
Thanks From the Heart

by: Ronald L. Dart

Are you a grateful person? Do you give thanks often? It is a shame, in a way, that we don't have a counter build in that every time we tell someone 'thank you' that it clicks on and off, and then we could check to see how we have done today and we could keep track of our level of gratitude.

When you do give thanks, you thank people or you thank God, is it from the heart? Or are you like the clerk in the store who has been trained to say 'thank you' to every customer. It's really funny. England is really remarkable in this regard. My wife Allie and I used to have a little joke about it. When you walk in the door of a shop, they say "Thank you", and if you walk around and take something off of the shelf to try it on, they say "Thank you very much". When you get around to buying something and you bring it to the clerk, she says "Thank you very much". Then you give her your money and she says "Thank you very much" and she gives you the change and she says "Thank you very much" and when you leave the store she says "Thank you very much".

Now what is really funny is that there was a little song in England on the charts for a while that went "Thank you very much, Thank you very very much". The English say "Thank you very much" so much that they have abbreviated it and the word is "Ta". So consequently if there is somebody that you know and you hand them something, they will say "Ta" and if it is very important they would say "Ta muchly" or "Ta very muchly".

'Thank you' gets to be a throw away line. It reminds me of the airlines stewardess who stands up and says "Thank you for flying American, we know that you have a choice", and I say "Oh really, I didn't know that". I call the travel agent and I say "I want to go from here to there and I want to go at this time of day" and I haven't noticed that I have much of a choice yet. In fact when I am on one airline or another I can't tell the difference. They all will give you a sack lunch rather than serve you food on your tray.

There is a different 'Thank you' that comes from a man or a woman who owns their own business and they really are grateful for the fact that at last a customer has come in to shop and your business means something to them. From these people you get a different kind of "Thank you".

When You Are Ungrateful

Now when you are ungrateful, and you are ungrateful from time to time. When you are ungrateful, why are you ungrateful? What is it in you that makes the difference from saying that you are grateful and that you are thankful, or that you are ungrateful and unthankful? Is it

because, perhaps you don't realize that something has come your way? You don't realize the significance of it, you don't realize that the person who may have brought this your way did so at some real sacrifice? Maybe it is because you don't feel any particular benefit from whatever it is that has come your way. Or maybe you think you deserve it and no thanks is due. If somebody has given you something that you have earned, do you thank them for it? We may also think that the person is just doing their duty and there is no special reason to thank this person for it. The waiter comes and brings your food. He is doing what waiters are supposed to do and there is no reason for you to be grateful to him.

I used to, when I was much younger, wonder why clerks thanked me for buying things? I come into the store, there is an item on the table and it costs \$1.50, and I pick up the item, I give them \$2.00 and they give me back the change minus the tax, and I say to myself "We have a fair exchange here" and I ask "Why is this person thanking me for buying this in this case?"

I think this is illustrious of the problem, that is that when we are ungrateful, or when our thanks are perfunctory or automatic or tossed off, it is safe to assume that we think that we have gotten a fair exchange, that what has come our way has no special value attached to it beyond what we have given for it. I think that probably in many cases we think that if we didn't give it today, then we have before today, or that we gave it another time or we will be giving it later and therefore we don't think very much of it. You did me a favor but you probably owed me a favor. If we are friends we pass favors back and forth all the time and nobody keeps track of who owes who the favors.

I pay my tithes, right? God blesses me, right? We're even. So what's the point of thanking God for the blessing? Isn't that the deal? I know most people don't think that way. I don't think that most people would think that my friend did me a favor and I don't owe him anything. However, if we act that way, what is the difference? You may not think that way but if you act that way, what is the difference?

Thanksgiving Day

On Thanksgiving Day this year, we probably will have turkey. Why one might ask, when I sit down to a traditional Thanksgiving style meal, why should I be thankful for the turkey? I bought it with my good hard earned money. It was mine. I worked for it, I got it, I went down to the store, I paid for the turkey, they made a profit, so why should I be thankful for the turkey? Why should I be thankful for the gravy? I made it, I took the drippings and put flour in it and did all of the magical things you do to make good turkey gravy. I did that, why should I give thanks for it? Why be thankful for the dressing? I bought the ingredients, blended them all together in my own special way and here is turkey, dressing and gravy. What is there to be thankful for?

