

Thanksgiving

By
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“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

-1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, I thought it would be a good idea to relate the American basis for this holiday, to the Biblical view of thanksgiving. In the above passage, Paul doesn't just say that we should be thankful for the good things within our life, but instead he adjures us to *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks...”* This goes further than merely being thankful for good things, this requires a spirit of thanksgiving that allows us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in any and all circumstances of life. This spirit is what animated the instantiation of this holiday, first by the governor of the Plymouth Massachusetts colony, William Bradford in 1623:

“Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.

Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the daytime, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.”

-William Bradford - Thanksgiving Proclamation

He spoke these words even after the original Pilgrims suffered a brutal winter that killed nearly half of all those who ventured to the new world. When our nation was founded, this same sentiment was later expressed by George Washington when he first established Thanksgiving as a national holiday after he became president in 1789:

“Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and

favor-- and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

-George Washington - Thanksgiving Proclamation

And finally by Abraham Lincoln who officially fixed the date of Thanksgiving as the final Thursday in November:

“The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and even soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God...

No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.”

-Abraham Lincoln - Thanksgiving Proclamation

Lincoln wrote this, not during a time of national prosperity, but in the most bloody year of the American Civil War. This is especially significant, because Lincoln acknowledges in his proclamation that it was the sins of the nation that brought about the great calamity and not any foreign animus or natural disaster. Even so, what is shown in the words of all three of these men is the same heart of genuine thanksgiving that the apostle Paul

described in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: *“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

The Christian who understands this principle correctly doesn't need to delude themselves into toxic positivity or wait for prosperous times in order to be thankful, the Christian who understands the benevolent care of God can also give thanks in all circumstances. But, practically, how do we cultivate this same spirit within ourselves?

Beauty Will Save the World

“Is it true, prince, that you once declared that 'beauty would save the world'? Great Heaven! The prince says that beauty saves the world! And I declare that he only has such playful ideas because he's in love!”

-Fyodor Dostoevsky - “The Idiot”

Arguably more than any other quote that I have read in the past couple years, this one has had the most profound impact on me. In the above quote, Fyodor Dostoevsky is writing about the noble Prince Myshkin, who, due to a form of epilepsy, is rendered “an idiot” (another word for invalid), for the majority of his life. Upon recovering, he enters into the world of the aristocracy in 19th century Russia. There, his childlike innocence and naivete are seen as both endearing and despised by his fellow Russians. Ultimately, his naivete undoes him and leads to a tragic ending. Which is why, in the above quote, the prince's sentiment that “beauty will save the world” is mocked and ridiculed.

What makes the quote so profound is that, while the sentiment is mocked by the Russian aristocracy, Dostoevsky, who was a Christian, actually believed this sentiment to be true, but not in the sense that his protagonist did. Dostoevsky believed that ultimately, it would be *God's* beauty that would save the world, not man's. The naivete of prince Myshkin was to look for this saving beauty in the world as opposed to staking his hopes in God Himself. But, there is another element to this quote that makes it so profound. Dostoevsky doesn't say that God's justice or goodness will save the world, (though his quote doesn't deny their participation) but specifically that “beauty will save the world.” There are almost infinite levels to understand this quote, but for our purposes today, let's focus on how a vision of beauty can create in us a thankful heart.

The True and the Beautiful

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

-2 Corinthians 3:18

This sentiment is not unique to Dostoevsky, (though he stated it in a truly amazing way) but we can also see in Scripture that this sentiment is indeed true. Notice that Paul says that it is by beholding the “glory” of God, (another word for beauty or majesty) that we are “being transformed into the same image”. The transformation of man, which is our individual salvation, is not accomplished by works of the flesh or by incredible understanding of the mind, but instead through a recognition of the supreme beauty of Christ. This recognition caused us to long for God, but also to recognize our unworthiness of Him. This opened us up to the message of the gospel and allowed us to enter into a relationship with God on the basis of grace.

