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How to Develop a Grateful Spirit

(Part 1)

176-A

Series: Miscellaneous Messages

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(Part 1)

Parents struggle with it. They give their entire lives to raising and loving their children. Then those precious angels become teenagers, and often something incredible happens. It seems that Satan enters the computer of their hearts, finds the folders marked “obedience” and “gratitude” and erases the contents from the hard drive of their minds. They suddenly forget all of the sacrifices, all of the kindnesses, all of the things Mom or Dad have given up to make life livable, and they want what their friends have, *or they want anything but what they have*. They, in their self-centered worlds, have become *ungrateful*.

Employers struggle with it. They take a new employee just out of college, train him or her from the ground up, give them the tools with which to turn their education into income, and then *the first company that offers them a few dollars more, now that they are trained, is enough to lure them away*. So the employer starts over, and the employee moves on. *Ungrateful*.

Husbands and wives have to live with it. They give the best years of their lives to their mate, pour their lives into raising the children or earning a living, and then one day, someone comes along, or something happens, and all the years of investment are thrown aside by one of them, as though that commitment made to God was meaningless or that commitment made to their spouse was temporary. *Ungrateful*.

Ungrateful! What a disappointing word. It carries with it the connotation of love scorned or faithfulness discarded. The very sound of the word pours into the atmosphere an element of self-centeredness, a kind of arrogance that refuses to humble itself or be thankful. It is the essence of Satan’s nature. It is the antithesis of God’s. It is obvious that few things grieve God more than an ungrateful spirit. It defies everything He stands for. It removes the cloak of love from the heart of man and replaces it with selfishness and pride. And as we move towards that precious moment in history when God will call His children into heaven, we are more and more surrounded by a world characterized by ungratefulness.

Athletes are ungrateful after being given a chance, they flee to another team at the hint of a dollar more. Politicians are ungrateful

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for the heritage and the integrity of the government for which they labor; and honor and honesty have become items of scarcity, indeed.

Children in today's world expect more and more because their friends have more and more. As the Great Depression drifts further from our conscious minds, we tend to take prosperity for granted; affluence becomes something we deserve; the government or someone owes us all of the things our grandparents worked so hard to get.

The closer we get to the end of the age, the more ungrateful men and women seem to be, and the Christian, who has so much to be grateful for, is now falling prey to the same arrogant presumption. God owes us this; God owes us that. We act as though we only need to put God in a corner and force Him to live up to His reputation, and He'll have no choice but to give us what we want.

Our praise times often seem focused on what we want and what God has given us that we want, rather than on who He is, and what He is doing to meet the needs of a lost and needy world. Our generation is self-focused, and a self-focused generation misses much of the grandeur of gratitude.

Let's take a look at God's perspective of a grateful spirit, and let's ask Him to reveal to us what we can do to become the grateful children He designed us to be.

If we think about it, one of the ultimate themes in Scripture is God giving to man what man does not deserve or even appreciate, just because He *is* God. Therefore, the ultimate measure of spiritual growth in us is how much we grow in our vision of God until eternal things are all that really matter and thus we have developed a grateful spirit. We have developed a spirit of gratitude for *whatever God gives us*.

A GRATEFUL SPIRIT IS...

Do you have a grateful spirit? We need to come to understand a little bit more about what a grateful spirit really is to answer that question. Here is a starting definition:

A grateful spirit is appreciation for life in whatever form God gives it to you simply because He gave it to you.

Having a grateful spirit means being grateful for a menial job because it provides you with an opportunity to work even though it

is far less than your worldly capabilities deserve.

A grateful spirit is excitement over wearing last years clothes when your neighbor just came home with a new wardrobe.

We know we have a grateful spirit when we have appreciation every time the car starts without assuming that God owes it to us for it to start. Have you noticed that every time we have car problems we act as though God let us down? I think we have developed a spirit of presumption, a spirit that says God owes it to us to have smooth running, quick starting, quick stopping cars.

What is a grateful spirit? A grateful spirit is the joy that brings tears to your eyes every time you pick up the Word of God. The realization that God could love you enough to do what He had to do to give you a love letter like this has the potential to stir within us a grateful spirit. How many of you weep inwardly with thankfulness every time you pick up the Word of God as you realize the price God has paid for you and what the Bible really means to you? Most of us don't. We stack them on the shelf with the dozens of translations we have and assume God owes it to us to make it easier to understand, so we won't need His Spirit to interpret it. God forgive us. We have not lived in an era in this country where we were denied access to the Word of God. There is a real opportunity to develop a grateful spirit.