The Cranberry

There is this little hickey in the middle of this Thanksgiving dinner that ought to make you stop. It is called the cranberry. A little red berry and remarkable dry, acrid, alkaline. Have you ever had pure cranberry juice? You probably couldn't talk for a few minutes after you had a glass of cranberry juice. But made up in that special sauce and placed on a plate along side the turkey and

the red color makes it so attractive. It gives you that cold, dry and bitter sweet contrast that clears your palate and makes that next bite of turkey and dressing and gravy so special.

Here's my question for you? Did you make the cranberry? Well the answer is no. Don't tell me you bought it. We know better than that. You didn't make the cranberry. Unless God made the cranberry, you wouldn't have a cranberry. Unless God had designed things in such a way that turkeys would make more turkeys, you wouldn't have turkey. And so it goes with all of the things that we were talking about before.

The one little reminder on the table, every year that we really ought to be grateful to the great artist who presented this to us, is the cranberry. It is the one thing on the plate that you really didn't make, even though you may have done some preparing of it. It is the tart, sharp, clean, cold, reminder that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17) .

There is something more that we should think about this, and it is this. It is not really so much that plate which is a work of art with turkey and gravy and dressing, sweet potato casserole, and the cranberry sauce. Doesn't this make you salivate? This really is a work of art to look at in the first place. It appeals to your vision, to your taste, to your sense of smell. It's just wonderful. Without your eyesight, your sense of smell, your sense of taste, it is nothing but garbage. Nothing but garbage! The real thanksgiving with the plate of food before you, belongs to the great God who gave you the capacity to appreciate it, for it to mean something to you, for it to nourish your body. You could have been nourished a lot of different ways. We could have been designed to be nourished by eating dog food. We could have been designed to be nourished quite adequately by things that don't taste good. Things could have been very different from the way they are. But all of the nourishment that keeps us alive and keeps us going can be prepared and presented before us in ways that are absolutely delightful and we can appreciate the beauty of them.

Be Thankful

It is true of any work of art, you can be thankful, to the man who spent hours of his life, perhaps days of his life, putting a gorgeous painting together, but don't forget to thank the God who gave him the power to create it, and you the power to appreciate it, and to enjoy it. Be it a painting, be it music, be it a sculpture, be it God's own gorgeous handiwork in a sunset or a waterfall, or a natural setting in the wild. Who made it? It was made by God and it is there, and perhaps the real miracle is that there is someone who could see it and to enjoy it and has the capacity to appreciate what it was that they saw.

Gratitude

Now about the matter of gratitude. In the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, there is a long admonition of God, in which He inspired Moses to give to the children of Israel right near the end of his life. I will commend it to you to study the whole section of this part of Deuteronomy. I am going to take you through this eighth chapter and talk about it. Let's begin in verse 1: "All the commandments which I command you this day shall you observe to do, that you may live,

and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore and promised to your fathers. {2} And you shall remember all the ways which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. {3} And he humbled you, and permitted you to get hungry, and fed you with manna, which you didn't know, neither did your fathers know". Now why did He do this? He did this so "that He might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live."

These are the words that Christ threw back in Satan's face, when he tried to tempt Him and take Him in the wrong direction, to command stones to be made into bread and Jesus said that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God shall man live". (Matthew 4:4).

When Are You Most Thankful?

Tell me something, when are you the most thankful for food? When you're hungry. Right? When you are hungry you are absolutely most thankful for food. When are you the most thankful for a cold glass of water? When you're thirsty. That is easy to understand. When are you most thankful for life? When you are in danger of losing it. When you realize that it may be going from you. To realize it may be gone, or you may realize as a friend of mine who got it back, if it hadn't been for God's protection, his life would have been gone, or at least his life as he knew it, even if he had survived the accident, a crippling injury could have resulted from the accident. That is when you really understand and appreciate these things. There is a lesson in there. You can grasp that, that you are most grateful for food, when you are hungry. You have put a peg in your heart and in your mind upon which to hang the concept of thanksgiving and begin to understand why you are grateful as you are and why you're ungrateful when you are not. When you are not grateful, you have come to a point in your life where you think that you don't need anything. If you don't need something that comes to you, you are not thankful for it.

There is in the New Testament a warning about those who say that they are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing (Revelation 3:17). They are also in danger of being spued out of God's mouth (Verse 18).

