

Community Church of Issaquah
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Where Is My Grateful Heart?
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The Bible that we all love has so much to teach us about life, particularly our lives as Christians. Each of us has likely spent a good bit of time reading the Scriptures or hearing verses read in church or memorizing passages to please a pastor or Sunday School teacher. As a seminary student back in the 70's, we were required to read the entire Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelations 22:21, no skipping from one book to the next, just reading all 66 books. The hard part? That was an assignment for one semester. Needless to say, there were many short nights and long days, and many weekends that included no fun. Just reading.

The Bible that I had then is one I still use today. When I came across a verse or passage that I truly loved or that spoke to me, I would use a red pen to mark it as a favorite. Today's passages that Woody read for us are among those that got highlighted. Here are some of the words to the passage from Psalm 106 that remain meaningful and my favorite.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love endures forever.

And

Remember me, Lord when you show favor to your people, come to my aid when you save them.

For me, its message is clear – there is a reason to give thanks to God. That reason is simple, God is good to us, and it is that gift of God’s love and grace that are the reason for our giving thanks to God.

The passage from Luke telling the story of the 10 lepers illustrates the central message as well – there is a reason to give thanks to God. The difference between David’s Psalm and the story of the ten healed men is that not everyone realizes that they are to give thanks to God for his goodness. One out of ten. So where were the other nine? Where were their grateful hearts.

It's hard for us to imagine what those 10 men were experiencing. They were exiled from their village and not allowed to come near anyone. There was no contact with family or friends, only a community of lepers who were outcast. We think that sounds so unkind and inhumane, but we must remember that we did the same thing, exiling individuals suffering from leprosy to a small Hawaiian island in the Pacific. Actually, I think it still exists. Yet one would think that experiencing healing would cause all of the men to jump for joy and fall down at the feet of the Healer. But that didn’t happen. Just the one man who threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was the one with a grateful heart.

More than anything, I want to be the one with a grateful heart, but that is not always easy. When life’s experiences sometimes weigh you down and you struggle to find the way Paul told us to behave when he wrote in I Thessalonians 5 verses 16 to 19:

*Be joyful always .
Pray continually,
Give thanks in all circumstances,
For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Many times I have asked myself, “Be joyful always? Really? Give thanks for everything? Seriously?” Did Paul even have a clue what he was laying on the shoulders of believers? How am I supposed to be the person he’s idolizing in that passage? Even now as I try to move through some incredibly difficult days, I find myself struggling to practice what Paul was preaching. So, I suppose I have to ask myself, “Where is my grateful heart?”

I’m quite sure that all of us had parents or teachers who had answers for everything. Once when I asked a professor how in the world was I supposed to practice what I preached about giving thanks in everything. His answer was simple but profound. He simply said, “Gratitude is an attitude.” I didn’t fully understand it when he shared it the first time, but over the years, it has deepened in meaning for me.

If we want to have a grateful heart, we have to focus on the substance of it. Let me share two lessons I’ve learned as I seek to have the attitude of gratitude. First, though we might not be joyful 100% of the time as life throws many curve balls in our direction often. We are not called to be joyful that these things have happened to us, but to remember that God is always present with us no matter what is occurring in our lives. It might be that we don’t feel

that at times, but it is true. Remember what David said, “God is good, his love endures forever.” Don’t focus so much on the difficulties as much as you focus on the presence of God in and through all of that.

The second lesson is this: if gratitude is an attitude, what kind of attitude do you have? Keep in mind that attitude determines behavior. That said, are we as Christians sharing with the world our attitude of gratefulness that God is present in and through us, what are we doing to show visual evidence of a grateful heart? How do we treat others? Are we grateful for them? Are we grateful for those the Lord put into our lives to teach us and show us what a grateful heart looks like? Are we grateful that we can rest assured that an eternal life with Christ is ours?

The question of the title of the sermon is something I hope you will think about and pray for an answer to. Where is your grateful heart? And remember the simple words of a wise professor, “Gratitude is an attitude.”