

## **GIVING THANKS FOR EVERYTHING**

Ephesians 5: 20 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

At the age of 20, Danylo, a deputy platoon commander in the Ukraine Army, in 2022, faced struggles too great to conceive. As a born-again believer in the Ukraine Army, in March of 2022, in the Kyiv region, he was ambushed and wounded in battle. For two days he hid in a closet with frostbitten feet. Then the Russian Army took him as a prisoner. Danylo's injuries were so bad he was offered by a Russian medic that he could inject adrenaline into his heart, and another Russian commander offered to shoot him quickly. Danylo refused. At first, he was held in Ukraine in Russian occupied territory. Then he was taken to Belarus, and then on to Russia. There, they cut off his left hand, then the fingers of his right hand, and his toes. After the surgeries, he was kept in prison where and taken for interrogation, beaten, and tortured. He remained unbreakable. Finally, he was exchanged in a prisoner swap, and he underwent surgery in Kyiv to remove both his feet. Danylo was fitted with prosthetic legs, and now he is mastering prosthetic arms. He likes to play sports and he has been studying to become a military psychologist. In recent days he has decided to go to seminary to become a pastor. Danylo has chosen to give thanks in the middle of one of the hardest circumstances of life.

How many of us know all we have? Have we gotten used to our blessings and started expecting them? A sweet lady, Carol, decided to do something nice for her neighbor. Mrs. Smith. She baked a pie and carried it next door. When Mrs. Smith opened her door, she was surprised to see Carol holding a pie. She replied, "For me? Oh, thank you so much! You just don't know how much I appreciate it! You are so thoughtful for doing this! Thank you!" Because Mrs. Smith liked the pie so much, Carol decided the next week to bake another pie for her. When she took it over, Mrs. Smith opened the door and said, "Thank you so much. You are so kind!" Carol took another pie over the following week. Mrs. Smith simply replied, "Thanks." Carol took another pie over the next week. Mrs. Smith responded, "You are a day late with that pie." The following week, Carol baked yet another pie. This time her neighbor said, "Try using a little more sugar and don't bake it quite as long. The crust has been a little bit hard lately. I'd like cherry instead of apple filling next time." The next week Carol was so busy, she was unable to cook for her neighbor. Carol passed by her house on the way to the store. Mrs. Smith looked through her window and noticed Carol wasn't carrying a pie. So, she stuck her head out the window and yelled, "Where's my pie?" Do we take blessings for granted?

A pessimistic, grumpy man spotted some money crumpled up on the ground. He picked it up, un-wadded it, and discovered it was a \$1 bill. He said, "That's just my luck, If someone else had found this, it would have been a \$5 bill!" Complainers look at the negative side of every situation. They don't give thanks for what they have. They gripe because it's not more. Are you thankful, or are you a complainer? It has well been said, "Complaining is like bad breath, you notice it when it comes out of somebody else's mouth, but not your own." How many of us feel up to a godly challenge today? This text in Ephesians 5: 20 is perhaps one of the toughest

challenges in the Christian life. Who among us could stand before God today, and say, “It’s easy to always be thankful for all things?” How do we submit to God’s

challenge to be thankful for all things? The well-known story of Matthew Henry comes to mind when he was robbed. In his diary, he wrote after being robbed, “Let me be thankful, first, because I was never robbed before. Second, let me be thankful, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life. Third, let me be thankful, because although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, let me be thankful, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “In heaven, we shall give thanks to God always for all things, without exception, and throughout eternity we shall magnify His holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Thanking the Lord is just a warm-up for heaven. Our text today reads, “Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thanksgiving all the time in every situation for all things is not optional for the believer. Peter O’Brien in his Ephesians commentary, wrote, “Thanksgiving is almost a synonym for the Christian life. It is the response of gratitude to God’s saving activity in creation and redemption, and thus, thanksgiving is our recognition that God is the ultimate source of every blessing.” We sing “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace.” Nothing, good or bad, comes into our lives that has not first, found approval before the throne of God.

Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit, give thanks to God the Father on the basis of who Jesus is and on what he has accomplished for His people by His death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord knows we are prone to grumbling. It’s a lifelong battle to cultivate grateful hearts in all things. In Ephesians 5: 18, thanksgiving is the result and by-product of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Let’s examine four questions that this challenging command answers for us this Thanksgiving Sunday. First, when are we to be thankful? Secondly, For what are we to be thankful? Thirdly, to whom are we to be thankful? Fourthly, how are we to be thankful? Let’s look at our text carefully and find the answer to these four interrogatives.

