Gratitude

Psalm 100

Key Verse: 100:4 “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.”

People say that gratitude is the barometer of maturity. Our maturity is measured depending on how we appreciate and how we live a thankful life in all circumstances. Those who trust in God and live according to his will are always thankful. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 that giving thanks to God in all circumstances is the will of God. However, it is not easy to be thankful in all circumstances. We are grumpy and angry more often than we are thankful while living in this tough world. Today we’ll study the meaning of gratitude, its purpose, subject, outcome, and examples.

First, gratitude is to **remember** (**recognize**) God’s grace. In the Old Testament the word ‘remember’ (*zakar*) appears 80 times. “*Remember this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand..*.” (Ex 13: 3) Gratitude starts with remembering what God has done for us. What you remember most often determines your attitude toward God and to others. In the Garden Satan tempted the woman to remember only what God forbade her. Satan planted the seeds of doubt and complaint by letting her remember the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God allowed her to eat all the trees in the garden. God gave her unlimited freedom for all trees, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was the symbol of God’s presence. But Satan tempted her to remember only the thing God did not allow her. God commanded his people the Israelites to remember what God had done for them in Egypt. God delivered them out of slavery from Egypt so that they could become a kingdom of priests and holy nation. But they didn’t remember this, only inconvenience in the desert. They complained about the lack of food, shortage of water, and uncomfortable tent life. Their ungrateful complaints provoked God to anger. God punished those who were complaining by sending them venomous snakes. (Nu 21:4-9)

In the same way we often remember what God did not give us or how others hurt us instead of what God provided and how others helped us. There is a saying, “People engrave other’s favor on the water and bitterness from others on the rock.” The Israelites forgot how God saved them from the slavery of Egypt and they remembered only the inconvenience in the desert. Today people forget what God has done for them and how others helped them when they were in need, and they remember only what they didn’t receive and how others hurt them. In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, a servant owed ten thousand bags of gold to his master, a debt which he was not able to pay. He begged his master to be patient with him. So, his master had pity on him and cancelled his debt. But the servant was angry with his friend who owed him only a hundred silver coins. He choked his friends’ neck and threatened him to pay him back. (Mt 18:21-35) We are sometimes like this servant who received tremendous grace of forgiveness, but didn’t forgive our friend who hurt us a little.

John Calvin said in chapter one of his book “*Institution of Christian Religion*”, “True wisdom contains mainly two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves.” We have to remember who God is and who we are. Psalm 100: 3 says, “*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.*” The LORD is God and we are his. He is our shepherd and we are his sheep. We live on this earth only by his grace. He is the one who sent us to this world through our parents and who enabled us to live on this earth. He is our provider, guide, and protector. Paul confessed in 1 Corinthians 15:9,10, “*by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*” So, we need such a humble attitude toward God as Paul said, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” (Gal 2:20) Amen! Remember that we live only by God’s grace.

Second, gratitude is to **respond to (reflect)** God’s grace. When Noah came out of the ark, what he did first was build an altar to the LORD. (Ge 8:20) He took some of the clean animals and birds and sacrificed them as burnt offerings on the altar. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma. When Abraham arrived in the Promised Land, what he did first was also build an altar to the LORD. (Ge 12:7) Abraham appreciated God who had guided him and his family to the land and appeared to encourage him. Solomon gave a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the LORD: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats when he dedicated the temple. Solomon expressed his gratitude and devotion to the LORD in this way. The Bible says, “*the people blessed the king and then went home, joyful and glad in heart for all the good things the LORD had done for his servant David and his people Israel.*” (1Ki 8:66)

All these stories teach us that gratitude is not just paying lip service, but responding to God’s grace with action. Noah and Abraham responded to God’s grace by worshiping God. Solomon appreciated God’s blessing by dedicating the temple. We have many ways to appreciate God’s grace. Jesus said to Peter, “If you love me, feed my sheep.” (Jn 21:15) By feeding Jesus’ sheep and taking care of them we appreciate Jesus’ love. Some show their thankful heart by participating in God’s ministry or supporting it financially. Attending Sunday worship service is to appreciate God’s grace and serve him on the Sabbath. On Sunday we worship God and serve others. This is also the expression of our devotion and appreciation to God and for others.

It is important for us to appreciate others' favors, too. On Thanksgiving Day we exchange Thanksgiving greetings. We remember those who have loved us and prayed for us, and we send them several grateful text messages or pictures. It does not cost much, but we spread the spirit of kindness and appreciation. It makes us feel good both when we are remembered and when we remember others. If you missed greetings to whom you remember, do it this coming Christmas day. We must spread the spirit of gratitude and kindness to this selfish and ungrateful world.

Third, gratitude is to **repeat (reproduce) for** God’s grace. After God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, he repeatedly commanded them to remember how God had brought them out of the slavery. God knew that his people easily forgot God’s grace and complained. One of the most effective ways for education is repetition. When we repeat importance, we remember. We should remember God’s grace and repeat to remember. If not, we complain again like the Israelites in the desert when we are inconvenient. One day Peter asked Jesus, “*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?*” How did Jesus answer him? “*I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*” (Mt 18:21-22) Jesus meant that Peter should forgive his brothers and sisters repeatedly and continually. As I mentioned before, we have a tendency to remember how others hurt us more than how they helped us. We need practice to repeat remembering the grace of God. One time is not enough, several times is not, either. We should do so all the time. Fill our hearts with the forgiving love and thankful spirit.

How can we do so? It seems very difficult and sometimes impossible for someone to do so. I asked one gentleman to forgive his employer who had fired him. He was fired for some understandable reasons. But he would not forgive his owner. I hope that he forgave him. It is possible when we trust in God and believe in his sovereignty over all things. When we believe that in all things God works for good for those who love him and have been called for his good purpose, we forgive. (Ro 8:28) Joseph in the Old Testament was hated by his own brothers and sold to the foreigners. In the foreign land he was falsely accused by Potiphars’ wife and imprisoned. Joseph had enough reasons to complain to God and blame his brothers. But the Bible says that whatever Joseph did he was prosperous because God was with him. God was with Joseph whatever he did and wherever he went because Joseph trusted in God in all circumstances. Later when his brothers repented and asked him for forgiveness, what did he say? Genesis 50:20 Joseph answered, “*Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*” Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, “*Be joyful always. Pray continually, and give thanks to God in all circumstances. This is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” We can be joyful always and pray continually and give thanks to God in all circumstances when we trust in God and believe his sovereignty over all things like Joseph.

Remember what God has done for you and your family. Forget what you didn’t get this year or how others hurt you, but repeat to remember God’s grace and how others served you. This is God’s will, and this is the best way to keep your heart and body healthy and strong. Not only remember but also respond to God’s grace by offering and writing greeting cards. I pray that thankfulness and kindness may fill this house and overflow our hearts. As Psalmist says in today’s passage, “*Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs...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.*” (Ps 100:2-5) Amen.

I personally thank God who strengthened my heart and cared for my health so that I could serve him with weekly sermons, group Bible studies and one to ones. Thank God for co-workers' prayers and support for me and my family. I thank God for helping me to serve one person Taylor Gao with one to one this year and finishing Genesis study. I also thank God for studying Revelation, Hebrews, and Mark’s gospel this year with coworkers. Thank God for sending my daughter Grace to medical school and Sam’s perseverance in his study and work. Thank God for sending Luke Yang’s family to be independent. Thank God for resuming in-person worship service last June. Thank God for healing Connie and Luke West from COVID. I have many other thankful topics, but I stop here for the sake of saving time. Again, thank you for your prayer, support, and partnership for the gospel. Amen! Let’s give thanks to God!