

THANKFUL FOR THE THORNS

Text: Psalm 116:1–19

Key Word: Thankfulness

Key Thought: We Need to Be Thankful for the Thorns in Our Lives as Well as the Roses.

Sandra felt as low as the heels of her Birkenstocks as she pushed against a November gust and the florist shop door. Her life had been easy, like a spring breeze. Then in the fourth month of her second pregnancy, a minor automobile accident stole her ease. During this **Thanksgiving week** she would have delivered a son. She grieved over her loss. As if that was not enough, her husband's company threatened a transfer.

Then her sister, whose holiday visit she coveted, called saying she could not come. What's worse, Sandra's friend infuriated her by suggesting her grief was a God-given path to maturity that would allow her to empathize with others who suffer. *"She has no idea what I'm feeling,"* thought Sandra with a shudder. Thanksgiving? Thankful for what? She wondered. For a careless driver whose truck was hardly scratched when he rear-ended her? For an air bag that saved her life but took that of her child?

"Good afternoon, can I help you?" The shop clerk's approach startled her. *"I...I need an arrangement,"* stammered Sandra. *"For Thanksgiving? Do you want beautiful but ordinary, or would you like to challenge the day with a customer favorite I call the Thanksgiving Special?"* asked the shop clerk. *"I'm convinced that flowers tell stories,"* she continued. *"Are you looking for something that conveys 'gratitude' this Thanksgiving?"*

"Not exactly!" Sandra blurted out. *"In the last five months, everything that could go wrong has gone wrong."*

Sandra regretted her outburst, and was surprised when the shop clerk said, *"I have the perfect arrangement for you."*

Then the door's small bell rang, and the shop clerk said, *"Hi, Barbara . . . let me get your order."* She politely excused herself and walked toward a small workroom, then quickly reappeared, carrying an arrangement of greenery, bows, and long stemmed thorny roses. Except the ends of the rose stems were neatly snipped: there were no flowers. *"Want this in a box?"* asked the clerk. Sandra watched for the customer's response. Was this a joke? Who would want rose stems with no flowers! She waited for laughter, but neither woman laughed.

"Yes, please," Barbara replied with an appreciative smile. *"You'd think after three years of getting the special, I wouldn't be so moved by its significance, but I can feel it right here, all over again."* She said as she gently tapped her chest.

"Uh," stammered Sandra, *"that lady just left with, uh . . . she just left with no flowers!"*

"Right," said the clerk, *"I cut off the flowers. That's the Special. I call it the Thanksgiving Thorns Bouquet."*

"Oh, come on, you can't tell me someone is willing to pay for that!" exclaimed Sandra.

"Barbara came into the shop three years ago feeling much like you feel today," explained the clerk. "She thought she had very little to be thankful for. She had lost her father to cancer, the family business was failing, her son was into drugs, and she was facing major surgery."

"That same year I had lost my husband," continued the clerk, "and for the first time in my life, had just spent the holidays alone. I had no children, no husband, no family nearby, and too great a debt to allow any travel."

"So what did you do?" asked Sandra.

"I learned to be thankful for thorns," answered the clerk quietly. "I've always thanked God for good things in life and never to ask Him why those good things happened to me, but when bad stuff hit, did I ever ask! It took time for me to learn that dark times are important. I have always enjoyed the 'flowers' of life, but it took thorns to show me the beauty of God's comfort. You know, the Bible says that God comforts us when we're afflicted, and from His consolation we learn to comfort others."

Sandra sucked in her breath as she thought about the very thing her friend had tried to tell her. "I guess the truth is I don't want comfort. I've lost a baby and I'm angry with God." Just then someone else walked in the shop.

"Hey, Phil!" shouted the clerk to the balding, rotund man.

"My wife sent me in to get our usual Thanksgiving arrangement . . . twelve thorny, long-stemmed stems!" laughed Phil as the clerk handed him a tissue-wrapped arrangement from the refrigerator.

"Those are for your wife?" asked Sandra incredulously. "Do you mind me asking why she wants something that looks like that?"

"No . . . I'm glad you asked," Phil replied. "Four years ago my wife and I nearly divorced. After forty years, we were in a real mess, but with the Lord's grace and guidance, we slogged through problem after problem. He rescued our marriage. Jenny here (the clerk) told me she kept a vase of rose stems to remind her of what she learned from "thorny" times, and that was good enough for me. I took home some of those stems. My wife and I decided to label each one for a specific "problem" and give thanks for what that problem taught us."

As Phil paid the clerk, he said to Sandra, "I highly recommend the Special!"

"I don't know if I can be thankful for the thorns in my life." Sandra said to the clerk. "It's all too . . . fresh."

"Well," the clerk replied carefully, "my experience has shown me that thorns make roses more precious. We treasure God's providential care more during trouble than at any other time. Remember, it was a crown of thorns that Jesus wore so we might know His love. Don't resent the thorns."

Tears rolled down Sandra's cheeks. For the first time since the accident, she loosened her grip on resentment. "I'll take those twelve long-stemmed thorns, please," she managed to choke out.

"I hoped you would," said the clerk gently. "I'll have them ready in a minute."

"Thank you. What do I owe you?"

"Nothing. Nothing but a promise to allow God to heal your heart. The first year's arrangement is always on me." The clerk smiled and handed a card to Sandra. "I'll attach this card to your arrangement, but maybe you would like to read it first."

