

Reflections

thoughts for the journey

NOVEMBER 2003—*Living Safely with God's Blessings*

One might think that receiving God's blessings would naturally cause our hearts to turn to him in gratitude. But Scripture and experience demonstrate that such is not the case. Indeed, living with the abundance of blessings and pleasures that are ours in America breeds certain dangers that require us to exercise special vigilance over our souls.

We see this in God's warning to Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land, with all of its rich blessings. God cautioned his people, "...beware that you do not forget the Lord your God." He urged them to keep him first in their hearts, and to remember that it was he who had given them the good land they were entering and the ability to make wealth: "...otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God...you may say in your heart, my power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth" (Deut. 8.11-18).

How can we, in the midst of our many blessings and pleasures, keep from forgetting God and becoming proud and self-sufficient in our hearts? C.S. Lewis offers us a clue when he relates his discovery that the good pleasures of life are shafts of God's glory striking us. "I have tried since that moment to make every pleasure into a channel of adoration. I don't mean simply by giving thanks for it. One must of course give thanks, but I mean something different.... Gratitude exclaims very properly: 'How good of God to give me this.' Adoration says: 'What must be the character of that Being whose far-off and momentary coruscations are like this!' One's mind runs back up the sunbeam to the sun."¹

So, as Lewis suggests, if we will allow God's good gifts to draw our minds and hearts to meditate on his character, we will not forget him. Indeed, we will grow to know, love, and adore him more. We will also grow in gratitude and the desire to please him and be good stewards of his manifold gifts and graces.

*Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

Psalm 63:3-5 NIV

*Thou
that has given
so much to me,
give one thing more*

—a grateful heart;

*not thankful when it
pleaseth me,
as if thy blessings had
spare days;
but such a heart,
whose pulse
may be thy praise.*

George Herbert

¹ *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, London: Geoffrey Bles, ©1964, p. 117-118.