

In everything ...

Well, here we are. It has been a few weeks after we here in Southwest Florida have been dealing with the affects and the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. As I have mentioned previously, it was a very powerful and strong storm with affects that have not even begun to be totaled as of yet. People are very much in the starting over stage, as well as the re-building stage, in their lives.

As with many of those who were heavily affected by the storm, many still do not have a home to go back to. Many are living in their “gutted out” homes and “making it through,” one day at a time. Many still do not have electricity, water or internet although everyone is working diligently and very hard. The utility workers, the fire, police and sheriff’s departments and the countless volunteers and other agencies are doing a great job in keeping things moving along.

As I had mentioned previously, my home and property suffered what would be considered “minimal damage,” compared to the many, many others who have suffered much, much worse. We were truly blessed and are very thankful to our God for all that He has done and will continue to do in our lives as well as in our community.

I guess that is what I want to share briefly with all of us. I want to share about having a heart of true thanksgiving unto our God. I know that our holiday of “Thanksgiving” is a little over a month away however the concept and understanding of what true thanksgiving is must be understood and then practiced by each and every child of God everyday as we live and walk upon this earth.

We as children of God must totally grasp and understand that the concept of thanksgiving or thanking our God should not be and must not be relegated to simply one time of the year. We must grasp that the concept of the holiday of “Thanksgiving” is not a worldwide concept. It was established here in the United States as a time of giving our thanks to God for watching over this nation and providing us with all of the blessings that we do have within our nation.

However, the concept of thanking God was established a long, long time ago and it is found within the Bible, the Word of God. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to be thankful to God just for all the things that it would seem that He has given unto us as His children. This is not wrong. On the contrary, I believe that it is imperative that we give our thanksgiving for everything and all that our God has provided us with. However, I believe with that, there must also be one more area that we are to thank our God for.

What I am saying is that we must be thankful for and give all of our thanksgiving simply because of who He is. He is God. He is the one and only true and living God. He is God over all and over everyone – even if they don’t believe in Him - even if they do not acknowledge God for who He is. That is the greatness of our God. We must choose to believe this very fact. Our God is God and He is a not just good but He is a great God.

That might seem to be a very simple thought but yet it is so very complex. Why? It is complex because of our very finite human understanding. Unfortunately, we have come to the place where we think that everything simply revolves around one thing - ourselves. However, it is really all about our God. God is so vast and so very great that we must grasp the fact that everything about God supersedes and is much, much greater than we could ever think or ever imagine. The simple fact of the matter is that God is God!!!

What is the essence of true thanksgiving and what does it truly mean to give thanks unto our God? It is revealed to us as we are taught in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. We see that the first mention of “thanking God” is found in Leviticus 7:12. It declares that we are to offer to God a “sacrifice of thanksgiving.

The term “thanksgiving” or “to give thanks” comes from the Hebrew word “*yādâ*.” It literally means “to throw, to cast or to shoot arrows.” It comes from the root word “*yāq*” which means, “a hand” and in a figurative sense it means “strength and power.”

As we can see from these Hebrew words, the concept of giving thanks to our God really represents the fact that we are to acknowledge that our God is the one who’s “hand” is always there to help us in every and all situations. It is only His strength and His power that is always there to help us, not simply in time of need but rather He is there in and for every aspect of our lives. Our thanksgiving unto Him is to be and it must be a simple and true heartfelt acknowledgment of that fact. Yes, it is truly all about God!!!

The Greek word, to give thanks, is “*eucharisteō*,” which comes from the original Greek word, “*eucharistos*.” Both of these words mean, “to be grateful, i.e. (actively) and to express gratitude (towards) the one who has given you something.”

In other words we can simply say that as we give thanks to our God, we are expressing a true heart which acknowledges that all we have, everything that takes place within our lives is an expression of our relationship with our God. This includes even the not so good things that we may incur. We can say, and many people do say, that if we encounter the “not so good things that occur within our lives” that it is from the devil. However, we must realize that even though that may be true, it may not be true in every situation. Sometimes, the fault lies elsewhere and the “elsewhere” may lie within our own decisions and within our own heart.

This is difficult for many of us to accept. After all, we never think that we do anything that may be wrong or that is opposite of what God may be telling us. However, the fact of the matter is, even though we do not like to admit it, we all make some very poor decisions at times and that we most likely make them on our own. Oh yes, we may pray but we pray, not really seeking God and His ways, but rather we pray with the answer already in our minds and it is usually the way we want things to take place or happen. We don’t really even wait for God’s direction but rather we just “sign off” with a bogus prayer and go and do what we want. When it doesn’t work out then we go back to God and pout and complain.

We must also remember that we may pray and God does answer our prayer, however, it might not be in the way we want things to turn out. Rather they turn out the way God wants them to turn out. Do we acknowledge that God is and was in control or, again, do we simply pout and complain back to our God?

We must remember that the scripture implores us in 1Thessalonians 5:18, “*In **EVERYTHING** give thanks for this is the will of our God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*” The apostle Paul commands us that we do this unto our God along with His other imperative “suggestions” of praying with ceasing... not to quench the Holy Spirit... not to despise prophecies... prove all things... hold fast to the things that are good and to abstain from anything that is evil. Why? Paul tells us so that, “*...the very God of peace sanctify you wholly...*”

We must realize that the action of giving thanks to our God in every situation that occurs is an action that expresses a true and pure attitude of heart towards our God. It is expresses a true attitude which acknowledges that God is our God – not us. Wow!!! That is a tough statement to swallow. Yet that is what a true relationship with God is all about. It is all about Him – not us.