Tiny Miracles

He goes on to talk about the experience these people had in the wilderness. Let's continue in Deuteronomy 8:4 "Your raiment did not grow old upon you, neither did thy foot swell for forty years". This is a remarkable miracle in that these people were in the wilderness walking from place to place and they never had a problem with swollen feet and their clothes didn't get old. I can see people after several years waking up and looking and saying "How old is this garment? How long have I been wearing this? Why hasn't it worn out?" And then they realize that there had been a tiny miracle in their life that makes a statement that God is with you. Those little miracles are going on in our lives all the time. Most of the time we are unaware of them as someone would be on a day to day basis that your clothes aren't wearing out. How long would it take to realize there has been a miracle in my life? How many miracles has there been in our

lives? No matter how much God is allowing you to suffer, even when He is allowing you to go hungry, is doing so that you may become thankful, so that you can learn what real gratitude is. In the process He will not leave you without encouragement. (Hebrew 13:5-6).

Verse 5: "You should consider in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you". Why does a man chasten his son? Well it could be because he is angry. It could be because the son encroached upon the father in some way and he is retaliating against the boy, or because the boy hurt the father, and the father is going to hurt him back. A bad rotten father might do those things. That is not what God is talking about. He is talking about a father who chastens his son so that the son will learn not to do hurtful things, to be able to create in the son certain lines of discipline that the boy is going to need as he grows older. He does it because he cares for his son.

He says: God chastens you and {6} "You should keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. {7} "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; {8} "a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; {9} "a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper". You have metals, you have agriculture, you have all of the resources that you should ever need to live a happy and fruitful and abundant life on that land. You should be able to really live the good life.

Now he says: {10} "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you". What do you mean bless God? Obviously it means to thank God for it. It is an expression of gratitude, that whenever you have eaten and your belly is full, and you look around you and you realize what a good life you have got, and you realize how things are working and you realize how they could have been and how they were. For the good times to really have meaning in contrast to the hard times, when you begin to understand those things and you can say: "Thank God that I am here. Thank God that I am full and not starving. Thank God that I am clothed and not naked. Thank God that I have a roof over my head instead of being out in the cold like a lot of other people might be this night. I am not here because I deserve it, I am not here because I am a better person than anyone else. I am here because of the blessing of the Lord my God.

Now he says: {11} "Beware that you don't forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today". We need to be real careful about that. One of the ways in which you can show gratitude toward God is in the way you live your life. It is an ungrateful wretch, is it not, to have received all of the bounty and goodness of God and then dishonor his father and his mother. Especially, realizing that his father and his mother were those who taught him God's ways in the first place and put his feet on the right path, and that is one of the reasons that he has what he has. What ungrateful wretch would do that? What ungrateful wretch having received the outpouring of the bounty of God's hand would lie, and cheat, and steal, and commit adultery, and trample all over God's Ten Commandments?

Are You Grateful?

Do you want to know if you are a grateful person or not? One of the ways is how you actually live your life in relation to God. I can tell whether you are a grateful person or not.

He warns: {12} "Lest; when you have eaten and are full, and you have built beautiful houses and you are living in them; {13} "and when your herds and your flocks have multiplied, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied". You go and check your financial statement and it all looks nice and plush. You have your retirement taken care of. You have a house built, and you are going to have an income from the investments that you made for the rest of your life, you are comfortable and have good clothes, good food, good friends, and a fine car to drive.

Verse 14: "When your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt". I think what He is telling us here is, it equates two things here. One of them is being grateful and the other thing is having your heart lifted up. What does it mean to say that your heart is lifted up? It means vanity, pride, ego, the swelling up of the self. Now what this tells me is that the ungrateful heart is a proud heart, that it tends to be egocentric, full of one's self.

He goes on to explain further than that, he mentions that you forget God {15} "Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought and where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; {16} "who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know". Why did He do all of these things? "That He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end". If you haven't marked that verse in your Bible, you should probably do so, and you need to go back to this from time to time, because you are going to have a lot of occasions in your life when life is not going to work right. When things are coming unstuck, and you say to yourself, "I've tried to be obedient to God, I know that I am a weak person but I am not any worse than anybody else is, and I have tried to be obedient and have done the things that God commands, and I ask, why is my life not working? Why is this happening to me? The answer could be right here. God allows you to suffer sometimes, to go hungry and to live in hardship, that He might humble you, but He humbles you with a point. The point is that He can do you good at your latter end. He has a long view in mind, and there is where the good is going to come.

