THE POWER OF THANKSGIVING

The Spiritual Authority of a Thankful Heart
By Paul M. Hanssen

> *Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God. (Psalm 50:23)*

There is something about thanksgiving and praise that goes far beyond merely expressing appreciation for what God has done. Thanksgiving is not only a response to God's goodness; it is the spiritual posture that positions our hearts to recognize, receive, and participate in what God is doing and in who He is. Thanksgiving and worship reposition our hearts before God, causing the heart to bow.

One of the most overlooked powers of thanksgiving is that it changes the spiritual atmosphere in which we interpret our circumstances. When we offer praise and thanksgiving to God from our hearts, things change around us and within us; even if everything remains the same, nothing is the same. Thanksgiving paints the walls of a cell while the prison doors remain closed; it brightens a dark sky while the rain is still falling; it bandages a wound while it is still bleeding; it helps the eyes see through the fog while it still settles upon the soul; and it calms the storm while the wind and waves actively rage.

Consider this: Two people can face the same difficult situation, the same opposition, and the same disappointment and hurt. One becomes consumed by it, while the other remains mindful of God's faithfulness and gives thanks. The difference is not necessarily a change in circumstances, but what has been allowed to govern the heart.

1. **Thanksgiving Breaks the Power of Spiritual Blindness**

> *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21)*

Notice the progression in this passage. Paul links the absence of thanksgiving to the darkening of the heart and the corruption of the imagination. This is remarkable – consider that for a moment. He does not begin by describing an outward act of rebellion but rather the failure to acknowledge and honor God. In other words, ingratitude can become a spiritual condition in which a person gradually loses sight of God's presence, involvement, goodness, mercy, grace, blessing, and the fact that He is God and that He rules all things well.

When thanksgiving disappears, we begin to interpret life exclusively through what we see, feel, and lack. Thanksgiving keeps the heart conscious of God when circumstances try to make us conscious only of ourselves. A thankful heart does not deny reality but refuses to let it become greater than the God who governs it.

2. **Thanksgiving Is an Act of Faith Before the Answer Arrives**

   Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always... (John 11:41-42)

Something extraordinary happened at Lazarus's tomb. Before Lazarus came out of death, before the stone that held him captive was removed, and before the miracle of the resurrection became visible, Jesus gave thanks to the Father. Jesus did not wait for the evidence of the resurrection before He gave thanks. His thanksgiving preceded the manifestation.

This reveals something important about the nature of biblical thanksgiving: It is not always a celebration of an accomplished outcome; sometimes it is an expression of faith and confidence in the One who has promised, the One who is able, and the One who rules all things.

We often want to see the answer before we offer thanks. But faith understands that God's faithfulness is already established, even when His answer has not yet appeared.

Thanksgiving is what faith sounds like when it has not yet seen what it believes.

3. **Thanksgiving Can Turn a Place of Lacking Into a Place of Divine Multiplication**

   And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples... (John 6:11)

Look carefully at the order of events in this famous story of the five loaves and two fish. Here we find thousands of hungry people. What was available could not meet the immediate need. Yet Jesus did not begin by complaining about what was lacking. He took what was available, gave thanks, and distributed it.

The miracle did not begin with abundance in the disciples' hands. It began with thanksgiving in Jesus' hands.

This is a divine principle we must all consider. Sometimes we are so preoccupied with what God has not placed in our hands that we fail to recognize what He has already put there. We keep focusing on the size of the need while overlooking what God has already provided.

Thanksgiving does not provide resources, nor does it manipulate God into performing miracles on our behalf. Rather, it acknowledges Him as the source and places what we have in His hands. Complaining magnifies the insufficiency of our resources; thanksgiving acknowledges the sufficiency of God's power.

4. **Thanksgiving Is a Weapon Against the Enemy's Attempt to Govern Our Hearts**

> *And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness... (2 Chronicles 20:21-22)*

Judah faced an overwhelming enemy. Jehoshaphat did something that seemed completely unreasonable from a natural military perspective: He appointed singers to go before the army, who offered praise and thanksgiving to the LORD.

Their declaration was: *"Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever."*

This is what happened: *"And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir..."*

The victory was God's doing, not the result of music, songs, or a religious formula for supernatural intervention. Judah refused to let the approaching enemy dictate the atmosphere of their hearts. They placed God's enduring mercy before the evidence of the opposing army and its threat. Their praise and thanksgiving were not based on the absence of an enemy; they were based on God's presence and faithfulness.

Thanksgiving refuses to give the enemy the privilege of determining what comes out of our mouths.

5. **What Happens When Thanksgiving Disappears?**

Perhaps one of the most sobering passages on thanksgiving is the verse from Romans quoted in the first point in this lesson.

> *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21)*

The absence of thanksgiving preceded the darkening of the heart. That should prompt us to examine ourselves. Could some of the spiritual struggles we experience be intensified because we have allowed our attention to be consumed by what is absent rather than by remaining conscious of the One who is present?

Thanksgiving is not merely a religious act. It is not simply saying a few words before a meal or acknowledging God when something good happens. Thanksgiving is the deliberate recognition of God's sovereignty, goodness, faithfulness, and involvement in our lives. It is bowing before the throne of His eternal kingship, acknowledging that the LORD is God and ruler of all.

A person can have very little in their hands and yet possess a heart full of thanksgiving. On the flip side, a person can have abundance in their hands and still live in poverty of gratitude. The real question is not simply whether we have something to thank God for. The question is whether we have developed a heart that recognizes God in everything.

Remember: Thanksgiving does not necessarily change what is happening around us (even though it may seem like everything has changed), but it can and does profoundly change what is happening within us. And when the heart is properly positioned before God, our circumstances no longer have the final word – God does!