

Sermon for October 13, 2024 - Thanksgiving

1 Timothy 2:1-6 EHV

Theme: **Thank the LORD for the People He puts in your Life.**

- 1) He provides for your daily needs through them
- 2) He gives you the opportunity to tell them about Jesus.

First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all those who are in authority, in order that we might live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

Fellow followers of Christ, do you perceive the people God puts in your life as a blessing or a burden? Well, it depends. If they're kind and helpful, we consider them as a blessing. But if their words or actions bother us, we might view them as a burden. But is that what Jesus wants us to do? Certainly not. Why not? Because, no matter how we feel about them, the LORD uses every person he puts in our lives to bless us. And we need to thank Him for this. Why? So that we, as followers of Christ, see people the way Jesus sees them and show them His saving love. Let's think about these things, under the theme: **Thank the LORD for the People He puts in your Life.** 1) He provides for your daily needs through them. 2) He gives you the opportunity to tell them about Jesus.

Part One: He provides for your daily needs through them.

Our sermon text begins with the apostle Paul saying: *First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people...*

Have you ever wondered why the apostle Paul thought it was so crucial for Christians to offer prayers of thanks for everyone? Well, it's because the LORD uses every person he puts in your life to provide for your welfare. The Bible tells us that God individually endows each person with unique talents and abilities. He then guides history to give people the opportunity to use those gifts for the benefit of others. We call this Biblical teaching "the doctrine of vocation." To appreciate its beauty, consider the following statement written by a Lutheran theologian named Gene Edward Veith:

*"When I go into a restaurant, the waitress who brings me my meal, the cook in the back who prepared it, the delivery men, the wholesalers, the workers in the food-processing factories, the butchers, the farmers, the ranchers, and everyone else in the economic food chain are all being used by God to "give me this day my daily bread." ... "Vocations are "masks of God." On the surface, we see an ordinary human face — our mother, the doctor, the teacher, the waitress, our pastor — but, beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them. God is hidden in human vocations."*ⁱ

Isn't that amazing? Behind every person in your life — parents, teachers, store clerks, managers, farmers, labourers, and so on—stands the LORD, working through them to provide everything you need for your body and life. Is it any wonder, then, that God invites you to offer thanksgiving for all people?

But do you do it? Do you take time to reflect on how the LORD blesses you through all the people he places in your life? Regrettably, I don't. And because we don't, we often fail to treat the people God has placed in our lives with the respect and dignity that He commands us to show.

For example, think about how easily annoyed you become towards a store clerk or waitress who is slower than you would like! Think back to a conversation you had with a customer service agent, who you may have been tempted to lash out at over the phone because they weren't doing what you wanted them to do. Think about how impatient you have been with the person struggling to communicate with you as they did their best to help you – wishing that someone who knew better English had their job. Did you view these people as precious souls for whom Jesus died, people God wants you to love? Or did you only view them as obstacles to getting what you wanted? Did you acknowledge that God was working through them as they struggled to fulfill their roles to assist you? Did you recognize God's presence, teaching you patience and providing an opportunity to demonstrate your Christian love through your response? I know that I don't think about such things at the time, and I suspect you don't as well.

But how different our attitudes become when we start thanking God for all people – praising him for all the wonderful ways he provides for us through them! By recognizing God's hand in their work, we begin to understand their value. As followers of Christ, we understand that people aren't objects we can selfishly exploit and mistreat for our gain. No, they are all God's servants through whom He works his blessings of physical providence. For that reason alone, they deserve our dignity and respect.

“But,” someone might ask, “What about the individuals who don't treat us with respect? Do we still have to thank God for them?” I would respond by saying that their sin does not negate the fact that God uses them to bless you in some way. As a follower of Christ, God wants you to pray for them, thanking Him for the good He does through them and asking Him to lead them to repent of their wrongdoings. One striking example of this is seen in what the Apostle writes concerning our duty towards godless governments:

I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all those who are in authority, in order that we might live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity.

You might be thinking, “God wants me to offer prayers of thanks for the governing authorities in this world? Doesn't God know how corrupt and oppressive many of these leaders are? Some even persecute Christians! Surely, the apostle intended for us to thank God for good rulers, not all rulers.”

