

COUNT YOUR MANY BLESSINGS

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on July 14, 1968 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Ronald Willingham, a friend who lives in Amarillo, Texas, for many years has taught men's development classes. Recently, he has incorporated much of his course into a series of recorded messages, entitled "Success For You." The sixteenth lesson in this series has the title: "Count Your Blessings, Not Your Troubles." In this recording he tells of sitting down one day to make a formal list of his blessings and his problems. After a period of time he counted up his totals. There were eighty-two blessings and nine problems. This was a rather interesting discovery, for it points up the fact that our blessings far exceed our problems.

All of us have problems and they tend to overwhelm us. If you come to know anyone deeply enough you discover that he has problems. Usually, too, he feels that his problems are the worst of all problems. He is so close to them, that he feels that they must be the heaviest problems that anyone can have. It is just in this kind of situation that we need to pause and remember our blessings in order to see our problems in proper perspective.

Many years ago my father spoke of his favorite hymn, "Count Your Many Blessings." Neither the music nor the poetry of the song made it his favorite, but the meaningful sentiment which the words expressed.

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by.

When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings money cannot buy
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

So, amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

An attitude of "count your blessings, not your troubles" will change our basic life attitudes from negative to positive. If we can see our day to day problems and even our longer-range problems against a background of our blessings, our lives can be much happier, and we will be much more constructive in facing our problems.

Easy To Be Negative

It is easy to focus our lives on problems. For example, a sore finger or toe dominates the whole body. Actually, it is only a small member and it may not even be seriously injured, but a sore finger or toe makes us forget about all of the more intricate parts of the body that are functioning normally and concentrate upon the minor hurt. Similarly, a flat tire or a cracked spark plug immobilizes a whole car. It may be a new car, and even an expensive car, but if it has a flat tire or a cracked spark plug it does not operate properly. The same thing is true in a different realm. The news that we hear morning, night, and throughout the day emphasizes the problems of our society to the point that we often forget the virtues and strength of America.

In still another area advertising emphasizes what we do not have. To turn through a magazine, or watch television for an evening, leaves one with the feeling that what he already owns is out of date, old fashioned, and inadequate. We see prettier homes, newer appliances, and generally more appealing material of every kind. The whole point of the advertising is to encourage us to discard what we already have and buy something different. The point we wish to make is simply that it is quite easy for us to focus our lives on what we do not have, or on problems which press upon us, to the exclusion of the things that we do have and the blessings of our lives. If we allow our focus of life to be on the negative, we will constantly be unhappy and miserable. If we dwell on what we do not have rather than on what we do have we will never be able to achieve happiness.

Focus On Our Blessings

Let's focus our attention on our blessings. Let's think of what we do have instead of what we do not have. It would be good exercise for each one of us to sit down and make a list of all our blessings, and then to post that list in some prominent place where we can see it daily as we go about our usual routine. In some manner we must let the positive dominate our thinking in order not to become negative minded, pessimistic, and defeatist.

Recently, I made a list of my blessings. It began with life, food, shelter, and clothing. These are broad categories, and under each one I can think of specific points that are worthy of a great deal of thought and consideration. For example, my life has been saved in recent years by the skill of a good doctor. Or, in the realm of food, let us single out a glass of pure, clean, wholesome milk and think of a farm somewhere where someone had to make an investment of time, skill, and money in order to produce the milk. Think, then, of a company that brought it swiftly into the city, processed it, and ultimately delivered it early in the morning to our door. Finally, this glass of milk sits upon our table, hardly noticed, only a small part of one meal. Yet, it is a remarkable thing, and is a product of much planning and of extensive effort. Similarly, we can think in detail of other elements that have to do with our necessities of life. In so doing, we appreciate our taken-for-granted blessings.

