

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

Thanksgiving: Rekindling the Gratitude

By John MacArthur

To help stimulate a kind of deeper gratitude, my family has adopted a Thanksgiving tradition we've found extremely helpful. Each year after our Thanksgiving meal we gather in our living room and simply recite the blessings of God that have touched our lives. One by one we circle the room, each one of us expressing our gratitude to God for His many physical and spiritual blessings.

Allow me to share with you just five blessings that deeply touch me every year and prompt me to thank God. Perhaps it'll catch and you'll be able to rekindle your gratitude!

You're Saved and You Know It

No work of God's is more beyond my comprehension yet closer to my heart and more worthy of gratitude than salvation. Before coming to know Christ, each of us lived in a self-imposed prison. Guilty,

condemned, spiritually blind and with no means to pay our debt, our destiny was one of eternal separation from God.

But Christ not only rescued us from the power and penalty of our sins, He also lifted us to a place of blessing. He delivered us from punishment and brought glory. He took away the threat of hell and gave us the hope of heaven. He dismissed us from divine wrath and brought us a divine benediction. One hymn writer put that unfathomable transaction like this:

In wonder lost, with trembling joy, We take the pardon of our God; Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, A pardon bought with Jesus' blood, Who is a pard'ning God like Thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?

We sing of salvation. We talk of salvation. Salvation is the essence of Christianity. Thanking God for saving us should be the unceasing occupation of our lips — only a stone-cold heart could offer anything less.

The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth

Watch a half hour of news and tell me if the word chaos doesn't come to mind. The world is gripped by it. Conflict abounds as

religious, philosophical, and political systems collide. Moral, social and economic problems proliferate but solutions are scarce. The political process is drifting rudderless on a sea of confusion. Life is all questions and no answers. There is no concrete guideline or standard by which to judge good and bad, right and wrong. The suppression of truth exacts a tremendous price.

But thanks to God, you and I have an eternal, objective, incontestable, irrevocable standard we can depend on for all matters of life. From the truth of Scripture we can understand the ebb and flow of life better than all the educators, philosophers, politicians and social pundits combined. God's Word offers us a window on the real issues people battle. We know how to be good employees, to love our spouses, to raise our families, to truly love our neighbors. Meaning in life is not a question, it's a fact. I thank God for revealing His truth to us and for allowing me the privilege of studying and teaching it.

Life's Storms

Perhaps the most difficult time to be thankful is when we're in the midst of a setback, a challenge or a trial. When the storm comes, giving thanks is rarely our first reaction. Being thankful for adversity is never easy, but it is always right. From experience I know the difficult times are the ones in which God seems to be most at work in our lives, strengthening our weak spots, comforting our hurts, and drawing us to greater dependence. Businessman John Marriott offered this perspective: "Good timber does not grow with ease; the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees." Let's not neglect to thank God for the strong winds He allows to blow our direction.

Faithful Churches

I'm sad to say there are some congregations today that seem to be wrestling with who they are and what their mission is — a spiritual identity crisis of sorts. Relentlessly assaulted by doctrinal fads, scandals, divisions, internal and external criticism, and worldly thinking, they've buckled under the pressure. The chain reaction that creates is heartbreaking. Doctrine is compromised, effectiveness is forfeited, biblical ministry is abandoned, and God's blessing is withdrawn. That grieves me, and I know it grieves you as well.

However, we can thank the Lord for the many churches that have stayed the course in spite of pressure, and the many others that struggle but have not given up the fight. Large or small, the congregations that remain faithful to God's Word are the ones that are alive, vital, flourishing, reaching their communities with great effectiveness, and advancing the kingdom of God. They've resisted the fads, remained true to God's calling, and are now seeing His blessing. I'm grateful to Him for those churches, and for the encouragement they are to me and to the Body of Christ.

The People Who Make a Difference

Someone once made this wise observation: "Friends in your life are like pillars on your porch. Sometimes they hold you up, and sometimes they lean on you. Sometimes it's just enough to know they're standing by."

That's certainly been true in my life. I thank God daily for the many people who add so much color and warmth to my life. My best friend and wife, Patricia. Loving children and

grandchildren. All who labor with me for the sake of the gospel. Each one enriches me greatly and is a very personal gift directly from the hand of God. I'm grateful for the friends — seen and unseen — whom I've been able to lean on, and who, to some small degree, have been able to lean on me.