It read: "My God, I have never thanked You for my thorns. I have thanked You a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorns. Teach me the glory of the cross I bear; teach me the value of my thorns. Show me that I have climbed closer to You along the path of pain. Show me that, through my tears, the colors of Your rainbow look much more brilliant."

Praise Him for your roses, thank him for your thorns.

What Kinds of Things Do We Often Forget to Thank God For?

I. WE OFTEN FAIL TO BE THANKFUL FOR THE ANGUISH OF LIFE (Psalm 116:1-4)

II. WE OFTEN FAIL TO BE THANKFUL FOR THE MERCY OF LIFE (Psalm 116:5-11)

III. WE OFTEN FAIL TO BE THANKFUL FOR THE GOODNESS OF LIFE (Psalm 116:12-19)

I. WE OFTEN FAIL TO BE THANKFUL FOR THE ANGUISH OF LIFE (Psalm 116:1-4)

This Psalm is a continuation of the Paschal Hallel. It must therefore find some measure of parallel with the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. There was no other bondage that could match the one inflicted upon the children of Israel by Pharaoh and his taskmasters.

"And worked them ruthlessly.

14. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly."

Exodus 1:13,14

"The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God."

Exodus 2:24

The words of Psalm 116 would have been sung by our Lord during the days just preceding His crucifixion. These words would have been fresh in His mind as He met with His disciples in the Upper Room for the Last Supper. He knew that His death was inevitable. The stark reality of these painful moments was becoming vivid as the minutes ticked away.

"The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow."

Psalm 116:3

It's hard to believe that Jesus could find anything good in what was taking place. Yet our Lord endured the cross because He was placed upon it with joy in his heart (Hebrews 12:2). **We can follow the Lord's example and be thankful that God can be trusted during times of anguish.**

II. WE OFTEN FAIL TO BE THANKFUL FOR THE MERCY OF LIFE (Psalm 116:5-11)

I find it interesting that Psalm 116:10 was written in a time when his life was being weighed in the balance. This same attitude was portrayed by Paul.

*“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;
9. persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.
10. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.
11. For who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.”*

II Corinthians 4: 8–11

The value of life takes on a whole new meaning when it is about to be ended. People who have survived a deathbed experience often take on a totally new perspective on life. They realize that life ultimately depends upon the mercy of God. It is important to voice what we believe. **The tongue is our heart’s interpreter.** What is spoken with the tongue is always stamped upon our heart. Scriptures are correct once again in telling us that out of the heart, the mouth speaks.

“It isn’t what you have in your pocket that makes you thankful, but what you have in your heart.”

E. C. McKenzie
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We would do ourselves and others a great deal of justice if we were not as fearful as we tend to be about expressing the way we REALLY FEEL. The psalmist once again leads us into a proper balance. You can feel the thankfulness stemming from the very recesses of his heart during a time of great affliction.

“I believed – trusted again, relied on and clung to my God – and therefore have I spoken (Even when I said), I am greatly afflicted. (cf. II Corinthians 4:13).”

Psalm 116: 10 AMP

Our Lord walked in the shadow of the cross. We can never be truly thankful for life – life everlasting without seriously considering Calvary. **Jesus gave His surrendered life in order for us to be thankful for life itself.**

III. WE OFTEN FAIL TO BE THANKFUL FOR THE GOODNESS OF LIFE (Psalm 116:12-19)

“We should be faithful for the good things that we have and, also, for the bad things we don’t have.”

“A person doesn’t realize how much he has to be thankful for until he has to pay taxes on it.”

“We are to be thankful that we’re living in a country where folks can say what they think without thinking.”

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*“How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?
13. I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.”*

Psalm 116:12,13

The word used to describe the **thank offering** in verse 17 is that of someone extending their hand in a form of worship and adoration. When it was offered with many other worshipers, it was considered as a **choir of worship** unto the Lord. Music or words were not needed. In fact, they were unable to express the gratitude that was flowing out from the heart of the worshiper.

“When the heart is full of the sense of the goodness of the Lord, the tongue cannot hold its peace. **Self-love may lead us to prayers, but love to God excites us to praises: therefore to seek and not to praise, is to be lovers of ourselves rather than of God.**”

Thomas Manton

One of the greatest ways of proving our appreciation for God’s goodness is mentioned twice in these few verses.

“I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.”

Psalm 116: 14, 18

One of the greatest ways that I know of to prove that we are thankful for the goodness of life itself is when we are faithful to our word. Many people have made vows to God if He would only . . . Most of these vows fall by the wayside as time progresses. People who are most thankful in life are also most true to their word.

*** Two men were walking through a field one day when they spotted an enraged bull. Instantly they darted toward the nearest fence. The storming bull followed in hot pursuit, and it was soon apparent they wouldn't make it.

Terrified, the one shouted to the other, *"Put up a prayer, John. We're in for it!"*

John answered, *"I can't. I've never made a public prayer in my life."*

"But you must!" implored his companion. *"The bull is catching up to us."*

"All right," panted John, *"I'll say the only prayer I know, the one my father used to repeat at the table: 'O Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful.'"* ***

Source Unknown

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Date: Oct 9/22 (Thanksgiving Weekend) Place: FCA

Time: 10:30Am

Song: I Am So Thankful - D

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