Thankful - Part 2

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BIG SANDY, Texas-At our Bible study on Wednesday night, I continued a series about being thankful. The title of the presentation was "Thankful - Part 2." This series was initiated around the celebration of the national holiday of Thanksgiving (which was celebrated on Thursday, November 26).

Thankful for God's vision

In Part 1 in this series, I talked about being "Thankful for God's Vision." In that study, we discussed God's vision in three areas.

- God's Creation
- God's Calling
- God's Children

Thankful for God's answers

In Part 2 of the series, I focused on God's answers in four ways.

- God often blesses you - before you ask.
- God often answers "yes" - after you ask.
- God sometimes answers "no" - after you ask.
- God sometimes answers "wait, I will be with you" - after you ask.

God often blesses you

God often blesses you - before you ask.

- Psalm 33:13-15 - The Lord looks from heaven upon all the inhabitants of the earth - "He fashions their hearts individually."

- Matthew 10:29-30 - Your Heavenly Father knows when a sparrow falls to the ground and He knows the number of hairs on your head.

God often answers "yes"

There are many examples of God saying "yes" in the Bible. Following are merely two examples.

- 2 Kings 20:1-6 - When Hezekiah prayed for healing while he was dying, God added 15 years to his life.

- Matthew 20:29-34 - When two blind men sitting along the road asked Christ for Him to heal them, Christ had compassion upon them.

God sometimes answers "no"

Following are two famous examples in the Old Testament where the Lord said "no."

- Deuteronomy 3:22-28 - When Moses asked the Lord to allow him to cross over the Jordan River and to see the good land and the pleasant mountains, the Lord said "no" - giving the reason and saying that Moses could only gaze upon the land from afar.

- 2 Samuel 12:15-23 - After David sinned and his son became sick, David fasted and requested that his son would be spared. God said "no" and David accepted the Lord's will.

I have friends who say that the New Testament has scriptures saying that a believer will receive "anything" and "everything" that the believer asks - presuming that the request is "in faith." Here are some of the scriptures that my friends use to express their perspective - Mark 11:22-24; John 14:13-14; John 16:23 and 1 John 5:14-15.

From my perspective, those verses are wonderful and have great truth. But I caution people to avoid viewing God as a "genie in a bottle" who is required to answer our requests - no matter what we ask.

- I certainly believe that those verses teach the importance of asking in faith.

- But I do not believe that God is required to give us all our requests - even if we view our requests as words expressed in absolute faith.

- Praise God that He is the loving Lord who hears our requests - and praise God that He will fulfill His will upon the earth. (The last scriptures mentioned at the conclusion of this article will be Matthew 26:36-44 - where God fulfills His will in the obedient sacrifice of His Son.)

Following is a great example of how God used His response of "no" - for His will and for the ultimate good for the requester (the Apostle Paul).

- 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 - Paul suffered many times in his service of the Lord.

- 2 Corinthians 12:1 - Paul had many visions and revelations in his service to the Lord.

- 2 Corinthians 12:6 - Paul actually had many opportunities to boast.

- 2 Corinthians 12:7 - To help Paul to remain humble, the Lord allowed Satan to give Paul "a thorn in the flesh" to buffet Paul and to keep Paul humble.

- 2 Corinthians 12:8 - Paul pleaded with the Lord three times for relief.

- 2 Corinthians 12:9 - The Lord said "no" - when He said: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

God sometimes answers "wait"

While the Bible includes examples of God answering prayers quickly, history shows that God oftentimes views "time" differently than we do.

- Genesis 15:13 - 400 years
- Exodus 12:40 - 430 years

430 years? Understand that some suffering was prophesied to last much longer than our time on this earth. Thankfully, there can be a difference between generational suffering and personal suffering.

Here is an important question: Why does a loving God let people suffer?

Following is a scripture mentioning two different reasons for suffering.

- 1 Peter 4:15-16 - Sometimes, believers face correction for their mistakes (which can be viewed as a form of suffering) and sometimes they suffer for the Will of the Father - to glorify God.

Following is a section of scripture that portrays God as a loving Father who corrects His children.

- Hebrews 12:5-11 - Since God deals with believers as with sons, believers must deal with the correction of our loving Father.

Let's notice some verses that reflect people suffering for the Will of God - the fulfillment of His plan and purpose.

- Hebrews 11:35 - Some believers were tortured - not accepting deliverance.

- Hebrews 11:36 - Some believers faced mocking, scourging, chains, and imprisonment

- Hebrews 11:37 - Some believers were stoned, sawn in two, slain with the sword, wandered, destitute, afflicted, and tormented.

- Hebrews 11:38 - Some believers wandered in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves.

Remember that believers suffered (and suffer) both for own sins and for the Will of God. And please remember that the Son of God suffered even though He did not sin.

- Hebrews 5:7-8 - The Son of God "learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

- Matthew 26:36-44 - Our elder Brother (who did not sin) had to wait to be delivered until He fulfilled the Father's purpose for Him.