

RECLAIMING GRATITUDE: A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

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“In ordinary life, we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.”

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Thanksgiving Day...

Reclaiming Gratitude. For the past few days I've been thinking about the nature of gratitude. What is gratitude, what are its values, and benefits? What happens when gratitude is expressed? What affects does gratitude have if embraced by the community as a sacred and practiced value? While I am definitely not an expert on the philosophical and theological aspects of gratitude, I at least know that gratitude improves lives. In fact, when I consider the blessings I've received in spite of myself, the way people meet each other's needs with the all the resources what God has given them, alleviating certain afflictions, difficulties, and problems, they enrich, impact, and can even change lives in the most dynamic ways. The earnest appreciation and the deep gratitude that flows from people committing their will to the true good of others can even be more important than the actual gift received.

What is "Gratitude?"

Gratitude is the state of being grateful; it is a strong thankful feeling of appreciation for what one receives. This mindset, disposition, and even way of life are to be clearly reflected in the Judeo-Christian faith. Like the Apostle Paul writes: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Has Gratitude Fallen on Hard Times?

But in this entitlement, image-driven, narcissistic society where so many of our wants and needs are met, the spirit of gratitude seems to me to have fallen on hard times in our society. But this should not surprise us since we now live in a post-Christian society. Gratitude is replaced with entitlement, self-surrender for narcissism, and self-surrender for expectation. In what may be described as a

“sensate” culture. I find it fascinating that we have a holiday that motivates us to think about gratitude. For some, Thanksgiving is day of recalibration of sorts in view of the pervasiveness of consumerism, instant gratification, and the loneliness felt given inked day-planners and constant business. Yet, “Black Friday” quickly follows with all of its consumer joys and burdens.

The Beauty of Gratitude:

While we never want to underestimate our ever-present propensity for selfishness, especially given the empirical and biblical facts of our personal depravity, when we receive a specific blessing from someone, two things can occur in that that moment. First, the giver of this gift can be moved by the qualities of giving (e.g., an enriching personal experience of fulfillment, joy, & peace; it feels good deep within). And second, the recipient of the gift experiences certain qualities (e.g., excitement, freedom, joy, peace, and relief). Giving and receiving engenders blessings for all parties involved. Spectators too are blessed.

I wonder if this two-fold experience is a reflection of natural, moral law; it pleases our God-given conscience to give to others and express that gift received with sincere gratitude; we are designed to be moral. We best express our love to God when we commit our will to the true good of others (1 John 3:16-17). But I’ve also discovered that when generosity and gratitude are cultivated as virtues whereby they become second nature to that person (habits of excellence), they become qualities not only admired by many, but can also make a significant impact in one’s spheres of influence.

Consequently, giving and receiving can motivate us dynamically to give more. The blessings experienced by all involved are an experience of textured richness. It is not a mere proclamation but a touch of happiness than can soften or even transcend our afflictions, our sufferings, and our woes. Like the brilliant writer Charles Dickson once observed, “Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; no on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.” The equally brilliant thinker G. K. Chesterton put it this way: “I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought; and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”

If we could re-claim the beauty of gratitude in our spheres of living, then (adapting some words from Neal Maxwell), “we would not only count our

blessings, but we would also make our blessings count for something great.” If we were more attracted to the beauty of gratitude, then we would be more intentional about anticipating, meeting, and exceeding the needs of others. If we enlarged our scope of gratitude to the places we gather, the paths we tread, and the people we encounter, family, friends, colleagues, and strangers alike, our society would experience something that possesses, I believe transcendent possibilities. Gratitude evidenced in this “sensate culture” points us to another realm where full restoration is found, hope made real, suffering erased, and unconditional love experienced. Because of God’s grace, undeserved favor, given by God to those who freely place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, gratitude become powerfully personal; gratitude to the one and Only Triune God becomes worship.

Consequently, committing our will to the true good of others is dynamically enabled within; it becomes easier to anticipate, meet, and exceed the needs of others in spite of our depravity and selfishness, because we have experienced perfect forgiveness from all of our mistakes, pain and sufferings we have caused, and the destructive impulses we have generated. Stated differently, all past, present, and future sins are all forgiven when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. Afterwards, unhurried intimacy with God cultivates this state of gratitude replacing the spoiled planks of self-centeredness with the ever growing desire to be altruistic, to live a life of self-surrender whereby we seek to love others with greatness. Though selfishness will remain as we walk with God, perhaps it will lose

When I think of my parents, dear friends, teachers, students, colleagues, congregations, institutions, and even strangers who believed in me, inspired me, invested in me, challenged me, and blessed me, I am humbled and remain very grateful.

A Prayer for Thanksgiving Day and Beyond:

Therefore, as I reflect upon what it means to be grateful and the acts of generosity and gratitude observed and experienced, I put together a list I would like to share. This list, while incomplete, is not only a prayer of thankful to God, but following each thanks involves a principle I would like to practice more consistently. Perhaps sharing this list will be helpful to you as you think about what it means to reclaim gratitude in daily living given this post-Christian

society.

Heavenly Father, I am earnestly grateful...

1. For the freedoms we enjoy that other people in this world can only dream of experiencing: freedom of religion; freedom of speech; freedom to learn; freedom to grow.

May we whole heartily uphold these values for the next generation!

2. For the things we take for granted...
Clean water running in our homes; a refrigerator; stove; electricity.

May we willingly serve those in need across our hurting world!

3. For our law enforcement who put their lives on the line each and every day to keep chaos, evil, and potential problems at bay.

May we find ways to appreciate our police officers and those committed to truth, justice, and due process!

4. For our past and present veterans and military personnel who have or are willing to sacrifice their very lives so that our country might be protected and preserved.

