

Giving Thanks to God

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Like many of you, I have been thinking about Thanksgiving this past week. And I have also been thinking about giving thanks this past week. That might sound redundant, but it isn't necessarily so. I hear people say, "I'm so thankful that (fill in the blank)." Or you might say, "I'm thankful for (again, fill in the blank)". But I wonder, when I hear such statements, to whom (or to what) is the person thankful? We hear people say they are thankful, but we do not hear very often to whom they are thankful, do we? There are very many of us who, if pressed, would say that it's God, of course, to whom we give thanks.

But God does not get mentioned very much, it seems. Oh, sometimes on a television sitcom, we might hear a sarcastic "Thank Gawddd!", but it's clear the line was written for laughs and is the furthest thing from an expression of sincere gratitude. (Actually, such a line is an insult to God, which he never takes lightly, and a violation of the commandment not to take God's name in vain, a commandment way too many take way too lightly.)

No, God does not get mentioned all that often in the proper context. Yet behind everything, behind every blessing and every benefit and every breath, there is God. And yet so many take him for granted. It seems God is very much an afterthought when he should be in the forefront of our thinking, and of our speaking, too.

The Bible has something to say about the subject. The psalmist composed: *I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations.* (Psalm 57:9) The prophet preached: *Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.* (Isaiah 12:4) The chronicler of Israel's history recorded: *Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!* (1 Chronicles 16:34) The apostle wrote: *We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers...* (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

I find that last example, from Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians, to be quite helpful. Paul was very glad for the Thessalonians' partnership in the gospel and their support of his work, but instead of only (and merely) thanking them, he recognized that it was God who was behind their partnership and support (because it is God who is behind everything) and so he wrote that he thanked God for them and for their work. I have tried to make more of a habit of including God in my expressions of gratitude, because it is right to say thank you to God instead of just into the air and to no one or nothing in particular and because it reminds me of what I believe: that God is worthy of my attention and that he is the source of every gift and grace. I am trying to make more explicit and specific what is too often implied and taken for granted.

So I have been thinking about giving thanks (to God) this Thanksgiving week. And I will try to continue to include God more in my expressions of gratitude. For example, I thank God that the Advocate gives me space to write this column. And I thank God that many of you read and think about what I write. And, as long as I'm thanking God, I am going to include a plug for something our church is doing again in a week that we thank God we have the chance to do – and some of you thank God we do it, too (and you're glad to be reminded). First Baptist presents "the Christmas story" at our Living Nativity next weekend, December 2 and 3, and there will be shepherds and angels and kings and live animals and a re-telling of the greatest story ever told, the story for which we thank God!

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Bible verses are from the [Holy Bible, English Standard Version](#) (ESV).