

Gratitude Over All Part 2

Last Sunday I shared the first of two messages on Gratitude Over All. I said then that **Gratitude is a response to the answer to this question: Where did it all come from to begin with?** Once we acknowledge where it all came from, that God is the source of every good gift, then gratitude is the appropriate response. We talked specifically about gratitude for the gift of life, gratitude for all the blessings we possess and gratitude for grace. Not only is gratitude a response to knowing where the blessings come from to begin with, but **Gratitude is a response to our awareness of who and what we really are.**

When we admit who and what we are, sinners in need of a Savior, and once we have been saved by grace, remembering what we were and where we came from, the response is one of gratitude and thankfulness. Remember who you were and where you came from. Paul writes, **“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

Read those words, “and that is what some of you were...” The truth is we’ve all sinned and missed the mark. None of us were righteous on our own, but we have been washed, sanctified, justified through faith in Jesus. Saved not by righteous things we’ve done but because of his mercy (Titus 3:5). Paul says “now a righteousness apart from our ability to keep the law has come. **“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Romans 3:22** Our response to this awareness of his saving grace is gratitude. We remember and we acknowledge “this is what we were!” Like Brennan Manning that I mentioned last week, we shout into the darkness, “Jesus are you crazy? How could you love me like this?” With gratitude we acknowledge that by God’s grace we aren’t who we used to be! God’s grace has saved us. The rest of our days, every day, we remember who we were, and how he saved us from that life of sin and death and gave us eternal and abundant life in him!

Gratitude is both a result and an expression of the grace of God in our lives. We acknowledge his grace at work in us and when we live in gratitude and daily express gratitude for that grace, that response spills over onto others. When our conversation, our attitude, our

actions are seasoned with gratitude and thanksgiving, we end up “gracing” the lives of those around us and causing them to give thanks as well. **Gratitude is contagious!**

Gratitude spreads. It’s like a seed we plant that produces a harvest. It reproduces. It liberates, it transforms, it produces peace. You want to be around grateful, thankful people. Gratitude is becoming, pleasant, pleasing. You look better when you are grateful. Grumpy or grateful, which is most attractive? **Both grumbling and gratitude are contagious. One spreads discord and discontent, the other spreads peace and harmony. Which do you choose?** Before you answer, remember the fate of the Israelites that wandered in and died in the desert because they grumbled and complained instead of giving thanks to the Lord. Remember where you came from! Remember God’s grace, his provision and blessing and then choose gratitude over all. Choose to be grateful and let that gratitude spread and spill over onto others!

Gratitude breaks the hold of negative emotions like fear, selfishness, and bitterness. Gratitude is liberating, healing, freeing. It’s hard to remain bitter when you are filled with gratitude. When you acknowledge all God has done for you, his generosity, it’s hard to be selfish. You’ll want to share with others. Fear is calmed when you live in gratitude. Gratitude for his blessings brings the re-assurance, He hasn’t failed me yet and I don’t believe he will! An attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving leads to rest, confidence and peace.

Somewhere I ran across a story told by Father John Kavanaugh. He told of a grateful, elderly woman who was in an extended care hospital. She had some kind of wasting disease and was declining rapidly over a period of weeks. He wrote, “A student of mind happened upon her on a coincidental visit. The student kept going back, drawn by the strange force of the woman’s joy. Though she could no longer move her arms and legs, she would say, ‘I’m just so happy I can move my neck.’ When she could no longer move her neck, she would say, ‘I’m just so glad I can see and hear.’ When the young student finally asked the old woman what would happen if she lost her sound and sight, the gentle old lady said, ‘I’ll just be so grateful that you come to visit.’” Kavanaugh concluded, “There was an uncommon freedom in that student’s eyes as she told me of her friend. Somehow a great enemy had been disarmed in her life.”

Gratitude is liberating and freeing as you remember what God has done, as you remember where you came from and how he saved you, as you remember every blessing and that he is with you eternally. Remember and give thanks and as you do, gratitude prompts you to release your fear, your selfish grip on things. Instead of holding on, you turn loose, out of

gratitude you share with others and give. Out of gratitude your perspective changes, doubts disappear, confidence in the Lord grows. Gratitude takes the focus off of yourself and puts it on God and on others. Gratitude reminds us that God is bigger and greater and He is in control! Someone said “The root of joy is gratefulness...It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful.” Give thanks with a grateful heart and watch joy grow in your life.

Gratitude is the protocol by which we approach God. The Old Testament instructed the people of God to bring a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord. The Psalmist referred to thanksgiving as something we can bring to God with both our hands and our heart. Not just an animal sacrifice, brought in obedience to the law, but the response of our heart, offering praise and thanksgiving to God out of love and adoration for who He is and for what He has done.

“Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us and we are his; we are 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 endures forever, his faithfulness continues through all generations.” Psalm 100:1-5

“Come before him with joyful songs...enter his gates with thanksgiving, with gratitude; enter his courts with praise.” This is how we are to approach the Lord. Not grumbling, not complaining. Yes, we are going to bring our needs and petitions to him, and even our complaints, but Paul said **“In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Philippians 4:6.** In the verses before he tells us to “rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” It’s how we respond when we remember where we came from, what he has done, whose we are, and that he has invited us to come into his presence and make our needs known to him. Rejoice! Give thanks! Gratitude and thanksgiving influences and determines how we handle and deal with much of life. Which brings me to the last point.

Gratitude must be inclusive of all of our life. Remember: Gratitude Over All. We aren’t just grateful when everything is going our way. Gratitude as an attitude is to be reflected at all points along the journey, in the good and the bad. Remember Job in the Old Testament, blessed in every way and then he suffers unspeakable loss. In the midst of his grief and pain, Job declared, **“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised.” Job 1:21** Gratitude, in spite of the circumstances. It’s our choice!

The apostle Paul tells us, **“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:18.** We don’t have to thank God for things that appear to have come from the enemy, the one who has come to kill, steal and destroy. Much has been said about giving God thanks “in” all circumstances but not “for” all circumstances. I understand that, but I also know that God has a way of causing all things to work together for our good and for his glory. Gratitude finds a way of being inclusive of the good and the bad, gratitude over all, encouraging patience in all. I don’t know how it’s going to work out, but I’ll go ahead and give God thanks in these circumstances because knowing Him, he’s going to work this out for my good.

Henri Nouwen wrote, **“To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives – the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections – that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for. Let’s not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God.” ...Henri Nouwen**

God is at work and we are his workmanship, his masterpiece, all of us, still being shaped and refined. We aren’t simply pieces of stone being sculpted, instead we are living creatures that respond to the events and circumstances of life. We are making choices that allow us to grow and learn and mature. We are wise to respond with gratitude and thanksgiving, with absolute trust in the Lord, even in the darkness or the difficult times. Don’t give into fear or despair, instead, trust and give God thanks! Gratitude over all!

We never thought we would be here, in circumstances like we find ourselves in, but guess who is still faithful, who is still at work, still directing our steps, still causing things to work together for our good? Jesus! We aren’t home yet, we haven’t finished the journey, but we trust Him and because of that, we live with gratitude over all! Happy Thanksgiving!

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.