



## **Fundamental Gratitude Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan 2022**

**Scripture** - Gen 8:15-21, Exodus 12:24-27

We have commenced a New Year – one that most of us have been waiting for in the hope that maybe 2022 we will see the end of Covid and its many viruses.

We have all experienced some form of grief whether it is the physical loss of someone we loved, loss of employment, loss of health and abilities, loss of regularly seeing our family or loss of normality.

When we experience loss in any form it often leads us to look inward to evaluate our life's significance and direction. We may slow down and spend time evaluating what is important and significant to us as we move forward in our experience on this side of heaven.

You may find yourself asking questions like:

- What is most important in life?
- How do I fully live so that I am ready to die when God's calls?
- What sort of legacy do I want to leave behind?

As humans we often desire a life of worth and significance. It's part of our DNA. Although significance is in the eye of the beholder, if we believe our life carries a weight of goodness that benefits the world and those we love,

we will desire to leave this world knowing it served a purpose. We want our lives to matter.

*So, what makes our life significant? We know that work, play, community, our home, investments, and even our service can add value to our lives, but they do not define it. Therefore, if I want my life to be significant, what underlying values or practices should I be participating in so that it is significant now and hereafter?*

The Bible says that the practice of gratitude gives us a life here and after of significance. Through gratitude, we appreciate life's goodness, which compels us to pay it forward. Gratitude creates within us a deep sense of happiness and satisfaction, which in turn enriches our relationships, nurtures the formation of new friendships, and underlies the very foundation of human society.

### **1. What is gratitude?**

*Gratitude is the practice of actively remembering and expressing the grace (benefits we do not deserve) and goodness bestowed in our lives.*

What do you think would be the first thing you would do if you had spent 356 days inside a dark and extremely smelly boat, up and down on the seas, being tossed about? What did Noah do as he walked off the plank. The very first thing he did was build an altar to the Lord. Noah's first recorded act upon leaving the Ark was an act of gratitude.

You may assume this was a regular simple practice but God had not given a commandment to do this; organized religion and faith practices were still a thousand years away from formation; Noah and his family had been the only followers of God amongst a society of evil heathens and offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving was not a social-religious-economic habit of his day.

Noah did not offer a sacrifice out of the need to have good fortune; or to keep God happy. He offered his sacrifice out of a heart of gratitude. His natural inclination upon leaving the ginormous wooden box was to say, "thank you." Would that have been your first act?

#### **A. How does God respond to this act of gratitude?**

God, knowing Noah's heart, understood that Noah leaving the ship and offering a sacrifice was more than sacrifice. As the aroma of Noah's sacrifice drifted up to the Lord, His heart was touched, and in turn, He said, *I will never again curse the ground because of man's evil heart or kill every creature. And God blessed Noah.*

Blessing Noah was not a response to anything Noah had *earned*; or because he was a stellar ship captain; or for having completed the ark by God's building code' or a reward for his exceptional care of God's last remaining creatures on earth. Noah's blessing was not a response to his obedience, but because Noah chose to worship, which *pleased the Lord*. Because his heart was thankful, and Noah's emotion overflowed into an act of gratitude – an offering.

## **2. Eucharista**

The English word *gratitude* stems from the Latin word *gratia*, which means *to give thanks*. The Bible takes this one-word definition further. In the Bible, *gratitude* is the word *eucharista*, which stems from the word *charis*, which means *grace*. *Charis (grace) - a favour, an act of goodwill, and loving-kindness for which we do not deserve.*

*Eucharista is an offering of thanks out of the abundance of grace shown to us. It is to give thanks to the Lord with pleasure and delight because we have received delight and pleasure from His grace.*

*Eucharista is not a horizontal practice. It is not a give and take, to and from. Grace does not travel one way and then come back again. Eucharista is reciprocal. It is a cycle of giving and receiving all at the same time. It is grace abounding.*

In Psalm 51:15-17 we are told that God does not desire sacrifice for sacrifice's sake, but that He delights in our expression - our declared praise and adoration, which is an outward expression of what is in our hearts. By choosing to practice gratitude, we choose the grace that God has freely offered us and offer it freely back to Him *and others*.

This gratitude is much more than a "thank you" utterance. Practicing *eucharista* flows out of a sentiment of thankfulness. The gratitude for God's grace is more than a mere recognition of God's grace, but a felt response which intrinsically demands that we express this response.

