

Gratefulness- Part II

Great-Full or Grateful? By Richard Hickam

Or as I like to call it "What Andy Meant to Say Last Sabbath"

As you may know I have spent my professional career until now as a music educator. How many of you participated in music as a student? What was it that you remember the most as a music student? How many for the pleasure of music? How many for an inspirational teacher? And finally how many for the trips you took in music? For many people the answer is the trips! It certainly was for me when I was a student. Much planning goes into making those things happen. A few years ago I was planning a trip for 75 or so students Chicago. It took a lot of time to figure out transportation, meals, concert venues, chaperones, down time, seeing cultural events, accommodations...well, what usually comes from good planning? The trip was successful, we created memories that will last a lifetime, but something strange happened as we pulled back into the school and got off the bus... no-one said thank-you, they all scurried like mice into their cars and were....bam gone.

Now before you think how noble I am, let me assure you that I have been one of those students during my lifetime and I would bet that you have also.

We all tend to have these experiences, times when we aren't grateful and times when people aren't grateful towards us. Well, how does God fit into all of this? What is His opinion of gratitude? Studying this week I was surprised to find out that scripture had a lot to say about being thankful. Searching a bible concordance I found the root word thank used over a 130 times.

Stick with me as we run through these texts, I have chosen a few from many:

1 Chronicles 16:34

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

1 Chronicles 29:13

Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

The bulk of thanksgiving in the bible comes from the book of Psalms. Do you know what the word Psalms translates as? **PRAISE**.

Psalms 92

A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day.

1 It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, **O** Most High, **2** proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, **3** to the music of the ten-stringed lyre (liar) and the melody of the harp.

4 For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD; I sing for joy at what your hands have done. **5** How great are your works, LORD, how profound your thoughts!

Psalm 100-Shout triumphantly to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs. Acknowledge that the Lord is God. He made us, and we are His—His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the Lord is good, and His love is eternal; His faithfulness endures through all generations.

Psalm 107:1 -Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

Psalm 118:21

I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

Clearly, we are to give thanks to God for His love endures forever, that particular phrase is repeated again and again, as a matter of fact it is used in various ways **43** times in the Old Testament, talk about a major theme!

What about in the New Testament?

Ephesians 1:16 This is Paul speaking to believers living in Ephesus. I have not stopped giving **thanks** for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one **body** you were called to peace. And be **thankful**.

And this one which (will be 1st service) (was 2nd and 3rd) featured in our offertory:

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and **thanksgiving** be made for **all** people--.

Hebrews 12:28

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be **thankful**, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

In the Old Testament we see gratitude as being expressed to our Creator as part of the essence of life and worship. Clearly the theme of gratitude continues cohesively in the New Testament, also expanding to our fellow man, but there's more, there's one story that particularly emphasizes its importance. Let's re-examine today's scripture in Luke 17 starting at verse 11:

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. **12** As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy **[b]** met him. They stood at a distance **13** and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, **praising God in a loud voice.** **16** He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a **Samaritan.**

17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? **18** Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” **19** Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

What would it be like to be a leper? Have you been sick when you had to be isolated from others? Can you imagine living apart from society until you died? What would their healing mean for them?

How has Jesus healed you spiritually? Physically? Emotionally?

These are particularly relevant questions as we are the Hospital Church.

What is significant about the one being a Samaritan? Remember, he was the outsider among the outsiders. In their misery the lepers bonded together, they had a common bond that was beyond what society had ingrained through generations. But at the moment of healing this outsider among outsiders was the most grateful. It reminded me of the text in Luke 7:47-“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

It’s quite a story isn’t it? Only one person returning to give thanks? Did you notice what made this so interesting? Let’s look back at verse 16: He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—he was a Samaritan. This passage is inferring then if he was a Samaritan then the other 9 were Jews. Just remember the story with the woman at the well in John 4:9- “The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)”

The Word in Life Study Bible says this about the Jews and Samaritans “There are countless modern parallels to the Jewish-Samaritan enmity—indeed, wherever peoples are divided by racial and ethnic barriers. Perhaps that’s why the Gospels and Acts provide so many instances of Samaritans coming into contact with the message of Jesus. It is not the person from the radically different culture on the other side of the world that is hardest to love, but the nearby neighbor whose skin color, language, rituals, values, ancestry, history, and customs are different from one’s own.

Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. With whom do you have no dealings'?

Let me ask you this- As one of the nine, how would you rationalize not going back to Jesus to say "thanks"?

When I hear this story I often tell myself well obviously I would be the one Samaritan here. Do you ever insert yourself that way into a story? But would I really? Would you really? As you might be sitting here with a loved one today, maybe a special family member that you don't get to see that often. Might you forget to say thanks to Jesus to reunite with that special someone? Or perhaps you would say let me see my family FIRST and then I will return and say thanks? There's nothing wrong with that is there?