The context of this is easy to lose, He says that when all of this has happened and life is really working, but your heart gets lifted up then {17} "You say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' " So I sit down with my plate in front of me and I say to myself, "Why should I be thankful for the turkey? I worked for it, I paid for it, it was my money, I bought it, it is mine. Why should I be thankful for the gravy? I made it, and so on as to what we might say. Why should I be grateful for my car? I work hard, I have to make the payments every month. Why should I thank God for that?

Now, wait a minute, where does your hand get the power to get wealth? Well, it comes from God.

Tithing

I heard an argument in which someone was making a point about how tithing was purely a matter of the increase off of the land of produce and that there was no tithe due for wages earned on a job because that was a fair exchange. You exchanged your labor for the money coming from your employer and no tithe would be due on that. I thought to myself, what are you exchanging? You are exchanging your time. Where did you get your time? Where did you get the power to work? What this is saying is I don't owe God anything. My time is mine. My work is mine. My life is mine. I will put it wherever I want to, if I earn money and I buy something with it, it is mine and I don't owe God any thanks for it. I think that a person who looks at things that way is going to have some very unpleasant surprises, because I think God will teach them better than that, because He cares for us, and I believe He will do that.

Verse 18: "You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day." In other words God gives you the power to develop wealth. He doesn't necessarily give you the wealth, He gives you the power to get it.

Don't Forget God

Then He says: {19} "Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. {20} "As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God." "If you do at all forget the Lord your God", those are frightening words. I think that no man could live through a day, without sometime during the day forgetting God. It is not so much the matter that you are not thinking about God every moment, because you do have to pay attention to what you are doing, driving your car as you are backing up in the parking lot. That is not what I mean. There is going to come a time in the day when the knowledge of God would call for one course of action from you, and forgetting God would lead you to another course of action. I don't think that any of us can get through a day without that happening.

He warns us, if you at all forget Him, He is going to forsake you, and in fact you will perish out of this land that I have given to you and to your fathers.

How Little We Deserve

I think the truth is: we are most grateful when we know best how little we deserve. When does that come? It usually comes when we are in trouble. When things aren't working. When we are sick. When we are in pain. When we have lost a job. Whenever something really bad has happened in our family and our life, and we really begin to examine ourselves and realize that we don't deserve anything, that is the moment in time when we are positioned and prepared to be most grateful.

It shouldn't be such a terrible surprise that God would humble us so that He might do us good at the latter end.

Blessings and Curses

There is a sobering passage of scripture back in Deuteronomy 28 which deals with blessings and curses. There are blessings if we obey God and there are curses from disobeying God. In verse 45 there is this short passage: ""Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue and overtake you, until you are destroyed". Why would that happen? "Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you." "These curses shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever". Why? {47} "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things".

What he is saying is that we should serve God with joy of heart and that is an expression in itself of gratitude. Do you follow me? The fact that you serve God with joy of heart because of the abundance of all things is an expression of gratitude for the abundance that God has given you. Someday God may say to us "I demanded very little of you. There were critical times in your life, I know that, but comparably speaking, I demanded very little of you, and I gave you so much, and there was no appreciation coming back".

Verse 48: He says: "Because of that you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in want of everything". Because you didn't serve Him with joy for the abundance of all things, then you are going to serve your enemy in grief, because of the want of all things until he has destroyed you.

Give Thanks to God

The hundred and seventh Psalm has very special meaning to me, because there was a time in my life, many many years ago, when I was very worried about my physical health and what was going to happen to me and some of the things that I had heard about the problem that I had which was a heart murmur and cardiac arrhythmia. The first time I had this was a very long time ago and I was frightened by it. I wondered what was going to happen in my life. I came to this hundred and seventh Psalm which I found to be very helpful.

It starts out by saying "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good for His mercy endures forever". Thank God, how good He is and His mercy does not wear out.

"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so". That is to say that His mercy endures forever. "Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, {3} And gathered out of the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south". He goes out and gets His people and brings them home.

