

Community Church of Issaquah

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We Need to Be Grateful

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Fresh out of seminary, my first role as minister was the Minister for Youth at a Baptist Church in Ardmore, Oklahoma. My youth group had about 300 teens, 7th to 12th grade. Trying to find programs and events that made them happy was a huge chore. And then there was summer camp at the assembly called Falls Creek. 6 weeks of youth groups spending the major part of the week anxious to become special. One event I had planned and asked a colleague youth director from another city to join in leadership was a Spend the Night Party in our gym. 150 youth, 40 parents, and 2 youth ministers. Quite a group.

The Event was called “Fill in the Blank.” I had compiled about 50 questions or statements that the teens divided into groups should answer. One of the statements was this: “What two words are the hardest to say in life?” Would you like to take a try at answering? What two words would be your choice? And this is a time for you to speak? (Pause) Some of the responses given were “That’s it?” “What’s up?” “Get lost.” “Drop dead.” And you can see, there was a host of teenage comments that produced lots of laughter. The purpose of the question was to try and encourage them to learn to say “Thank you.” Sadly, no one ever came up with that answer.

Like most of you, I was brought up by a Christian parent who taught me to be a good follower of Jesus and always say thank you for anything someone did for me. Oddly, I hope I still make my mother proud by continuing to do what I was taught. Someone holds the door open for me as I slowly approach the entrance of a store. “Thank you! Someone sends me a very tender and thoughtful card that really means a great deal to me. “Thank you!” Someone brought me a bag of cookies each Sunday that I loved and ate non-stop. “Thank you.”

But those are the small things that we find easy to say our thanks for, and it’s very appropriate. We could call that “good manners.” This is learned behavior. And most of the time, we’ve learned it from someone other than ourselves. This gratitude is housed in our attitude toward other people. If we turn our attention to the Bible and seek to understand what the Scriptures want to teach us about thankfulness and saying “Thank you,” you’d be a bit surprised what you might find.

Like the verses from the Call to Worship we had read today, believers are directed to come before the Lord with thanksgiving and to praise him with music and song. That’s a lovely commandment, but how do you plan to come before God with your thanksgiving if you hungry or thirsty? Can you get by without that concept and just come to God with an attitude of being thankful without making it a celebration? That’s a haunting question. What does the Bible require of us regarding our duty to be thankful people and ones who say “Thank you, God” often?

Suppose you turn to the New Testament and see what Paul said to the church in Corinth.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”

Or maybe we could learn something from Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians when he said:

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

That’s a hard pill to swallow. The apostle is telling me that I have to give thanks in every situation. Do you think Paul was speaking for himself or for the Lord.

Now, here’s an interesting fact if you decided to go on a search for what Jesus actually said about being thankful. You can search the four Gospels and you will not find the word ‘thanks’ or ‘thanksgiving’ in a single verse. Oddly, all the recordings of what Jesus taught and said do not contain that word. Oh yes, there are examples of people being thankful for something that happened to them. Remember that man who was among the 10 lepers healed who alone came to offer thanks for his healing? That’s only one of the many stories about good deeds that were done that merited thanks. I found that fascinating as I researched and prepared for the message today.

Let me go back to Paul’s instructions to the Thessalonians. I had a hard time trying to weave the words “give thanks in all circumstances” into my daily life in Christ. How am I supposed to be thankful for everything in my life? Do I want to say, “Thank you, Lord” when I have to rush my

spouse to the hospital as he suffers more serious complexities with his heart issues? Do we want to say “Thank you Lord” when a loved one dies and leaves a void that we often cannot fill? Do we want to say, “Thank you, Lord” each day as we read the news about so many deaths as a result of war, or the increase in the number of homeless or unhoused individuals, or the divisiveness that our democratic country is experiencing now? Do I want to say, “Thank you, God” when my own health issues cause me to limp along instead of walking? No.

For me, there does not seem to be a requirement that we say thank you for everything. More realistically, the Bible shows us that when we are blessed in any way, large or small, we can reflect the teachings of Christ by our gratitude and thankfulness. When we all here on a Sunday, each of us can and should find those people and experiences that the Lord has blessed us with and for whom we can say thank you. Once that list of blessings is evident, you will undoubtedly find a wonderful cause to be thankful. Many reasons to say “Thank you, Lord.”

In truth, each of us has a great deal to be thankful for. We could start right here, right now. The Lord has blessed each of us by bringing us into a faith family that loves and cares for us. That should be near the top of our list of blessings. Each of us has a list, whether long or short, of family and friends whom we want to tell God thank you for. I do. You do. I could go on and on, but I trust you see the message from Christ. When we are blessed, we are to acknowledge our gratitude. This is how we grow in Christ.

Let me add to this short message my own word of thanks for each of you. God has richly blessed me by allowing me to lead such an amazing group of believers. It is certainly at the top of my blessings list for which I will offer my thanks every day. Thank you for who you are and what you do. You are dearly loved. I believe in my heart that each of you would like to say “Thank You” to someone else here in this church, and I would be amiss in not allowing you that golden opportunity.

So let me pause here and simply ask you, “Who would you like to say ‘thank you’ to this afternoon? Perhaps the person you wish to acknowledge is here and perhaps not, but you now have the chance to express your own thanks to them. This is your time. Who would like to go first?”

Let me share again this prayer of another minister about saying “Thank You.”

Dear God:

I want to thank you for what you have already done.

I am not going to wait until I see results or receive rewards.

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until I feel better or things look better,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until people say they are sorry or until they stop talking about me,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until the pain in my body disappears,

I am thanking you right now.

I am not going to wait until my financial situation improves,

I'm going to thank you right now.

I am not going to wait until the house is quiet,

I am going to thank you right now.

I am not going to wait until I understand every experience in my life that has caused me pain or grief, I am going to thank you right now.

I am not going to wait until the journey gets easier or the challenges are removed,

I am thanking you right now.

I am thanking you because I am alive.

I am thanking you because I made it through the day's difficulties.

I am thanking you because I have walked around the obstacles.

I am thanking you because I have the ability and the opportunity to do more and do better.

I am thanking you because you have not given up on me. God, thank you for being so good to me.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

We need to be grateful. We need learn to say "Thank you," not just to the server in a restaurant or the cashier at the grocery or the doctor who tried to help us mean or to our friend who has helped us in a time of crisis. I could go on and on with that list, but let me close with this: learn to say "Thank you" whenever someone does something to brighten your day, and most definitely, learn to say "Thank you, Lord," for the blessings in your life that God has given.