What is a grateful spirit? It is thanksgiving for pain or affliction, knowing that pain creates divine dependence and eternal awareness and therefore it is a blessing from God.

A grateful spirit is also never assuming you deserve a raise or promotion, thereby never being disappointed or bitter when you didn't get it. A grateful spirit delights in memories when the real person has been taken from you or you have been separated for a time. A grateful spirit is a thankful heart that all Christians are not just like you. A grateful spirit is being in awe each time the curtains of heaven open when you say, "Jesus." How often do you stop and realize the awesomeness that every time you come to Him in the name of His Son, Jesus, as a believer, that God listens?

What is a grateful spirit? It is a spirit that is excited about paying taxes because you live in a country where you can. A grateful spirit is thanksgiving when the door closes that you prayed would open, knowing you prayed for the wrong door. A grateful spirit is encouraged when you are misunderstood, for you have a chance to experience greater grace. A grateful spirit is delighted over who God

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chose as your parents because God chose them. A grateful spirit is one that is pleased with your children just because they are your children.

What is a grateful spirit? It is an excitement over your looks, your intellect, your talent or lack of same because of the divinely uniqueness of God's design. It is God's special design just for you.

In the course of this study, we are going to seek to answer the following questions:

- I- What is a grateful spirit, and do we have one?
- II- What is so significant about being the one in ten?
- III- What are four things an ungrateful spirit produces for the Christian?
- IV- What are some of the things God instructs us in the Word to be thankful for?
- V- Why are we by nature ungrateful?
- VI- How can we as Christians develop a grateful spirit?

As a basis for our study we want to turn to Luke 17. This is a passage that is familiar to most of us. We will not dwell on it, but I do want to call attention to the principles that unfold there.

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off.

And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God,

And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"

Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

(Luke 17:11-19 NKJV)

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I want to underscore a few critical points in this passage.

1- There were ten men we find in verse 12. It is interesting from the standpoint of percentages, as we shall see.

2- Look at the condition of the men. It wasn't that they had bad colds, or even the flu. They were lepers. Lepers were in a state of maximum need, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. These men had as much need as a man could have, so if something should happen to change their world, they, of all men, ought to be grateful.

3- Look at the request of the men in verse 13. They cried out with a loud voice because they could not come near to the Lord. They cried, "Lord, have mercy on us! Help!" Not only did they have a need, they were so aware of their need, they were willing to be further humiliated, if necessary, to be effective.

4- Notice the response of God as He said in verse 14, "I'll tell you what, you go and show yourself to the priest. I want you to exercise faith." As they were going, look at the result of God's love. They were healed. These ten men who were terminally ill were healed.

5- The response they had to the love of God we can see in the following verses. One of them saw that he was healed, and he recognized the magnitude of what had happened to him. The other nine didn't. He turned back and glorified God. He made no effort to take any of the credit for what had happened or to share it with another man. He then humbled himself by falling on his face before Jesus. Lastly, he gave thanks as he told God, "Thank you."

6- We see Jesus' question in verse 17 as he looked at the man and asked, "Where are the other guys? Where are the other nine? Weren't there ten of you?"

7- We see the love of God in verse 19 as He responds to a grateful heart. He says, "Rise, assume your position. Go and resume your walk. Your faith has made you whole." What does it mean, "Your faith has made you whole."? All he did was come back and say, "Thank you, Lord, for healing me."

I don't know if I can totally communicate this, but I want you to pray about it in the coming weeks. Ask God through the Holy Spirit to communicate to you the value of a grateful spirit. I believe that this man's confidence in God was exercised through a grateful spirit. He trusted God enough to thank Him and give Him credit for what He had done. His faith made him whole and

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complete. He alone of the ten received total healing. All ten were healed *physically*. This man was healed, *eternally*. His thanksgiving created faith, which when exercised granted more grace to change his life. This principle can apply to being thankful for the “good” things in life, but also for being thankful for the “bad” things in life, and for life itself. An attitude of a thankful, grateful heart toward circumstances as they are, when given back to God in a specific act of the will, as a commitment of thanks, will generate faith. That faith when it is carried to completion will transform our lives.

The principle that we are studying for this lesson is that many of our lives are lacking in their spiritual commitment because of an ungrateful spirit. We have fallen prey to that attitude that we always want things to be different. We always want things better. We always want something more than what we have. We basically complain, murmur and grumble about the plan of God, the purpose of God, even the person of God, when in reality we should have nothing but joy and thanksgiving to express to Him. The joy, the positive, complete transformation of a grateful spirit will increase our faith.

