

GIVE THANKS ALWAYS

ABRAHAM PHILIP, PHD

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

Two angels were sent out from heaven, so the story goes, to bring back the prayers and thanksgivings of the people on earth. The Angel of Thanksgiving went with a large hamper to collect the thanksgivings of the people. The Angel of petition went out with a basket to collect the petitions. The Angel of Petition returned with petitions that overflowed the basket and filled a sack as well. And the Angel of Thanksgiving had only three thanksgivings in his large hamper.

The truth is that we are eager to bombard heaven with our petitions for temporal blessings and divine favor for living a prosperous life. Yet when we do receive God's blessings, too often we forget to thank Him. Thanksgiving Day is a reminder that we have so much to thank God for. In the words of the hymn writer Johnson Oatman, Jr., "Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done." Indeed, thanksgiving is our expression of feelings of gratitude. "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues," said the Roman philosopher and statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero, "but the parent of all the others."

The apostle Paul wrote, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18). It is God's will that we give thanks always in every situation, good and bad. That's a tall order to fill. Such an unconditional and unceasing thanksgiving is not natural to us; it requires the aid of the Holy Spirit. Paul exhorted the Christians at Ephesus, "do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit . . . giving thanks always for all things to God" (Eph. 5:18, 20). When Mathew Henry (1662–1714), the well-known Bible commentator, was robbed one night, he penned this prayer of thanksgiving in his journal: "I thank Thee Lord first because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was not I who robbed." We can always find a reason or two for thanking God even in our adversity.

When we cultivate the virtue of giving thanks in every situation, thanksgiving becomes more than a verbal expression; it defines who we are in Christ. It's been said that Saint Felix of Cantalice, a sixteenth-century illiterate street preacher and friend of the poor, always said *Deo gratias* ("thanks be to God") when he received something from anyone for his monastery. Soon the people on the street began to call him "Brother Deo Gratias," which became his nickname.

Let us resolve during this Thanksgiving season to give thanks to God always in every situation and thus fulfill God's will. The psalmist wrote, "I will praise God's name with singing, and I will honor him with thanksgiving. For this will please the Lord more than sacrificing cattle, more than presenting a bull with its horns and hooves" (Ps. 69:30–31, NLT). *Deo gratias.*