

THANKSGIVING

By Alden Truesdell

"What man is there of you, whom if his son ask for bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" These words of Jesus illustrate how the earthly father and the heavenly Father operate as adequate sources of good. Worldly men who might not profess religious inclinations or altruistic motives appear to know how to give good gifts to their children. Jesus, in this instance, contrasts the quality of their giving with God's giving -- "how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him."

How does God give to man? We know how the earthly parent gives: he works, earns, saves, buys, and gives according to his means. Some people say God gives ideas, and that man can use His ideas in any way that he wishes to achieve what he wants. This is true; but we must remember that even the lesser creatures, unable to comprehend or appreciate God's ideas, are also recipients of God's giving. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," "Behold the fowls of the air ... your heavenly Father feedeth them." God's giving can be likened to the radiation of the sun. The sun sustains life and aids growth in all creation by simply being itself. God gives Himself to His creation by being Himself; and His Love, His ideas, His energies quicken, adhere to, serve, and supply all (man in particular) with needed blessings and gifts.

The next question that arises is, How much will God give? We know that the earthly parent may give himself and all his goods to his children, but his giving is always limited to his life expectancy and to the extent of his accumulation of worldly goods. The child who is dependent upon his earthly parent for what he hopes to get can expect just so much, and it is possible he may have to wait until after his parent enters into his well earned rest before he can have it. Even then it may be subject to the parent's last will and testament. On the other hand, God anticipates no future demise nor does He have to provide for old age or for the proverbial rainy day. Therefore, He is prone to look upon whatever He has to give in terms of present performance and immediate utilization. Since it is generally conceded that God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts, there ought to be no question about the supply being adequate. Such thoughts as these reverse the generally accepted concept that man gives in the present and that God gives, or rewards in the future.

The question next in line is, How much more will God give? What example can be used to point up the obvious incommensurability between man's ability to give and God's manner of giving? Average alms giving is generally a sop to an ego with a lord or lady-bountiful complex. If the giver were actually lordly or ladylike or bountiful, he would either give a whole lot more or a great deal less. The reason he does not give more is his own cupidity; the reason he does not give less is that he fears public opinion more than that he mistrusts God's ability to care for all who need help. Gifts are often accompanied by the sounding of cymbals and the blaring of trumpets, and good works are usually praised in many words. However, we recall one case of charity mentioned in Scripture where the benefactor did much more than was required or expected of him. The story of the good Samaritan expands the point considered.

The Scripture reference at the beginning of this article is from Matthew 7:9-11. In Luke the same instruction is found in Chapter 11:11-13. The difference is in the question asked: "How much more shall your heavenly Father

give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" The worldly man's reaction to this question would very likely be, "Who is asking for, or who wants the Holy Spirit?" He forgets the sweep of the promise that "all these things shall be added unto you," after you have sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness for "your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." And all these things are given by or through the whole or Holy Spirit. The earthly parent can promise to give what he has, or he can give all that he has; but he can not promise to give all things; for many things will elude his grasp. But, just as the Holy Spirit is guaranteed to teach man all things and guide him in the way of truth, so are all things added unto man by the Holy Spirit as the reward for his seeking first the kingdom of God.

We are learning that God, of Himself, fills full to overflowing every nook and cranny of consciousness from center to circumstance. This is how God gives. The question of how much of things God is able to give to anybody hinges upon the ability of the receiver to recognize, acknowledge, and accept His gifts; for God gives not according to measure nor as a reward for a virtuous life. He gives Himself, and how much more of things He gives to any man depends upon the value that man places upon the essential qualities of Spirit. The treasures in heaven are life, health, strength, protection, and provision. If a man places value on depleting practices and wants to dissipate his forces and spend lavishly in riotous living, he will place little value upon such things as life, health, strength, protection, and provision, except as these things appear to be spent and in need of replenishing. Ordinarily, man does not appreciate such splendid gifts until he nears the age of wisdom in this worldly life. As the prodigal learned to value his father through separation from him and all that he had to give, so man learns to place a premium on life, health, strength, protection, and provision as these things appear to ebb. How much more God can give than man can give is entirely a matter of individual perspective and correct placement of emphasis.

This brings us to our Thanksgiving message. Ask these questions and try to supply vital and valuable answers to them: How shall we give thanks to God? How much thanks shall we give to God? How much more thanks shall we give to God? How shall we give much more thanks to God? The worthy practice of giving thanks is a most beneficial self-indulgence and it is also a prolific bearer of blessings. Thanksgiving is not a duty or a religious routine. Thanksgiving is a pleasurable and profitable privilege much like breathing, and it is actually as important as breathing is to the life of man.

We understand that the purpose of the Thanksgiving Season is to express gratitude for blessings and benefits received and enjoyed. We understand that the practice of thanks on this Day is to be dedicated to God. Although we are grateful to parents and to friends for their services and kind interests in us, we deliberately distinguish between gratitude to them and thanksgiving to God. We have set apart Mother's Day and Father's Day and friendship days or weeks; but our Day of Thanksgiving is considered to be God's Day. Thanksgiving has always taken the form of prayer and, to those who use it consistently, it has the effect of invocation because the more gratitude expressed the greater the flow of benefits and blessings.

