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# THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

## When You Don't Feel Like Giving Thanks

By Sabrina McDonald

Helen Keller had every reason to bitterly complain about life—she was blind and deaf as the result of a disease contracted as a toddler. It wasn't until she was nearly 8 years old that a teacher helped her intelligibly communicate with her family for the first time. She lived with these disabilities her entire life.

But because of her steadfast faith, she didn't live in sorrow. She encouraged others saying,

*Observers in the full enjoyment of their bodily senses pity me, but it is because they do not see the golden chamber in my life where I dwell delighted; for, dark as my path may seem to them, I carry a magic light in my heart. Faith, the spiritual strong searchlight, illumines the way, and although sinister doubts may lurk in the shadow, I walk unafraid towards the Enchanted Wood where the foliage is always green, where joy abides, where nightingales nest and sing, and where life and death are one in the Presence of the Lord.*

Helen Keller understood how to give

praise even through life's most difficult circumstances. The smallest tasks we take for granted—walking, reading, expression—were a struggle for her. Yet she found a way to glorify God and even celebrate her weaknesses in light of how they strengthened her faith.

### Giving thanks through faith

We will all go through hard times in life, whether pain culminates after the slow chipping of ongoing difficulties or one paralyzing, tragic event. And when that hurt comes, it's challenging to hear God's voice or feel His presence. During the Thanksgiving season, you may wonder, *How can I give thanks when I'm not even sure God cares?*

When my first husband, David, died in a head-on collision, there was a point when I wondered the same thing. When I needed God the most, He felt so distant. But by walking through tragedy and healing, God patiently taught me I had to walk by faith, not by sight. He revealed to me the promise in Philippians 1:6, which says, "... He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

That verse became a flagship in my life. For the funeral, I requested a song based on that promise, and while it played, I raised my hands to the Lord. Some friends commented

later that they were amazed at my strength that I should praise God during the funeral. But it wasn't strength I was showing; it was surrender. I was telling God I had nothing to offer Him, but I would accept His will because I knew He had always kept His promises. It wasn't praise for the moment in my heart, but praise for what was to come.

## **Sometimes thanksgiving is a sacrifice**

Even when you don't feel like giving thanks, God is honored by what the Bible calls a "sacrifice of praise." Hebrews 13:15 (NASB) says, "Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." A sacrifice is an offering that hurts to give. Thanksgiving in good times is simply a response to the goodness of God, not a sacrifice. But to honor God in times of suffering, that is an offering far more valuable.

It's not hypocritical or insincere to offer a sacrifice of praise, because your gratitude is based on the character of God and the future fulfillment of His purposes, even if those promises are not fulfilled in your lifetime. When the Apostle Paul was in prison, he wrote to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Paul never made it out of prison alive, but his praise was not dependent upon his circumstances; it was upon the character of God. Faith, hope, and love in the heart of a believer are from where we draw our strength for thanksgiving, even in the valleys of life.

Perhaps you have been struggling with Thanksgiving for a while and can't seem to

find anything to praise God about. I believe there are two practical steps you can take to help you give your praise offering.

### ***First, remember what God has promised.***

When I was grieving the loss of my first husband, the gospel of John was my lifeline. I read it over and over because it emphasizes the theme of eternal life. Death seemed to be the air I breathed, and the book of John reminded me that God promised eternal life for His people. Without the hope of that promise, I would have been overcome with despair. But God's promise of life gave me the strength I needed to keep going.

Another great book for difficult times is Philippians. Even though the apostle Paul was enduring captivity and facing execution for his faith, his words are full of inspiration to rejoice and be glad, reminding his readers of all the wonderful promises God made to His people.

The Bible is full of inspirational passages that declare the assurances of God: Eternal life, blessings, honor, the guidance of His presence, peace, joy, and more. Find the passage that speaks to you, and read it often.

### ***Second, remember what God has already done in your life.***

I have journals from years past where I can see the many ways God answered my prayers or worked miracles for me, and when I begin to doubt God cares, I look back through the stories, and my heart is encouraged.

Isaiah 46:9 says, "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me."