AN UNGRATEFUL SPIRIT PRODUCES...

Ask yourself this question: “Do you have a grateful spirit? Are you the one in ten?” Those are the odds, and I don’t believe those odds have changed. What does an ungrateful spirit produce? I know of at least four things that are produced by an ungrateful spirit.

1- It produces presumption- the process of developing false expectations based upon self-worth or prior expressions of grace. If you allow an ungrateful spirit to harbor itself in your heart, you will become a presumptuous Christian. This is expressed when the believer turns to God with an attitude of, “You owe it to me. You are God.” or “What have you done for me today, God?” The shortened memory span and the presumptuous spirit can do great harm.

Here are some verses to study on your own concerning presumption as demonstrated through the children of Israel: Numbers 14-17, Deuteronomy 18, and Isaiah 14. An ungrateful spirit produces presumption. It produces presumption toward God and presumption toward man.

2- Bitterness is an inner hostility that bears a grudge against God or others based upon the assumption of having been wronged.

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In other words, “God, you cheated me.” It was David who said, “Why is it, Lord, that the wicked prosper? Here is good old me having so many problems.” God said, “If you will sit still long enough, I will explain it to you, David.” A bitter spirit can take root. Why is it that some people can go through life and pass through extreme trials and difficulties and come out with a calm, serene positive heart towards God, while others come through with an inner hostility, anger and bitterness towards God? The difference is whether they have a grateful or an ungrateful spirit.

3- Self-righteousness is a prideful, unhealthy opinion of yourself when compared to others can cause an ungrateful spirit. The publican’s thanksgiving prayer went, “Dear Lord, I am thankful I am not like these other men.”

4- Impurity. Ephesians 5 tells us,

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;

Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

(Ephesians 5:1-4 NKJV)

Here Paul contrasts impurity and greed with a thankful spirit. The reason is that an impure spirit is unholiness of life that rejects God’s gift as justification for God’s standards. In other words, the attitude is, “What you have done for me, God, is not great enough to warrant a holy life.” This is an ungrateful spirit. This kind of attitude says, “I can’t be satisfied with spiritual things.”

A GRATEFUL SPIRIT SHOULD...

What are some of the things in Scripture that God admonishes us to be thankful for? We can check ourselves against this list to see if we continually give thanks for the following things. As I began to do this study, I realized that for the most part, I have a basically ungrateful spirit toward God. I seldom thank Him for so many things that I take for granted.

1- Thank God that He revealed Himself to the simple. Do you? Turn to Luke 10,

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, “I thank

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You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”
(Luke 10:21,22 NKJV)

How long has it been since you have stopped to say, “Thank you, Lord, I don’t deserve to understand Your grace. I don’t deserve to understand Your love. I don’t deserve to be able to open the Bible and have Your Holy Spirit draw from it realities that pertain to my life. I don’t deserve that. I have no academic qualifications to do that.” God says in return, “That is My plan. I have taken it from the wise of this world and revealed it to the poorest, to the babes of this world, to the simple.” We qualify only because God in His grace chose to withhold it from the worldly wise and chose to reveal it to the simple. He voted us in. He turned the key. He broadcasts on our wavelength by the Holy Spirit. When was the last time you thanked Him for that?

2- Thank Him that He always listens. When was the last time you did. We take God for granted. Let’s look at John 11:

Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”

Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.

And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.”
(John 11:38-42 NKJV)

When was the last time you stopped while you were praying to thank God for hearing you? Do you realize that the ears of God are never closed to the cries of a Christian? Are you the one in ten who stands amazed that the mention of the word “Jesus” causes the curtains of heaven to be drawn back, the ear of God to listen and the heart of God to respond? We have nothing to do with it

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except simply allowing Him the privilege of coming into our lives to save us. When was the last time you went to God to thank Him for always hearing you? As you go along in your day to day activities, maybe you pray occasionally or regularly. What do you do when a crisis comes along? We never at that moment think, “Is God going to be home when I call?” We know He will be because He told us He would.

Some of us can remember that as teenagers we sometimes really weren’t anxious for our folks to be home when we came in because, first of all, we didn’t want them to know what time it was, and then didn’t want to explain all that we had been doing. But when we had a problem, the car broke down, we had a wreck, or something went wrong, we wanted to pick up that phone, and we wanted nothing more than for Mom or Dad to answer and be there when we needed help.

