

“My Favorite Day of the Year”

James 1:16-18

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Thanksgiving Day is my favorite day of the year. Christmas is my favorite season, but there is something special about Thanksgiving. Perhaps this is because I have such fond memories of this holiday. As a child, every Thanksgiving Day was spent at my grandparents with extended family. Everything was perfect or so it seemed to me. It was always a day of pure delight. No wonder I love this holiday so much.

My affection for Thanksgiving has not waned even though I am an adult and many family members that made it special as a child are now with the Lord. Others have been added to my family that are also dear and precious to me. Spending time with them excites me and enriches my life.

I also have a different perspective on Thanksgiving as an adult. While it is still a time to relax and enjoy delicious food, it is also a time to reflect upon God's goodness and faithfulness. A portion of each Thanksgiving Day is spent counting my blessings and thanking the One that has been so gracious and generous. Certainly this is not the only day I do this, but it is one day that I take more time to do it. I agree with Elton Trueblood who said, “Gratitude is something that can never be overdone.”

This year, James' words will guide my humble thoughts. Evidently someone was trying to deceive his readers and misrepresent God. This person was trying to convince the early Christians that God was selfish, mischievous, temperamental, manipulative and unreliable. James knew that nothing could be farther from the truth and boldly proclaimed it.

“Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created” James 1:16-18.

We need “good and perfect gifts,” don't we? Everything we receive in life is not good. All of us face hurdles and struggles that drain and deplete us. What would life be like without these “good and perfect” gifts?

God knows this and is eager to bless us. Why? He loves us. As a matter of fact, we are the most valued part of His creation, the “first fruits of all He created.” Giving us good gifts is His greatest delight and according to James always will be.

As a parent or grandparent, don't you enjoy giving your children gifts? Don't you feel a sense of satisfaction when you have surprised your children especially when they are going through a difficult time? Don't you feel good when you see a smile replace a look of worry or concern? Of course you do and so does God. This is why our Lord, who has created us out of a profound sense of generosity, sustains us out of His fullness.

C. S. Lewis opens a window for us on God's grace. He differentiates between need and gift love. “Need” love grows out of someone's emptiness and is selfish or extracting. A person must find someone or something to love that will fill a void in his or her life. “Gift” love emerges from someone's fullness and desire to share with others, not to meet a need in the giver's life but the recipient's life.

So often, our love is need based but not God's. God gives out of His immeasurable generosity and gracious spirit. Dr. John Claypool reinforces this idea in his book, The Hopeful Heart. Let me share an excerpt with you.

“What is the Great Story? It begins in the time before time when there was nothing except God, nothing except this Mystery that is life and has the power to give life. Sometime long ago, something utterly momentous must have happened in the heart of this Mystery we call God. The Mystery must have said, ‘This wonder of aliveness that I am is simply too good to keep to Myself. I want others to taste the ecstasy of being and having and doing. I want others to share in the utter joy of what I am and what I have.’

This constitutes the first great movement in the Great Story of Holy Scripture, namely the Holy One choosing to become the Generous One. You realize, do you not, that this is why all of us are here today. We do not call ourselves into being out of nothingness. As creatures, it is our nature to receive life and if it were not for the generosity of the Holy One we would not exist, a word that means to “stand out of nothingness.”

It is important to realize that God created, not to get something for God's self, but to give something of God's self. There was no emptiness in God that prompted this One to act out of selfish regard, nor was there any outside force that coerced the Holy One to create. This momentous shift of the Holy One becoming the Generous One was purely intentional. God acted this way because it was God's deepest desire to share and to make the kind of joy that was essentially God's accessible to other creatures as well.”

What “good and perfect” gifts has the Generous One given you? If you were to take an inventory today, what would be on your list? There are some gifts common to all of us, aren't there? As believers, He has given us meaning, purpose, guidance, direction, peace, security, strength, courage, confidence, dignity, forgiveness, faith, hope and love. What a list we share!

Let me challenge you to be more specific, though, when drafting your Thanksgiving list. What has He given you this year that made such a difference in your life? What “good and perfect” gift did He surprise you with as you traveled down the “valley of the shadow of death” and said goodbye to a mate, a job, a marriage, a friendship, a dream or your health?

What was your response to His goodness and faithfulness? I pray it was gratitude. I hope you smiled and expressed the deepest sense of appreciation as you let Him know what a difference it made in your life.

I wonder what “good and perfect” gifts He wants to give you. As a loving parent, what does He want to do for you that would help you through the tough time you are experiencing now? I hope you will open your heart and life to Him and allow Him to love and bless you. Doing so could make this Thanksgiving your best ever.