May we forever remain grateful for their service, finding the best ways to repay them for sacrifices made.

5. For our teachers who have surrendered very much to educate the next generation for a better future.

May we support their efforts in every possible way!

6. For medical and fire personnel who protect and sacrifice for our communities.

May we support those who are willing to save lives!

7. For those who use their resources, times, and energy to benefit the lives of others. When we think of benefactors, donors, and volunteers who give, give, and give! We are blessed! Our communities are qualitatively enriched!

May we be more sacrificial and self-surrendering with the resources God has given us (e.g., time, energy, and resources).

8. We give thanks to businesses, civic leaders, politicians, legal, and social reformers who see their work as worship, who value personal integrity over selfish gain and exploitation, who promote the inherent dignity of all others, and live out a life of civility in discourse and life. They serve at great cost.

May we do likewise!

9. For our colleges and universities who are guardians of democracy by giving us the opportunities to freely study, learn, and do research without hindrance or harm.

May we learn broadly and deeply!

10. For artists, musicians, actors, and story tellers who help make the world beautiful with their creativity, imagination, and talents against the backdrop of all the grief, suffering, loss, and evil we experience on a daily basis.

May we seek to invest in those who seek to create art that is reflective of what good, true, and beautiful!

11. For those who serve unseen, anticipating, meeting, and exceeding the needs of others without any attention given to themselves.

May we not merely assist, but serve others with no redirection to ourselves!

12. For the little joys in life that uplift us-even if for a moment.

May we have the eyes to the extraordinary in the ordinary!

13. For fellow ordinary citizens who value personal integrity. The promises made are promises kept; their yes is yes and no is no. They fulfill their commitments.

May we be people of authentic, wholesome integrity in word, thought, and deed!

14. For the privilege of hard work and the employment we have received!

May we see our work as worship and be honorable-always.

15. For the creation you have made. The beautiful sunrises and sunsets, the stars in the sky, the rain and sun, the diversity of plants and animals, the vistas and valleys, deserts and jungles, the smell of flowers, the beautiful gardens, the taste of honey, and forests providing shade, beauty, and other resources.

May be good stewards of what God has given us!

16. For all the critters we enjoy who bring delight in ways other things do not. For the animals we are able to embrace like dogs and cats, the wildlife that fly overhead, the life that lives in the waters, and other critters like pollinators who provide so much for us. You not only provide us what we need, you create other forms of life that point us to you.

They can teach us much!

17. For the good pleasure we enjoy...the wide arrays of foods, spices, delicacies, the dinner parties, the festivities, the potlucks, the weddings, and the outings.

May we make time to have fun!

18. For the homes we have.

May our homes be havens of ministry to all who enter and never a war zone!

19. For our families.

May we treasure the time God has given us and not live for things that don't really matter!

20. For family members and father and mother figures that have sacrificed their own dreams to see us needs met and our dreams come true.

May we be so daring!

21. For our friends who love us in spite of our frailties and failures. For those kindred spirits who enrich our lives!

22. May we be committed to becoming better listeners!

23. For scientists who are unlocking the mysteries of the universe you created.

May we always stand at awe of what you created!

23. For our Judeo-Christian worldview which is not only historical testable over and against all other worldviews, offers teachings that coheres with the way reality actually is, and is centered on Jesus Christ, who spoke the greatest words ever spoken and did the greatest deeds ever done.

May our worldviews be God-honoring, holistic, and reflective of Jesus Christ.

24. For churches that consistently give us hope by teaching us God's Word as it is to people as they are so that we may grow into our full humanity and become all that you have called us to be.

May we actively contribute and fulfill the vision God has given each congregation.

25. For Scripture, and when studied become "alive" before us, molding us by the Holy Spirit.

May we open God's Word daily and spend unhurried time with him.

26. For when we pray, you listen, and answer according your perfect will. You are both infinite and personal!

May we pray more earnestly and more often knowing that prayer changes us!

27. To you, our one and only Triune God, who is both sovereign and good, Our Almighty God and King! We give thanks to our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins and who rose bodily from the dead, our Exemplar, our Savior, our Shepherd! We give thanks to the ministries of the Holy Spirit! The One who has indwelt us and who enables us to bear the fruit of the spirit, gives strength when there is none, and grows us to spiritual maturity!

28. For your infinite and perfect love! You, who absolutely knows all, our past, present circumstances, and our future, still loves us perfectly. How amazing is your love! Your love for us never changes.

May we live lives of holiness in response to you!

29. For actually forgiving us. When we placed our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, you forgave us unconditionally, declaring us righteous because of what Jesus did on our behalf, and not something we could ever do. Our salvation is forever secure.

May we deny ourselves, pick up the cross and follow hard after you in gratitude for the forgiveness you have given us!

30. For the unconditional gift of grace, undeserved favor. You sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins. But death didn't hold Jesus Christ down. He rose bodily from the dead. Thus, when we place our trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, we too can receive this gift of undeserved favor and all the other positional benefits.

May we intimately pursue you in moment-by-moment living...seeking to walk with you, talk with you and experience the fullness of joy you have to offer in the now in this love-relationship that will last for all eternity!

31. For knowing that our sufferings our only temporary against the backdrop of eternity spent with you! You have prepared a place for us!

May the hope we have of our future spent with you never be clouded by the pain the experience in the now!

32. For the promised destruction of the problem of evil. You took care of our sin problem with the first coming of Jesus Christ and you will begin to take care of the problem of evil, in all of its forms, beginning with the Second Coming, the Millennial Kingdom, culminating into the Eternal State

May live in practical anticipation of your return and our deliverance.

33. Lastly, we give thanks to you that you created us so that we might enjoy you forever.

May we actually enjoy you in the now and in anticipation of the future!

Hebrews 12:28

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

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