The reason why this is relevant to the topic at hand, is because we perceive beauty differently than we do truth, and by setting truth above beauty we view the world very differently than we probably should. Since the Enlightenment, the west has been obsessed with truth more than we have been concerned with beauty. We think that salvation will happen through understanding, that we will peel back all the mysteries in the universe through our scientific discoveries, and create a utopia of perfect predictability in our own image. We think that we will be able to cure every virus, stop every war, create endless resources, fix every possible mental illness, and even create harmony in the cosmos by fixing the climate all through scientific knowledge. Because of this, we now disagree with Dostoevsky, we don't think that beauty will save the world, we think that truth will.

I am not setting up a false dichotomy between truth and beauty, these are both aspects of God's character, I only wanted to point out that by valuing truth so highly, we may have forgotten about beauty and might be suffering consequences for that decision. Even within Christianity, we can spend so much time trying to understand God and His commands, that we forget to “behold” God and “see” His beauty and goodness. Forgetting that it is by “beholding” God that we are given the ability to transform into His image. To put it more simply, the way that we access truth is by understanding, the way that we access beauty is through “beholding”.

What this means is that our minds are now geared more towards perceiving the world as a compilation of facts, instead of seeing the world as something aesthetic or artistic. This might sound strange, but this has everything to do with how we experience thanksgiving. If I see the world as a simple list of facts to be understood, then I will also be prevented from true thankfulness.

Life as a Story

To understand this point, think about the way we learn history versus how we approach a fictional story. When we learn history, our minds are set on understanding the facts surrounding the event. We want to know who was involved, what they were doing, and the significant impact of an event. When we approach a story, the same isn't true. Since the story is fictional, we read the story not to understand it, but to "behold" or enjoy it. Because of this, we don't see the story as a series of facts, but instead as a harmonious narrative that tells a particular story. In other words, appraising beauty requires us to harmonize disparate events and to see overall meaning, whereas looking at events only leads us to understand truths.

This is how art works in contradiction to mere facts. Minor chords can be a part of an uplifting symphony, a black background can highlight a beautiful landscape, and the most tragic events imaginable can be harmonized into a beautiful and uplifting story of hope and redemption. Art is meant to be taken as a whole, harmonized in an overall narrative, while facts can be taken singularly. And since we are addicted to facts, we don't see our lives as stories anymore, only as facts.

This makes sense of why we are addicted to bad news. If life is merely a series of events, then our attention funnels to the things that matter most to us. Tragedy always draws the eye because happiness merely needs to be enjoyed, whereas tragedy needs to be attended to. Think about your body. If you break a bone, you don't think about the over 200 unbroken bones, but instead you become fixated on the one broken one that needs your attention. Only in the aesthetic mindset, specifically oriented towards God's beauty and sovereign will, can we see our lives as part of something bigger, to zoom our attention out and see both the good and the bad harmonizing in a larger narrative that leads to glory.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

-Ephesians 2:10

The Scriptures reveal this reality to us as well. When Paul says that we are His "workmanship" he didn't use a normal construction word, which would insinuate that God is "constructing" us in a utilitarian sense, but instead he uses the Greek word "poiema" from which we get our word poem. Meaning that God is not a construction worker trying to build some useful structure, but a master craftsman, an artist, bringing beauty and harmony out of our lives. While truth can convey facts, beauty, using symbols, aesthetics, conveys the deeper meanings undergirding reality. Our lives are

not just a series of disconnected events, but a beautiful tapestry that God is weaving together which will fit into His even greater narrative of the world itself.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

-John 1:14

This is one of the ways to interpret the above passage. Christ, the eternal word and meaning of the whole universe, stepped into His own story, filled it with His glory, and united our stories to His own. This means that the victory of Christ becomes our victory, and the consolation of the cross becomes personal for each of us. By seeing our world in this narrative structure, we are now freed to see the meaning behind our lives that brings even negative truths into harmony, and allows us to be thankful in all things.

