

The story is told of two old friends bumped into one another on the street one day. One of them looked forlorn, almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What has the world done to you, my old friend?" The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars." "That's a lot of money." "But, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand free and clear." "Sounds like you've been blessed...." "You don't understand!" he interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million." Now he was really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?" "This week... nothing!"

That's the trouble with receiving something on a regular basis. Even if it is a gift, we eventually come to expect it. This is the "entitlement mindset" that has permeated American society at almost every level. Someone once said that if the stars only came out once a year, we would stay out all night to watch them. But they are there every night and we have grown accustomed to them. You and I can sort of take for granted our apartment, house, food, clothes to wear as if they were our rights to have. Taking things for granted destroys thankfulness. Pride also destroys thankfulness. This is the attitude that says, "Nobody ever gave me anything, I worked hard for everything I have." For years you studied hard and now it is finally paying off. With this kind of attitude, we feel that we have no one to thank but ourselves.

On this Thanksgiving day, we are going to drop our take it for granted attitude and our sinful pride, and recognize that everything we have is really a gift from God. Let's join King David today in the first few verses of Psalm 103 to "Count Our Blessings!"

Think for a moment about the greatest blessing God has poured into your life. If you were to choose one gift that surpasses them all, what would it be? Your spouse? Your children? Your family? Your friends? Your job? The blessing that topped David's list? Forgiveness. Forgiveness is by far the greatest blessing we have received from God. And the more acutely we are aware of our need for forgiveness, the more this great blessing will mean to us. Think of David in those days and weeks after he committed adultery and murdered his faithful friend, Uriah. The psalms that David wrote during that time spoke of his bones wasting away inside of him, his guilt crushing and nearly destroying him. How good David felt inside, when Nathan brought David to a point of confession, and then was reassured that God had forgiven him his sins. What a God we serve! What grace! He forgives all our sins—past, present and future. That's a huge insight because it touches how we see God. He's more willing to forgive than we are to be forgiven. He is eager to forgive. He is ready to forgive. He wants to forgive you. One day a fellow was visiting with his pastor in the parsonage. He picked up a book that was on a stand and began to read. Suddenly he shouted, "Glory! Praise the name of the Lord!" The pastor asked, "What's the matter with you?" The visitor replied, "This book says that in certain places the sea is 5 miles deep!" "Yes, that's right," said the pastor. "What of it?" The visitor answered, "Why the Bible says that my sins have been cast into the depth of the sea, and if its that deep, I'm not afraid of them coming up again. The pressure of the water is so great there that if the largest battleship could be sunk to that depth, it would be crushed like an egg shell." Count Your Blessings. The blessing of forgiveness.

The second blessing we have listed here is that the Lord heals all our diseases. 'That's an odd statement, isn't it? We pray every week for brothers and sisters in our congregation who are struggling through various diseases. In some cases this healing never comes. How can David say, "He heals all your diseases"?

Actually, there are many different ways that God works healing in our lives. How many of us consider ourselves fairly healthy individuals? For many of us the Lord "heals all our diseases" by not even letting us become ill, by giving us the gift of health. Our congregation has now over 100 members. Yet, there are weeks that, as far as we know, there is no one we know in the hospital. Let's not wait until we get ill before we recognize what a gift God has given us in our health and thank him for it.

Let's also not forget the ability that God has given our bodies to heal and recover. Many of you have faced surgeries and life-threatening diseases this past year from which and through which the Lord has graciously healed you. It's the Lord who gave the medical professionals the wisdom and the knowledge that allowed your healing to take place. When we pray for the Lord to guide the hands of the surgeon, those aren't empty, meaningless words.

