

## Hebrews 12:28, 29 NIV

### “How to be thankful for the bad stuff”

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for ‘our God is a consuming fire.’”

**Thanksgiving speeds at us faster than a fleeing turkey.**

**We traditionally thank God for our blessings surrounded by family, friends, plentiful food, and unnecessary desserts.**

**There’s ample reason to be grateful.**

**Our California daughter Stephanie was employed in the food industry for years.**

**One Thanksgiving, Steph sent this greeting.**

### “T’WAS THE NIGHT OF THANKSGIVING”

“T’was the night of Thanksgiving, but I just couldn’t sleep. I tried counting backwards, I tried counting sheep.

The leftovers beckoned—the dark meat and white, But I fought the temptation with all of my might.

“Tossing and turning with anticipation,  
The thought of a snack became infatuation.  
So, I raced to the kitchen, flung open the door  
And gazed at the fridge, full of goodies galore.  
“I gobbled up turkey and buttered potatoes,



Pickles and carrots, beans and tomatoes.  
I felt myself swelling so plump and so round,  
Till all of a sudden, I rose off the ground.

“I crashed through the ceiling, floating into the sky,  
With a mouthful of pudding and a handful of pie.  
But, I managed to yell as I soared past the trees....  
Happy eating to all, pass the cranberries, please.

“May your stuffing be tasty, your turkey be plump.  
Your potatoes 'n gravy have nary a lump.  
May your yams be delicious; your pies take the prize.  
May your Thanksgiving dinner stay off of your thighs.”<sup>1</sup>

If we don’t add significant pounds, we can be really grateful.

**Today’s text refers to gratitude, but it’s appreciation in different circumstances.**

**On the dining room table, no huge turkey rests, accompanied by dressing, cranberry sauce, corn, mashed potatoes, gravy, and pumpkin pie.**

**No NFL game.**

**No calls or texts from family or loved ones.**

**No drumsticks two days afterward.**

<sup>1</sup> The likely heavy weight author of this poem remains anonymous.

**The writer of Hebrews knew a different situation. Authorities and neighbors persecuted Christians for their belief in Jesus.**

**Believers suffered hostility and harassment.**

**Persecution for doing right seems grossly unfair. But that’s what Christians faced then.**

**In this area now, you might take some heat if you are a fervent Christian, or if your lifestyle doesn’t fit the majority’s mold.**

**I’ve taken criticism for not talking about Jesus in a politically correct fashion and for comparing Jesus with other religious leaders.**

**I accept that disapproval for good reason.**

**If Jesus isn’t uniquely the Son of God, why follow him?**

- **I believe Jesus pre-existed as God.**

Though Jesus is divine, he took on human form.

- **He died for your sins and mine.**
  - **To break death’s hold on us, Jesus was raised on the third day**

**Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed never did any of those things.**

**None of them ever claimed to do that.**

**Telling people our beliefs brings scoffing.**

**Current behavior and court decisions seem to be creating a society unfavorable to Christians.**

**Believers should prepare to face persecution.**

**Yet other faith challenges lie ahead.**

**Some Christians think that once we give our lives to Jesus, we become his favorites.**

**God will strew roses on our paths.**

Kind of like riding in a presidential motorcade.

**“Lord, I’m doing right, where’s my motorcycle escort? Your angel Secret Service should remove all the bad guys and hard times from my way.”**  
Some preachers stress that idea.

**The Bible says: “Remember! God disciplines us:”**

**“Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”<sup>2</sup>**

**God disciplines us because he’s preparing us for something better**

**Ball players practice all week for the big game; Christians practice to prepare for heaven.**

- 1. The practice and discipline we endure in order to receive something better bring suffering.**



<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 12:5, 6 NIV In this context, “son” symbolizes all heirs of Christ.



### **Sometimes suffering brings extreme pain.**

Peter James Flamming told about a young man who had been pitched from a horse and had been paralyzed. Slowly, but surely he began to respond. He went to a huge regional hospital for further therapy. On the day he was to take his first step, the people who helped him stood watching. He fell flat on his face. He wept in pain. Nobody moved. A chaplain, a friend, and confidant of the family, felt every instinct to rush to his aid. But the therapists would not let him. Again the boy tried. Again the agony of the fall and the defeat. Again and again the cruelty continued. The whole occasion produced pain. To the young man, it was dreadfully painful. It was painful to the therapists who watched. It was painful to the chaplain who empathized.

But the day came when the boy walked!

