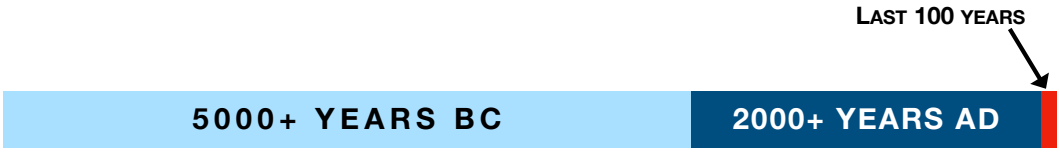
THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

INTRODUCTION



Look at the above time line of recorded human history. That red section represents the last 100 years. Think about this... Today you woke up in a world that every person who ever lived before our modern time could never have imagined. Communication. Transportation. Food. Clothing. Shelter. Medicine. Technology. Knowledge. A hot shower. Starbucks. Frozen food. And yet we grumble when the house is a little chilly. How silly!

People like us, who wake up in a life of innumerable privileges, opportunities and advantages barely recognize them. Instead we either take them for granted or assume we are entitled. The result? We lose the trait of gratitude.

With as much as we experience every day that most people throughout history and around the world today never experience, we should have a nonstop stream of thank you's flowing out of our hearts and voices. But instead we are like the princess in the classic fable "The Princess and the Pea."

COMMENTARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

Remember the story by Hans Christian Andersen? A prince wanted to marry a princess, but although he searched throughout the kingdom, he was unable to find one who was without doubt a true princess. After much discouragement he ended his search and came home.

One stormy night a young lady knocked on the castle door, drenched from head to foot, but claiming to be a princess. Her appearance made that hard to believe, so the queen devised a test and put a pea under twenty mattresses and twenty eider down comforters in her bedroom, believing that a true princess, accustomed to a life of comfort would be able to detect the pea. In the morning, the queen asked how she slept.



"Oh, most miserably!" she said. "I scarcely closed my eyes the whole night through. I cannot think what there could have been in the bed. I lay upon something so hard that I am quite black and blue all over. It is dreadful!"

That proved it just as the queen reasoned: *None but a real princess could have such delicate feeling.*

Let's admit it. Modern life has turned us all into princesses, who find it hard to be grateful when the least little thing can disturb us. This is a big problem in our lives generally. But it's particularly harmful to our ability to love others. I'll show you why that's the case in just a moment, but first...

Let's define gratitude this way: ***Expressing indebtedness for unmerited benefits you have received.***

Becoming a person of gratitude starts by recognizing that you did absolutely nothing to have the myriad of blessings that most human beings in all human history could never have imagined. You are owed none of these things. Expressing thanks, therefore, is the only appropriate response. To grumble over inconveniences is wholly inappropriate. And notice I said "expressing" gratitude. Gratitude does not truly exist until it is expressed. Out loud. To God first and then to whomever is in ear shot.

"Oh wow! I just am so grateful I woke up this morning and I can see, hear, touch, taste and smell... These aches and pains? So what."

However, this necessary spirit of general gratitude that should mark our lives everyday must extend farther and get much more specific and expressive when it involves the benefits we are constantly receiving ***because of other people*** in our lives. For our spouse. Parents. Kids. Friends. Neighbors. Co-workers. Strangers.

Someone may say, "Well, I feel thankful, but I'm just not a very expressive person." Really? So what? Is it loving to be receiving all sorts of kindnesses and benefits from other people and fail to tell them thank you? Would you want to be thoughtful toward someone, give them a gift, buy them supper, go out of your way to help them, do a good job, fulfill a request and not hear a single thank you?

In fact, our goal—given our definition of gratitude that it's a debt we owe— should be never to forget to say thank you for every benefit that we are receiving. That's what love calls for. We don't wait for a feeling or a different, more expressive personality to suddenly overtake us. Rather we must work on increasing our awareness of "unmerited benefits" and "indebtedness" and our sense of obligation to give expressions of thanks.

REFLECTION:

If you could look around at all of the things that you receive from other people and start off with a mindset that says, "They actually owe me nothing," you will be well on your way to being a grateful person. Consider adopting this motto for your life:

"Give more than people expect
and expect less than people give."

This motto represents an intersection between generosity and gratitude. They go hand-in-hand. You're being generous when you give people more than they expect. And you'll be much more likely to express gratitude when you expect less than people give. That's when you'll notice how they've done something that they didn't have to do, and you'll sense the need to show gratitude.

Isn't that the heart of the Lord? According Ephesians 3:20, He gives more than we expect.

"God is able to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine."

And even the most meager attempts we make to serve Him well, He receives and affirms with pleasure, saying things like

"Well done, good and faithful servant...
Come share my happiness." (Matthew 25:23)

Almost every unhappy marriage could be saved by following this motto, because it is at the heart of how you love someone. You say thank you for every act of service they perform that benefits you.

The apostle Paul is a good example for us. Listen to what he wrote to the people at Philippi.

> ***I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-6)***

Isn't that incredible? He says "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy. Not most times, or sometimes, or every time for most of you. Always. Every time. Always. For all of you.

Was Philippi just that wonderful? No. There are numerous indications in his letter that not everything was hunky-dory in the church. That's why in his letter he urged them to do "everything without grumbling or complaining" (2:14), and to think always and only on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable (4:8) and to do this even in times of plenty or want, whether well-fed or hungry. His gratitude flowed from a habit, what he called a secret of contentment (4:12). Paul must have had a strong habit of gratitude.

So here's one last thing to think about in order to really ramp up your expressive gratitude: **Make each day a "no-gripe" zone.** Too often we let our personal difficulties darken our vision so much we can't see unmerited blessings. When that happens and the hardships persist, we eventually drift into habits of grumbling rather than gratitude. Soon those habits twist our thinking toward entitlement. No longer are we thinking about blessings we don't deserve. Instead, we're preoccupied with what people owe us. That's when marriages and other relationships begin to crumble. So, ask the Lord to help you notice every time you're tempted to grumble or actually grumble. Tell Him, "I want my mind to be a "no-gripe" zone.

And finally...one more thing to think about. **Who is the most grateful person you know?** Picture them. How do they express their gratitude? How does it make people feel? Why do you think they are so grateful? Tell the Lord, "I'd like to be more like that person."

Would you join me in this prayer for strengthening your gratitude?

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, I confess I take so many blessings for granted. I have so many expectations for my life to go smoothly. I am so used to comforts and conveniences that most of the world has never known. I must sound like a spoiled child much of the time, the way I react when the least little thing is not to my liking. I am so sorry. And since You are the source of every good thing that comes my way, I'm not only failing to thank others, I'm failing to acknowledge Your goodness. I'm no better than the Israelites who had all the food, water and proof of Your protection they needed and still grumbled and complained. I want to put an end to grumbling and complaining even if it's not that frequent. My goal is no complaining and constant praising instead. Then let that spill over into the way I relate to other people. May my increasing spirit and expression of gratitude take me closer to Christlike love. In Jesus name I gratefully pray. Amen.