{4} "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; They found no city to dwell in. {5} Hungry and thirsty, Their soul fainted in them. {6} Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He delivered them out of their distresses. {7} And He led them forth by the right way, That they might go to a city that they could live in. {8} Oh, that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" Oh that they would thank him. Oh, I wish people could just see what has happened in their life. They were in trouble, they were lost, they were in the wilderness, in the desert, they were hungry, they were

thirsty. God then brought them out of all of that and said "I just wish that people could see that and Thank God for what He has done for them".

Verse 9: "For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness".

Then comes the next segment: {10} "There are those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and irons". Why are they in that circumstance? Well, {11} "Because they rebelled against the words of God, and treated the counsel of God with contempt, {12} Therefore He brought down their heart with labor; They fell down, and there was no one there to help. {13} Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He saved them out of their distresses. {14} He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, And broke their chains in pieces. {15} Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!" The same theme comes back again. This is a psalm and I suspect that the way this was is like a chorus with the same music connected to it, so the theme get planted in your mind. "Oh that men would praise their Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!".

Verse 16: "For He has broken the gates of bronze, And cut the bars of iron in two".

Are You a Fool?

Next segment: {17} "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted". I read that and I said "Yup, I am a fool, and because of my sins, and because of my iniquities I am afflicted".

Verse 18: "Their soul abhorred all manner of food". Forget turkey and dressing. It doesn't even look good. Forget the cranberry sauce, it will not refresh me. "They drew near to the gates of death. {19} Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. {20} He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions". Now comes the refrain: {21} "Oh, that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! {22} Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing". Declare whose works? His works.

Now verse 23: "They who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, {24} These see the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. {25} For He commands and raises the stormy wind, Which lifts up the waves of the sea. {26} They mount up to the heavens, They go down again to the depths; Their soul melts because of trouble". They think they are going to die {27} "They reel to and fro, and they stagger like a drunken man, And are at their wits' end. {28} Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, And He brings them out of their distresses. {29} He calms the storm, So that its waves are still. {30} Then they are glad because they are quiet; So He brings them to their desired haven".

What comes next? {31} "Oh, that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! {32} Let them exalt Him", and not themselves, "Also in the assembly of the people, And praise Him in the assembly of the elders", and not themselves. {33} "He turns rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground". God can turn a

green land into drought stricken desert and He can turn a barren land into a fruitful land. When does He do it? When He wants to, because He is God, and He can do whatever He pleases. God can do all of these things.

We are supposed to be His servants. We are His servants, we belong to Him. We are bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). We are His, and He will chastise us, He will turn our lives into a desert, if that is what it takes. He will humble us by hunger and by thirst if that is what it takes. He will humble us by the loss of a job or loss of a career or a loss of family, a loss of everything in this world that we hold dear to us, if that is what it takes. That somehow, somehow, that we come to appreciate Him, and what He gives us and what He can do for us and what He has done for us and what He will do for us.

A Psalm of Thanksgiving

A few pages back, there is a very beautiful Psalm, one of the most encouraging of all of them to me. It is a psalm very much of thanksgiving. I think sometimes that the word 'bless' and 'blessed' kind of goes in one ear and out the other because it is used so much in religious circles, but if you can just understand, that what it means essentially is: thanks be to God, glory be to God, He is the one who has done all of this. Blessed be God, is the theme.

Psalm 103: "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!" This is a call of a person to himself. {2} "Bless the LORD, O my soul". Everything that is down inside of me, reach up and praise God, thank God for what He has done for you. Bless the Lord O my soul "And forget not all His benefits." What benefits? What has God done for you lately? What has come your way from God? If a day passes in which there is no thanksgiving from you, is that the spirit that you are in? What has God done for me lately as opposed to the spirit you think you are in, a humble Christian, who is thankful to God all of the time.

Verse 3: "Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, {4} He redeems your life from destruction, He crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, {5} He satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's". We already know, don't we, that He will satisfy your mouth with good things, but He will also permit you to be hungry. For a time you will be hungry, there will be a time when He will satisfy your mouth with good things. That's an important point for you to understand when you go back up and say "He says He will heal me of all of my diseases and I haven't been healed yet". The answer, well there has been a time in your life when you were hungry and he wasn't satisfying your mouth with good things either. Back in Deuteronomy we found out why, didn't we? That He might humble you to do you good in your latter end. So why are you suffering in the way that you are suffering? Why are you going through the things that you going through, because God cares about you. He is going to create in you His kind of character. I think God is determined to make grateful people out of us with whatever it takes, to make us grateful.