Next on my list was home, family, and friends. Again, it is possible to pause and think of details of home, of the individual members of the family, and of various friends, and in these smaller segments to appreciate more fully the blessings in this area of our lives. Then there came the beauties of nature. What a wide range of thought this suggests. God's sky, trees, grass, flowers, hills, valleys, streams, lakes, and all the rest that go to make up the physical setting in which we are privileged to live our lives. Also on my list was the fact that we live in a land of freedom and of opportunity. We can choose where we live and what kind of occupation we will enter. We are constantly invited to go through various doors of opportunity,

My list also included education, skill, vocation, and security. What a wonderful thing it is to have the trained talent to hold a job, to earn a living, and to provide for old age. My list also included physical protection, medical care, and insurance. It is a tremendous privilege to be able to lie down at night and to know that one is protected from harm by local and national agencies. Medical care so many times and in so many ways saves our lives and extends their length. Insurance is a means by which many of us can contribute, and the ones who have special needs can then be cared for. In my list also were transportation and communication. What a blessing it is to be at the bedside of a loved one within hours even when one has been far away. What a blessing it is to be able to work at a distance and yet be home with family almost immediately after the work is done. What a blessing it is to be able to talk by phone to children or parents in distant places. What a wonderful age it is in which we live.

Spiritual Blessings

Then, above all of these in my list was the fact that we are , children of god, just as much so as was Abraham, or David, or Daniel, or Paul, or Timothy. Christ is our Savior and also our perfect example. The intimate, personal relationship we have with him is a blessing beyond our description. Then, there is the wonderful blessing of the church, this fellowship with other like-minded Christians that helps us so much. The Bible is our ever present and dependable guide. We can carry it with us wherever we go, read it whenever we like, and know that it contains the foundation principles upon which we can build a happy and successful life.

My list also included the fact that our own natures are wonderfully planned. We have the capacity to think, the capacity to make choices and the ability to love. God has made us in his own image, and all of these factors play a part in our realization that we are living souls, and that we will live on eternally. In all of this I remember the words of James, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." (James 1:17).

Ronald Willingham tells of a letter that he received from Lee Goodman, one of five young men chosen recently as Outstanding Young Texans by the Junior Chamber of Commerce. The letter read in part, "We are living in the greatest period in the history of man. There are many reasons why I feel this way: (1) My generation had the privilege to live through the depression years. I guess you can call it character that one would receive from experiencing such a thing. (2) The great knowledge explosion of today opens the doors to millions of opportunities that were unheard of a few years ago. (3) We live in the greatest country in the history of man, with freedoms and opportunities that no other country has ever enjoyed. (4) Our land is bountiful in every respect--we are most fortunate."

Even Our Handicaps

Even our handicaps usually turn out to be blessings. William Law once wrote, "If anyone could tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and all perfection, he must tell you to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you. For it is certain that whatever seeming calamity happens to you, if you thank and praise God for it, you turn it into a blessing. Could you, therefore, work miracles, you could not do more for yourself than by this thankful spirit; for it turns all that it touches into happiness." It was Henry Ward Beecher who said, "Troubles are often tools by which God fashions us for better things." Just here it seems appropriate to remember Paul's great promise, we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28).

Similarly, we find good growing out of what must have been considered at the time evil, as Paul writes in his Philippian letter, “Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have fallen out rather to the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole Praetorian guard, and to all the rest.” (Phil. 1:12-13). Paul was writing from a Roman prison, while he was waiting to appear before the Emperor, after he had been arrested in Jerusalem, kept in prison at Ceasarea, and then transported to Rome through a troublesome ship-wreck voyage. After all of this, he could say that things had worked out for good.

Later in the Philippian letter he expresses this confident, hope-filled attitude: “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice ... In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.” A little later in this same passage he adds, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.” Phil. 4:4, 6-7, 11-13).

Conclusion

If we would be happy, and if we would be pleasing to God, we must count our many blessings. We must learn to count our blessings and not our troubles, We must show our gratitude to God for our many blessings by being obedient to his commands. The great spiritual blessings which God gives are to be found only in his church. The natural physical blessings are for all men, but the spiritual blessings are for those who are willing to follow their Lord. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph. 1:3). In order to have these blessings we must accept and obey Christ. This means believing in him as the Son of God, repenting of our past sins, confessing the name of Christ before men, and being baptized for the remission of our sins. God’s gift of salvation depends upon our obedience to these initial commands, after which he adds us to his church. Unless we are willing to accept Christ, through obedience to his teachings, we cannot receive God’s grace, the salvation of our souls. If you are not a Christian, let me urge you at the earliest opportunity to become one, and thereby show your gratitude to God, the giver of all good gifts, for the many blessings that have enriched and blessed your life.