

Thanking God for Jesus in Stressful Times

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There are some years that are particularly challenging, where multiple situations and events arise that are overwhelming to the soul. Since 2020, pandemic fears have caused the destruction of many small businesses, greatly increased death globally from mandated experimental medical treatments, the sharpest political divisions in the country since the Civil War more than 160 years ago, rioting and looting in numerous major cities, social isolation from loved ones, and the increasing threat of nuclear warfare.

These things have caused the rise in delayed medical diagnoses that have resulted in severe injury and death, increased depression, and suicide. Being thankful in the face of these things can seem to be an impossible task. It would be far easier to fall into despair and hopelessness, as many have.

In 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and captured it. Among the captives he took with him back to Babylon was Daniel, part of the nobility of the Kingdom of Judah. Daniel was a young man when he was taken captive to Babylon. It is not hard to imagine the anguish he must have felt when he saw his home surrounded by foreign invaders, and eventually destroyed by them. Think of the mass violence and death he witnessed, and the separation from family and his homeland to what may have seemed to him an uncertain fate. He probably felt the abject hopeless feeling that God had abandoned him

and his people.

Yet even in this situation, Daniel's life was characterized by faithfulness to God. This included being thankful to God in even the most dire of circumstances, which helped him to endure adversity and persevere (Daniel 2:23, 6:10).

Psalm 107 describes several dangerous situations, the kinds in which any of us may find ourselves. Facing dehydration and starvation in the desert (vs. 4-6), the distress of captivity (vs. 10-14), deadly illness (vs. 17-20), and being tossed around in a stormy sea. But in these circumstances, the Lord's provision and deliverance led to thanksgiving (Psalm 107:6-8, 13-15, 19-21, 28-31).

The apostle Paul in his missionary travels experienced much suffering and persecution for the name of Jesus. Paul gave a summary of them:

"Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." (2 Corinthians 11:24-27)

Despite these things, Paul exhorted his readers to have an attitude of thanksgiving.

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Notice that he does not say to give thanks **for** everything, but **in** everything. We **do not** give thanks for acute illness,

bankruptcy, or the death of a loved one. But, as difficult as it can be at times, we can and should give thanks in the midst of these trials.

Praising and giving thanks to God is not just to please Him but is for our benefit as well. It takes the focus away from ourselves and places it on Christ and His love and goodness toward us. It helps us to be content no matter what situation we may experience.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”
(Colossians 3:15-17)

If we stop for a moment and think, there are still many things for which we should be thankful. Many of us still have shelter, food, transportation, loved ones, friends, health, and intact mental faculties. These blessings are often taken for granted. Adopting and developing an attitude of praise and thanksgiving to God for these and His many other blessings can help us to develop the qualities of faith, patience, and perseverance in our characters. This is pleasing to God and helps us to be able to receive and enjoy the peace and rest He offers to us.

Some of you may know of the television cartoon series called *The Simpsons*. Humor aside, those who are familiar with some of the regular characters in this show will know of a certain Ned Flanders, who is Homer Simpson's deeply religious Christian neighbor. While the show often sadly pokes fun at his and his family's piety, there was one episode that caught my attention. It was the one called *When Flanders Failed* (Season 3, Episode 3, 10/3/1991), where Mr. Flanders started a

business that sold various items made for left-handed people.

He put all his money and energy into his business only to see it fail miserably. As a result, the Flanders family, who was once wealthy in the good things of life, lost nearly all their material goods and their home. All that was left to them was their car, and the family planned to live in their car until they could hopefully find lodging with a relative in another city.

What I found touching in this episode, and where I think we all could draw a lesson, was that despite this calamity the Flanders family still sang praises to God and thanked Him for what they had. In spite of their sadness at losing nearly everything, they had the courage and faith in God to face the unknown, because like the apostle Paul they learned to be content in whatever circumstances they found themselves (Philippians 4:11-12).

We can all learn, by God's grace, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, to have this attitude. In life we do not always know when things will go well or take a turn for the worse. But we have the promise that God will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). For this we can always be grateful. An attitude of praise and thanksgiving keeps us mindful that all we have and receive comes by God's blessing, and it gives us the strength to face any lack or adversity. It also helps us to be more aware of those undergoing hard times and encourages us to reach out by faith with a helping hand (James 2:14-18).

Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and Resurrection Day Sunday can be something we experience throughout the year. The Father sent into the world the greatest gift of His own Son, God in the flesh, to save people dead in their trespasses and sins. Jesus paid in full the penalty for sinners by dying on the cross. He rose again on the third day, the first day of the week, so that all who trust in Him alone are born again, reconciled to God, and receive eternal life. This is the best

reason to have an attitude of thanksgiving as a way of life.

Not only will Jesus be with you always in this life, but He will also see to it that all who trust in Him alone will make it home to heaven.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25)

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