
Spiritual Formation Part 15

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The Essential Gratitude Part 2

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

When we fully recognize our dependence on Christ, and fully feel the love and acceptance we have from Him, then our spiritual walk will increase. When our walk increases, then the flow of love and care will proceed from us in a powerful and focused way. We will then see that we already have all that we could ever want or need because all that we are and could ever be is found in Christ.

Gratitude also shows that our obedience to God is motivated by the fullness we receive from our Christian life and the joy that can't be found without Jesus. Thus, we are able, and should give God the glory for that all that we do and practice in life, no matter what happens. Holding on to Him in our struggles and fears and still having Gratitude means we are maturing in Him. If all we have is ungratefulness, then all we will have is stress and fear and not the holding on of faith in Christ, a life of disappointments without meaning, and a hope that is not seen. Then, all we will produce is bitterness and malevolence to self and others.

I have found something very interesting through the years of my counseling experiences and that is people in causes that are self-defeating or are chaotic to society are started, run, and staffed by people who are very ungrateful in life. (I have not seen any study on this subject, just my observations.) Ingratitude produces a firm desire to destroy and cause havoc to others out of jealousy or contempt or for whatever reason. Ungrateful people hate and desire to destroy. For example, when I was involved with "Operation Rescue" in the 80s, we would go to abortion clinics to pray and hand out literature showing pictures of unborn fetuses as a "proof" for their humanity, showing they were persons. But, such people who perform abortions or work with those who carry them out do not see the humanity of the unborn. They demonize or rationalize that a fetus is like a tumor even though the biological evidences clearly show it is fully human. And primary, I noticed they tend to be people of extreme ingratitude who are motivated by anger and bitterness. While rational, honest, and even some grateful people will think through this issue and say it is human, they say that the mother's rights supersede its rights (which is flawed logic and I strongly disagree with). The same attitudes, arguments and rational were used by Nazi Germany to show the Jewish people as inhuman and deserving of extermination. And, having met some of the doctors who experimented on the Jews and researched this ("Logo-therapy Center," run

by holocaust survivor Victor Frankel in San Jose in the early 80s, was a goldmine for such research!), I found them to be extremely ungrateful in their character makeup; they also had entitlement issues. Ingratitude can produce great amounts of evil and rationalization that a lie is a truth. The ingratitude mindset is extremely dangerous to a Christian personally, because it stagnates. We will never realize what we have, nor will we be able to grow in faith or worship God with this mindset. And, if we remain in it, we may even become evil in our thinking and eventually in our actions. It is essential that this discipline of Gratitude is pursued for the sake of contentment and for the sake of humanity.

Be aware: when we become infected with these age-old diseases of ingratitude, ungratefulness, and thanklessness, they will lead to apathy, envy, anger, lust, misplaced ambition, greed, aloofness, and bitterness. They will block the growth of our relationship with Christ and cut us off from the character and reflection of Christ to the world. It has been said we cannot control our circumstances, but we can control our attitudes. I have found, both from Scripture and my personal experiences and research, that if we forget who we are in Christ, we will actually dismiss God from our lives and replace Him with the gods of *self* and *ingratitude*.

The reason the Discipline of Gratitude is a discipline is because it comes easy theoretically and actually; all we have to do is recognize Christ and His work in our lives. But, the “practice” seems to come hard; we have to work at it. To cover ourselves in the call and blessings that Christ has for us should be easy; He says so. *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* (Matt. 11:29-30). Christ actually offers to us His love in place of His wrath. Grace takes the Law off our shoulders when we turn to Him, and away from all that is false; this means freedom (Jer. 6: 13-20; 27:2; Gal. 5:1; 1 Cor. 1:26-31)! But we complicate it, so we must discipline our focus and work at it.

