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## Spiritual Formation Part 14

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### ***The Essential Gratitude* Part 1**

**Gratitude is perhaps the essential attitude that fuels our faith and builds our Christian formation!**

**Principle Scriptures on *Gratitude*:** 1 Sam. 12:24; Matt. 5:17-20; Luke 17:11-19; Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 4:7; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5: 12-18; 1 Tim. 5:17; 6:1; 1 Pet. 2:17; Heb. 12:28-29

*Gratitude* means we are practicing and producing an attitude of Gratitude, of being thankful, even when we cannot see what we have. This is an aspect of our worship of Christ—expressing to Him our appreciation and reverence for how He has benefited our lives. We are grateful because His blood has redeemed us. This also has a relational application in that it helps us deal with others as we show our support, appreciation, and benevolence to them for how they have benefited our lives. This means we are to realize our indebtedness to God and “practice” our faith and church life because of what He has done for us. Thus, Gratitude enables us to know Him and His will more and do for Him more as we keep our focus on God’s promises and not our circumstances—His provision and care, not merely our experiences. Christianity is not for our personal benefit; it is for His glory. Seeing life from the perspective of *what I can’t get* or *what I deserve* rather than what I have already been given will create grave problems. We must discipline ourselves to see His gifts of eternal life, grace, and forgiveness—such things that could never be earned or merited—so that we are willing to grow closer to Him and to lead others to Him.

Gratitude is not is mindless joy or a good attitude without a reason behind it, because it will not last. Good attitudes are important and essential, but we have to have a basis for them to keep them, to hone them, and further develop them.

When we are not grateful, watch out your life will fall apart! We will be fueled and filled with ingratitude, refusing to acknowledge and respond to what Christ has done for us. This will produce in us a very unhealthy attitude and a life that is not Spirit-led. We will not realize what we have or could have, but rather focus on an “entitlement” mentality that says we deserve this or that, and where humbleness and servitude are absent. It will create for us a life of dissatisfaction and dysfunction. This can happen to a Christian who does little to nothing with his or her faith and remains in the ways of the world, or someone who refuses to grow and respond to God. This places a barrier to seeing the great, incompressible gift of grace we have received, and then refusing, or forgetting, to respond to Christ as our LORD. When we refuse to be partakers of gratefulness, the waywardness of our sinful ingratitude will rise up and continue to fester and build and eventually take control of who we are and what we do, even as Christians. Then, pride will come in, causing us to hurt others and cutting us off our

relationships and growth while creating self-defeating anger and bitterness that worsens to produce more ingratitude. We must be careful that ingratitude does not take root in us!

Are you a Christian who is overflowing with praise, or overflowing with criticism? Do you have a sense of His presence or a list of agendas? Do you have a stilled soul or a raging cry? Do you come to Christ only when you feel that things are great, or only when you are facing a crisis? How you answer these questions may indicate if you are practicing a discipline of thankfulness or a life of stress and fear. We must realize that gratitude creates a happy heart and a functional Christian life as well as a triumphant church and that ingratitude creates chaos, confusion, strife and discontentment! Gratitude comes from the relationship we have in Christ; when we are happy in Him, we are happy in general and content, humble, and mature. Our hearts are secure and at rest in Him! When our relationship with Christ is not working, it is usually because we messed it up by our attitudes, refusal to work at it and focusing on our disappointments and not Him. Thus, we become ungrateful, and in turn, unhappy and immature (Psalm 131; John 13:17; Philippians 4:6-13).

Gratitude shows character because it is a temperament that comes from the spiritual growth we are called to emulate; it is also a discipline because it fuels our spiritual growth. But, it does not come to us naturally and we have to work at it. Just like the other disciplines, we need to do it consciously, constantly, and carefully. We need to think through and meditate on the things of God and in so doing, be aware of His presence and practice His presence by being thankful to Him. This stimulates our spiritual formation. Gratitude should be a daily practice, as any discipline, and not just at set times. Like prayer; it is a way we commune and grow with and in Him.

Gratitude is fueled from our heartfelt thanks to God for what we have, for what He has done, and is a lifestyle of worship and adoration. This also allows us to give to and value others with respect and honor because it takes the focus off us and places it on God's purpose and direction. This aspect is central in producing our character by focusing our heart on Christ and thus taking the focus off ourselves and our situation, fears, and self-centeredness. When we are making God our complete focus, we will see what we have and what we can have. This helps us develop a good attitude of gratitude. We are not consumed just with our needs and desires; being thankful is an essential aspect to growing deeper in Christ, and in character and maturity.

Our focus needs to be on our gratitude for the gift of grace we received from Christ's work on the cross, and disciplining ourselves to keep *front and center* in our Christian walk. Gratitude is the *carrot on the stick* for our scriptural and relational growth. This helps us focus on God and live a life of Christian maturity, faith, and character as well as being happy and fulfilled. Grateful people realize that God indeed cares, even when they can not see it. This forms a mindset that cultivates happiness and enthusiasm and subsequently inspires love toward others. Those who are ingrates promote anger and bitterness. If Gratitude is not our focus, then ingratitude will be what leads us—what we do or do not get. Ingratitude says, "I did not get what I deserved," or

“I am not going where I want to go.” So, we become consumed with our wants and desires. This causes mistrust, an absence of hope, and/or a mindset that one is unworthy of love and acceptance. All produce a lack of love, lack of Fruit of the Spirit, of hospitality, generosity, and of good stewardship. This further escalates when the hurts, pains, and disappointments of life come knocking on the door. Disappointments come when our expectations and our experiences collide. Disappointments for a Christian come also by ignoring God, His promises, and His provisions. Then, ingratitude will turn into hostility and bitterness.

### **Questions**

1. How would you define *Gratitude*?
2. What part does *Gratitude* play in your relationships with church members, friends, coworkers, and family?
3. How does the *practice of Gratitude* give you rewards and successes in life?
4. Do you realize that gratitude creates a happy heart and a functional Christian life and that ingratitude creates chaos, confusion, strife, and discontentment?
5. What do you think about Christians who think they are entitled to something?
6. What happens when your church does not engage in *Gratitude* or teach and model to its people their indebtedness to Christ?
7. What happens to your relationship with God, with others in your church's community, and with the opportunities God gives you when your church refuses to be grateful for whom Christ is and what He has done—such as taking Him for granted?
8. In what situation did you or your church fail to engage in *Gratitude* when you should have?
9. How would people respond to your church if you all actually and sincerely gave God the glory for all that you do and practice?
10. How does a list of agendas and personal motivations show ingratitude?
11. What issue is in your church that would improve with a dose of *Gratitude*? What do you need to do to raise your trust in Christ? How does *Gratitude* play out here?
12. Do you come to Christ only when you feel that things are going great, or only when you are facing a crisis?

13. Do you realize that gratitude creates a happy heart and a functional Christian life and that ingratitude creates chaos, confusion, strife and discontentment?
14. Think through the steps that you need to take to put *Gratitude* into action in a specific instance. For example, what can you do to instill within yourself a sense of gratitude, even when you do not see a reason for being thankful? What will you do to get rid of it ingratitude in you and prevent its reprisal?

This lesson is from the *Discipline of Gratitude* from our Disciplines page.

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