Flamming contrasted that young man's painful experience with a cartoon he saw, which showed a mother helping her son into a wheelchair. A nearby friend said, **"I didn't know your son couldn't walk."** The reply: "Oh, he can. But thank God he doesn't have to."

Flamming went on to say, "From everything we know in the Scripture, God is not like that mother. He is more like the therapists. He wants us to walk and run and soar. He is about the business of

soul making. If He needs to work through this stained, bent-out-of-shape world we live in, He will. His will for us is not to make us happy or unhappy. It is to make us, us, as only He knows we can be. . . He weaves into the tapestry of our lives both joy and pain. He will not give up until we all attain to the **'to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13)."**<sup>3</sup>

**We need a caution in respect to suffering.**

### **2. We must be careful about interpreting the meaning of other people's suffering.**

**We flippantly advise others to rise above their pain and suffering.**

Kathryn Lindskoog suffered many years with multiple sclerosis (MS), a chronic disease that gradually weakens and paralyzes the body. She was amazed at some of the advice she received from friends and relatives. A few examples:

**"You must really like to be sick; you bring so much of it on yourself."** That comment was from a nearby relative who never so much as sent a get-well card.

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<sup>3</sup> Layman's Library of Christian Doctrine Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985. Quoted in Dynamic Preaching, 3-90

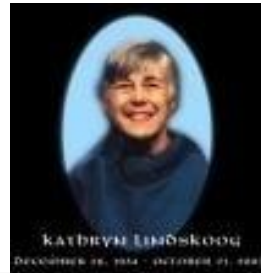
See also Revelation 1: 9 NIV "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

**"The reason I have perfect health is that I think right; nobody gets sick unless he thinks wrong."** That from another relative.

"I know just how you feel about being crippled; I had a bad case of tennis elbow last month."

Here's another:

**"Your present improvement is just wishful thinking."**



Kathryn Lindskoog

**Would you like to know what Lindskoog's minister said with entire seriousness?**

"I know you fake your limp to try to get attention."<sup>4</sup>

**We cautiously judge other people's suffering.**

**God didn't give us the right to second guess His work in the lives of other people.**

**Of Christian suffering, the Apostle Peter wrote:**

"Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup>If you suffer, it

should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup>However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."<sup>5</sup>

In the original, the word *meddler* literally means someone who tries to oversee the lives of others.

**Peter listed that sin along with murderers, thieves, and other criminals.**

**The Lord considers meddling serious business.**

**3. Now, let's focus on what the Lord seems to be telling us in our text.**

In Christ, we benefit from God's kingdom or rule.

**All human organizations are temporary.**

**Laws of gravity are dependable, can be mathematically calculated, and proved.**

**Yet God's kingdom-church is more durable than any physical law God established.**

**No human institution or organization is permanent.**

The assumption that athletes are being "immortalized" in sports halls of fame is laughable.

**Only God is immortal; His Kingdom and rule, unshakeable.**

**Faithful believers in Christ receive that permanent Kingdom.**

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Lindskoog, "What Do You Say to Job?" LEADERSHIP, Spring 1985:93-94. Quoted in Ron Lee Davis, HEALING LIFE'S HURTS (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 4:12-16 NIV

**The prophet Daniel saw this vision:**

“Before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven . . . <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”<sup>6</sup>

Daniel’s vision referred to Jesus’ church, which came into being on Pentecost as *Acts 2* describes.

**The *Book of Revelation* affirms: Jesus**

“has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—

to him be glory and power for ever and ever!”<sup>7</sup>

**Jesus’ church doesn’t have a special clergy or priesthood.**

**All faithful, baptized believers serve as priests.**

The word “worship” in our text often refers to the work performed by *Old Testament* priests.

In Christ, all of us now serve as priests.

**By God’s grace, we serve as priests in the one permanent organization in the Universe—God’s kingdom-church.**



**Our duties include worshiping as one and encouraging one another to be faithful.**

NT scholar Hermann Strathmann wrote of what the Lord expects of us: “A manner of life which is pleasing to God, and which is sustained both by gratitude and by a serious sense of responsibility.”<sup>8</sup>

**“In everything give thanks.”**

**We should gratefully come into God’s presence.**

**Rather than dwelling on the world’s failures and the way others have wronged us, we should be grateful for Jesus’ victories over sin and death--thankful that God allowed us to be in his kingdom.**

**What sacrifices do we priests offer to God?**

“Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name...do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”<sup>9</sup>

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel 7:13, 14 NIV See also

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 1:6 NIV

<sup>8</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Hermann Strathmann, Vol. IV, p 64.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 13:15, 16 NASB