Take this subject seriously. As a church growth consultant and a pastor, I have seen lives as well as churches destroyed by ingratitude! A church that allows the ungrateful Christian to run *amok* will cause enormous damage that may never be repaired. Such a person will quickly turn to legalism and/or connive with his or her ill begotten feelings and agendas to manipulate others and in turn produce the various forms of discontentment toward others. Because he or she is unwilling to see the love that Christ has for him or her, he or she is unable to give it to others. They do not see appreciation from others or even from God, so their focus becomes “entitlement” or the “poor me” attitude. This attitude will reciprocate discontentment in a very powerful and focused way. If you want your Christian walk disarmed and muted, be ungrateful; if you want your church destroyed, all you need to do is allow people who are ingrates to be in leadership; your pews will either soon be empty, or your church will become a festering haven for ingrates who fuel off one another. Ingratitude is a serious disease that must be cut out like a malignant cancer and healed by the sowing of love, serious counseling, and awareness of Christ. If you or another person refuses to heal, then you must be removed from others until healing and forgiveness can take place and help can be

obtained. If you are in leadership, it is essential to help these people while at the same time keeping them away from others until they are able to be people of gratitude. If they refuse, they need to be under church discipline and be cut off from the rest of the flock, if necessary, until they accept and realize healing and forgiveness. If not, they will spread their disease to others.

Questions

1. Are you a grateful Christian? Here is how you can find out. Take a careful look at this *Discipline of Gratitude* from God's most precious Word by examining your life and the passages above. Now ask yourself:
 - a. How do I exhibit a life of *Gratitude* in my life now?
 - b. How can I develop the willingness to be a more disciplined person who will realize *I am grateful for His work in me*?
 - c. What blocks *Gratitude* from working and being exhibited in me?
2. How can I initiate an attitude of *Gratitude*, and discipline myself to carry it out?
3. What can I do to make *Gratitude* function better, stronger, and faster, even in times of uncertainty and stress?
4. Are you a person who is Grateful? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. How does knowing who and what Christ has done help you to be grateful? How does ingratitude affect the way people treat one another? What about your church's vision and agenda (whether you are in leadership or not)?
6. Have you ever met a person who is ungrateful yet happy? Why do you suppose he or she is that way? How would the *Discipline of Gratitude* help your church handle problems and overcome difficulties?
7. When have you exercised *Gratitude* the most?
8. How does gratitude produce happiness? How does ingratitude produce bitterness and unhappiness?
9. Why do so many Christians engage in ingratitude and bitterness and not pursue His promises? What do you suppose their rationalization is? How would Christ feel about it?
10. Do you have a sense of His presence in your daily life? If so, how does this help you be grateful? If not, why? What can you do to have a heart that is aware of His care for you?

11. Do you have a stilled soul or a raging cry? What would real, authentic *Gratitude* look like in your church fellowship, meetings, and other doings?
12. How can the *Discipline of Gratitude* help your church focus on being edifying and equipping for its people? What will you do about this? What can your church do to make this a priority?

Ideas: Use these Scriptures to count your blessings (start off by taking two a day and read them several times): Psalm 30:4-5; 12; 75:1; 97:10-12; 105:1; I Chron. 29:6-13; Dan. 2:23; Mark 1:15; John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 27:34-35; Rom. 1:8; 6:17-18; 8:26-27; 1 Cor. 1:4; 15:55-57; 2 Cor. 2:14; 9:15; 12:9; Eph. 1:18; 5:20; Phil. 1:3-5; 2:9-11; 4:6; Col. 1:12; 2 Thess. 1:2-3; 5:18; 1 Tim. 4:3-5; Heb. 2:3; 12:28; James 1:2-4; Rev. 11:16-17. Now, consider what it is like in a third world country, 100 years ago, and compare it to all the conveniences we have today!

Thanksgiving of faith for who Christ is and what He has done (Rom. 15:1; 25-27; 1 Cor. 11:4; Phil. 1:3; Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:1; Philemon 4

If you need more Scriptures on what to be thankful for, get a "Bible Promise Book" that lists scriptures in various categories, such as: *The golden Treasury of Bible Wisdom*, published by Barbour Press.

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

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