

# Thanksgiving for Youth

Rev. B. Woudenberg

Youth is a time of high hopes and aspirations.

Youth is a time of dreams, plans, and preparations.

This is no reason for surprise. It is but natural that the young person, a young man or a young woman, should have a forward look. The youth stands at the close of his childhood. His childish thoughts and childish acts have been put away with his toys, and he looks in at the threshold of his adult life. His life is a life of preparation; preparation for the future that lies ahead. First, there is school with its great variety of subjects, all in preparation for adulthood. One leaves school and there are the numerous choices and decisions that must be made: what is to be his vocation? with whom will he establish his friendships? who is to be his life's partner? etc. All this comes upon a youth because adulthood is pressing upon him and approaching quickly.

At the same time, one experiences the maturing of his spiritual life. There are catechism classes and society meetings for him to attend which are established with the purpose of preparing him for an adult life within the church. There is the growing consciousness of the preaching of the Word and its importance for his life. Throughout, God takes an ever-growing importance within his heart as he grows in knowledge and in truth.

It is but natural, when life proceeds so rapidly as it does in the maturing youth, that there should be many hardships to conquer; re-occurring disappointments and doubts to overcome. When one stands before decisions affecting the whole of his life, it is necessary for him to make personal evaluations of himself, which often bring disappointing conclusions. A person finds himself limited. In school he is not always able to study and to learn as well as he would like. He wishes he had greater abilities to concentrate, to comprehend, and to remember. On the job he wishes he were quicker and more capable of mastering his duties. But our abilities are not always what we might wish them to be. Even spiritually, one feels the weaknesses of the flesh, the powers of temptation, and how incapable one really is of withstanding the powers of sin.

Thus, youth can often be a time of disappointment; because a person is not always what he would like to be, and he does not always have the things which he would like to have. It seems as if we would be so much more successful both in the world and in the church, if only we could have a few of the things which somehow we never receive.

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Our subject is that of "thanksgiving." The month of November is a month that seems to center in Thanksgiving Day. It is a day especially set aside for the purpose of expressing our thanks to God for all of the blessings which He has given us. It is not intended to be, nor should it be, a day absolutely unique in the year. It is our duty every day of the year to lift our hearts in thanksgiving to God. Nevertheless, Thanksgiving Day is not to be disparaged. It is entirely proper that one day of the year should be set aside with the purpose of reminding us and exhorting us to give due thanksgiving to God as the fount of all our blessings. Hence, it is proper that also in "Beacon Lights" we should be reminded to this end.

Moreover, it is not difficult for the youth of the church to take a very real and active part in this celebration of thanksgiving. As we have said, youth is a time of self-evaluation. In

making these evaluations he finds without fail, much for which to thank God. Just from an external point of view the blessings of youth are many. There is a certain youthful vitality of body and mind, good health, optimism, and ambition. Youth sees the world with young eyes which are inclined to appreciate and thank. In his spiritual life the young person begins to come for the first time to a comprehension of the truth with its many brilliant facets. He begins to taste the power of the Word of God and rejoices. In catechism he hears of the riches of our Reformed heritage, and his heart swells with thanksgiving. Truly it is not hard for the young person to find ample room in his heart for a hardy expression of thanksgiving.

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Yet there are those other things, those shortcomings and limitations of body, mind, and spirit, those things which seem to hinder life, those things which one surely would not call "blessings." What must be done with them on Thanksgiving Day? Are they, perhaps, the unmentionables of Thanksgiving Day which we must do our best to forget? Are they merely burdens to be borne, about which we should not complain? Do we balance them against our blessings so as to see how small they really are? What actually is their place within our hearts?

A text was brought to my attention which, for me, has shed a very beautiful light upon this problem. It is found in Psalm 84:11:

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Note especially the last clause, "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

One's first inclination is to object, "This is not true. At least, if I am to be included among the upright, it is not true of me. There are so many good things that I do not have. I would be so much better off in school if I had more application, if I could concentrate better, if I had a better memory, if I were smarter. On the job I lack much in ability and ambition. Surely I would benefit spiritually if I were stronger and not so easily tempted, if my faith were greater, if I had greater understanding and knowledge of the truth."

But just a moment; remember this is the Word of God. Do not be too hasty to evaluate this text according to the wisdom of your mind. Do not judge it with your own judgment. Read it with the eyes of faith, "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

The meaning of the text is plain. All the things that God gives to the upright are good. If there is anything that He withholds it is simply because that thing is not good. Maybe we were wrong from the start. True, there are many things which we lack, things which according to our own judgment would be good for us to have. But God is God. Eternally He has set forth His counsel concerning us. It is a plan set forth according to divine wisdom, a wisdom which is able to adapt all things to the well-being and glory of the church. We cannot always see that wisdom, but it is there, giving grace and glory to God's people.

Now let us evaluate our lives again. Take away all earthly wishes and earthly evaluations. Judge purely and simply according to the Word of God. There are things which we lack, things which we think it would be well for us to have, but God has withheld them from us. Is it because God is limited? Is it because God is not capable of giving us all that we should have? This cannot be true for God is capable of doing whatsoever he pleases. Is it then

because of us, because we are not truly upright? But we are upright, for we have been saved by Jesus and His righteousness has been imputed unto us. In Him we are made perfect, and God looks upon us with untainted love.

There is but one reason why we lack the things we do: they are not good for us. We may not be able to understand it. To us they may seem to be exactly the things we need. But God has withheld them. That is the proof that, regardless of what they may seem to us, in reality they are not good for us.

Yes, even our shortcomings and our weaknesses have a place on Thanksgiving Day. Even as it is due to God's grace that we have the things we do, it is also by His grace that we lack the things we do. Also for this we should always thank God. In that faith we can exclaim, "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."

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