



DAILY DEVOTIONAL FRIDAY BIBLE STUDY FOR JULY 6, 2012

THE GOOD GOD IS DOING

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. (Philemon 4, NIV)

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE LEAST TENACIOUS HUMAN EMOTION IS GRATITUDE. Golfers know this. That's why we say that a good last hole will keep us coming back. Every good thing before that tends to be forgotten.

In our walk with Jesus, however, as is often the case, we want to find motivation and build practices to do the opposite. We want our thanksgiving to recur and endure. There is no other way to "give thanks in everything" but to keep the fires of gratitude stoked.

Few of us, though, would think of people has a provocative source of thanksgiving. Oh sure, we *love* people. But they let us down frequently enough. Even our best friends stand in the way of our thanksgiving now and again. Unless we begin with forgiveness.

This is what Paul did when he opened his letter to Philemon, a brother in the Lord wealthy enough to have at least one slave (or indentured servant). As we read further into Paul's brief letter, we see that this slave, Onesimus, had run from Philemon, and the undertone of Paul's writing suggests that Philemon was not blameless in this affair. Philemon apparently needed to be forgiven of inappropriate treatment of his man.

But here was Paul, opening the letter by saying that he always thanked God when his mind turned to Philemon in prayer. Memories of others, then, may be an excellent place for us to start in cultivating our gratitude. We may look back on the gifts God has given us through family, friends, mentors and teachers who have fed us and led us, in literal and metaphorical senses.

And this thinking turns our eyes to an amazing fact: God does much of his good work through people! Why was Paul thankful for Philemon? Because this brother demonstrated faith in God and love for others. When we start looking for the work of God in those he has planted in our lives, we end up seeing unexpected results. Average people do faith-filled things. From there, gratitude kicks in as we stand amazed at what God has done and continues to do.

God in you

Read Philemon 1-7. What specific evidences did Philemon and his friends demonstrate that God was doing important things through them?

What specific encouragement or challenges do you find for yourself in this passage?

Those for whom you are thankful

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 and 2 Timothy 1:3-5. To whom could you write similar words? What memories and traits are you especially thankful for in these people?

What causes you to delay or avoid speaking with thanksgiving to others?
