

November 24, 2022

A Cup of Living Water

GRATITUDE IS MORE THAN ATTITUDE

Last week I went to a friend's home for a neighborhood ladies' Games Night. Though not much of a gamer, I knew that being with the women would be fun. I was grateful for the invitation, and grateful for the lighthearted evening. To my surprise, I even won a prize: a charming, fall table decoration bearing the word, "Grateful." How fitting! It echoes another little sign I have in my dressing area, to see as I start and end each day, which simply reads, "Gratitude."

These visual reminders help me continually infuse my thoughts with thanks, as I deal with all that life brings while trying to live out the biblical command to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Admittedly, this is not always easy to do. Sometimes it is the farthest thing from our mind. But reminding ourselves, and willing ourselves, to give thanks, even when life is hard, is a practice God commanded for our own good. Science -- God's own invention -- proves this.

Scientists at the University of California, Berkeley, studied 1,000 people ages 8 to 80, and found that those who consistently practiced gratitude had stronger immune systems, were less bothered by aches and pains, enjoyed better sleep, felt more joy and pleasure in life, were more generous and compassionate, felt less lonely and isolated, and were better positioned to recover from serious trauma, adversity and suffering. With all these remarkable benefits, it is no wonder our loving God wants us to *practice* gratitude!

Many people use gratitude journals, gratitude jars, and social media postings to express their gratitude. But sometimes these practices, while well-meaning, are lacking; because gratitude is more than an attitude. Undirected thankfulness is a dead end, and gratitude kept in a jar has no life.

So first, we need to give thanks to the source of whatever we are thankful for. The Bible reminds us that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights", so it is to God we should direct our thanks, first and foremost (James 1:17).

Rather than just feeling vaguely thankful, it is to Him we should give thanks with our whole heart: "With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord; I will praise him in the midst of the throng" (Psalm 86:12; Psalm 109:30). There are many other psalms of thanks in the Bible as well, giving lyrical, sacred words to our gratefulness to God (e.g., Psalm 136, 118).

As we practice giving thanks in *all* circumstances, we begin to see even hardships as gifts that join us into Jesus' redemptive work: "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

Secondly, it is good to give life to our thankfulness by doing something with it, rather than just keeping it in our hearts, or in a jar, or even in our prayers. Followers of Jesus are called to act -- to make our thankfulness to God known by expressing it to others "in the midst of the throng."

Saying "Thank you" to people in everyday encounters is a simple way to do this. "Going the extra mile" for others is a biblical concept of thankfulness (Matthew 5:41). Telling somehow thankful you are for them, by note, text, spoken word, or kind deed, animates our gratitude and blesses the recipient (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 3:9).

So as we celebrate Thanksgiving, I challenge both of us to continually *practice* thankfulness to God, and to show it through acts of gratitude in his name (Matthew 25: 35-40; John 13:34-35). In this moment, I thank God for his gifts of life and faith, for his Word and inspiration for these messages, for the ability to craft them, for the platform by which to publish them, and for faithful readers like you.

For what do you thank Him today? How can you show it?

"You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 118:28-29)

With love in the Lord,

The Rev. Christine Maddux

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