We have a loving Father who never leaves the phone. In fact, He never leaves our side. All we have to do is say, “Lord,” and He is there. When was the last time you thanked Him for His total availability? He always listens. Jesus stopped to thank the Father that He always heard.

3- Thank Him for your food. Now I realize that this is a sore spot with many people because saying grace at the table has become so routine, so mundane that we either do it without even thinking about it, or we try to preach to the family through our prayers. When I do preach, the food gets cold and that causes an ungrateful spirit in itself.

The point is, that we can come to a place where God has a purpose in mind for a blessing at the meal that we never fully grasp. I think it is twofold. The first purpose is that God wants to remind us of the spiritual significance of food. Everything in the physical realm is given to us to teach spiritual truth. I believe that is why God created trees. His ultimate goal in providing trees was so that we would have an object lesson when we read that we could be like trees planted by a river. I believe the reason God made clouds was so that we could learn spiritual truths through the rain. I believe that the reason God made mountains was so that He could demonstrate His steadfastness and faithfulness. I think everything God created has a spiritual purpose. His ultimate goal is spiritual. I believe that includes food.

Every physical reality has a spiritual implication. Some of you

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may have a hard time with this thought, but don't negate it in your mind until you have spent some time thinking about it. Every physical reality has a spiritual implication. I believe that God gave us food, realizing our physical bodies need it, but there is a far greater spiritual truth involved. Deuteronomy 8:9 tells us that God intentionally took away food from the children of Israel so that He could give them back the kind of food He wanted them to have. He then could teach them a spiritual truth that man does not live by bread alone.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the Bread come down from heaven." He never said He was caviar, but bread come down from heaven. He didn't represent Himself to be some kind of liquid delicacy, but said that He was the water of life. He wanted to convey the fact that He came to fill our every need, not our every want.

You may have prepared a fancy roast to eat after church today, and your family will really be thankful for that; but tonight, you may well be offered cold sandwiches or even leftover tuna fish from yesterday. Our level of expectation by tonight will have reached such proportions that when that tuna fish sandwich is put in front of us, we will probably say, "Thank you, Lord," but won't really mean it. The principle is that there is spiritual significance in the giving of thanks at meal times. It is a continual thanking God for His continual provision of the Word and the continual provision of His Spirit.

That which we eat and drink speaks of the Living Word and the Living Spirit. Every time you say grace, you ought to be mindful that we are not just thanking God for this plate of potatoes or this piece of toast. We need to realize that it is manna from heaven, and it meets the needs of our bodies and all the needs that our bodies have. The whole point is that the spiritual implications of that food are that God has provided it as a free gift to teach us that He is meeting the needs of our bodies just as He will always meet the needs of our spirits. How thankful are you for every morsel of food God gives you to eat?

How thankful are you for every day He gives you to live? How thankful are you that you have a job? How grateful are you that every time you call to heaven, God hears? How thankful are you that every time you pick up the Word of God, His interpreter, the Holy Spirit, is waiting to feed your soul?

How often do you stop to thank God that He made the gospel so

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simple a child can understand it? How often are you grateful that He chose the foolish things of this world to confound the wise? How often do you thank Him just because He is?

As you answer those questions, ask yourself, “Am I the one in ten with a grateful heart?” Or, “Had I been one of those lepers, based on how I respond to God, when He asked the question, “Where are the other nine?”, would He have been asking about me?”

It isn't too late to begin developing a grateful spirit. By God's grace, may we become the one in ten.

A Challenge to Further Study and Application

1- Do a study of Luke 17:11-19. What was unusual about the one who came back (vs 16)? Do you believe the odds of one in ten are unusual or typical? How grateful are you for your salvation? When was the last time you thanked God?

2- Why would a leper be more likely to be grateful for being healed? What did the other nine miss?

3- Study the four things an ungrateful spirit produces on pages 6 and 7. Examine your own heart. Try to determine if any of those problems are evident in your life. If so, ask yourself for the grace to examine, scripturally, just how grateful you are.

This week, remember *each day* to do the following:

1- Every day thank God that He chose to reveal Himself to the simple. Thank Him that His Spirit is available to take deep truth and make it understandable to you.

2- Thank God every day that He *always* listens.

3- Thank God every day that He has provided not only food for your physical body, but by that food He has reminded you of the *Bread* come down from heaven.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize John 17:15-17

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