

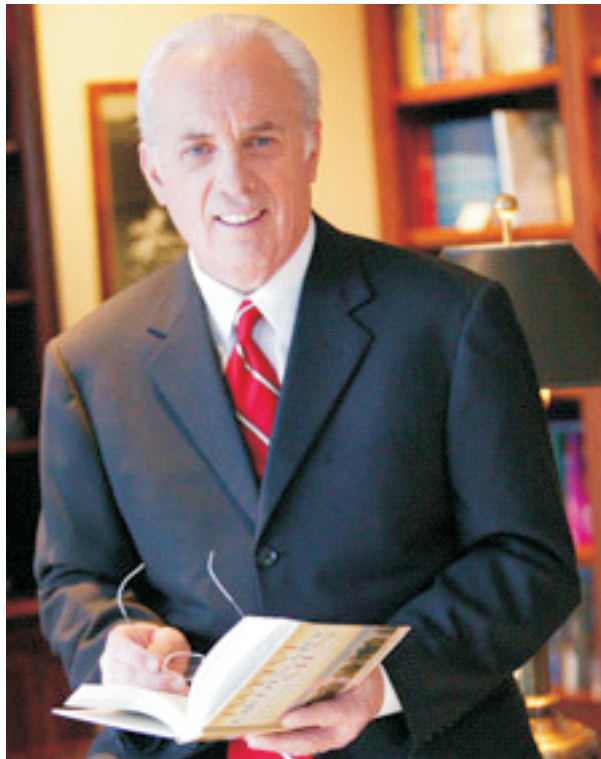


*Words of Encouragement
From
The Word of God*

Pastor Curt Brown, editor

Rekindling the Gratitude

by John MacArthur



The Thanksgiving season is a wonderful time to heighten your sensitivity to the blessings bestowed by God. Thanksgiving grabs your attention, shakes the cobwebs loose, and reminds you of all God's most precious gifts. That's one reason Thanksgiving has always held such a special place in my heart. It rekindles in me the kind of God-centered gratitude that our Lord demands and deserves—the kind that

should readily be on our lips year round.

To help stimulate that 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!