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Dear Friends,

Reprint from November 2000.

It's nearly time for my favorite holiday, Thanksgiving. No, it's not turkey or football that makes it my favorite but, its history and the fact that no other culture shares this day. And what could be found wrong with a day set aside to count your blessings.

One of the most influential Bible verses in my life is I Thessalonians 5:18; ***In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

I know this will probably sound weird but I'm almost finished reading a fascinating book titled *Pain the Gift Nobody Wants* by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. This book has inspired thanksgiving in me about the pain I sometimes put up with. You would have to read the book to get a good understanding of the seeming contradiction of thanks and pain. Dr. Brand, having lived in three different cultures, says that citizens of the west and especially of the US live in greater comfort but are less equipped to handle suffering. He says Americans suffer less, as a group, but fear it more. We are more likely to be traumatized by pain than those in other parts of the world. Through out the book he mentions the loss of family closeness causing pain to be sharper and more traumatic.

Chapter 17 discusses Intensifiers of Pain. Surprising to me they are more psychological than physical. He mentions fear, anger, guilt, loneliness, helplessness all as attitudes or circumstances that make our pain hurt more!

The research of a Dr. Hans Selye into the impact of emotions on health interested me greatly. In Dr. Brands summary of this work he mentions that Dr. Selye found vengeance and bitterness as the emotional responses most likely to produce high stress levels in humans and these two, also, intensify our level of pain. In our culture we see pain as the enemy and

tend to respond with attitudes of *–Why me? I don't deserve this! It's not fair!* which has the vicious consequence of making pain even worse.

What do you suppose was the emotion that reduces stress and lessens pain's sharp edge? Now before you get upset at what I'm going to say remember the verse I mentioned above. Dr. Selye research, which Dr. Brand whole heartedly agreed with, found that GRATITUDE was the single emotional response that nourishes health and can reduce the suffering caused by pain. I'm not suggesting you send cards to sick friends admonishing them to be thankful for pain but, research is just pointing to what God knew all along. ***In everything give thanks...*** and the suffering you experience will be in God's able and compassionate hands.

Reprint from 2001

Is Your Hut on Fire?

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Discouraged, he eventually managed to build a little hut from driftwood to protect himself and his few possessions from the elements. Then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, smoke rolling into the sky. The worst had happened – everything was lost. Stunned with grief and anger he cried, "God, how could you do this to me?" Early the next morning, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island. "How did you know I was here?" asked the shipwrecked man as they rescued him. "Why we saw your smoke signal." replied the captain.

It is too easy to get discouraged when things are going badly, but we must not lose heart because God is at work in our lives. In the midst of pain and suffering we need to remember that as our best built little hut is lying in ashes, that may just be the smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

May God bless you with many opportunities to be thankful! *Richard*