

***James 1:17,18. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. <sup>18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.***

***Give Thanks to the LORD***

- ***His Love Is Reliable***
- ***His Love Is Perfect***
- ***His Love Endures Forever.***

The list - at least the basics - is pretty similar each year. What are you thankful for? The usually categories fill the list. God has blessed us with family, with friends, with clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home. He gives us all that we have and all that we need. We are thankful for the blessings that our LORD continually and regularly pours out on us.

There might have been a few extra things to be thankful for this year. There may have been changes in the family roster. A few additions: a child, a grandchild, a son-in-law or two, a niece, a nephew. God is good. Year after year he provides for us the blessing of family and friends. And his blessing is continual. His love is steadfast. His love and care and his blessings are regular.

The same goes for our possessions and our bodily needs. His care is reliable. We all have a roof over our head, and we have food, we have clothes on our back. Again there may have been a few changes throughout this past year. The roof may have changed. The food is not the exact same thing that he gave us last year or our diet may have been adjusted for one reason or another. Our wardrobe may have been updated, altered, or changed here or there. Our health might have seen ups and downs. But God is good. God provides. God is constant and regular and reliable in his love and care. Like James says, ***“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows”.***

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is reliable. Each day God brings the steady rise of the sun. The brilliance of the stars are fixed in their place and light up their spot in the sky. The inspiring fazes of the moon change according to their steady routine. The seasons change, but there is reliability of the seasons, the leaves change, the winter wind brings its chill at about the same

time each year, the snow falls in its due time, and soon enough the warm sunlight of spring returns and brings forth green fields and beautiful flowers. And of course he brings seedtime and harvest, rain showers and sunshine, again and again each year. Even though each year we do have this tendency to worry and fret that things won't turn out right God is good, God provides, God is reliable in his care. Give thanks to the Lord. Each day he provides us with our homes and the things that fill them: family, food, and possessions. God is steadfast in his love and his care and yet in his love he fills each day with enough variety for us to give thanks for something new every day and every year. As it says in the book of Lamentations. God's mercies ***are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.*** (Lamentations 3:23) We give thanks to the LORD for he is good. His love is continual. It is dependable. Give thanks unto the Lord His love is reliable.

But it soon becomes easy to overlook such blessings or to take such blessing from God for granted because it is so regular and reliable. Because we live in such continual love and care it is easy for us to go through life without pausing to reflect on how good our God is to us. We simply overlook the blessings that he gives us and assume that they will be there. Perhaps we fail to give thanks because we assume such things are just somehow owed to us. And because we live in such regular care when problems do arise it is just so easy to grumble and complain. In our sinfulness instead of praising God and thanking him for all that he does for us, far too often, we act like spoiled children who pout and complain, who whine and moan. We might even take out our frustration on God our Father and we may blame him when we don't get what we want, when we don't get our way.

Problems and difficulties in life are the result of sinful people living in a sinful world. This is no fault of God. On our bad days he doesn't care about us any less. His love for us is unchanging. Even if our health or wealth our bank statements or our level of happiness and cheer takes a plunge our Lord still provides. In fact, even the things that have gone wrong this past year we can give thanks for them. That is right. I said we can give thanks for them. Even the changes we do not enjoy: the loss of income, an unexpected illness, an unplanned emergency, things that are far worse. Even in all of this there are reasons to give thanks. We know this because his love for us is not only reliable, but it is perfect. ***Every good and perfect gift is from above coming from our unchanging and perfect heavenly father.***

We can give thanks to God in all circumstances. Even when he allows difficulties to come into our lives, we can give thanks because we know that God is not tempting us or pushing us away from him. But rather when such difficulties come into our life we know that he is testing us and bringing us closer to himself.

He is purifying our faith and giving us opportunity to put our faith into practice or share our hope in Jesus. And so not only can we give thanks for when life is comfortable, but we can also give thanks when life is a challenge. We can give thanks when there are difficult moments and unexpected obstacles in our life. In fact, God tells us through his apostle, that we can consider it pure joy whenever we face all sorts of trials. James writes at the very beginning of his letter, ***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:3-4)***

Even our trials, when our faith is put to the test by health problems or personal problems, put it on the list of things to be thankful for. Even in our difficulties, we rejoice. Instead of checking something off as a reason to grumble and complain, instead of using such hardship as an excuse to blame God for our misfortunes, instead we can give thanks. ***Because we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).*** We can trust God. His love is reliable. His love is perfect. He is our perfect Father who loves us with an unchanging love. God allows difficulties to touch our lives in order to bring us closer to him. Sometimes he allows such things to come into our life so that we might receive needed discipline through such an experience. Sometimes he allows trials to touch and affect us so that we will reach out to him more quickly. Sometimes he allows hardship so that he may challenge us in our faith and help us grow. Sometimes he allows difficulties into our life and we have no good answer for why, but we simply trust that he will do as he has promised: to make all things work for the good of those who love him.

Give thanks to the Lord. In his love every good and perfect gift comes from him. Let us give him thanks for everything in our lives that is clearly good, and everything that is for our good. Our God supplies us with everything that we need. Sometimes he gives us something that we may not have asked for or hoped for, but such blessings are ones that are heavenly Father knows that we need as well. He is our perfect Father who wants us to have everything that we need and not be lacking in anything. He wants us to develop patience, perseverance, and character. He wants to bless us with gifts for the body and the soul. He wants to pour out spiritual blessings upon us as well as those that are physical in nature.

We see that very clearly in the way that he dealt with the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians. While many of them were not the richest or the most important people, while many of them suffered for their faith physically and financially. While some were forced from their homes, imprisoned and even killed, God still

took care of them. He provided for them. He bound them together in faith so that they would help and support each other. And even though they didn't always have an abundance of physical blessings they were blessed spiritually. They were given new birth into the living hope of Christ and they clung to the word. In times of trials and persecution their faith not only survived, but it thrived. And even though some lost their lives he brought them to their eternal home and their faith lived on. And so James encourages these believers that their faith would not be in vain, but God had made them a type of firstfruits and many more would believe in the name of Jesus after and even because of them.

Today as 21<sup>st</sup> century believers we give thanks to God because his love is reliable. We give thanks to God because his love is perfect. And we give thanks to the Lord because his love endures forever. God has passed his Word onto us. He has passed down his Sacraments, the same precious means of grace that these first believers enjoyed we enjoy. He has passed these means of grace down to us and through Word and Sacrament he has brought to us wonderful and countless blessings. He has brought us new life. We know that we are God's children through baptism, through faith. We know that Jesus has died for us. We know that our sins are forgiven. We know that we have peace with God. We know that God will be there and guide us through the trials and troubles of this life. We know that our Savior rules over all things for our good and he will come again in glory so that we may live with him in the paradise of heaven. God has given us this word to share with future generations so that they may know his enduring love and mercy as well. Today we give thanks to the Lord because his love endures forever, for just like he brings forth food from the earth every season so the Lord in his goodness maintains his church, and brings spiritual life to generation after generation.

As a Christian there is so much that we can be thankful for and so today we give him thanks. We give him thanks for all that is clearly good in our lives. For family and friends, for food and clothes, and we give him thanks for all that is so good for us. For our faith, for his word and sacraments which strengthen our faith; and we give thanks even for those things which test our faith because he knows we need those things too. Yes, it is most certainly true that, ***Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*** And that is certainly something for which we can be thankful. Amen.