And what about people that don't get better? What about those who have sicknesses—that doctors cannot cure! What about people who have radiation treatments—until they pass away—and miss their last appointment? What about them? I thought Jesus heals all your diseases? Jesus does. Jesus either makes you better—or Jesus makes you perfect! That's why we don't need to be afraid—whatever our earthly doctors tell us! Ultimately earthly physicians fail. Ultimately the doctors in the ER at the Mayo Clinic—the doctors at Johns Hopkins—the doctors at the trauma center at the UOM Hospital in Ann Arbor will fail. But Jesus never ever fails us. The day will come when Jesus will say it's time to come home to heaven where he will make everything new! Everything—our hearts will never ever attack again. Our brains will never ever bleed. Our minds will never ever be confused again. Jesus will fix our livers and kidneys—our large and small intestines—our joints will have no arthritis—no disks will bulge in our backs. Our heads will never ache—our stomachs will never turn. We will never ever get sick again! "He heals all our diseases."

The third blessing we want to thank God for today is redeeming us from the pit. To redeem means to rescue from danger in the time of trouble. The "pit" refers to death itself. This benefit may be hard to grasp so think of the speedometer in your automobile. Think of the thousands of miles you have driven with no accident. Yet every day people are killed on the highway, but you were not killed when you could have been. *That you are hearing these words is proof positive that you are not dead.* God has preserved you to this very moment and has protected you every step of your journey. Often we are too flippant about God's protection, as if we were in charge of everything. "What happened today?" "Nothing." But think of what didn't happen. No one robbed you. No one shot you. You weren't fired. You arthritis didn't flare up—or if it did, you made it through the day. A truck didn't hit you. You weren't rear-ended. No one scammed you on the Internet (though some people tried). Your identity wasn't stolen (as far as you know). Your wife still loves you. Your husband is still happy to see you. You don't have

cancer—or if you do, you’re not dead yet. You’ve got your health (what there is of it), your friends (most of them, anyway), your money (maybe not as much as a three months ago but you’re not broke), your job (if you don’t get let go tomorrow), and on and on it goes. Think of all the bad things that could have happened to you today that didn’t. The fact that you think nothing happened today means that God has been doing his job! *I call this the doctrine of “perpetual preservation.”* It means that while we are on earth, with all its dangers and troubles, God is constantly at work behind the scenes, working to protect us from trouble, to clear the way ahead, and to give us strength for each new day.

The fourth blessing we want to give thanks for today is that our God has given us much more than we need. Our lesson says, “He satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.” In his great love for us, he fills our lives with all sorts of pleasures and joys that go above and beyond. Has God given you a job that you enjoy, a challenge that invigorates you, a task that fills your life with meaning? What a blessing! Do you have people in your life, family and friends, who care about you, people with whom you can share your thoughts and your dreams, people you can count on to be there when you need them most, who forgive and accept you despite all the miserable things you say and do to them? What a blessing!

Do you have more than a roof over your head, an extra change of clothes, and a scrap of food to eat each day? Do you have time to play with your kids, watch a football game, go out to a movie, surf the net? Do you have nice things in your house, a yard in which to play or plant a garden, more than one car in your driveway? You are richer than 90% of the people in this world. Why is God so good to us? What a blessing! Thank you, Lord, for filling our lives with so many joys! My youth is renewed like the eagles.

We can even be thankful for our setbacks. Be thankful that you don’t already have everything you want. If you did, what would there be to look forward to? Be thankful when you don’t know something, this gives you the opportunity to learn. Be thankful for the difficult times. During those times you grow. Be thankful for your limitations, because they give you opportunities for improvement. Be thankful for each new challenge, because it will build strength and character. Be thankful for your mistakes. They will teach you valuable lessons. Be thankful when you’re tired and weary, because it means you’ve made a difference.

It’s easy to be thankful for the good things. But, a life of true fulfillment can come to those who are also thankful for the setbacks. As hard as it may be, find a way to be thankful for your troubles, and they can become your blessings. As we look around us at the land of plenty that we live in, it is my prayer that we will see through new eyes each day the ways that God has blessed us and never take God or those blessings for granted. This year, as we celebrate Thanksgiving, may we each see God for who he really is and see ourselves as who we really are: People who have been blessed beyond measure and people who NEED to give thanks to the giver of all good gifts. Count Your blessings. We have much to be thankful for.