



# The 4th Focus

## “The Glow of Gratitude”

**H**ow can we experience and express joy and thanksgiving in the midst of various trials and particularly difficult economic times? David A. Seamands tells this great story to illustrate:

*Back in the very early thirties, William Stidger was seated one day with a group of friends in a restaurant. Everyone was talking about the depression: how terrible it was, the suffering people, rich people committing suicide, the jobless, the whole thing. The conversation got more and more miserable as it went on. There was a minister in the group, and he suddenly broke in and said, "I don't know what I'm going to do, because in two or three weeks I have to preach a sermon on Thanksgiving Day. I want to say something affirmative. What can I say that's affirmative in a period of world depression like this?" And as the minister spoke, Stidger said it was like the Spirit of God spoke to him: "Why don't you give thanks to those people who have been a blessing in your life and affirm them during this terrible time?"*

*He began to think about that. The thought came to his mind of a schoolteacher very dear to him, a wonderful teacher of poetry and English literature from years ago who had gone out of her way to put a great love of literature and verse in him. It affected all his writings and his preaching. So he sat down and wrote a letter to this woman, now up in years. It was only a matter of days until he got a reply in the feeble scrawl of the aged. "My Dear Willy"--Stidger says at that time he was about 50 years of age and was bald, and no one had called him Willy for a long time, so just the opening sentence warmed his heart. Here's the letter:*

*"My Dear Willy: I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf of autumn lingering behind." Listen to this sentence, will you? "You'll be interested to know that I taught in school for more than fifty years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has done in many years."*

*Stidger says, "I'm not sentimental, but I found myself weeping over that note." Then he thought of a kindly bishop, now retired, an old man who had recently faced the death of his wife and was all alone. This bishop had taken a lot of time, given him advice and counsel and love when he first began his ministry. So he sat down and wrote the old bishop. In two days a reply came back.*

*"My Dear Will: Your letter was so beautiful, so real, that as I sat reading it in my study, tears fell from my eyes, tears of gratitude. Before I realized what I was doing, I rose from my chair and I called her name to share it with her, forgetting she was gone. You'll never know how much your letter has warmed my spirit. I have been walking around in the glow of your letter all day long."*

As our Creator, no one knows what we need better than God. His instruction manual for us repeatedly urges us to continually give thanks (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thes. 5:18). Our expression of thanks to God and others serves as a measure of our love for God and others. A sure sign of spiritual flu includes a dominant focus on getting from both God and others. A sure sign of health is frequent thanksgiving to God and expressions of encouragement and gratitude to others. When we love, it is because we are soaking in the wonder of his love for us (1 Jn. 4:19).

The more you love him, the more you will want to express your delight in him. And as the teacher and bishop basked in the glow of gratitude, so does God bask in our gratitude to him. These are challenging times. But in the midst of it all, there are countless reasons to give thanks. I give thanks that your faith and love for each other is growing more and more (2 Thes. 1:3).

Let us be a people who are faithful with giving thanks, every day, to our faithful Lord, Savior and Provider. Pick up the phone or send a note of encouragement and gratitude and let's share the stories of God's grace and Spirit working in us and through us.