Let's re-evaluate Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation in this light:

“The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and even soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God... No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.”

-Abraham Lincoln - Thanksgiving Proclamation

Lincoln was able to be thankful in the midst of the Civil War because he saw the events he was living through as part of a larger story and not as a simple brute fact. Beyond seeing his life as a story, he saw it as being a part of God's much larger narrative, which allowed him to look beyond his own tragedy and perceive, by the eyes of faith, the larger purposes of God in his individual circumstance; and he enjoins his fellow Americans to do the same thing.

This kind of talk is almost completely missing from our day to day life, especially our political lives. Since we perceive the world as a series of facts, our current culture has become almost completely reactionary. We can't be thankful for the past and we can't be hopeful for the future, we can only be anxious and despondent about the present. While you can understand facts, you can't be thankful for them. Thankfulness is a state of “beholding” or sitting in awe of something greater than yourself, and you can only do

that with an aesthetic mind. The rational mind can understand facts, and even address facts, but it can't be in awe, it can't truly be thankful.

Thanksgiving and the Past

“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

-1 Corinthians 15:9-10

Notice how Paul speaks about his past. There is a level of shame attached to his past conduct, but he doesn't dwell in it. Instead he ends his confession with praise for the grace of God. Since he saw his life in the context of a greater story, he was able to both acknowledge his past mistakes and to also see how the grace of God could redeem his past and make him the man that he was. This is almost impossible for modern people to do. It isn't a mistake that in the modern world, the word “trauma” has become so ubiquitous. This isn't because we are wrestling with worse traumatic events than anyone in the past, and it also isn't because we have better diagnosing capabilities. While there are many particular reasons for this problem, I would say that our inability to see our lives as being a part of a larger narrative is a fairly big reason.

Without this perspective, without the belief that the beauty of God will harmonize all things, we have no mechanism at evaluating the tragic elements of the past. This leads many down the path of denial where they don't even want to think about the past because of how messy it is. And for many others to look at the past with only a sense of shame and anger. This holiday is the perfect opportunity to see this phenomenon. Many on the political right want to look at the past and only focus on the good things, while the left wants to only focus on the bad things. This has filled countless people with an overwhelming feeling of national shame. Where we spend the beginning of many presentations and ceremonies with so-called “land acknowledgements” where we dwell on the shame of having “stolen” lands that do not belong to us. But neither perspective allows for truth or genuine thanksgiving.

The truth is that the past is filled with both good and bad. But, by seeing the past as a part of God's larger narrative, we can see His providence shining through and be thankful for the past that has brought us to our present moment that God also has plans for. Our personal stories reflect this same reality. If our past is really just a series of meaningless events piled on top of one another, then I will either ignore my past, or I will live in constant shame of my past mistakes. Both perspectives are bad, and both lead to

the negative psychological effects associated with PTSD. The only way forward is to recognize your past, all elements of your past, as being part of your overall story.

When we watch a movie, we usually see the hero of the story subjected to many different “traumas” and misfortunes. But, because we see the full story, we don’t evaluate their misfortunes as meaningless or as purely traumatic, instead they become formative to the overall character and disposition of the hero. Think about Batman. It is by overcoming the tragedy of his parents death that he becomes a hero. Without the overwhelming tragedy, the overwhelming heroic character could not be formed.

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

-Romans 5:3-5

This is why Christians have always offered up our testimonies. We do this, not to minimize our past depravity, nor are we trying to wallow in shame or self-pity, we see our own personal story of redemption and salvation as a “testimony” of Christ’s continued work upon the earth. In salvation, our individual story becomes a part of Christ’s story, which makes our past, the good and the bad, the seed for what Christ is doing in our present. The cross is the ultimate example of this. Though the cross was the ultimate symbol of humiliation and suffering, Christians have adorned our buildings and even our own bodies with this symbol, with pride. Why? Because the story of Jesus’ victory is only completed *through* the cross where He was able to defeat sin and death.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

-Colossians 2:13-15

This perspective is what has allowed Christians throughout time to come to accept even the most terrible elements of their past, as being a part of God’s redemptive story within their lives. It allowed men like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to write this about his unjust time in the brutal Soviet Gulags:

“All the writers who wrote about prison but who did not themselves serve time there considered it their duty to express sympathy for prisoners and to curse prison. I . . .

