

A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

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My dear Friends:

“What a beautiful thing, God, to give thanks, to sing an anthem to you, the High God!” (Psalm 92:1 The Message). It is a beautiful thing—to express our gratitude to the Lord for his many blessings or benefits. And yet, in our present cultural moment, gratitude is not high on the list of the things we do.

Have you noticed this? For example, the thank-you note is a bit of a lost art—whether it is going to someone’s house or someone’s church to speak, whether it is receiving a gift or a nice meal, very rarely do people actually put pen to paper to write a thank-you note. My Granny was death on this. She would give us presents for birthdays and Christmas, but if she didn’t receive a thank you in return, we were likely to hear about it. She’d wait two or three weeks, but the next time I talked to her, she would say in her very gracious, southern mountain drawl, “Well, honey, did you receive my present for your birthday?” Implication: you didn’t thank me for it—and you better or else!

Of course, gratitude doesn’t work well as a duty (as every kid forced actually to write thank-you notes can testify). As moral instruction, Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:20 are what we should do: “Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Likewise, the parallel in Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” But actually doing this—being grateful and giving thanks for everything always—isn’t something that works well as a checklist or spreadsheet. The law doesn’t help us become grateful or express gratitude.

So, how do we move from duty to delight? How do we move from hearing the command to believing that giving thanks is a beautiful thing? How do we move from “have-to” give thanks to “want-to” give thanks?

On one level the answer is that this is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. As we are filled with the Spirit, under the Spirit’s control, one of the marks is that we give thanks for everything (so, Eph 5:18 with 5:21); as Christ’s Word dwells in us, so that we are controlled by that Word, we are empowered to do everything in Jesus’ name with gratitude (so, Col 3:16 with 3:17). The Spirit uses his Word to change us, to make us grateful, to cause us to sing and give thanks to the God who loved us and gave himself for us. On another level though, this is part of what our own reflection on the Gospel should produce in us. As we consider the great gifts showered upon us through Christ by the Spirit—especially in the light of God’s absolute purity and holiness and our own corruption and waywardness—it should stir our hearts to say, “Hallelujah! What a Savior! Thank you!”

I wonder whether this is something you should consider next week. As you gather with your families around your tables laden with food, I wonder if taking a few moments to meditate on the wonder of God’s grace lavished upon you through Jesus Christ might not cause you to give thanks to our God? I wonder whether you might not even want to take down the family hymnal and sing a song of praise and rejoicing to the One who has granted you so great a salvation? That would be a beautiful thing.

In the grip of God’s grace,



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