No, the apostle meant exactly what he wrote. We should thank God “*for ... all those who are in authority,*” even the bad ones. Think about it: there was not a single Christian ruler in the world when Paul penned these words. Rome’s emperors were wicked and violent. How could the LORD expect Christians to offer up *petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings* for people like them?

Here’s where we need to distinguish between the office and the person. Even though every ruler at that time was godless, God still chose and used them to protect and provide for the people under their rule. Yes, many of them committed grave sins against God and their people, and the LORD will judge them accordingly. But God can and does still work his blessings even through the most wicked rulers.

Therefore, when God asks us to pray for those in authority, He’s not asking us to thank them for the evil they do. He’s asking us to thank Him for all the blessings He provides us through them despite their wickedness. Thank the LORD that we live in relative peace and safety. God wants us to remember that He put our leaders in their positions to do us good.ⁱⁱ

But that is extremely difficult for me to do. The actions our leaders take make me so furious that I just want to curse them, not bless them. And that, dear follower of Christ, is precisely why God commands you to give thanks. By giving this command, he compels you to reflect on all the blessings He provides through your government, such as food safety, infrastructure, law and order, healthcare, and much more. He wants you to view your leaders as people Jesus loves and died for on the cross. He wants you to pray that the LORD grants them the godly wisdom they need to repent of their wickedness and do good. May the LORD forgive us for not doing that.

And the LORD does forgive us for Jesus’ sake. Not only did He die on the cross for our sins, but for our sake, Jesus perfectly submitted to every godless human authority placed over Him. Not only did he submit, but he also showed them love and respect, as seen in what he prayed as they crucified him: “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*”ⁱⁱⁱ He did this both to fulfill God’s command in our place and to provide an example for us to follow.

Therefore, in the peace of God’s forgiveness, ask the LORD to open your eyes to the numerous blessings He provides for you through your leaders. Compared to most nations on this planet, you live in a peaceful and prosperous land, free to live your lives in all godliness and dignity. The LORD provides and sustains this blessing to us through your government. So, let’s thank the LORD for those who govern, regardless of their political affiliations. And when they promote a platform that blatantly contradicts God’s Word? Let us then pray for them, asking the Lord to lead them to repent and do what’s right. Yes, let us always pray for all people, particularly our leaders.

Part Two: He gives you the opportunity to tell them about Jesus.

Why? Because: ³*This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,* ⁴*who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* ⁵*For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,* ⁶*who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*

The LORD certainly blesses our lives through other people. Imagine how challenging life would be without farmers to provide food, transportation workers to deliver it to market, police officers to maintain peace, sanitation workers to keep our cities clean, teachers to educate our children, personal support workers to care for our loved ones, factory workers to produce the products we rely on daily, and government workers to organize these essential services? Life would undoubtedly be much more difficult! But look at the many blessings the LORD provides for you through them all! Yes, thank the LORD for all the people He puts in your life.

And what is the best way you can show the LORD your gratitude? By fulfilling your calling as a follower of Christ: using the peace and security with which he has blessed you to share His message of salvation with others.

The Lord doesn't just want you to see His hand working in the people he puts in your lives; He wants you to love them every bit as much as He loves you. He wants them to know the truth about their sin — how they have separated themselves from Him. More importantly, He wants them to know the truth about His Son, who died on the cross for their salvation. Yes, God *wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. That is why He has given you, follower of Christ, a special gift and calling in this world. The gift is the Gospel — the good news of our reconciliation with God through Jesus. And your calling? To use your words and actions to share that news with everyone God puts in your life.

Dear follower of Christ, God graciously provides you with everything you need, not so you can sit back and selfishly do whatever you want with your life. No, just as he has placed many people in your life to bless you, so has he placed you in the lives of many people to bless them. He works through your vocation to help others. More importantly, He uses your witness of His Gospel to help people know Jesus and be saved.

Therefore, repent of all the times you viewed other people as anything less than precious souls for whom Jesus died to save. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you thank God for all the people he puts in your life, acknowledging His gracious providence through them. Learn to pray for all people, asking the LORD to be as merciful to them as He has been to you. Finally, thank the LORD by using the opportunities he gives you to share Jesus with everyone He puts in your life. That is the best way you can show gratitude to God for all the ways he provides for you. That is the best love you can show others as a follower of Christ. Amen

ⁱ From “The Masks of God” as quote by Michael Spencer <https://internetmonk.com/archive/the-masks-of-god>

ⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 13:1-7

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 23:34 EHV