

Dangerous Excess

We thank thee with all our hearts for every gracious dispensation, for all the Blessings that have attended our lives, for every hour of safety, health and peace, of domestic comfort and innocent enjoyment.

As some of you know, I'm a huge fan of Jane Austen, English authoress of classic novels like *Pride and Prejudice*. Her father was an Anglican minister, and she was a person of strong faith too. Not surprisingly, then, gratefulness for God's blessings is a common theme in her preserved prayers (excerpt above), as it should be in our own. But I want to put a little different spin on things today, to raise a caution. God's good gifts, such as Austen outlined above, can become tests, even points of stumbling, depending on what we do with them.

Safety and peace are indeed blessings, but they can also encourage a dangerous complacency to develop. Adequate food and drink is important for *health*, however, overindulging can result in just the opposite. Enough money for *domestic comfort* is desirable; hungering after riches and luxury is not. *Innocent enjoyments* should be appreciated, but unwholesome 'entertainments' abound. Similarly, although useful employment is a gift, even that can get out of control, exceeding healthy proportions. Where is the boundary, then? It's often a balancing act, walking the uncertain line between enough and sinful excess, between enjoying God's good gifts and allowing them to become idols in our lives. The Bible warns us,

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. [But] be careful... otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when... your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth... (Deuteronomy 8:10-18)

Our sinful natures are all too proficient at taking God's good gifts and turning them into something unhealthy – by overindulgence, by forgetting the true source of the blessing, by hoarding rather than sharing. Even with right intentions, we may cross that line. What is our safeguard, then? Gratitude. Look again at Austen's prayer and the superlatives she uses. Let us thank God with *all* our hearts for *all* his blessings, remembering that we are indebted to him for *every* single hour of safety, health, peace, comfort and enjoyment. We can claim credit for none of it ourselves. That puts things in the proper perspective.

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