

“Attitude of Gratitude: Give ‘til it Flows”

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Sermon Series: New Year New You: Part 3 Live for Others Week 5: Gratitude/Appreciation

Linda Brecht Marr, Elder

How many of you were here for Backwards Sunday? It was a few weeks ago when I might have been a smidge late for the 9:00am Service. As I waltzed through the back doors of the Vineyard, I immediately stopped dead in my tracks as EVERYONE was staring at me! I looked around. Was this some kind of crazy Eric prank?? I grabbed the first seat I could find and plopped myself down. After the redness receded slightly from my face, I sheepishly looked around the room and realized everyone was simply worshipping. It was NOT about me - it was a technical glitch and the front screen was not working; hence the turning around to see the back screen. Counting my blessings, I joined in the fun at gawking at everyone else who came in a little late! Seriously – it was the best. People would come in smiling over their shoulders at the greeters in the lobby, turn their head and immediately do the eye gasp!

But you know what? It went from being hilarious to heartwarming. Seriously, as I watched the people coming in and looked around at all those faces worshipping together, I was filled with gratitude and love that overflowed into thanksgiving to God. And then I truly counted my blessings. I was reminded of how grateful I was to God for leading my family and me to Woodside. You are my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, my spiritual family. I don't see nameless faces in the congregation, I see faces of people I love and am blessed to get to worship with. I see amazing people whose service and love of others blows me away. I see people who I love to spend time with, who lift me up in prayer, who I'm in Growth Group with, who love on my kids when I'm not even sure I like them, who I sincerely desire to get to know better. Which leads perfectly into the Message for today – how to Live for Others by expressing gratitude and appreciation!

And once again I am thankful to God for giving me the inspiration and the words, He wants me to say today!

So, let me ask you a question - How do you start off your morning? Jump out of bed? Hit the snooze button 10 times? Blindly fight your way to the coffee maker. Do any of you start your morning off like this: VIDEO OF LITTLE GIRL.

Before any asks, yes her parents were right there watching her carefully and no she didn't get hurt. But who here starts off their morning jumping and singing about all the things you love in your life? Your moms and Your dads. Your cousins? Your hair. Yourself?? If you start the day off with this much gratitude and joy, what kind of day do you think you'll have??

According to an article in the Harvard Mental Health Letter, “gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.” Geez – who wouldn't want those things in their life?

The backstory of this video is that while her dad filmed the video in 2001 (when sweet little Jessica had bouncy curls and an unhindered zest for life), it didn't go viral until 2009 when

Jessica was an awkward middle schooler. Becoming an “overnight celebrity” when you are 12 is not something I’d wish on anyone! It was rough on Jessica, especially when comedian Daniel Tosh made fun of her on live TV, but she managed to stay pretty positive even through high school and college. Her friends did often remind her that “she can do anything!” I’d say those AM Affirmations served her pretty well.

How about us? We might not have the agility to start our mornings jumping on the sink singing about our hair, but how about thanking our creator for all the things He gives us every day? The bible tells us to cultivate an “attitude of gratitude”: “Always be rejoicing. Give thanks for everything.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16,18. Do we regularly thank God for the many blessings in your life? And why is it important?

Let me share today’s bible reading. See if it sounds familiar to you.

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:6-8.

This passage ring a bell for anyone? When do we typically hear it? Exactly – during Stewardship time – when we are talking about tithing and being generous with our financial gifts. But God’s Word is often layered with many meanings and God **also** calls us to be generous with our thanks and praise. God has abundantly blessed all of us in many ways. As we gratefully acknowledge his gifts and love, that gratitude should naturally overflow in love and appreciation for others. But sometimes it’s just not that simple. Why?

Maybe our reluctance to show appreciation/love for others is tied up in our own self-worth. It’s hard to praise others when we don’t feel worthy. Friends, we need to claim this and believe it deep down in our souls – We ARE worthy. Because of God and his unconditional love for us. Because of the cross. Listen to God’s reminder in Jeremiah 31:3, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.” And John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God’s love for us is everlasting – meaning nothing we can do or say can make Him love us less. In fact he loves us so much, He sacrificed his son to reconcile us to him. We are deeply loved and we **are** worthy. With that assurance, we can reach out to others to show them the same love and appreciation God shows us.

Maybe we feel forced to show thanks. And who likes to be forced to do anything? In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul reminds us we should give cheerfully – never forced or out of obligation. Remember when you were a kid and your mom made you thank your Aunt Roberta who you saw maybe once a year and your mom not so gently pushed you forward to give an awkward hug and say “Thank Aunt Roberta for the beautiful warm bulky sweater you sent me for my birthday...in July... and we live in Florida ...” Not sure how heartfelt the thanks was and it was definitely forced.

In the 2nd part of Corinthians 9:7, Paul says, “For God loves a cheerful giver.” The Greek translation of cheerful is actually more like “hilarious.” God loves a hilarious giver? Close... Not only should our gratitude never be forced, but our giving should bubble up with joy/in hilarity as we live in gratitude for all God has given to us. When we live in gratitude, our eyes are open to see His glory everywhere; His goodness in others. No one will need to force us to be thankful. We will be so filled with God’s joy; gratitude will naturally bubble up hilariously and overflow out of us.

We might also may hold back thanks or praise because we cling to a “scarcity mentality.” We worry success/praise is in short supply – there might not be enough to go around. Maybe we feel jealous or envious of our brothers and sisters. Sure hope this doesn’t exist in heaven!

