



Living a Life of Gratitude

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The motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar, has wonderful quotes for living. I especially like this one: **Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for.**

In scripture you will find these words where the Apostle Paul is giving encouragement to the Christians at Thessalonica also reflects a life of gratitude. We too ought to follow such precious wisdom. **Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.** [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NRSV)]

You and I are continually presented with living a life of gratitude every new day. We can look outside the window first thing in the morning to see what type of day lies ahead of us. The events of the day and the people we meet can afford us opportunities for living with gratitude. Even among the difficulties and frustrations of the day, we can find something to be grateful for. Sometimes we just need to stop and reflect on life.

One of the things that I suggest to folks who are experiencing a "Bad day" or a pessimistic outlook is to find at least one thing they can be thankful for. Usually the person stops to think and flashes back through the day to find those glimmers of hope. Many times the person will name one thing he or she is thankful for and then another and another. It is really amazing to see that even the littlest things in life can be seen in a state of gratitude. Yet, for some folks, gratitude can be elusive.

Let me share with you about 76-year-old woman named Dorothy. She was a regular attendee and participated in the women's group where I served in a church in Missouri. Even though she was in many ways faithful to the cause, Dorothy had a way of being unkind and hurtful with her words. She seemed to relish in telling others what she thought about them and what she thought about events. In her eyes she thought she was doing something good while others felt her unkindness.

One day she said something that was critical and unkind as she was leaving the Sanctuary after worship. It was then that I felt I had to confront her even if it was right there in front of many worshippers. "Dorothy, I've endured your harsh criticisms and hurtful comments way too long. I'm asking that you now stop." I could tell that my words were hitting home. "I want to know why almost everything I hear from you is critical towards me or someone else or about the church. I am wondering what is going on in your life or even some of the

things you have experienced in life to cause you to be unkind and ungrateful. We both know that God loves us. So what is it that is preventing you from showing and expressing God's love rather than negativity and hurt?"

Well, I could tell Dorothy getting wound up. Dorothy's angry red face began to quiver. Then the tears began to flow. We all stood there in silence, watching her. After a while she said, "People don't like me and I am so lonely. I want to have friends and to do things together with them. I am more inclined to say negative and unkind words because I really don't know how to love others or to love myself. I truly want to feel and be grateful in and with my life. But you know what, It's hard!"

"Dorothy, I'll make you a deal. If you strive to be more grateful in and with your life, then I will seek to love you more. What a deal. Is this a deal you can live with? A few years later when I left that church, we both cried at my farewell reception because we knew the transformational power of love and of gratitude – renewed love and renewed gratitude.

Dorothy died some years later. But I still remember those times and especially this exchange.

Friends, the created order we live in is a gift from God. When we experience this great God we come to realize how thankful we really are; every day. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that God created us and provides for us every day with a sense of joy and a beautiful day. Even the people sitting next to us. Gifts from God.

So the more we abide in God's love, the more we learn to strengthen our faith and have gratitude. Once we affirm our belief in God, then is when we develop a greater appreciation for gratitude towards others and even to ourselves.

The Psalmist wrote Psalm 100 with a realization that God was to be praised with a thankful life and a thankful heart. Even though this psalm is more a process for entering worship, it comes from a person who is grateful for God's tender care and steadfast love. Something they are experiencing, something they are writing about and something they are living. The praise of the Psalmist reflects the nature of creation by God and how the believer and how we acknowledge God's mercy and love in one's life, in our life. Then the psalmist enters a time of praise when he writes: **"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name."** The very nature of worship is to thank God for all that the believer has and is. For all the things we believe and we express and we seek live out in life.

Jesus also helped the people to see how God works through the act of sharing bread and fish. The feeding of the 5000 was an act of faith. The disciples were reluctant to feed all those people; whereas, Jesus was looking for a way to nourish the people and to give them life. In the midst of the sea of humanity, Jesus took the barley bread and gave thanks for the portions. In the act of giving thanks, Jesus provided for the people so their hunger could be satisfied and they could be well. There was even bread and fish left over. Jesus gave to the people out of an abundance of thanks-giving so that they too could experience the thankfulness of God.

Well there is a theologian named Karl Barth and he said this about gratitude: "Joy is this simplest form of gratitude."

Friends, this congregation is a place where gratitude is celebrated. This a place where talent and gifts abound. Last Sunday, was a special day of music and joy. We gathered together with hearts and voices. There were so many folks sharing their talents that I want to lift them up and thank them. So at this point, I'm going to ask you to take part. Of course there were many and I'm afraid to miss a name. So as I call out the areas of music, please stand and remain standing.

We are grateful for those who sang a solo or who played an instrument solo; for those who played in the Joyful Spirit Ensemble as well as director, Joan Dakin; for those who played in the Valley Singers, for those who sang in the choir; for our Director of Music, Joel Pierce; for Rev. Diane Christopher, Rev. Dr. Linda Lloyd and Rev. Mark; for the Ruling Elders and Deacons, for the ushers, for the support staff who help to assist with the bulletins and the sound system and for the custodial staff. Now there is one more group I and we are grateful for, and that is you the folks who have made your commitment to be here to sing and to hear the word of God – you the congregation.

Friend, please know that I am grateful for our time together as we worship and praise God through song, through the word, through prayers and through our presence here today.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the acknowledgement of God as our Creator testifies to our gratitude in worship, in everyday life and in relating with others. Even the doxology we sing after the offering is a prayer of thanking God for the blessings we have received. Let us also look for things and people in our lives so that we can be thankful. When we are thankful to God, then we know that God leads us and gives us life.

I ask Judy this morning about what I am thankful for. I said I'm thankful for you Judy. So then I asked her the same thing. You will have to ask her. She's thankful family, for me and for others.

Friends, we have to be thankful because if we get so mired down in the criticisms and harshness of life, where is our love for people? Where is God's love in us? We have to be grateful otherwise we get lost in the darkness of life.

I close with a story about a Chaplain in a nursing home who gathered the residents for a time of worship during the Thanksgiving season. The Chaplain asked the residents to state one thing that they were thankful for in life. Some residents mentioned family, ability to still walk, pets, and many other things in their lives. When the Chaplain asked one old woman, she smiled at him with a mouth void of teeth except for two – one on top and one on bottom. She said, "I am thankful that when I chew my two teeth come together."

We can be grateful in all circumstances of life. Yes, this is the season of thanksgiving. May we remember that God points us toward living a life in gratitude everyday no matter what is going on in our life or in our relationship we still have to be thankful. Have a sense of gratitude for all of life.

Let us close with a prayer by Ralph Waldo Emerson:
For each new morning with its light, Father, we thank thee,
For rest and shelter of the night, Father, we thank thee,
For health and food, for love and friends,

For everything thy goodness sends, Father, in heaven, we thank thee.
Amen.

Supporting scriptures.

Psalm 100:1-5 (NRSV)

¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. ²Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing. ³Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. ⁵For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

John 6:1-14 (NRSV)

¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “**Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?**” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰Jesus said, “**Make the people sit down.**” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “**Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.**” ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”