That is where mainline Christianity has faltered in this hour. It seems as though mainline Christianity has turned things around and has made it to be all about us – not God. We declare that God must do what we want and we want it now. We can also say that mainline Christianity has taken an alternate direction. It has done this by bypassing what the scriptures truly tell us. We are being told, many of the scriptures are outdated and that we no longer need to really look at them nor is there a need to adhere to them today.

Rather, we look at and hear people tell us the things that we want to hear. We have “contracted” the disease in which the scripture refers to as “itching ears.” In 2Timothy 4:3-4 it tell us, *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having **itching ears**; ⁴ And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”*

Unfortunately, in this hour, there are plenty of “false teachers” and “false prophets” who are there to help us scratch those itchy ears with “fables.” They feed us lies and deceptions that are contrary to the full Word of God. We must be very wary of the lies that come from the enemy – the forces of darkness.

In Psalm 118:19 we read, *“Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, [and] I will praise the LORD.”* In this scripture we see that it is the true worshipper to whom the Lord “opens the gate” to come in to worship and praise our God “at His place,” where He dwells, His Throne Room. We come in as the “righteous.” We have been made “righteous” in the sight of a Holy God through the atoning blood of Jesus. We “enter His gates **with thanksgiving**” in our hearts and we “enter His courts with praise.” (Psalm 100:4)

The scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, refer to this many times as “blessing the Lord.” We are all familiar with Psalm 103 as a psalm of truly blessing the Lord. Well, this is actually a psalm (a song) that truly gives thanks to the Lord for all that He is. It starts off with these words, *“Bless the Lord, oh my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name.”* Then it proceeds to express all the things that God has done for us. The writer then again expresses at the conclusion of the Psalm, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul.”*

But wait a minute. How can I bless God? He is so great; so powerful; so very awesome. How can I, a mere human being “bless” an all powerful God? Doesn’t He truly bless us by giving us new life, salvation, through the atoning blood of Jesus? So how can we truly bless Him when He is the one who truly blesses us with new life?

We must understand that when God pours out His blessings upon us He is literally expressing His adoration to us His children. He is literally, bowing down to us, not in submission or obeisance, but rather as a Father who would bend down and bestow wonderful things onto His children. The important thing that we all must remember is this very fact – it is God who desires to pour out His blessings upon us even though none of us truly deserves it. He simply loves us. When we recognize all that God has done for us and how God pours out all that He is to us, we cannot do anything else but get down on our knees and adore Him right back with the “sacrifice of thanksgiving.” We offer to God all that He has given to us right back unto Him.

Remember, that we mentioned the definition of thanksgiving and the giving of thanks unto the Lord comes from the Hebrew word, “yāḏâ,” which meant and expresses the idea of “shooting arrows into the air.” Well, the actual physical expression of this for the worshipper is the extending of the hands. We “shoot our arrows” of not only love and praise but we “shoot our arrows” of thanksgiving to the Lord.

The “arrows” of thanks and appreciation are to be aimed right at the heart of God. They pierce His heart and those offerings of thankfulness that are expressed unto Him give Him a joy and a delight that floods His heart and truly “blesses” Him. That is why “thanksgiving” is such a powerful force.

That is why, as we had mentioned previously, Psalm 100:4 tells us that with thanksgiving, we are able to enter into the “gates” of His presence. It is a heart that truly desires to bless their God in all and in every situation, for all the good things as well as for those things that may seem to be bad. When we simply come with this heart of thankfulness, the gates of heaven are truly opened and they are opened wide to us, to enter into His presence and to just be with Him and experience His love, grace, mercy and peace.

It is called, the "sacrifice of thanksgiving." We must remember that the idea of "sacrifice" is the total dying and putting away of self. Many times we may fail to recognize where our blessings come from. It becomes all about me and what "I" did. Oh yeah, God was with me but after all "I allowed" God to do it through me. Oh boy. Watch out. With thoughts like that, lightning may not be too far away. Ingratitude may start to creep in. We begin to take things for granted as if they were owed to us. Pride begins to enter the picture. This can become very dangerous. We must always remember that it is God and only God who is our source.

Yes, many of us have gone through some very difficult situations. Some of us have gone through hurricanes. Some of us have gone through many very difficult times within our own personnel lives. Each and every one of us goes through, has gone through and may continue to go through very difficult times. The following is a list of who God is for us to always remember. It is a brief list and you can add to it.

Yahweh - Elohim (Genesis 1:1; 3:8-15) – God is the *"Lord God;"*

Yahweh-Yireh (Genesis 22:13-14) - God is the *"The Lord will provide;"*

El Shaddai (Genesis 17:1-4) – God is the *"The God who is more than enough;"*

Yahweh -Nissi (Exodus 17:8-15) - God is the *"The Lord is my Banner (flag);"*

Yahweh -Shalom (Judges 6:24) - God is the *"The Lord is our Peace;"*

Yahweh -Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6) - God is the *"The Lord our Righteousness;"*

Yahweh -Shammah (Ezekiel 48:35) - God is the *"The Lord is who is always Present;"*

Yahweh -Rapha (Exodus 15:26) - God is the *"The Lord who heals thee."*

I encourage all of those who truly know Jesus as their personnel Lord and Savior to never stop giving thanks onto Him. Yes, I know, at times, it may seem bleak and the outcome may seem so very far away and not so good. Just remember that, if you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, no matter what happens here on this earth, you have a destiny that is found in Him when we leave this earth. Your destiny is the new heaven, the New Jerusalem.

Remember, *"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."*
(1Thessalonians 5:18)