

GRATEFULNESS vs. APATHY

EXPRESSING SINCERE APPRECIATION TO GOD AND OTHERS FOR WAYS IN WHICH THEY HAVE BENEFITED OUR LIVES.

WHAT IS THE BASIS OF GRATEFULNESS?

True gratefulness springs from an awareness of our total unworthiness and inadequacy before a holy and just God. If we receive what we deserve we would all be destroyed in an eternal hell. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed” (Lamentations 3:22). In light of our condition before God, Jesus instructs us to be “poor in spirit.” This is the attitude of a beggar along the roadside hoping that someone will supply his daily needs and grateful for anything that is done for him.

The Hebrew word for thankfulness, *lithazo* means “to hold out the hand, to revere, and to give worth with outstretched hands.” The expectations of others, which are based on the assumption that we are important destroy a spirit of gratefulness and instead produce presumption and murmuring.

WHY IS GRATEFULNESS IMPORTANT?

Gratefulness is the very foundation of our walk with God and is a part of His daily will for our lives. “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (I Thessalonians 5:18).

When we give thanks for all things, including unexpected trials, physical infirmities, people who reproach or persecute us, mundane necessities of life, and distressing situations, we pass the test of the Holy Spirit and receive the power of His genuine love, joy, and peace.

WHY SHOULD WE THANK GOD FOR ALL THINGS?

It is easy to thank God for the things that obviously benefit us. However, gratefulness for trials and tribulations requires faith and obedience. The following points help us remember why we should be grateful.

1. All things come from God’s hand

It is easy to understand that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17), but what about the attacks of Satan? Job wisely acknowledged that all his sufferings ultimately came from God. After losing everything he had, he worshiped God by saying, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord [not Satan] hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

With the same insight, Paul spoke of the messenger of Satan that came to buffet him. “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

God rewarded Job’s gratefulness by restoring double what he had lost. Paul’s gratefulness was rewarded with the power of Christ and the glory of eternal riches.

2. All things are for our good

How true is the statement “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28)! Even the sufferings that we experience are for our benefit. Paul wrote, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

God explains that just as the chastening of a father is good for his children, His disciplines are likewise for our benefit. “Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Hebrews 12:9).

The prophet Jeremiah also observed, “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the

Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies” (Lamentations 3:27–32).

3. All circumstances can produce Godly Character

Citing Romans 8:28 should include 8:29 as well. Together, these two verses explain not only that all things do work together for good but also how they work together for good. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). We are not to resent trials or tribulations, but instead welcome them as friends. They are given to conform our character to Christ’s.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2–4).

4. A right response to difficulty produces genuine love

After we are filled with the Spirit, the Spirit will lead each of us into a time of testing. If we thank God for and rejoice in every test, we will then experience the power of the Spirit. This power begins with love, joy, and peace.

“We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:3–5).

Love is the greatest power on the face of the earth. Through it, God is able to accomplish supernatural work in our lives and the lives of others that brings about eternal achievement.

5. All things, including trials, can bring us closer to God

When our lives go well, we tend to forget God. It is in times of trouble and affliction that we seek Him. Indeed, the Psalmist testified, “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord” (Psalm 77:2). He further stated, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. . . . I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psalm 119:67;71;75)

When God removes the pressure of a difficult circumstance, we tend to forget His mercy and overlook gratefulness. When Jesus healed the ten lepers, only one returned to thank Him. Because of this human tendency, God will often put us in an “impossible” situation so that we can experience His deliverance and glorify Him. “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).

WHEN SHOULD WE THANK GOD?

1. When we remember His name

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High” (Psalm 92:1). “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15).

2. When we remember His holiness

“Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness” (Psalm 30:4).

3. In a special time of worship during the night

“At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:62).

4. During gatherings with other believers

“I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people” (Psalm 35:18).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in

word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col 3:16–17).

5. When surrounded by Evil

“Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name” (II Samuel 22:50).

6. When your faith is put to the test

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did afore time.” (Daniel 6:10).

7. When in need of a miracle

Jesus “took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.” (Matthew 15:36).

8. When eating a meal

“And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.” (Acts 27:35).

9. When we see growth in another believer

“Thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you” (II Corinthians 8:16).

10. When remembering the saints in prayer

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers” (I Thessalonians 1:2).

PRACTICAL WAYS TO THANK OTHERS

A spirit of genuine thankfulness to God also produces a practical gratefulness toward others. How can true gratefulness be expressed?

Verbal expressions - Take time to verbally thank others for what they do and for the qualities which motivate their actions.

Written expressions - Letters should be prompt, neatly written, and well thought-out.

Public Recognition - Tell others of the kind deeds done by the individual you are praising and how this person benefited your life.

Giving Gifts - These should be appropriate and of value to the person or people receiving them. The personal thoughtfulness behind a gift is of greater importance than its monetary value.

Investment of Time - For those who are lonely or need encouragement, the investment of quality time would mean more than a letter or gift.

Prayer support - Paul routinely began his letters by explaining how he thanked God for those to whom he was writing. (See Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3; I Thessalonians 1:2; II Thessalonians 2:13.)

HOW GRATEFUL ARE YOU?

☞☞ Do you begin each morning by thanking God for a new day?

☞☞ Do you look for things that you take for granted and thank God for them?

☞☞ Do you thank God for your health and strength?

☞☞ Do you quickly express thanks to other people?

☞☞ Do you rejoice in trials and tribulations?

☞☞ Do you have unwritten thank you notes?

☞☞ Do you ever murmur or complain?

☞☞ Do you give public recognition to those who have helped you?

☞☞ Do you pray for those who have benefited your life?

☞☞ Do you thank God for your human authorities and pray for them?