*have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation:
“Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!”*

-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn - “The Gulag Archipelago”

When we see the cross, we see the power of God to redeem even the greatest of all evils and the most severe of all tragedies, to turn the crown of thorns into the crown of gold, and to turn the humiliation of the grave into the victory of heaven. No matter what our past might look like, the Christian sees it as part of God’s story that will finally end in beauty and therefore, we give God thanks.

Thanksgiving in the Present and Future

“Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

-Romans 8:27-30

Paul is not writing this to a group of Christians who are thriving in peace and prosperity, but to a church that was undergoing suffering and persecution. His encouragement to them is powerful and mighty; he teaches them to see their present sufferings, which were brutal and overwhelming, as a part of God’s will for their life. This doesn’t mean that Christians are not supposed to fight for more just and peaceful times, but that even when the present moment is unjust and filled with pain, we can still offer up thanksgiving to our God.

This is another reason why the present culture is so filled with anxiety. We are always looking forward to a better future. We don’t look at the present as a place to live, but as a staging ground for our future happiness. We are conditioned to think this way throughout our childhoods. We get through elementary school so we can get into middle school, we graduate middle school to go to high school, we graduate high school to go to college, we go to college to get a good entry position, and so on and so forth. We don’t know how to rejoice and be thankful in the present moment, we only know how to worry away the present in anticipation for the future.

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body

more than clothing? “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?”

-Matthew 6:25-27

It is our hope in the providential care of our good Father that we can have peace and thanksgiving in our present moment, even if our present moment is filled with trials and suffering. This might seem a little naive, so let's take a look at a powerful example from a Christian who did just this. In the powerful book “The Hiding Place” Corrie Ten Boom shares her story of helping hide Jews during the Holocaust. Partway through the book though, Corrie and her family are captured and taken to a concentration camp named Ravensbruck. But during their time there, her sister, Betsie, helped Corrie remain thankful even in those terrible circumstances. One day, Betsie and her went through 1 Thessalonians 5 and had the following conversation:

“In the feeble light I turned the pages. “Here it is: ‘Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all... ‘. . . to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus—”
“That’s it, Corrie! That’s His answer. ‘Give thanks in all circumstances!’ That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!” I stared at her, then around me at the dark, foul-aired room. “Such as?” I said. “Such as being assigned here together.” I bit my lip. “Oh yes, Lord Jesus!” “Such as what you’re holding in your hands.” I looked down at the Bible. “Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here! Thank You for all the women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages.” “Yes,” said Betsie. “Thank You for the very crowding here. Since we’re packed so close, that many more will hear!” She looked at me expectantly. “Corrie!” she prodded. “Oh, all right. Thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds.” “Thank You,” Betsie went on serenely, “for the fleas and for—” The fleas! This was too much. “Betsie, there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.” ““Give thanks in all circumstances,”” she quoted. “It doesn’t say, ‘in pleasant circumstances.’ Fleas are part of this place where God has put us.” And so we stood between piers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.”

-Corrie Ten Boom - “The Hiding Place”

Corrie then tells us that a few days later, Betsie and her were supposed to be transferred to a brutal work camp, but were denied due to their fleas. This isn't to say that every negative thing in our life will immediately be transformed into our benefit in the here and now, but that everything we go through, big or small, is working together

for our good. To be made into the image of God and to draw closer to Him in the ultimate sense, this is the height of the Christian purpose and desire. And God can use, even suffering, to accomplish this high purpose. This means that the cause of thanksgiving in the present is inextricably tied to future hope. So while we are not to ignore our present in anticipation of the future, we also shouldn't see the present as being detached from the future.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.”

