

Palisades Community Bible Church

Bible Study

Gratitude

September 5, 2021

By; Brent Briggs

“...it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor...” George Washington

Are you a thankful person? Do you often express gratitude? Webster’s defines gratitude as: **the state of being grateful. Thankfulness. A feeling of appreciation or thanks.**

Before I really knew God was ending my corporate career and taking me down the road of starting my own business, all I could see in front of me was a termination letter: “We regret to inform you that, due to organizational changes.....blah, blah, blah.” Here, I had a mortgage, 3 kids (one looking at college) and a tech industry that had committed financial suicide. By not anticipating how two-digit dates would render all computers and software instantly obsolete on Jan 1, 2000, the knee-jerk reaction was to put all resources into programming and installing. Sales would be zero for 2 years. It mattered NOT how many sales records I’d broken for them; they were suddenly done with me.

Matthew 6:19-21 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Sending out resumes yielded nothing. Head hunters did not return my calls. Well-known customers and contacts could only sympathize. I was praying like I’ve never prayed! Before I crashed, however, I made three decisions:

- A.** My God is bigger than this. I put myself unconditionally in His hands.
- B.** I’ll never again allow some company to affect my income and my family.

C. I put my tools in my pickup and started asking folks if they needed repairs around their homes.

All three paid off handsomely!

Proverbs 28:19 Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

While still in the indecision mode, I met with a fellow church member who was a very successful business owner. He generously spent an hour with me, sharing how he got started. He gave me some of his 'secrets to success' and encouraged me to keep prayer in the forefront of my life. As I rose to go, he pulled out a checkbook. I told him I did not come to him for money, that his advice and counsel were truly what I needed.

Proverbs 11:14 Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

He gave me the check, anyway, and told me to earn it back, and encourage someone else with it. I thanked him. Amazingly, it was enough money to get me started with a computer and some other necessary things!! (Funny how God works like that! I thanked God a lot.) A few days later, I ran into a friend at Staples who was looking for a new printer. I was not able to afford one, but was just looking at prices. He asked me if I knew anyone who could use his old printer, which worked fine. WOW! How God works – I thanked him over and over.

A few weeks later, a storm had torn off a lot of the aluminum trim you see on houses, these days. I had been renting a piece of equipment to bend the material to do the repairs, but it was eating up most of my profit. I remembered a friend who had an old one and called him. He said I could use it as long as I wanted to. I asked if he might sell it. He said a hundred bucks would do. A new one would cost me over \$1,000! I drove over right away, and bought it. It's made me a lot of income over the years. My, oh my! How God works!!

Daniel 2:23 I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.

My home improvements business was able to fill a great need in our area, and I was soon on my way (praise God!). A couple of years later, I had tucked away the sum that business owner had given me and I learned of a Missionary prepping to go to Vietnam. I met with him to understand his mission and felt that money would be well invested into his ministry. He accepted it gratefully and thanked me.

I wrote my business-owner friend, and told him what I did. I thanked him for his investments in me and shared how it had helped both me and the missionary. He replied with a hand-written letter thanking me for my correspondence. In it, he told me that he has given dozens of checks to young start-ups through the years and I was the FIRST to have ever thanked him!! Whaaaa?

I was floored. How could such kindness and generosity go without expressing gratitude?? Wow!

Deuteronomy 8:18 But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

I truly hope that, when I get to heaven, I' find the youth leader who persistently invited me to meetings and social events. He got me into a church service in which I walked forward during the invitation. I'd sure like to thank him!

Just last week, when the remnants of Hurricane Ida hit our area, I stopped for coffee during a run to a building supplier. Winds were whipping the rain, when I pulled in to a 7-11. As I walked toward the entrance, I spied a guy huddled low on the sidewalk between the propane tanks and a big trash can. Assuming he was a smoker on break, I paid no attention.

He called out to me, so I walked over. Lying in his lap was a very thin woman, shivering violently, keeping her long hair over her face for warmth. He said they just got out of jail. He offered to pay me \$50 to drive them to Philly. I told them I was on a job and could not... "sorry."

The two were wearing only t-shirts and were obviously very cold. It had been 80 degrees, earlier; I was cold standing out there! I could not help noticing how much the woman was trembling. I asked if she was sick. He said she's just cold. I

told them I'd be back and went to my truck. I always keep extra clothes, so I pulled a couple of sweatshirts from my toolbox.