And this is the point of the sermon in relation to gratitude, when it comes down to it, do I put thanksgiving first or not? The spin on the title of the sermon g-r-e-a-t full asks am I great and putting my thoughts before being g-r-a-t-e-ful to where the gratitude should go.

We started today with a story about not getting thanked and let me tell you one that happened this week about getting thanked. Our piano player from last week Andre and I finished eating at Panera and we walked outside where we were approached by a homeless man on a bicycle. He started asking us questions and got around to asking for some money to stay at a shelter for the night, this was the second time in a week a homeless person informed me that it costs money to stay at a shelter. Andre was quick to give him some money and we started asking him questions about how he got here and where he came from. After a few minutes it was time for us to go but the man first expressed his gratitude to us by saying thank you, not for the money which was given to him but for being kind to him and having a conversation.

What are your stories of gratitude? For those of you that were here last week we collected some stories about about thankfulness. Here are a few of those responses:

As a senior in college in the nursing program I was expelled. I transferred to another state, and during that year, I met a young soldier and fell in love. We married after I graduated and have had our 54th anniversary. Yes, I am thankful now for the Lord's guidance in my life.

I can see, I can walk, I can talk, I can hear, I can read, I can understand.

I'm so thankful for this year, God's given us his blessing and good health. Being in good health is really great.

I am very thankful that a couple of weeks ago, I was able to celebrate yet another birthday with my mom who battled breast cancer last year and is now cancer free!

My daughter is back home...TYJ I love U...to see old friends in church. Overwhelmed to be back in church. God bless us all...

This week there was a giant step taken toward healing our family.

We moved here cross country for a job. Within a week of arriving my husband was hospitalized and not expected to live. I didn't know anyone here except my brother's family. I had to start my new job. I am thankful for the support of my brother and his wife, for my parents and sister who took turns flying down to help care for my husband when he left the hospital after 2.5 months. But above all I am thankful for comfort and peace from God at a time it all felt like too much.

It has been a long journey. Packing what I could along with two young children and even with a physical condition from a car accident. God gave me strength to walk away from a home, a job and a few treasures on earth that I had collected and an 18 year abusive marriage. Today I am thankful to live here in Orlando and be at the Florida Hospital Church.

Author Glen Hopkins says this about gratitude- "Imagine for a moment one of those nights when you just can't fall asleep and you have to get up early the next morning for a very important meeting of which you are the keynote speaker. Your alarm clock goes off early in the morning waking you from what little sleep you had. You stumble out of bed, have a quick shower, grab a coffee and some toast, and off you go to fight the traffic on the way to work. Does that sound like the start of a terrible day? Most would answer 'yes.' Few people however, would answer, 'no.' these are the people, who are in my opinion blessed with a gift. A gift, which determines how they view their life. These people live with 'an attitude of gratitude.' For them, the situation described could be worse. Much worse. For example, think of the man who doesn't have a bed, let alone a roof to over his head. When he is awoken from what little sleep he is able to get, it is by the rain falling on his cold body. He too stumbles to his feet and begins his journey to work in his bare feet. His work is in the field of survival. He searches through garbage cans for scraps of half-rotten food to eat and odd bits of clothes to keep him warm.

The purpose of this example is to illustrate that we all have so much to be grateful for. Even in times when it seems that nothing could be worse, there is always a reason to be grateful. And when you feel a sense of gratitude, you feel a sense of happiness and contentment. My challenge to you today is to learn to look for the good in every situation and live with 'an attitude of gratitude.'

I assure you, if you were the fellow searching for food in garbage cans you too could find things to be grateful for. You just have to look hard enough and 'open your eyes' to what is around you. You have to focus on what's good in your life, not what's bad. An unknown author said this-"I once was distraught because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet." -

Life works in mysterious ways. Time and time again there have been stories of people who are in a dire strait yet they are found helping others who are

experiencing greater turmoil. This is because once you have helped someone in greater need than yourself, you always feel better. You feel better because you have helped another human being, and this forces you to change your mindset from focusing on your problems to focusing on their solutions.

Always focus on the solution, not the problem and live with an attitude of gratitude! Mother Teresa was a primary example of this phenomenon. Her entire life revolved around helping others in need. As a result she experienced a great deal of love and self-satisfaction in her life.

I challenge you now to take a moment to think of five things in your life that you are grateful for today. For example, your friends, your family, your job, your sense of smell, touch, sight, and sound. The list can go on and on. Imagine what your life would be like without these things. Write them down on a piece of paper and really think about the things you are grateful for. You will be amazed at how great you will feel!

Scripture suggests that if we take our eyes off ourselves (no matter what our circumstances) and give thanks to God and to our fellow man we will have an appreciation in its rightful place.

As we transition from a season of Thanksgiving to the Christmas season, let's remember gratitude, you'll have opportunity to show it again and again...and if you can develop it into a habit you may end up like this quote from Rabbi Harold Kushner "If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul." —

Prayer

Takeaways

Christmas stories coming soon to a pulpit near you