

NOVEMBER 2004—*Blessings Temporal and Spiritual*

God is a loving Father who delights to pour out blessings upon his children and “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Tim. 6.17). All of his blessings are good, and cover the spectrum of human experience, ranging from simple pleasures in this life to endless life in the world to come.

However, in our fallenness we can corrupt God’s blessings in our lives—especially his temporal blessings. This arises, says C.S. Lewis, from inattention, greed and conceit.¹ Inattention to God and his grace is a perennial danger to those of us in America who live with an abundance of material resources and enjoy the ease, comfort, and pleasures they afford.

However, preoccupation with these blessings can easily distract us from God and lead to a cooling of our love for him and for our neighbor. And as we lose sight of him and his grace, our gratitude fades. Our hearts can then become even more entangled with the love of this present world, which always brings in its wake pride and conceit. In the end, we allow God’s blessings to displace God himself in our hearts.

This grieves God, who wants to bless us not only temporally, but especially spiritually. Most of all, he wants to give us himself, but he finds that we have become satisfied with his gifts. Lewis quotes St. Augustine: “God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full—there’s nowhere for Him to put it.”²

Because of his great love for us, God will use fatherly discipline to deliver us from our captivity to the world and draw us back to himself. As gently as possible, he will seek to pry our hand off of temporal blessings. If we resist, he may have to allow some kind of hardship to enter our lives. Then, like Lewis, we see that “...all my little happinesses look like broken toys...” and “I remind myself that all these toys were never intended to possess my heart, that my true good is in another world and my only real treasure is Christ.”³

How can we avoid allowing our hearts to be corrupted in the first place? A good place to start is to develop the habit of not only giving thanks to God for all his blessings, but also allowing the blessings to draw our heart to adore God. Lewis explains: “Gratitude exclaims, very properly, ‘How good of God to give me this.’ Adoration says ‘What must be the quality of that Being whose far-off and momentary coruscations are like this!’”⁴ This will help us maintain both attentiveness and gratitude toward God. Then we need to remember that God’s good gifts are given not only to bless us, but also (perhaps especially) to enable us to be a conduit of his blessing to others. Blessings *from* God bring a corresponding responsibility to use them *for* God. Finally, we need to hold his blessings lightly, as stewards, being ever watchful for opportunities to use them to bless others.

Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.
I Chronicles 29:14 NIV

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1992), p. 90.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 94.

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 106-7.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1992), p. 90.