Giving Thanks for EVERYTHING?

Early in my walk with Christ, I learned the life-changing, perspective-changing discipline of giving thanks for everything. EVERYTHING.

Initially, I stumbled over Ephesians 5:20, "always giving thanks for everything," thinking that surely that must not be an accurate translation, or there was a footnote or asterisk or *something* that would mitigate the implication of the absolutes of "always" and "everything." I even bought a Greek-English interlinear New Testament so I could check out the original language.

Yep, that's what it says.

But it's awfully hard to embrace this command without an understanding of why God would tell us to give thanks always, much less why this command, like all the others, was given "so it may go well with" us.

It starts with the reassuring truth that *a good and loving God is in control* of everything that touches our lives. His sovereignty cloaks and protects us like spiritual bubble wrap; whatever makes it through the layers of His protective love and purpose has been given express permission to touch us. It means God has a plan that includes the good and the painful things that enter our lives. It means that He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Apparently, God thinks that giving thanks is important, since He directs us to do it several times.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus.” Phil 4:6-7

I love that God wants us to bring everything to Him instead of being anxious. I love that God knows the value and importance of thanksgiving to help us stay balanced, so He tells us to weave thanksgiving into all of our communication with Him (the first, general word “prayer”) and all our supplication (asking for what we need), as we make our requests known to Him (telling Him what we’re asking).

“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; *in everything give thanks*, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thess 5:16-18

For all the books, CDs and pulpit messages out there on finding God’s will for our lives, there’s nothing like starting with the passages that spell it out plainly! God’s will for us is to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything. Pretty much covers everything, all the time! Giving thanks isn’t just a good idea: it’s God’s will for our lives.

“Understand what the Lord’s will is. . . *always giving thanks for all things* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” Eph 5:17-20

This is the passage that first challenged me to bring my thinking into alignment with God’s word, a passage that spells out His will: not just giving thanks IN all things, but giving thanks FOR all things. And of course we can’t do it with our fleshly, fallen feelings and we can’t do it in our own strength, which is why this command is followed by the directive, “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.” We can do things in Jesus’ name and in Jesus’ strength that we cannot do on our own. But when we step forward in obedience despite our feelings, He meets us there with His more-than-sufficient grace and enabling!

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed

you were called in one body; and *be thankful*." Col 3:15

I love this verse. Letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts means letting it be an umpire, calling out "Safe!" or "Out!" For years I have counseled friends, "Let God's peace be your umpire. Follow the peace, and go wherever it leads you." Choosing to be thankful (note that it doesn't say *feel* thankful, just *be* thankful. Give thanks regardless of your feelings!) is like getting a fluoride treatment at the dentist: it lays a protective layer over the peace, the way the fluoride is a protective layer over your teeth. I love that although Paul's directive is to the whole church at Corinth, it can and should be implemented on an individual basis as well. So when we give thanks in our faith communities, we help seal the peace in the body of Christ, and our thankful hearts also help keep our own personal peace quotients high. Talk about a win-win situation!

But why is it so important to give thanks? I had a lightbulb moment when reading Romans 1 and saw the incredibly important role of giving thanks in protecting ourselves from spiraling down into a really bad place:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-His eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

"For although they knew God, they never glorified Him as God ***nor gave thanks to Him***, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to

look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” (Rom 1:18-23, emphasis mine)

Giving glory and thanks to God is a *spiritual retaining wall* that keeps us from descending to the next level, where our thinking becomes futile and our foolish hearts become darkened. And after this point, a downward spiral into depravity is inevitable.

So giving thanks as an ongoing self-discipline is a protection for us! But far more than that—it helps keep us in a healthy relationship to God. The warning from Romans 1 is that people who knew God but refused to give thanks to Him were refusing to embrace His sovereignty. There is an ugly spirit of rebellion in rejecting God’s right to be God!

When we give thanks for everything that God allows into our lives, we are saying, “I acknowledge that You are God and I am not, and You know what You’re doing. Even if I don’t like this thing You have allowed to touch me, I trust You to make it turn out okay in the end.” I think that kind of trust is pleasing to the Lord. And my own experience is that getting (and staying) in the habit of giving thanks for everything keeps our hearts tender toward Him.

For an example of this, three years ago I blogged about this in “Giving Thanks in a Hard Place.” And my story of learning to give thanks for a lifelong disability is here. Where can you start giving thanks for what God has allowed to touch YOUR life?

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