Let me encourage you not to allow this Thanksgiving to come and go without taking inventory. Biblical gratitude isn't something that should pass from our minds with the passing of a season. It's an attitude, a God-focused response to circumstances that should pervade each moment of each day of each year.

May you, your family, and friends enjoy a blessed Thanksgiving season ... all year!

God's Promises Are Music to Our Souls

By Erik Raymond

I remember years ago, our oldest son stumbled onto something. He noticed the positive effect of music on his mom. In the course of some of the hard days that accompany life, he would put on certain types of music in the car as they drove. He noticed that he could encourage, cheer, and make her smile with some songs. When deftly deployed, music can have such a positive effect on us. What a discovery for a caring young son!

God's promises can do something similar. In fact, they are meant to get stuck in our heads and instruct our hearts. They are to be what we meditate upon, feed on, and turn to. Like a familiar song with a catchy tune or meaningful lyrics, the promises of God should

get stuck in our head.

Exposure to them will drown out the background music of this world, the pinching pressures of life, and by so doing God and his glory will take center stage.

WEARY PILGRIM ENCOURAGED

One incident where the promises of God help to encourage a discouraged man is the story of Jacob leaving Laban. In Genesis 32 Jacob is heading back to the land of Canaan. And he is leaving with a bit of wind at his back. Laban had treated Jacob like a slave and not a member of his family. But God intervened and abruptly ended the mistreatment. It is as if the door of a cell has been unlocked, and he has been set free. Now traveling with a large family, massive amounts of animals, and God's promises freshly pressed into his chest pocket, you might say he has a pep in his step.

But then Jacob is greeted by angels (Gen. 32:1-2). Angels are important in the life of Jacob. In Genesis 31 (vv.11-13) it was the angels who informed Jacob that God would bless him in spite of Laban's duplicity and because of his promises to him. This pointed back to the wonderful scene in chapter 28, at Bethel, where God promised to lead Jacob back to the promise land and use him to expand the covenant blessings.

So these angels are strategic. They are all about reassuring Jacob that God will keep his promises. God is with Jacob and he is for Jacob. It is similar to having a song stuck in your head. Seeing the angels again reminds Jacob of the song of promise from chapter 28. And like any song that is meaningful to you, it travels with you and is colored by your own experiences. Now this song of promise is

colored by God's obvious intervention in Jacob's life to abundantly bless him and rescue him from his oppressive uncle Laban.

WE HAVE WORK TO DO!

Obviously, we don't learn and know God's promises by osmosis. We have to work at it.

We have to intentionally expose ourselves to God's Word in Bible reading and meditation. This is the source of God's promises.

We must prioritize the Sunday gathering to hear the preaching of God's Word. This is where we celebrate the truth of God's abiding promises together as a covenant community.

You need to get the promises of God stuck in your head so they cheer and encourage you throughout your day.

How familiar are you with God's promises?

Do you have scriptural addresses and scriptural content to turn to?

Are you filling your mind with God's Word?

We are meant to deal with the discouragement, anxiety, bitterness, and fear in life with the true and abiding promises of God. By turning to God and his Word we are instructed and refreshed.

In order to get a song stuck in our head, we need to be exposed to it. We need to hear it. So too with the promises of God. Spend time with God's Word. Meditate upon it. Know, love, and plead the promises of God. They are certain to cheer and encourage you.

FUNNIES

The pastor stood before the congregation and said "I have bad news, I have good news, and I have more bad news."

The congregation got quiet. "The bad news is: the church needs a new roof!" the pastor said.

The congregation groaned.

"The good news is: we have enough money for the new roof!"

A sigh of relief was heard rippling through the gathered group.

But then the Pastor added, "But, there's more bad news, and that is, that it's still in your pockets."

A man always wanted a parrot since he was a boy. His family knew this, so they decided to surprise him on thanksgiving day and bring him a parrot.

Now the parrot wasn't raised in a Christian environment, so it was mocking, insulting, and threatening the man.

The man became so angry that he put the parrot in the freezer. After 3 minutes he let the parrot out. and the parrot said "I take it by your actions that I somehow offended you."

The man replied, "You certainly did!"

Then the parrot say "Can I asks you one more question?"

The man says "Sure. go ahead."

The parrot asked "When I was in the freezer, I saw a turkey. What did he do?"

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!!!!!