When are you the most grateful for your food? When you are hungry. When are you most thankful for your life? When you think it is slipping away from you.

Verse 5: "He satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. {6} The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed". All of the time? Eventually. Does He allow you to suffer and be oppressed? Sure. Why? So He can do you good in the latter end.

Do You Think that God is Angry with You?

Verse 7: "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. {8} The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy". You know it is odd to me how often I run into people who believe that God is angry with them. They say, "Oh God won't hear me, God is angry with me, God is down on me, God is crushing me every day and so forth". Yet this scripture says that God is slow to anger and merciful and gracious and abounding in mercy. The only thing I can conclude is that God really does have His hand on you. If He really is punishing you or chastising you, then you ought to be grateful. For He is planning to do you good at your latter end and this is a necessary part of building sterling character inside of you, the character of gold, that you might ultimately have. Part of it is, a lesson that all of us have to learn, of simple gratitude, with a thank you that comes from the heart.

Verse 9: "He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever." He will not stay mad at you from now on. {10} "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded or punished us according to our iniquities". You know, I keep coming back to that particular verse because in my own life, and you probably feel the same way, because you know how true it is. The fact that I am chastised, the fact that I am in pain, the fact I am doubtful about how much longer I am going to be able to live, the fact that I have this fear or that fear or suffer this, none of these things really mean that God is punishing me for my sins, for in fact, He has not dealt with me for my sins, or rewarded me according to my iniquities. If He had I would be dead. I would be dead!

The chastisement that I'm getting isn't that I might die, it is that I might live, that I might come to know Him better, that I might come to love Him more, that I might come to learn what real gratitude is.

He has not rewarded us according to our iniquities {11} "For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward them who fear Him; {12} As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us". How far has He removed your sins away from you? Well, as far as they can get, as far as the east is from the west. They are gone, they are not here.

Gratitude and Thankfulness

Therefore, whatever is happening to you right now, is not a just and fair and equitable punishment for your sins. Is it? It has to do with something else. One of them is, one of the things it has to do with is gratitude and thankfulness. Learning humility that is expressed in gratitude. Learning what hunger is like so that you can be grateful when you are full, so that when you are full that you will not forget God and turn your back on Him and run your life your own way. When He cares about you, when He sets His love upon you, you can't get away.

I think there is a song in our hymnal titled: "A Love that will Not Let Me Go". A love that will not let me go, which may mean, suffering, it may mean pain, it does not mean that God is getting even with you for things you have done to Him. It doesn't mean that He is hurting you because you have sinned against Him. Your sins are gone. He has His hand on you, because He wants to make you into something that you aren't yet. And that is one of the greatest truths that I could ever tell anyone.

Verse 13: "Like a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. {14} For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. {15} As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. {16} For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and you tell where it was". Go back next year and try to find where a given wild flower was. It is gone. That's the way human life is.

Verse 17: "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting". It is open ended in both ways "upon those who fear Him, And His righteousness unto the children's children". There's another important element you know, God's mercy and righteousness is not only on you, it is on your children and upon your children's children. So what you do and how you live your life is so important it makes a difference not only to your own generation but to the generation following and to the generation after that. The accountability to those of you who have children is very very high indeed.

Verse 18: "To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them. {19} The LORD has prepared His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all. {20} Bless the LORD, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word. {21} Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You ministers of His, who do His pleasure. {22} Bless the LORD, all His works, In all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!"

This is a beautiful psalm. One that sometimes on a dark night when things don't seem to be working real well for you, would do well for you to take to your knees in prayer by your bed and read through it, and pray and talk to God and make this your prayer and learn how to have and to express the grateful and the thankful heart. Remembering at all times that it is gratitude and thanks from the heart.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. How grateful are you?

2. When you thank someone is just rote thanks or from your heart?
3. Does how heartfelt you say thank you depend on the situation?
4. Why do you feel ungrateful sometimes?
5. Have you realized that there is a connection with taking things for granted and ungratefulness?
6. Have you ever listed the things that you are grateful for?
7. If you have, have you noticed that things keep popping up that you are grateful for?
8. Do you thank God every day?
9. Do you find that when you are thankful it is easier to get through the hard times?
10. What times in your past were you the most thankful?