

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

November 2009



We hurried down narrow streets and alleys until we came to a small unmarked door. The dimly lit room was hushed as we entered and climbed up a narrow stairway. The outside chill followed us into the damp unheated concrete meeting room. The cold sank deep into our bones, but the chill seemed to be ignored by those filling the room. In fact, there was a sense of joy and thankfulness that permeated the place. Over three hundred men and women had silently crowded in to hear God's word and to offer praises to Him who had brought them out of darkness. Every square inch of the room, even the stair well and open bathroom were filled with the expectant faces of Chinese believers. This was Guangzhou, China and this was the underground church! The scene took place in the early 90's but it is still vivid in my mind. Our daughter, Belene (McLaughlin), just 18, Rick a close friend and I were doing what we could to "bring" Bibles into China, and we were surprised and honored to be invited to this meeting.

One hour of preaching, one hour of scripture reading, and one hour of sincere worship was the order of service. By the end of the meeting, I remember not being able to shake the cold that had penetrated so deeply; others seemed to have no visible discomfort. What I did notice was the joy and evident thankfulness on the faces of these believers. Many were students, and just being in that meeting could mean the termination of their education! Some testified of losing their state controlled employment because of their faith. One young lady joyfully testified of losing her job because she had brought three others to church! Jesus was not tolerated by the state, but this made little difference! Truly we were on holy ground.



What thrilled me the most was the testimony of how their evident joy and thankfulness, in such a dark country, opened doors to witness. Just a smile in those dark streets would bring questions like, "Why are you so happy?". This would open the door for the gospel could be shared! Here was the secret reason the church was growing so rapidly in China! True thankfulness!



Thankfulness defines us! Being unthankful also defines us! Difficult times separate the wheat from the chaff. That is why the Psalmist speaks of the "...sacrifices of thanksgiving." We as a people are going through difficult times. Our nation, our economy, our lives are being buffeted with difficulty that many of us have never experienced before. Uncertainty prevails! It would be easy to succumb to the temptation to sin and to be unthankful, but we must not.



In nearly every epistle the apostle Paul penned, he reminded believers to be filled with thankfulness, "*In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*" Paul, by the Holy Spirit, also warned that the end times would be characterized by an unthankful spirit; he wrote that men would be "...lovers of themselves, unthankful." Brothers and sisters, do you want to know God's will for your life? It is clear, **be thankful in every situation.**





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All of us at FARMS have seen extreme thankfulness in places of great need: places like Cambodia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Rwanda, and Vietnam. Epistles written in human flesh are impossible to forget. *Joy unspeakable and full of glory!* In Nepal, in a Hindu village, I witnessed a baptismal service that was extraordinary. The pastor tried to dissuade one woman from being baptized. He reminded her of how her husband was beaten severely after he was baptized. She responded with tears, “I love Jesus so much, I am so thankful he brought me out of darkness, nothing man can do can change that.” She was baptized that day.

We have so much to learn. Let this truth penetrate us like the cold in China! It has been said that we need the poor more than they need us. Without doubt, their testimony of thankfulness in the face of real difficulty is something we need to learn from. Most of our problems in life, whether in our family, our marriages, our work, our relationship with others, can be traced back to our unthankful hearts. Selfishness is the opposite of thankfulness. Let this truth penetrate deep into our souls. We must examine our hearts. Are we truly thankful? Do others see thankfulness bubbling up from our innermost being? Has anyone asked you recently why you are so happy? If not, turn, repent of hidden sin, and become what God wants you to be.

We, and those you help through FARMS, want to thank you for identifying with the poor. Your faithfulness is not forgotten. Thank you!

Bound to give thanks,

Joe & Pat

Joe and Pat Richter
For all of us at FARMS



Blessings this Thanksgiving!