In actuality, research tells us it’s the opposite – the more we recognize the good/success in others, the better we will feel and the more we all rise. Studies have shown that expressing gratitude **reduces** social comparisons. Rather than becoming resentful toward people who have more money or better jobs, taking the time to acknowledge and appreciate other’s accomplishments makes us feel grateful and happy. (*Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude that will Motivate You to Give Thanks Year-Round*. Forbes.com).

God’s love is abundant and freely given – it doesn’t ever need to be rationed. As Jesus taught in Luke 6:8 “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” The more we give thanks to God and show appreciation to others, the more we will unleash gratitude and joy in our own lives.

Once we remove any obstacles, how then do we then show appreciation/thanks to others? A good place to start cultivating gratitude is by thanking God in prayer. A few years back my growth group read the book *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp. We were challenged to journal three things we were thankful to God for every morning. There was even an app you could use to capture this. The goal was to reach 1,000 things. I have to admit, I don’t always stick with things, but I did with this one. And I filled several journals with over 2,700 things I was grateful for – sometimes more than three a day.

While I no longer keep a running count, most days I still journal at least three things. It’s a simple, but profound way to begin my day. Starting that habit of gratitude really helped me see God’s blessings and hand in my life. It may feel hard at first (my dog Nala made my thanks list many days...), it will soon flow easier and you will have trouble stopping your time of thanks.

In your Bulletin there is a white insert with Attitude of Gratitude at the top. Let’s take a moment to jot down three things you’re grateful to God for. We’re even giving you an insert to make it easier. Don’t overthink it – three things you’re grateful for right now.

Then as you let that gratefulness wash over you, ask God to place on your heart, in your mind, people who He wants you to bless for Him. Along with our family, friends, co-workers, God also calls us to show gratitude/kindness/appreciation to those we may not know or know well – even strangers. What does that mean?

Take time to notice people around you. The person who holds the door open for you at Wawa. The cashier who bags your groceries while you try to quiet the baby. The kid in your gym class who always seems to be alone but gives you a sympathetic nod when you strike out in softball. The guy on the train who looks bothered and weary, but graciously moves over so you can sit. Just notice. Jesus modeled noticing for us – he even noticed the marginalized, the people others looked past. The woman at the well, the children being shooed away from his presence. The tax collector in the tree. He noticed them and by acknowledging them, he gave them legitimacy and hope. Can we do the same? By letting God’s love flow through us in kind words of appreciation, we can point others to Jesus.

Let’s quiet our minds and go back to that insert and this time, jot down three people God is putting on your heart to bless, to thank for him. It can be someone you don’t even know by name.

And then make the time to thank those God put on your heart – to let them know you appreciate them. The apostle Paul took the time to write to the believers in Philippi, “Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.” Philippians 1:3. Write a note; say a kind word; send an encouraging text – say thanks!

Sometimes the people closest to us are the ones that are hardest to appreciate; to thank and show love towards. Many of you may remember a few years back when as a church we studied *The Five Love Languages*. It’s also a tool used in the Alpha Marriage Course.

Through years of research, author Gary Chapman identified 5 Primary Love Languages:

- Acts of Service – completing tasks and/or actions to show your love (i.e. cooking, helping others)
- Quality Time – Giving someone your undivided focused attention
- Receiving Gifts – giving gifts is a symbol of love and affection
- Words of Affirmation – Expressing verbal compliments or words of praise and appreciation.
- Physical Touch. – Showing affection through physical touch – i.e. holding hands, cuddling, intimacy

The way **you** typically express love/gratitude may be different from what the person your thanking needs. Understanding how your loved one or friend feels love and appreciation will help you better know how to show gratitude to them.

One of my good friends told me recently she used the 5 Love Languages to better understand her daughter. When her daughter did great in school or was extra helpful at home, she would often pick up a little present for her – something out of the blue to thank her and acknowledge her. Her daughter never seemed very grateful and it drove her crazy. After remembering the love languages, she figured out was that while one of her top love languages was “receiving gifts,” “words of affirmation” were most important to her daughter. Taking the

time to look her daughter in the eye and share why what she did was important, helpful or amazing meant all the world to her. And my friend saved a few bucks in the process!

On your insert there's a listing of the Five Love Languages along with a link to the short 5 Love Languages quiz. If you haven't taken the quiz, consider doing so. It's quick and easy and the info it gives you is really helpful. Encourage your family and friends to take it with you. And then think about how to show appreciation to those God puts on your heart. In case anyone wants to know, my top love language is Words of Affirmation. But family and friends, this does not free you from EVER buying me a gift...

God invented giving—think of sunrises and oceans that rise and flow to give life to the earth; plants that give oxygen so living things can breathe; mothers and fathers who give life to others. God created them all. Every living thing in some way is a giving thing. Even when we, through our continued sin, brought on a spiritual and physical death, God still found a way to give life – he gave his Son for our lives.

After the Resurrection, before He ascended into heaven, Jesus promised us there would be an encourager who would be with us always. "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8. God gave us the Holy Spirit so we can build his church and make the life saving gift of Jesus known throughout the world. God blesses us to be a blessing. Proverbs 22:9 states, "He who has a generous eye will be blessed." Let us use that eye of generosity to see others around us and thank and bless them in His name. Amen.