

## A Grateful Heart

Text: Exodus 12:1-14

Romans 13:8-14 (Series A. 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 149

Matthew 18:15-20

Free texts:

“Oh! give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”—1 Chronicles 16:34

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

—Ephesians 5:18-20

Just like the acquisition of most virtues, you can't instantly become thankful. We only become thankful when we habitually practice gratitude in our life.

Everything good in your life comes from God (James 1:17). We'll grow closer to God when we understand this truth and build our lives around it. Especially this difficulty time in modern history. Developing these habits can help us become more thankful even in the midst of this Covid-19 pandemic:

*Regularly practice giving thanks.* We should make a habit of expressing gratitude. Thankfulness rather than criticism should be our default position. When you see something good in your life, point it out. Thank God for it. We all complain occasionally, but practice responding to your own complaining by finding things to be thankful for. This helps to rewire your brain to be as proficient at recognizing the good in your life as you are at identifying the bad.

*Express gratitude regardless of the situation.* Paul tells the Thessalonians to give thanks in all circumstances because God wills it (1 Thess. 5:18). Why? We never see the full picture.

We can't look at every situation and clearly understand why it's happening. We can only know God is at work in these situations and working them out for our good and his glory (Romans 8:28). Regardless of what's happening, we can thank God for his presence. He is redeeming the situation and sustaining us through it.

On our own, we focus on the current situation. We rise above the situation when we purposefully look for what God is doing in the middle of it. A.W. Tozer says, *"Perhaps it takes a purer faith to praise God for unrealized blessings than for those we once enjoyed or those we enjoy now."*

*Praise God when all is well.* We're conditioned to believe that life will go well for us. When life runs smoothly, we don't tend to see this as God's gift to us. We don't see how He protects and guides us along the way to green pastures and still waters.

*Learn to see how bad experiences can produce good outcomes.* We should all take some time to consider the benefits of the difficult times in our lives. After a period away from the situation, we would be able to see the good that came out of those experiences.

Wilson Johnson, the founder of Holiday Inn motels, once said, "When I was 40 years old I worked in a saw mill. One morning the boss told me I was fired! Depressed and discouraged, I felt like the world had caved in. When I told my wife what had happened, she asked me what I was going to do.

I replied, 'I'm going to mortgage our little home and go into the building business.' My first venture was the construction of 2 small buildings. Within 5 years I was a multimillionaire! At the time it happened, I didn't understand why I was fired.

Later, I saw that it was God's unerring and wondrous plan to get me into the way of His choosing!" Thus, Johnson was able to bring great glory to God in his testimony and life and helping the kingdom of God! – (Source Unknown).

Often, you'll be able to see how those bad experiences helped you gather strength and momentum for future blessings in your life. Regardless of that, learning to see past trials through eternity's perspective enables us to be more thankful during times of struggle.

*Make gratitude a part of your interactions with other people.* Gratitude should impact both our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. Appreciation raises in value not only of things, but true of people.

When you appreciate somebody, you literally raise their value. We ought to appreciate people because it increases their self worth." Make it a regular practice to say thank you to people in your life. Often, the people we express gratitude with the least in our lives are those the closest to us.

**Coronavirus pandemic:** has given us the ample opportunity. Lean into the strength gratitude provides. I know many people who have been through extremely tough situations in recent months. I've noticed those who are the most grateful and have learned to see God's work regularly show the most perseverance. Thanksgiving is a superpower, it enables us to see past our experiences and embrace how God is moving. Not only are thankful people able to draw strength from gratitude, but they're also able to empower others with their perspective as well.

Cultivating a spirit of Gratitude honors God and strengthens our faith. It also strengthens our relationships with other people. We can't be in a right relationship with God or with anyone without a spirit of thankfulness. No matter what problems we're struggling with, we don't want to be like the nine former lepers who forgot to say "thank you" to their Healer.

One of the most productive qualities God desires us to develop is that of "Thankfulness!" It is not so much "Thankfulness" for pain or troubles as much as it is "Thankfulness" for the fruit that will result from such experiences!

God has absolute control over all things so that we can give "thanks" with assurance. Make Gratitude your Attitude! It will bless everyone ... you and God!

Amen.

September 6, 2020