**WHEN ARE WE TO BE THANKFUL?** (I.) Look at the text! What is the answer in the first word of our text? “Giving thanks always!” Doesn’t this raise questions in our minds? A few questions are: (1) **Is it possible for thankfulness and grief to coexist?** Since we are to be thankful in a grieving time, both of them can coexist. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was dead, He said to His disciples, “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe.” (John 11:15) Jesus was thankful, yet sorrowful. When He came to the tomb of Lazarus, John 11:35 tells us, “Jesus wept.” Just before Jesus called Lazarus forth from the grave, He prayed in John 11:41-42, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that You sent Me.” (2) **Is it wrong to grieve an earthly loss for a lifetime, such as the loss of a child or a spouse?** No! Never forget that the time for wiping away all of our tears has not yet arrived. (3) **Is it hypocritical to give thanks when we don’t feel thankful?** We don’t obey by feelings, but by faith.

How do we get the right feelings? Eugene Peterson calls it a long obedience in one direction. (4) **Why is the denial of God's sovereignty over evil a bad way**

**to deal with the problem of evil?** There is a theology that is rampant today called open theism. It denies the sovereignty of God in the face of evil. God is sovereign. That doesn't equate with determinism, meaning that God plans and orchestrates disasters for His glory. Never believe that the sovereignty of God that coexists with man's free will—never believe that God is the one who ordains and commands sin such as abortion. Never! God allows man in our sinful free will to sin terribly, but that isn't His hope, His dream, or His desire. Romans 1: 21 tells us when we don't honor the Lord as God, we are unthankful, and we grumble as the children of Israel did in the wilderness during the Exodus. (I Cor. 10:10) Grumbling is a dangerous sin, when we fail to thank God always. Secondly,

**FOR WHAT ARE WE TO BE THANKFUL?** (II.) Let's go back to our text in Ephesians 5: 20. We read, "Giving thanks always and **for everything.**" Listen to a Thanksgiving story dating back to 1620 and the founding of America. Mary Chilton first spotted the New World in November 1620. Mary, just a 13-year-old girl, had been aboard the Mayflower for 10 weeks, dressed in the same clothes, cramped in dark, damp quarters among seasick passengers, and sleeping near dying goats. Each family was allotted one storage trunk for all their possessions. Mary Chilton is known as the first European woman to set foot on Plymouth Rock. The week before Christmas, her father died. Three weeks after Christmas, an illness called the "general sickness" claimed her mother. Only half of the Mayflower's 102 passengers, 51 lived to see spring in Massachusetts. Mary marked her 14th birthday as an orphan, learning the ways of a foreign land where the Wampanoag Indians offered guideposts, how to grow corn, catch fish, extract maple sap for syrup, and how to identify poisonous plants. She was present at the first Thanksgiving, a three-day feast called for by Gov. William Bradford to celebrate a successful corn harvest. The Plymouth colonists were joined by their teachers, the Wampanoag Indians, who arrived with five deer. The colonists cooked wild duck over an open flame, feasted on seasoned corn and gave thanks—for their harvest, for their friendship and, ultimately, for their survival.

Gov. Bradford chronicled it all, saying. "We found the Lord to be with us in all our ways and to bless our outgoings and incomings, for which, we praise His Name forever. We began to gather in the small harvest we had and to fit up our houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength and we had all things in good plenty." The general sickness had ceased. Their food was hot, their faith was intact. It was hard for Gov. Bradford to fathom what more they could possibly want. It was, to him, "all things in good plenty." Mary Chilton married and gave birth to 10 children. She died an old woman raising her family, welcoming grandchildren and writing a will. In it, she accounted for six white aprons, three pocket handkerchiefs, two leather chairs and a brass candlestick. Mary Chilton understood what really counted. She wrote in her will these words, "Knowing the uncertainty of this present life and being desirous to settle the outward estate the Lord has lent me, I do make this my last will and testament."

“First, I commend my soul into the hands of Almighty God, my Creator.” “For all things” is a stretch I know, but it is a divine stretch, God calls us to make. Thirdly,

**TO WHOM ARE WE TO BE THANKFUL? (III.)** I read in Ephesians 5: 20, “Giving thanks always and for everything—to whom? “To God the Father.” Go back a moment to verse 18. We read, “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” By the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are to be thankful to God the Father. General Stonewall Jackson knew this blessed truth. “In 1862, around the middle of the Civil War, Stonewall Jackson wrote to his wife, who was ill: “I trust you and all I have into the hands of an ever kind Providence, knowing that all things work together for the good of His people. So live that your sufferings may be sanctified to you; remembering that our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” On May 2, 1863, the seemingly invincible Confederate Army won a tremendous victory at Chancellorsville. This victory was offset by the setback of General Stonewall Jackson losing his left arm. Born-again believers served on both sides of the Civil War. The next day, Chaplain Lacy heard Stonewall say, “You see me severely wounded but not depressed. I am sure my Heavenly Father designs this affliction for my good. I am perfectly satisfied that either in this life, or in the life to come, I shall discover that what is now seen as a calamity, is a blessing. If it were in my power to replace my arm, I would not dare do it, unless I could know it was the will of my Heavenly Father.” To whom are we to be thankful? The answer is, “to God the Father.”

