

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his mercy endures forever. Amen.

Your toddler wants to sled. So you slide her into her snow pants. You push on her boots, zip up her coat, slip on her hat, gently attach her mittens, and help her outside. She tries to pull her little sled, but she can't, so you carry it. She tries to walk through the snow, but she can't, so you carry her.

When you get to her little hill, she wants to bring herself and her sled to the top. But she can't, so you carry them both again. She wants to position her sled for the ride, but it keeps moving, so you hold it. She wants to use her own momentum to rocket down the hill, but now the sled is not moving at all. So you push her, she squeals with delight, and at the bottom she says, "I did it! All by myself!"

Children can be mistaken about who really does the work. That happens with their stuff too. Did your kid ever say, "Dad, no, that's mine!" Really? Can I see your receipt? Kids can be deceived about who the owner really is.

What about adults? Can they be deceived about who really does the work, or mistaken about who the owner really is? James thinks so: **Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters (1:16)**. Some of your gifts are from above? A bunch of your gifts are from above? A majority of your gifts are from above? No.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father (1:17). James does not want you to be deceived about the source of every blessing. Don't think like a child. **Everything good comes from God**. Every good and perfect gift comes from your Father in heaven.

So what good gifts drifted down to you this year? A good report from the oncologist? Reconciling with an old friend? A new baby? A funeral where you grieved with hope because your grandmother had faith in Christ when she died? A job offer? Twelve months without tragedy? A husband who came home to you every night? All A's on your report card?

Whatever it is, remember that it all comes from above. Even if you made the shot, put in the hours, did the work, it all comes from God. "Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). God gave you the body, the mind, the time, and the ability, so remember to give thanks!

And even if you think nothing good drifted down to you this year you can give thanks. I heard about an incredibly optimistic pastor who could always find something to be grateful for. But one Sunday the weather was so nasty that the members who bothered to show up thought, "Man, even pastor can't find anything to thank God for today." But then he climbed into the pulpit and prayed, "Lord, we thank you that it is not always like this. Amen."

Sometimes, that's all you can pray. Some days life is confusing and depressing – a grueling mess. But you can pray, "Lord, you promise me that it won't always be like this. Thank you." You know the pain will end. Maybe now in life, but absolutely in eternity, because God has promised that the curse of sin will end (Revelation 21:4).

That's something to be thankful for! Because God always keeps his promises. He does not change his mind (Numbers 23:19). In fact, he never changes at all (Hebrews 13:8).

Think about that! Our world is full of changes. Seasons. Technology. Politics. Friends. Family. But in our ever-changing world, there is One who always stays the same: **the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (1:17)**.

He is your Creator. He separated the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:4) and he promises that, as surely as the sun rises on schedule, he will provide everything you need (2 Corinthians 9:8). Imagine the sky filled with every good and perfect gift drifting down from above, and thank God for it.

But don't stop there. You are deceived if you stop there. If all you do is join America in thanksgiving for family and friends, health and happiness, you're missing the point of **every good and perfect gift (1:17)**.

Listen to this. **He chose to give (1:18)**. He chose to. Why would God choose to give? Usually, you choose to give to the people who have given to you. You buy Christmas gifts for the kids who make you smile or the friends who hang out with you. We give to those who give to us.

So why would God choose to give to us? If you're like that toddler, celebrating success without remembering the God who gave it, why should God give? If your average prayer contains more gripe than gratitude, why should God give? Why does God bless sinners like me and you?

Because he chooses to. One of those gifts that radiates down from heaven is the heart of God, a heart so bursting with mercy that it chooses to love the unlovable and give the Greatest Gift to those who don't deserve it.

This is what your merciful God chose to do: **He chose to give us birth (1:18)**. A new birth. The first time you were born, you were dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). Your sinful parents produced a sinful child (John 3:6). So God gave you new birth. Spiritual life (Ephesians 2:4-5).

How? **Through the word of truth (1:18)**. To give you the new life of faith, God used his Word. Either his Word spoken or written, or his Word combined with water in baptism (Titus 3:5).

And that changes you. It makes you **a kind of firstfruits of all he created (1:18)**. Firstfruits are the very first fruits that you harvest. In the Old Testament, the very first crops that you brought in belonged to God (Deuteronomy 26:10). You are a kind of firstfruit because you belong to God (Psalm 135:4).

You see, the best gift that comes down from heaven is not pumpkin pie or a good friend or a Thanksgiving nap. It is Jesus Christ, who for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven. He is slandered, mocked, abused, beaten, whipped, stripped, crucified, and forsaken. Your childish thinking is nailed to the cross with him. Your ingratitude lies forgotten in his empty tomb. And all this he did that you should be his own.

And that changes what you thank God for – not just the physical, but the spiritual too: the forgiveness of sins and the catechism teacher who taught you about it; not just the Thanksgiving supper, but the Lord's Supper that strengthens your faith; obviously the Christmas gifts, but more obviously *the* Christmas Gift, the Savior who was born to you (Luke 2:11).

When you understand all that God sends from above, there is only one thing to say: "Thank you." When the sky is filled with more good gifts than stars, fold your hands to pray. Not, "All by myself," but, "All glory be to God alone" (CW 936:1).

In 1630, Europe was in year twelve of the Thirty Years War. Nations were decimated. Millions died as armies and disease spread across the continent. In one year, German pastor Martin Rinkart buried five thousand people.

And in the middle of that nightmare, Pastor Rinkart wrote a meal prayer for his children to memorize: "Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices, who from our mother's arms, has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love and still is ours today" (CW 597:1). That man knew how to give thanks. As the smoke rose from his city, he looked up and saw countless gifts of love coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

In good times and bad, in comfort and agony, in life and death – don't be deceived: **Everything good comes from God.** Amen.