hope set on him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

This will be the final victory, and whatever hard times we must go through, they are only bringing us closer to that day of Resurrection Victory. "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:57).

When the world looks at a Christian going through adversity and bad times, does it see a sorrowfully depressed person, or does it see someone of faith filled with God's spirit, who is giving praise and thanksgiving to God? Even in the midst of trials we are to remember that we are "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

Throughout the bible are stories of how God used severe trials to develop character and faith in His people. Peter explained it: "In this you greatly rejoice though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness **through** manifold trials, that the trial of your faith being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:6-7). We go through these trials, Peter says, that we may receive praise, honor and glory when we see Jesus.

"Oh give thanks unto the God of heaven; for his loving kindness endures for ever" in good times and bad.

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