If ever for a moment we are distracted from thought of self-possession, self-motivation, self-seeking to a realization of God's all-capacity, God's motivation, God's giving, we shall indeed feel inadequate and incompetent to be grateful enough. Like the Scriptural zealot who declared, "While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto God while I have any being," we must try to say, "Thank you, Father," not because God wants credit, but because we measure our own welfare and well-being by our appreciation of and thanksgiving to God.

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VOLUNTARY EXPRESSIONS OF PRAISE

for God's Healing Presence through
JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

"Your dear, sweet letter received this morning. We are indeed grateful to you blessed ones, for I realize that had it not been for you the operation would have taken place as per schedule."

"Your kind letter has filled me with a new hope of perfect health. (Later) I must tell you how glad I am that I asked your help, and I can truthfully say you have helped me find God."

"I am doing faithfully what you told me and will continue to do so. I feel like I am being helped and I do want to be able to swallow and get around good. (Later) Your letter is just like the voice of God speaking to me; so easily understood. (Later) Am so glad to send you the enclosed and wish it could be more. I have followed your instructions. One of your letters I think I know by heart and I always turn to it. You know, I really feel well -- all I need is to swallow normally and use my hand and arm and leg. (Later) Am glad to tell you I am better I feel in every way. I can walk now without holding on to things. I can use my left hand more -- could not pick up anything for awhile -- now I can hold on to something when I pick it up. I have more feeling in my left foot and can move it more -- can use my tongue a little better. They tell me I have improved far better than they had expected me to. What they don't know is that God is working with me and that He is helping me. (Later) I have been home a week now. I am able to eat any kind of food. They always try to tell me I can't be cured, I but I know better. I feel that God is present with me and helping me as they told me later they thought I wouldn't last two weeks and I surprised them and got right up, so I know it was God taking care of me and your prayers too, with your faith. Your letters make me feel God's Presence so plain as you can say things so they are clear to me and I shall do everything you say. (Later) Thank you for the lovely letter and the Spiriticity you enclosed -- I have read it and you always seem to send or say the things that are so helpful to me. I thank you for your help and know that prayer has done for me what the doctors couldn't. As I told you, they were so surprised at my quick recovery, but of course, they thought they had done it -- but we know better. I have been on my feet most all day -- walking out now and then in the yard and 'round the house; out in the car some. You see my dear, it has been about six months since I have walked only to hold on to the bed. I have gained about twelve pounds and look well and healthy -- everyone is so surprised. So I just leave myself in God's hands and thank Him that I am perfect here and now. Thanks again for your lovely letters -- they lift me up so -- you just don't know. God bless you."

"I glance up often and give thanks for such a nice vacation from the grind and for my many gifts including friends like you."

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NEHEMIAH (Continued from Spiriticity, October 1950)

By Robert Applegate

Sanballat and his lackeys at first confined their efforts to mockery, evidently in the hope of discouraging the workers and increasing the dissension within the city. Later they threatened an attack upon the wall itself; but Nehemiah countered by posting guards and arming the workers, so that "the builders on the wall and those who bore burdens were also armed, each carrying on the work with one hand and with the other holding his weapon." More insidious, however, than overt attack were the attempts upon Nehemiah's person. Sanballat, holding out the threat of a libelous accusation to Artaxerxes, tried to lure Nehemiah into a conference in the plain away from the protection of the city. When this attempt failed the wily Samaritan hired the prophet Shemiah to warn Nehemiah to flee to the Temple to escape an attempt at assassination. Such an act would have provided the grounds for an accusation of cowardice and profanation of the Temple. Nehemiah, however, revealed his courage: "Should a man like me flee? How can any one like me enter the Temple to save his life? I will not enter."

Sanballat's attempt to bring Nehemiah into disrepute with the population of Jerusalem reveals the presence of a party hostile to the governor within the city. There is also a further indication of the activities of this group. In 4:10 it is stated that the Judeans complained, "The strength of the burden-bearers is overtaxed, for there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to go on with the wall." Such a complaint was ridiculous, and the threat to stop work looks like an incipient rebellion against Nehemiah's authority. Also Nehemiah's order that the workers remain within the walls at night may have been due as much to his fear that those who lived away from the city would not return to the work as to the desire for protection from the Samaritans.

Nehemiah met every emergency with calm decision and astute measures, so that, in the face of open opposition and secret disaffection, the walls were completed in the brief time of fifty-two days. They were then dedicated by a solemn ceremony. The account of the dedication (12:27-47) has been reworked by the Chronicler, but the main outline of the event is probably faithful. A joyous procession mounted to the top of the wall, there it was divided into two companies. Both parties, to the accompaniment of music and psalms, marched, one in one direction and one in the other, around the circuit of the wall until they met at the Temple, where sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered.

