

Thanks in Hard Times

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, William Stidger was in a restaurant with friends who were all talking about how terrible things were: suffering people, rich people committing suicide, joblessness. The conversation got more miserable as it went on.

A minister in the group interrupted. "In two or three weeks, I have to preach a sermon on Thanksgiving Day," he said. "What can I say that's affirmative in a period of world depression like this?"

Stidger felt the Spirit of God saying to him, "Why don't you give thanks to those people who have been a blessing in your life and affirm them during this terrible time?"

He began to think about that. He remembered a schoolteacher who was very dear to him, a wonderful teacher of poetry and English literature who had gone out of her way to put a great love of literature and verse in him, which had affected all his writings and preaching.

So he sat down and wrote a letter to this woman, now up in years. It was only a matter of days until he got a reply in the feeble scrawl of the aged:

My Dear Willy:

I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my 80s, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf of autumn lingering behind. You'll be interested to know that I taught in school for more than 50 years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has done in many years.

"I'm not sentimental, but I found myself weeping over that note," Stidger said. Then he thought of a kind bishop, now retired, who had recently faced the death of his wife and was all alone. This bishop had taken a lot of time giving Stidger advice and counsel and love when he first began his ministry. So he sat down and wrote the old bishop. In two days, a reply came back:

My Dear Will:

Your letter was so beautiful, so real, that as I sat reading it in my study, tears of gratitude fell from my eyes. Before I realized what I was doing, I rose from my chair and I called my wife's name to share it with her, forgetting she was gone. You'll never know how much your letter has warmed my spirit. I have been walking around in the glow of your letter all day long.

You would expect me to ask you this question:

Is there someone you need to write this week?

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers (Ephesians 1:16 ESV).