"This one is a hoodie, so she might be warmer in it." They quickly put them on. I apologized, again, that I could not drive them to Philly, and turned for the door.

I don't share this story to call attention to myself – you would have done the same. I share it because there was no expression of thanks. I did not do it for the thanks, I did it for the same reason YOU would have done it. It was just striking to me that there was no expression of gratitude. It did not make me bitter- just the opposite. It made me THINK. It showed me a far greater need in their lives than needing a warm shirt!

Matthew 25:40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

I've thought about those two a lot and have wondered just HOW COLD it had to be for them to be thankful for the shirts? How complete would the 'blessing' have had to be for them to say thanks? It kept running through my mind.

Then, I got to thinking about myself. How many things have I become "accustomed" to receiving from God? Are my health, my wife, my job, my family, my church, my country so routine that I've stopped expressing gratitude? Have I stopped valuing them enough to take notice and thank God for them?

We look at the treacherous abandonment and horrific fate of the American citizens, and Afghanis who participated with our military, by our own government. Have I become so accustomed to my own peaceful lifestyle that I don't realize just how costly it is to stand for liberty, or for Jesus Christ, in some places?

Proverbs 29: 2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

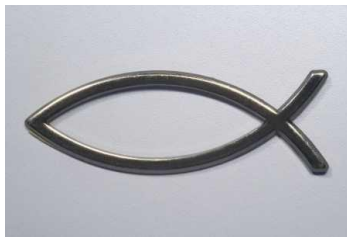
This line of thinking has been very sobering. I find that most of the things that make us safe, comfortable, healthy, and at peace are the very things we take for granted. We DO NOT COUNT THEIR VALUE as we should. In fact, it seems it is the opposite of those things that make us turn to God! Right now, over a thousand of our countrymen wish they could walk down an American street, or sit in their

home, at their table, with their family. Right now, Afghanis who worked as translators, as guides, as fellow soldiers in the fight for a free Afghanistan wish they could count on being alive another day. They have been cruelly abandoned to face certain torture and death.

Psalm 33:12 “How blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he has chosen as his own inheritance.”

I receive ‘Voice of the Martyrs’ each month, and I have to pause to get my head straight before I can read it. As praiseworthy as the stories are, my heart breaks for what they must endure...just to live in some of those places. They knowingly, willingly, regularly, risk death to share Bibles. And, I so often fail to share Christ for fear of a little embarrassment?!!

I find that the more thankful I am for even the smallest things, the more I hurt for those who don’t have anything. My thankfulness for my condition in Christ makes my heart burn for those who have not had the Gospel explained to them. My thankfulness for the ability to sit on a cushioned chair and hear our Pastor preach makes me pray for those who must hide in caves, or in the woods, to whisper the name of Jesus, lest they be killed.



The fish symbol (Ichthys) was a way early Christians could secretly identify themselves to each other. When meeting, one would draw an arc on the ground. If the other completed the ‘fish’, it meant they were a Christian. (See the study; “Who Were the Famous Forty Wrestlers?” for a description of how Nero treated Christians.)

My thankfulness for hearing the Word of God so clearly taught each week, makes me pray for those who know that becoming a Christian means horrendous sacrifice. It also makes me weep for the young people being raised up with no more knowledge of God than that He is a ‘myth.’

My thankfulness for all the Bible studies, small groups and other para-church ministries run by our church's lay leaders makes me weep for those who are just "too busy" or "not interested enough" to give some of their time to such opportunities for growth.

Judges 2:10 And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

Our church supports a missionary who has spent his life translating the Bible into African languages. I love hearing his stories of the gleeful gratitude the people express when they are finally able to read God's word. How many Americans read their Bibles with such joy? How few Americans, these days, even HAVE a Bible?

Matthew 15: 8 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Since I started writing these studies, I not only post them on our website, I offer them whenever I get the chance. If I meet someone and chat about their church, I often find that their church still isn't open, or that they've not returned, or that they aren't too interested anymore. I tell them about these studies and offer to email them. I've not been turned down, yet. The distribution list is growing! My prayer is that they'll be blessed in a way that they'll look to Jesus more often.

I'm thankful that God directs me in this activity each week. I often wonder what is happening with them. I wonder if anyone else is sharing them?

Isaiah 55: 11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

I invite you to pause and truly 'count your blessings.' Name them in prayer...even the small stuff. Thank God for them. It will make you value them more, and perhaps, become more aware of those who also need a blessing.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.