It is when we forget God's wonders that we are tempted to feel abandoned. That's when the enemy can use those feelings of doubt to discourage and manipulate. Puritan minister William Gurnall put it this way:

*Now when God withdraws, and His cheer is taken off, Satan's work is how he may deface and wear off the remembrance of this testimony, which is so important for a believer's spiritual standing. Satan wants to deprive him of this evidence, so that when he accuses him again the believer will have nothing with which to defend himself.*

If you don't have a journal from the past, sit down and start recording the things God is doing in your life now. I've heard of several ways of doing this—journaling, praise jars or boxes, or keeping a list in your Bible. It may start out small, but that's okay. When David died, I could only think of four things to put on my list of praises. But since that time, I've added dozens more. God continues to open my eyes to the ways He is using this tragedy, including the love I have for my new husband and stepfamily.

You may be in a place where Satan has already started working in your mind, and giving thanks at this point seems almost impossible. But it's not too late. Just bring whatever you can to the Lord.

There was a time when the only praise I could conjure up were the words to the song from Philippians 1:6, and the only prayer I could express was my children's bedtime prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul should keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul should take."

If that's all you have, bring it to the Lord in faith. Remember God was more honored by the poor widow's penny than by the gifts of gold from the very rich (Mark 12:41-44).

In the same way, He is more honored by the small sacrifice of praise you bring Him than all the rejoicing of those who enjoy an easy life.

## A change of heart

Giving thanks in dark times is a humbling experience, but it helps to put our lives in proper perspective. Like Job, who lost all of his children, his fortune, and his health, we must come to the place where we can say, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; *blessed be the name of the Lord*" (Job 1:21, emphasis added).

That's the kind of humility that honors God. Psalm 50:23 says, "The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me." It may be a sacrifice right now to praise, but it won't always be. To those who are faithful to honor God in the dark times, He will raise you up. First Peter 5:6 says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you." God will lift you higher than you ever thought possible.

Self-pity doesn't accomplish anything, but praising God through songs, prayer, and through His Word brings hope, confidence, courage, and a fresh perspective—all the things you need to overcome adversity. When you lift your eyes to heaven, you begin to realize there is more to life than just your own circumstances.

As nineteenth-century preacher Thomas Watson said, "In petition we act like men. In praise we act like angels." Praise and thanks are the language of heaven, and if even for a moment, when we praise, we can leave the chains of our worries and troubles and soar like eagles in the peaceful presence of God.

# FUNNIES

Ten-year-old Joey calls into the house, “Mom, which would you rather have happen—I fall out of the big oak tree, or I tear my pants.”

His mother answers, “Naturally I’d pray that you tore your pants.”

Joey replies, “Your prayers have been answered.”

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A middle-aged school teacher came to the Better Business Bureau with a complaint. She had invested her life savings in a business enterprise which had been elaborately explained to her by a swindler.

“Why on earth,” asked the BBB representative, “didn’t you come to us first? Didn’t you now about the Better Business Bureau?”

“Oh, yes,” said the lady sadly, “I’ve always known about you. But I didn’t come because I was afraid you’d tell me not to do it.”

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A well-loved pediatrician plays a game with some of his young patients to put them at ease and test their knowledge of body parts.

One day, while pointing to a little boy’s ear, the doctor asked him, “Is this your nose?”

The little boy turned to his mother and

said, “Mom, I think we’d better find a new doctor!”

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A first grader became curious about her father bringing home a briefcase full of papers every night. Her mother explained: “Daddy has so much to do that he can’t finish it all at the office. That’s why he has to work at night.”

“Well, then,” the child said, “why don’t they put him in a slower group?”

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A mother spent a great deal of time preparing a special salad for dinner. As her family was eating it, her seven-year old daughter asked, “Mom, where did you get this recipe?”

“It’s in several cookbooks” the mother answered. “Why?”

“Well,” the girl replied, “when I grow up, I don’t want to accidentally make it for my family.”

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How many chiropractors does it take to change a light bulb?

Only one, but it takes six visits.

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One of life’s mysteries is how a two-pound box of candy can make a person gain five pounds.