Some years ago, a letter was read on Thru the Bible Radio by J. Vernon McGee from a mother whose 17-year-old son, Nate, was killed in a car crash caused by a drunk driver. By noon the next day, five different people brought the same verse to his bereaved parents: Obviously, the Holy Spirit had a purpose in giving all the comforters Isaiah 57:1,2 which declares, “The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands, for the righteous man is taken away from calamity; he enters into peace.” The mother of the son killed by the drunk driver, discovered that Isaiah 57:1,2 was the text used by Dr. J. Vernon McGee on his Thru The Bible radio on the same day her son died. Isaiah 57:1,2 was also the text used by the pastor in the memorial service for her son, attended by nearly 1,000 people. Nate’s mother testified that Isaiah 57:1,2 gave her an assurance that “God knew what was happening, and Nate’s death was not an accident in God’s sight.” She said, “It provided joy and confidence to me as Nate’s mother to know my son knew the Lord and was now at peace in God’s presence. To whom are we to be thankful? To God the Father.” Fourthly,

**HOW ARE WE TO BE THANKFUL? (IV.)** Look at the apostle Paul’s answer in Ephesians 5: 20. “Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” How are we to be thankful? We are to be thankful in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever read the book ‘The Hiding Place’ by Corrie ten Boom or see the subsequent Billy Graham movie, also called “The Hiding Place? One story stands out and most of us know it as unforgettable and well worth recounting once again. When the Nazis took Corrie and her older sister to the Ravensbruck concentration camp during WWII, Corrie

and Betsy found that their barracks were infested with lice. Betsy insisted that they must thank God for the lice, since Ephesians 5:20 commands us to give thanks for everything or all things. Corrie struggled with that reminder, but Corrie and Betsy were obedient to thank God for the lice in their barracks. Strangely, these born-again sisters had an unusual freedom to read the Bible and pray in the barracks at night with all the other inmates. Almost all the other women imprisoned there were Jews. In spite of the crushing and repressive practices of their Nazi guards, they had freedom to witness for Jesus. It was God's opportunity for Betsy and Corrie to point all these many precious women to Jesus, their Messiah. All these Jewish women were on their way to the gas chamber. Corrie said, "The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the word of God. Why were we given such freedom? After a while, we understood -- the lice! Yes, the lice were one more blessing from God in disguise.

God is sovereign. The Lord Jesus said that even the very hairs of our head are all numbered. If He notices the fall of each little sparrow, He certainly cares about His children and each little problem we have. He wants to be the absolute center of all our lives and all our thoughts. Will we let Him be in the center of our life and in the center of our thoughts? We need to thank God for all things. Is there anything in particular in your life right now that is terribly difficult? Have we considered this difficult circumstance is God's blessing in disguise? Have we stopped to thank God for this untoward circumstance? God is calling us to do it right now, no matter how unreasonable it may seem to be.

Francis Havergal could see God's hand in all things when she wrote the words of the hymn that we have in our hymnals on page 343, "Like A River Glorious." She wrote, "Every joy or trial falleth from above, Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love; We may trust Him fully, all for us to do -- They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true. Stayed upon Jehovah, Hearts are fully blest -- Finding as He promised, perfect peace and rest." Romans 8:28 is still in the Book of Books, the Bible. We read God's sovereign promise, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

This superb promise in Romans 8:28 is not "carte blanche" for everyone. It is only for those who love God; only to believers, will all things work together for good. Are you sure you are a child of God? Have you come to God for salvation, through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins? It is the cross that turns our trials into triumphs, and our curses into blessings. If you haven't given your life to Jesus, know today that the Savior is waiting for you to trust Him now. John 3:16 makes it clear that God is not willing that any should perish. He will make us a new creation as He promises in II Corinthians 5:17. Jesus said in John 6:37, "The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Let's place our trust in Jesus alone, today. Then each of us will begin to experience the awesome privilege it is to be a child of God. Beloved, I call us all to the challenge of Thanksgiving—Ephesians 5: 20, "Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.