

**O Lord of Heav'n and Earth and Sea***Christopher Wordsworth (1807–1885)*

O Lord of heav'n and earth and sea,  
to Thee all praise and glory be;  
how shall we show our love to Thee,  
who givest all?

The golden sunshine, vernal air,  
sweet flow'rs and fruits Thy love declare,  
when harvests ripen, Thou art there,  
who givest all.

For peaceful homes and healthful days,  
for all the blessings earth displays,  
we owe Thee thankfulness and praise,  
who givest all.

Thou didst not spare Thine only Son,  
but gav'st Him for a world undone,  
and freely with that blessed One,  
Thou givest all.

Thou giv'st the Holy Spirit's dow'r,  
Spirit of life and love and pow'r,  
and dost His sev'nfold graces show'r  
upon us all.

For souls redeemed, for sins forgiv'n,  
for means of grace and hopes of heav'n,  
Father, what can to Thee be giv'n,  
who givest all?

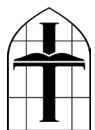
**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***Can We Be Thankful?***Kevin T. Bauder*

At the end of 1990 I left the church that I had pastored for six years and moved my family to Dallas so I could pursue doctoral studies. I had no source of income, no friends in Texas, and no family nearby. After a few weeks I found a job in a factory. Even though we lived quite frugally, my pay did not cover our expenses. As our savings dwindled I looked for every opportunity to pick up overtime or extra shifts, sometimes working sixty hours or more during the week. In moments of financial stress I was forced to sell prized possessions. I worked third shift and went to class in the mornings, so I was tired all the time. We had trouble finding a church with an expository pulpit; after almost a year of looking we settled for one that was weakly biblical. As we approached Thanksgiving Day of 1991 we were still largely on our own; we had no friends or family nearby with whom to share the day.

Our circumstances were difficult, but we had few or no distractions on Thanksgiving day. We did not even have a television. We just had each other. We spent time playing games with our children. We lacked funds for a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, but Mrs. Bauder fried a chicken and it seemed like a feast. The central event of the day was taking time to enumerate what we were thankful for.

Mrs. Bauder and I were still growing in love (we still are), and happy to have each other. Our children were a delight to us. I had recently gained recognition at work, leading to a cash prize that helped to provide the Thanksgiving meal. Our extended families, while distant from us, were a source of encouragement. We had an adequate home to live in. My education was moving ahead; in fact, a significant obstacle had recently been eliminated. We were getting acquainted with our neighbors—Mexican immigrants on one side, African-Americans on the other, and Anglo senior citizens across the street—and found them all to be kind and generous people. We had begun to get used to Texas weather, habits, and speech. We had never missed a meal or failed to pay a bill on time. Our needs were met, and if we had nothing to spare, we also owed nothing to anyone.

Most of all, we knew and felt that everything in our lives, the good and the bad, had come from the hand of a loving, wise, and sovereign God. In many



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ways the past year had been the most difficult in our lives together. We recognized, however, that God was disposing of us according to His will, and that His dispositions would ultimately prove very good. We had always known this, but now the truth of it was like a keen breeze on a hot day. We had less (at least materially) than ever before, but we were more grateful for the little that we had.

That Thanksgiving became one of the high-water marks in our family's story. It stands out in memory as the best and most meaningful that we have ever enjoyed. On every other Thanksgiving we have had more, yet neither before nor since have we felt so profoundly grateful as we did that day. I have often asked myself what made that Thanksgiving so remarkable.

One important answer is that our attention was more focused on our blessings. Why? For one thing, we had felt want, and felt it acutely. For us, passing through hardship and necessity highlighted by contrast the sufficiency of the blessings that we had received. Because we had received less, we appreciated the little that we were given more. It was enough! We understood at an experiential level that simply having enough was really a rich blessing from God. He was taking care of us.

Furthermore, that Thanksgiving was remarkably free from distractions. We didn't plan to go anywhere because we couldn't afford to. We couldn't entertain anyone because no family or friends were nearby. Mrs. Bauder didn't labor over a huge dinner because a simple fried chicken was a treat to us. Since we owned no television we watched no programming, and we did not miss it. We took time to pay attention to each other, to play with our children, and to enjoy the process of taking up and examining the blessings that God had provided. With fewer distractions we had more freedom to focus both on God's gifts and on Him as the giver.

Gratitude is not a function of how much we have been given. It is a function of how much we pay attention not only to God's gifts but especially to Him as One who gives graciously, kindly, and wisely. We do not become thankful because we receive, but because we acknowledge having received.

For many, 2020 has been a year of loss. We might easily become preoccupied with what we do not have. Instead, let us recognize that we have been subject to the dispositions of a generous, kind, loving, wise, and almighty God. While we may mourn our losses, we must also recognize the sufficiency of the blessings that we have received. These blessings flow from the hand of our heavenly Father. The sorrows are real enough, but so is the generosity and goodness of the One who, watching over us, neither slumbers nor sleeps. Let us at least take a day to free ourselves of distractions, to acknowledge what we have received, and to give thanks to God.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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