When we receive God's grace in our life, we naturally want to express it. We do not always know how it will come out, be used, or where it will go. But when this grace is received, it desires to be expressed.

### **3. Grace**

It's easy to recognize God's grace in our life when life's greater needs are met. Or when we are the recipient of unmerited generosity. We all experience smaller graces in life, or more subtle graces in life, because we do not necessarily *feel* them at that moment, we often fail to recognize God's abundant grace throughout our day. The litmus test for actively identifying God's grace in our lives, is in and of itself, our practice of gratitude.

- When does God hear me offer *charis* for His *charis* in my life? Is it only at the dinner table when I am in a rush to fill my belly?
- How does my response to His grace sound? Do I contemplate His grace and say thank you out of this intentional reflection of the goodness and kindness He has given me? Or, do I just repeat the same four lines I always say before I go to bed?
- Do I take the time to consider moments of God's goodness and kindness throughout my day?
- When I get up in the morning, do I say, as David did, "*Thank you God for another morning with new mercies?*"

When we slow down and take the time to recognize *charis* in our life, as believers, we will desire *eucharista*. If God's grace is all around us, in us, and working through us, then we intrinsically desire a willingness to show and receive gratitude at recognizing God's grace and are expected to do so.

#### **4. Gratitude: The Practice of Remembering God's Grace**

There is a ritual tucked in the middle of the Passover story that is often unnoticed, and unless you are familiar with the Jewish tradition, you probably have heard little to nothing about it.

Before Passover night, the Lord gave clear and precise instructions to the Israelite people regarding the actual Passover event. After directing the Israelites in the events of Passover night, Moses informs the Israelites that they will be practicing a feast, a Passover feast, as a ritual for all the generations to come.

In Exodus we read that Moses, speaking on behalf of God, tells the people to always keep this command as a law for themselves and their descendants. And when your children ask you – why are we doing these things – this is to honour the Lord who passed over the houses of Israel and though He struck the Egyptians He saved us.

Now, you may be wondering what this passage has to do with gratitude or grace. God knows we humans can be forgetful and even repeat the same mistakes throughout life. He knew the Israelites would eventually forget His extravagant act of grace, and this significant event would be lost on His

people. Their lack of remembrance would lead to a lack of gratitude, and without gratitude toward the Lord for what He had done, their hearts would grow hard, they would forget the Lord's salvation, and they would once again end up as slaves.

So, when the children would ask, "*why do we practice the Passover?*" God wanted the adults to respond by remembering the Passover with gratitude for their salvation. If they wanted to live as a nation of significance and not fall back into a nation of slaves once again, they had to practice remembering God's grace in their life. The Passover was more than just a ritual; it was a practice of gratitude.

Practicing gratitude, receiving, and expressing God's grace is the foundation for building a deep and meaningful life. Gratitude is a fluid virtue, and other virtues, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, thankfulness, and self-control piggyback upon intentionally giving and receiving God's grace – the practice of gratitude. Most, if not all, virtues are built upon living out of a state of gratitude.

Research in a scientific journal in 2018 identified that the desire to express and receive gratitude stems from our biological roots – roots that appear to be embedded in our history, the structure of our brains, and in child development. And although gratitude can be heavily influenced by culture, it also appears to be an inherent part of human nature, even in animals.

Many animals exhibit a desire to receive and express gratitude – this is called "Reciprocal altruism." Animals, such as chimpanzees, fish, birds, and

vampire bats are just some that have been studied. And shown to initiate a behavior that helps another, an unrelated individual, even at a cost to themselves, because they innately know that reciprocal altruism (gratitude) will benefit them later.

Our desire to express, receive, and give grace is what makes life significant. When we ask ourselves what is most important, we must assess within the realm of grace. For, if practicing gratitude is the virtue that surpasses all other virtues, then anything of importance would have to be built upon living out of God's grace and expressing God's grace – gratitude.

To live a deep and meaningful life, we must begin by accepting what is freely given and offering this grace back to God and others through regular practices of grace.

In closing, our challenge this week is both a simple and a profound one;

- Meditate, journal, verbalize, or share with others the things you are grateful for.
- Where have you seen the grace, *unmerited kindness and generosity*, of God in your life?
- And as a follow up, identify areas in your life where you can extend grace, *unmerited kindness and generosity*, towards others.