-Matthew 5:3-5

Notice that the blessedness (or joy) that Christ offers His followers is found in present hardship through future hope. This means that I don't have to be thankful *for* all things in themselves, but instead I can be thankful for all things in connection to God's overarching will for my life. To put this point more simply, if God can create thankfulness in the hearts of Christians locked in a concentration camp, which is about as close to Hell that someone can get on this earth, then we can be thankful anywhere because of the beauty of God that we can experience even in the worst of circumstances and the future hope we have in His sovereign will. Because of this, we can give thanks in everything.

Again, this doesn't mean we shouldn't try to change our bad circumstances, or earnestly pursue a blessing from God. Only to mean that even if our efforts fail and our prayers are unanswered in the specific sense that we prayed them, it doesn't mean that God is silent or that He isn't working through our circumstances. As Paul puts it after praying that God would remove a source of suffering from his life:

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

-2 Corinthians 12:7-10

To boast, or give thanks, in the midst of suffering is only possible for the person who sees their life as a part of God's story. Who knows that their present sufferings are not

isolated or meaningless, but they are a part of God's unique glory and intentions for their life. This allows for the Christian to be set free from anxiety over the present moment and live in harmony with God's overall purposes for their life. I love how the "Serenity Prayer" puts this:

*"God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change
the courage to change the things I can
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time.
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace.
Taking, as he did, the sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it.
Trusting that he will make all things right
if I surrender to His will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
and supremely happy with Him forever."
-The Serenity Prayer*

Most people have heard the beginning of this prayer, but I personally find the latter half more powerful. To have serenity in my present circumstances means being thankful in the hope of God's perfect will for my life. This attitude change will also make us far more open to seeing the blessings of the present moment. I like how C.S. Lewis put this point in his book "Reflections on the Psalms":

*"I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and content, praised the most, while the cranks, misfits and unhappy praised least... I have never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside... I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation... The worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. If it were possible for a created soul fully to "appreciate," that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, than that soul would be in supreme beatitude..."
-C.S. Lewis - "Reflections on the Psalms"*

This is another way that beauty saves us. Facts can be understood and addressed, but only beauty can pull us out of our present anxiety and lift us towards praise and thanksgiving. If there is ever a belief in our heart that tells us that we are unthankful and unhappy because of our present circumstance, we have not yet learned this lesson. While the present sufferings can, and should, cause us grief, grief is never at odds with rejoicing, praise, and thanksgiving:

“As sorrowful yet always rejoicing...”

-2 Corinthians 6:10

When George Washington and Abraham Lincoln called their nation to a day of Thanksgiving, they did so on the belief that thankfulness was an act of the will. It isn't something that falls from heaven without warning, but a discipline of the soul. This is a discipline to notice the good things in our life, and to hope in the future purposes of our present sufferings. This is something that we must choose to do though, because the natural state of our soul is to be discontent and unthankful. But to the one who can learn to be thankful, regardless of their circumstances, this same one will learn to experience more and more of the infinite joy and love of God. And this same joy over the present moment will spill over into a heart of hope for the future glory and beauty that will meet them in the age to come.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

-2 Corinthians 4:16-18

“To know GOD is Life Eternal. There must therefore some exceeding Great Thing be always attained in the Knowledge of Him. To know God is to know Goodness. It is to see the beauty of infinite Love... To know Him therefore as He is, is to frame the most beautiful idea in all Worlds. He delighteth in our happiness more than we: and is of all other the most Lovely Object. An infinite Lord, who having all Riches, Honors, and Pleasures in His own hand, is infinitely willing to give them unto me. Which is the fairest idea that can be devised.”

-Thomas Traherne - “Centuries of Meditations”