

FOCUS ON FAITH

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

I guess many of us can remember the age-old “*grace*” said before mealtimes, “*For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful*”. Although these words are said in the context of physical provisions, particularly food, actually I think they are appropriate in numerous situations.

Firstly of course in a month when we particularly remember the sacrifice of so many in wars and conflict, we should be grateful and full of thanks to those who have given so much for our freedom. That we are able to live in a land free from tyranny and oppression is a testament to their courage and selflessness. It is vital that those of us who are alive continue to honour their memory so that hopefully future generations will learn the lessons from history.

But of course history is being made all the time. Since the last World War our Armed Forces have seen action in the Gulf, the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland, the Falklands plus Iraq and now Afghanistan which sadly shows no sign of ending soon. Add into these the never-ending threat of terrorist attack both at home and abroad and we should be constantly thankful for the men and women of our Armed Forces and their families who also make incredible sacrifices.

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And there are so many other areas where we should remember to express our appreciation. Whilst I recognise not everyone will be able to subscribe to the whole of the list below perhaps some of the following may elicit our gratitude:

- Family relationships and friendships that mean so much to us and which enable us to both receive and demonstrate love
- Employment and the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to society through volunteering or serving others
- Education and opportunities for life-long learning
- Physical health and well-being together with medical facilities which by and large provide excellent service
- The wonders of nature and being able to live in a country which doesn't suffer extremes of climate
- Democracy, freedom of speech, the Rule of Law and (by and large) the right to choose our own destiny

The list could go on – I'm sure you can think of many other so-called blessings that we enjoy.

But we can be so fickle. Many of us seemingly have an overwhelming tendency to focus on the not so good aspects of life. We complain about the weather; we constantly seek more, be it a better job or more “*stuff*” to fill our homes; we grumble about those who might have the temerity to criticize or complain about us or we find fault in other's activities, especially when they adversely affect us.

It's so easy to highlight the negative instead of following of the advice of the old song that advocates we should “*accentuate the positive*”. Bad news sadly sells more than good news.

Yet I believe at the heart of the Christian faith there is a good news story. The Bible starts off with God saying that all He had made was “*very good*” and it ends with a wonderful celebration pictorially described as a wedding.

Whilst we live in the middle of these events it's still possible for us as Jesus declared to “*live life to the full*”.

And that occurs when we value other people's abilities and talents rather than disparaging them or being jealous; when we remember to express our appreciation rather than taking things for granted; when we recognise that instead of living life independently we're actually designed to be inter-dependent of one another. And it happens when we acknowledge that God's ways as demonstrated in the life of Jesus are actually much better than our attempts to make life work by our own abilities or on our terms.

We have so much to be grateful for and so many to whom we owe debts of gratitude.

Jesus said, “*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked*”.

Not only do we need to recognise and count our blessings but also demonstrate our thankfulness for what we have received by giving away what we've benefit from.

After all, we're blessed more when we give than when we receive.

To find out more about the Christian faith and resources available plus information on local Churches together with contact details, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.