

Fanning it into Flame
Sunday, November 27, 2011
The Lens of Giving Thanks

Many years ago I received a teaching on the Lord's Prayer that began to open the eyes of my understanding in this area. While this powerful prayer could be prayed in less than a minute, it could also take an hour or more. The key was that it was meant as a recipe of prayer rather than a rote model. Just as you would have ingredients in baking a cake along with the order in which they are combined, the proper temperature, and the time it stays in the oven, so too this prayer was ordered in a specific meaningful manner. Some people barge into God's presence frantically crying out their need only to find that faith was not at the heart of the prayer, but fear. Faith is the key in getting our prayers answered. That's not because God is reluctant to act on our behalf, nor is he upset with our lack of decorum. Rather it is because faith is at the heart of our relationship with God. It releases what God is longing to do for us. Jesus said in **Mark 11:24 (NIV)** "*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*" Faith is the noun and believe is the verb. To believe is to have faith, and to have faith is to believe. When we don't take the time to put God first in our prayer, i.e. acknowledging him as our Father in Heaven, praising his Holy Name, declaring the priority of His Kingdom, our faith level can be very low and not at the place it needs to be to appropriate what we're looking to receive from him. This doesn't have to take a long time to accomplish. It can be in a heartbeat of time as long as it is heartfelt. God sees the heart. "Give us this day our daily bread" represents our personal requests and that comes after God is given priority. We are more inclined to believe that we are going to receive something from God when we've meditated on his nature and character and declared it to him.

Some people want to ask God for forgiveness before they make their petitions hoping that this "washing" ourselves will make us worthy to receive what we asking for. This is wrong thinking. We are clean because of what Christ has done for us. We don't even know how deeply we need his forgiveness until we've spent time in his presence. This part of the recipe comes after we've made our requests known. I believe the reason is that after we've worshipped him and looked at things from His Kingdom perspective, and then prayed the prayer of faith to receive what we need, our hearts are touched enough to be sensitive to our spiritual condition. Contrition is a natural part of the flow as well as forgiving others in the same way we've been forgiven. This is all about relationship; with God and with one another. It's as though we need to go through the various stages of prayer in order to have the proper "lens" to see what's coming next. **A right perspective follows right order.**

Now that I've established the idea of needing proper lenses to see clearly and that there is an order to this spiritual world, I want us to consider the lens of giving thanks. Gratitude is essential for seeing in the Spirit. It gives us a clearer picture of who we are, what we have, and where we are going. An ungrateful person is one who only sees through their own vantage point; how everything affects "ME!" When you are thankful you have to be thinking about someone other than yourself. There comes the realization that we are not alone and cannot do things without the help of other people, especially God. Gratitude must be verbalized. It is not a private notion. It is not just a glad feeling that you get when things work out for you, but a realization that someone is on your team and needs to be acknowledged.

Psalm 100:1-5 (NIV)

¹ Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. ² Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. ³ Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ **Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.** ⁵ For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

The Apostle Paul said in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)** "*Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" You don't have to be thankful "for" all circumstances, rather "in" them. The reason is that you are not alone. God is there with you. Like the Hebrew boys in the fire, the Son of Man was in there with them. A wonderful verse of encouragement is **Romans 8:28 (NASB)** ²⁸ *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* Isn't it great to know that everything will work out for our good when we are in relationship with him? That includes good times, bad times, victories, and failures. All things mean all things! Now that's cause to be thankful!

This next verse is so powerful. **Philippians 4:4-7 (NIV)** ⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Notice that thanksgiving accompanies presenting our requests to God. Why would we be thanking him before he answers us? Remember the verse quoted above? We must believe that God is going to do what we're asking him and it will be ours. Thanksgiving fits perfectly. God is working on our behalf. He even says, "Before you called I answered." He is so willing! Gratitude gives us the lens of seeing God at work on our behalf. Make thanksgiving part of your daily routine, to God first and then to others. He will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.