

Characteristics of a Grateful Heart

Psalm 100

Philippians 4:15-19

As we approach Thanksgiving week I would have us to focus on the Characteristics of a Grateful Heart.

The Psalmist sets the stage for us in Psalms 100 (MSG)

**On your feet now—applaud God!
Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into his presence.
Know this: God is God, and God, God.
He made us; we didn't make him.
We're his people, his well-tended sheep.
Enter with the password: "Thank you!"
Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.
For God is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.**

Winston Churchill told the story about a little boy who was playing on a pier. All of a sudden he fell off the pier into the water. He did not know how to swim and was in serious danger of drowning. A very kind-hearted young soldier saw this, and he immediately jumped off the pier and swam towards the little boy. He put the boy on his shoulders and brought him back up to the pier quite safely. This young man saved the boy's life.

The boy had been playing with other little boys, but his parents were nowhere to be found. The soldier drove the child to his parents' home and left the boy there. The young man did not even think of receiving any reward. He was a very kind-hearted person, and he was extremely happy that he was able to save the life of this little boy.

A few days later, the boy's parents came to look for the soldier. Everybody was helping them look for him, because they thought that the parents had come to give him a reward for saving their child. Finally they found the soldier working at the pier.

The parents approached the young man, and the father said, **"Where is our son's hat?"**

The young man was shocked. He said, **"I tried to save your son's life and I did save his life. Now you are asking me for his hat?"**

"Yes," replied the parents. They demanded, **"What did you do with our son's hat? What is wrong with you? We want to know where the hat is!"**

Most of us could give examples of ungrateful people and their ungracious actions.

That is not our focus – I would have us consider three characteristics of a grateful person.

1. A grateful person is a humble person. (Nancy Leigh DeMoss – Revive Our Hearts)

A humble person is generally thought to be unpretentious and modest: someone who does not think that he or she is better or more important than others. A humble person will recognize the limits of one's talents, ability, or authority; and, not reaching for that which is beyond one's grasp. [Wikipedia](#)

True Christian humility is embodied in Christ - in his humble birth in the manger, in his humble daily walk, and finally in his self-sacrificial death on the cross.

The Apostle Paul wrote concerning Christ: **6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death---even death on a cross!** Phil 2:6-8 (NIV)

If we truly follow Christ's example, then humility will be a way of life, a habit of submitting to God's will and a lifelong commitment of devoting ourselves to God's calling.

In daily practice, humility means to put aside self-interests in order to serve God and others whole-heartedly. Such an attitude would allow no room for a private agenda to be No.1. Paul T. P. Wong, Ph.D., C. Psych. President, International Network on Personal Meaning Coquitlam, B.C., Canada

As the Psalmist exclaimed: **3 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.** Psalms 100:3 (NIV)

A government official who came into President Lincoln's office was startled to find the chief executive shining his shoes. "Sir," he gasped, "surely you do not polish your own shoes!" "Of course," replied the humble President. "Whose do you polish?"

The greatness of a man is evidenced by his humility. In the words of an old Filipino saying, **"The higher the bamboo grows, the lower it bends."**

All of this is illustrated in the life of Jesus. **"Jesus did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"** (Matt. 20:28). The highest title God ever allows in His church is "servant."

Am I willing to serve people as Jesus did? I know, I cannot die for people to save them as Jesus did, but I can "die to self" to enable me to tell people that Jesus died for their sins, and thus serve them in the greatest way possible.

A grateful person is a humble person.

2. A grateful person is God-centered and others-conscious. (Nancy Leigh DeMoss – Revive Our Hearts)

I suspect that for many of us, our Christian experience is too often influenced by our circumstances. When we are "up," God is great. When we are "down," God is distant. If things go our way, we have much for which to praise God. If times come that would test the patience of Job, we are tempted to give up.

To be God-centered is to realize that God is at the heart of life. He influences and invades all of reality.

Why does this matter? How will this enable me to be a grateful person? Because, our happiness is not dependent on personal experience, but on God's grace and love for me.

Again we hear the Psalmist call out: **2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.** Psalms 100:2 (NIV)

Worship the Lord with gladness – Know that the Lord is God – Give thanks to him and praise his name – For the Lord is good – his faithfulness continues.

Dr. Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, and one of the foremost authorities on the topic of gratitude in North America was quoted as saying: **"I think of gratefulness as really anchored in spirituality. And so a secular perspective is going to tend to erode that sense of gratefulness.**

Grateful people are free to be giving and caring because they are centered on God, and they are centered on others, not on themselves. Grateful people who are God-centered and others-centered are loving people who want to bless others.

