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Certainty and Doubt

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Ashley Huizinga

For what am I thankful?

I pondered this question for a long time. I continue to think over it, even now as I write this, trying to pin down a single thing for which I am especially thankful. I have friends with piles of “gratitude journals,” dotted with things for which they are grateful. I have relatives who will not even eat a snack without first giving thanks to God for their daily bread. I have parents with stable incomes, and siblings with goals in life. I have ambitions and dreams and expectations. I have the time to write this article for you to read, as well as the energy to put pen to paper and fingers to keyboard. A lifetime of access to educators much wiser than myself who have taught me everything I know about words and their power. I have, I have, I have... there is so much, named and unnamed, for which I am thankful today. But one piece of these blessings, something threaded through each gratitude named above, strikes me in particular.

I am thankful for people.

People are truly amazing. Lifelong friends, brand-new acquaintances, family members, neighbors, teachers and pupils and strangers. Even your favorite author or blogger, about whom you may know nothing except that their words speak deeply to you. Every individual has someone in his or her life who knows just the right thing to do, to say, in order to build up, break down, make you smile, push your buttons, or inspire you to tears. So very often, we take people—and all the blessings they bring—for granted.

But, there’s one thing that all people do.

Just as often, they fail.

They let you down. They show up late or not at all. They disappoint you, just as you disappoint them. A life with other human beings in it in a never-ending circle of imperfections, of promises made and broken and forgiven and made again. No one has ever been immune to this cycle of inadequacy.

Still, as I think of things for which I am thankful, I am reminded that there’s One who never fails.

My favorite Bible verses, James 1:6, reads, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering...” (KJV). The “him” here is in reference to the believer, the brethren to whom James writes this letter—especially those asking wisdom of the Lord. When was the last time you asked someone else for something without wavering? Or the last time you made a request and there was no doubt in your mind, no fear of being refused now or ever?

I would be the first to admit to my own failings. My forgetfulness, my habitual tardiness to morning class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, my indifference to responsibility (as a senior, I’m told this aloofness is fairly common, but that doesn’t excuse the problem or the part I play in making senioritis “normal”). I too fail, and let people down, and come up short. “To err is human,” said Alexander Pope, in *An Essay on Criticism*, and I am very, very human. But when I imagine asking for something with *no doubt*, no insincerity or uncertainty as to the fulfillment of that request? How *amazing* a thing, to whisper or speak or even cry out for help or comfort or contentment and to know the answer?

So, I am thankful for certainty.

That’s not to dismiss or disguise doubt. In a roundabout way, I am thankful also for doubt. In a theology class years ago, little freshman me was told that “Doubt is not antithetical to the Christian faith,” and the sentiment has stuck

with me since then. Consider the rest of the verse of James 1:6, "...For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (KJV). There are and will always be those who waver. There are storms of life which shake us to our cores, which bring waves beating against our hulls and timbers and rudders, and winds careening through our sails. There will ever be psalms and hymns and contemporary worship songs about deep waters closing around us and even over us.

But in certainty and doubt alike, we give thanks. Doubt reminds us of our inability to determine or direct our own paths. It tells us that we are in the hands of One much greater and much more than we are. Certainty reminds us that we shouldn't want to steer our own course, for in doing so we would certainly never reach our destinations.

The ancient peoples used to trust the stars to guide them, to predict the future, etc. They trusted these tiny, unknown points of light in the great black arch of the heavens because the stars appeared every night. There was never a time at which the sun would go down (whether that was the Greek Apollo Helios driving his golden chariot, the Roman Sol of Constantine the Great, or the Egyptian Amun-Ra piloting his golden barque) and the stars would fail to appear, even for one night. Nowadays, we know that the stars are not eternal. They, too, had a beginning and will have an end. They, too, will one day vanish from the fabric of the heavens and fail to delight us even once more.

But our God is truly eternal. Our God is truly never-failing, never-ending. We trust the Bible's assertion that He had no beginning and will have no end. Never need we doubt this faithfulness to send us the best end for those requests we make in faith, nothing wavering. For that, especially, I am thankful today and every day.