

“COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS”
(Deuteronomy 8:7-18)
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**[PROP NEEDED: Printed “I’m Thankful For...”
Notes for all congregants]**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 11-21-10]

-I-

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Deuteronomy 8:7-18 and Pray.

2. [READ QUOTATION...]

“We [Americans] have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, the many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to God that made us! It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before [God], to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”¹

3. Sounds like what you might hear from a televangelist or revival preacher, doesn't it? But it's not. Any idea who said it?

A—President Abraham Lincoln back in 1863, as he was announcing a “*Proclamation of a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer.*”

1—And though it was said nearly 150 years ago, the warning in its words could have been spoken yesterday...

2—...Because while we *are* a prosperous country (even *with* our economic crisis), Lincoln’s words remind us that there clearly are dangers to prosperity, and responsibilities that come along with blessings.

B—[STORY OF NOT SAYING THANKS]

Too many times today we’re like the little boy who was returning from a birthday party at a friend's house. His mother asked him, “*Bobby, did you thank Susie's mother for the party?*” He replied, “*Well, I was going to. But a girl ahead of me said, 'Thank you,' and the mother told her not to mention it. So I didn't!*”

C—You see, many of us have grown so accustomed to our own prosperity and blessings that tend to do what this little boy did – we take them for granted.

4. Well, in today's scripture from Deuteronomy 8, we find basically the same thing happening with the people of Israel, and today's verses are a reminder not to do that.

[**Contemp. Service:** Read MSG, Deuteronomy 8:7-18]

A—Now, understand that in the chapters immediately before this reading, God spoke through Moses about the dangers that Israel would have to face to reach the Promised Land.

B—And those dangers and difficulties were things that we might expect: violence from the other inhabitants of the land; potential lack of food or water; and so on.

C—But today's reading from Chapter 8 presents a very *different* kind of danger and challenge: the danger and challenge of *success* – the threat of self-sufficiency and arrogance; of thinking that their success and achievement is the result of their own doings.

D—Listen again to Verses 12-18:

(MSG) “*Make sure that when you eat and are satisfied, build pleasant houses and settle in, see your herds and flocks flourish and more and more money come in, watch your standard of living going up and up – make sure you don't become so full of yourself and your things that you forget God, your God... If you start thinking to yourselves 'I did all this. And all by myself. I'm rich. It's all mine!' – well, think again. **Remember that God, your God, gave you the strength to produce all this wealth** so as to confirm the covenant that he promised to your ancestors.*”

(NRSV) “*When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied,... then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' But **remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth,** so that He may confirm His covenant that He swore to your ancestors.*”

5. From where do our blessings come, then? From God. *NOT* from our own strength or power or intellect, or business skill, or hard work.

A—Oh, God may *give* us our strength or intellect, or the business savvy that enables us to earn a good living, but it all *ultimately* comes from *His* hand, not our own.

B—And so, lest we take our blessings for granted, Thanksgiving is a day for us to count them, each and every one.

C—The words of an famous old hymn say it well:

*“When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*”

*Count your many blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.”*²

6. So, what is it that you're thankful for?

A—In your bulletin today you received a small slip of paper. After I pray, I want to invite you to take a few minutes to jot down just a few of the things you're thankful for, and then when you come for Holy Communion later in the service, bring them forward to the baskets as a way of saying thank you to God for them.

(And if you're willing for these to be anonymously shared with your fellow church family at a later date, please check the box at the bottom)

B—This Thanksgiving Holiday, let's be sure to “*Count [Our] Blessings*” and thank God.

7. [PRAY: “*Thank you, God, for the bounty of our lives that ultimately comes from your hand alone. Forgive us when we arrogantly presume that all we have comes from us and our own work. Instead, help us to continually take an inventory of our blessings and to remember you as the source of those. Help us to count our many blessings and see what you have done in and for us in our lives. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*”]

8. **[Congregants write down what they're thankful for on note and bring forward to basket at time of Holy Communion (and if they're willing to allow these to be shared with fellow church members later, please check the box)...]**

9. [HOLY COMMUNION]

I'm thankful for....

Yes, as a testimony of my thanks to God, I'm willing to allow what I write to be anonymously shared with my fellow church family at a later date

ENDNOTES:

1. Spoken by Abraham Lincoln March 30, 1863, cited in Roy P. Basler, ed., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (Volume 6, p. 156).

2. Hymn “*Count Your Blessings.*”