On May 1, 1998, Jules and Jan Broom's 23-year-old daughter was killed in an automobile accident. In the days following Shannon's death, her parents discovered her gratitude journal. For nearly a year, Shannon had been faithfully chronicling five things she was thankful for every day. She was thankful for the little things, like Chef Boyardee, good egg salad, and ChapStick, but what touched her parents the most were the entries specifically about family. Through reading her journal, they realized that every day of Shannon's life she had been happy, and had loved every member of her family.

The Brooms wanted Shannon's family and friends to know how much they had meant to her, so they used Shannon's artwork and thoughts to create bookmarks.

Due to an overwhelming response, the bookmarks have now taken on a life of their own, with over 20,000 given out by the end of last year.

The thoughts of gratitude often cause people to think about their own lives, and they will pass the bookmarks on to others to inspire them as well.

The Brooms say they went through difficult times when they wanted to give up, but this experience has served as "bookmark therapy." Every time they created a bookmark and heard

back from someone who was touched by it, they felt a little bit better. Jules and Jan say that just knowing the bookmarks are out there — that Shannon is speaking to people's lives, perhaps even making them better — continues the healing process for them.

A grateful person is humble, God-centered and others-conscious.

3. The grateful heart is a full heart. (Nancy Leigh DeMoss – Revive Our Hearts)

The grateful heart is a full heart. No matter how little he may actually have compared to others, a grateful person feels like he is full because he is grateful.

Once again we refer to the words of the Psalmist:

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Psalms 100:4-5 (NIV)

The grateful person has an unlimited capacity to enjoy God's blessings, no matter how few or how many they may be. Let me tell you this, nobody has few blessings from God. We all have many, many, many blessings from God. The grateful person, even in the midst of heartache and loss, is going to feel full.

There is a great illustration of this principle in the book of Philippians. The book of Philippians is really a rather lengthy thank-you note, written from the apostle Paul to express gratitude to the believers in Philippi for what they had done to minister to Paul's financial and material needs while he was traveling around and planting churches.

Paul wrote a thank-you note. He says in Philippians chapter 4, verses 15-16, **“15 You Philippians well know, and you can be sure I'll never forget it, that when I first left Macedonia province, venturing out with the Message, not one church helped out in the give-and-take of this work except you. You were the only one. 16 Even while I was in Thessalonica, you helped out—and not only once, but twice.”** Phil 4:15-17 (MSG)

Paul is writing to say thank you, to express gratitude. Now, having expressed his appreciation for the latest gift, Paul, who is sitting in the heart of a Roman prison while he is writing this letter, deprived of all but the minimum necessities, makes what I think is a remarkable statement.

He goes on to say in verse 18, **At the moment I have all I need—and more!** Phil 4:18 (NLT)

Where are you, Paul? In a Roman dungeon. And you are saying, **At the moment I have all I need—and more!**

He is thanking them for the latest gift they just sent, and he is saying, **“I have everything that I need. God’s grace is abounded to me. I am full.”**

How could he think of himself as full in that situation?

Paul had a grateful heart. So even when he was missing some blessings that people would consider pretty important, he felt full because a thankful person always has a sense of fullness.

Paul believed that God’s goodness and God’s blessings were so abounding that he goes on in the next verse to reassure the Philippians that there was enough for them as well.

He says in verse 19, **And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.** Phil 4:19 (NLT)

Not only is there enough for me sitting here in my prison, but there is enough for you.

So do you have a sense of fullness or emptiness as you look at your life these days?

Could you say with Paul, **“I have everything that I need. God’s grace is abounded to me. I am full?”**

You see, Paul didn’t have “all” in terms of creature comforts. But I’ll tell you what he did have—he had Christ.

You may have lost a mate. You may have lost a child. You may have lost a job. You may have lost a friend. You may have lost the dearest possessions in the world to you. But if you have a thankful heart, you can still, through your tears, have a sense of fullness.

Where does God find you with these characteristics? Do you have a grateful heart or an ungrateful heart? Is your heart proud, or is it humble? Is it God-centered and others-centered, or is it self-centered? Is your heart full, or is it empty? The answer to those questions may be seen in whether or not you have an attitude of gratitude.

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity.

It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

- Melodie Beattie