After the completion of the wall Nehemiah remained for twelve years as governor of Palestine. During this time he did not exact the usual contribution for the support of the Persian governor, but rather lived at his own expense and also maintained at his table a hundred and fifty of the leading men of Jerusalem. In view of this liberality, we can well understand his anger at the rich who were lending money at interest to the poor and then, when they were unable to repay the debts, taking their children as slaves, and their fields, upon which they depended for a bare subsistence. Nehemiah rebuked these money-worshippers and shamed them by revealing that, while they had been taking Jews as slaves, he, to the extent of his means, had been buying Jews back from slavery to foreigners. Extracting from the nobles a promise of restitution and cessation from their practices, he invoked a curse upon anyone who should violate the promise. He also took measures to ensure the repopulation of the

now-secure Jerusalem, and then, after a twelve-years governorship, he returned to the court of Artaxerxes.

As soon as Nehemiah left Jerusalem, the old laxity reasserted itself; and, when he heard of it, he returned to institute a series of religious reforms. Tobiah had been installed in a room in the Temple, usually reserved for the storing of offerings and sacred vessels. Nehemiah ejected the intruder, had the room purified, and restored it to its proper use. He then took measures to ensure the payment of tithes and of the regular contributions for the support of the Levites. He also enforced the observance of the Sabbath and had the gates kept locked on that day to prevent the entrance of foreign merchants. When they set up their markets outside the city wall on the Sabbath, he threatened to use violence, and the practice was not repeated thereafter. Finally, when he learned that the children of men who had married foreign wives could no longer speak Hebrew, he made all the Jews promise not to marry, or give their children in marriage, outside their own nation. With this incident the account of his activity ends, and we do not know how long he stayed on his second visit to Jerusalem or whether he ever again returned to the court of Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah is frequently criticized for his "narrow nationalism" and his opposition to relations with foreigners; but there is no evidence of his opposition to outsiders, not even Samaritans, as such. (1. Cf. Oesterley, op.cit., p.255: "There is nothing in Nehemiah's memoirs to show that he objected to the Samaritans on any but political, or personal, grounds. The idea of their being racially impure, or even that they were unorthodox, is never hinted at by him.") His objection to foreign marriages was that the offspring of such alliances could not "speak in the Jew's language," and were thus, doubtlessly, apostasizing from Judaism. Otherwise his animosity was directed only towards those who had opposed his selfless efforts to help his city.

Nehemiah is criticized also for his undue emphasis upon the ceremonial side of religion. Herein he was a child of his time, but here also the criticism is largely wide of the mark. The ceremonial emphasis in the book of Nehemiah is largely due to the Chronicler; and Nehemiah's insistence upon the payment of tithes, the purity of the Temple, and the observance of the Sabbath were due to something more than concern for ritual. Such observances were the recognized and accepted tokens of reverence for Deity, and without that reverence there can be no true religion.

It is easy from our twentieth-century viewpoint to criticize Nehemiah; but he still remains one of the outstanding examples of what one man, armed with faith, courage, and determination can accomplish. His selfless devotion to the welfare of his people was the highest form of patriotism, and his efforts were instrumental in saving them from amalgamation with their neighbors, a union in which they had nothing to gain and everything to lose. He did not dwell, as did the apocalyptic writers who followed him, upon the glories of a future age that would be issued in by a divine dispensation; but he concerned himself with what was to be done in the immediate present; and, whatever it was, he did it "heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." In this example is his much needed contribution to our present age.

Alphabet Of
DAILY MEDITATIONS
For Every Week Day of the Month

NOVEMBER 1950

1. The Father hath not left me ALONE.
2. I will BLESS Thy Name forever.
3. My praise shall be CONTINUALLY of Thee.
4. I will DIRECT my prayer unto Thee.
6. Let EVERYTHING that hath breath praise the Lord.
7. Have FAITH in God.
8. GIVE unto the Lord, O ye mighty.
9. HEARKEN unto Me, ye that know righteousness.
10. Nothing shall be IMPOSSIBLE.
11. By thy words thou shalt be JUSTIFIED.
13. The Lord KNOWETH the way of the righteous.
14. Thy LOVINGKINDNESS is good.
15. The MEEK shall eat and be satisfied.
16. The Lord is NIGH unto all them that call upon Him.
17. Wisdom is an ORNAMENT of grace to thy head.
18. Confirm the PROMISES made unto thee.
20. QUIETLY wait.
21. Thou, Lord, wilt bless the RIGHTEOUS.
22. They SHALL praise the Lord that SEEK Him.
23. My TONGUE shall TALK of THY righteousness.
24. I will look UP.
25. I am the true VINE.
27. WHATSOEVER ye do, do it heartily as unto God.
28. Lay up for YOURSELVES treasures in Heaven.
29. Have a ZEAL for God.
30. Praise the Lord, O my soul.

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"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

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SPIRITICITY is the working Power of the Spiritual Principle,
As electricity is the working power of the electrical principle.