**Attitude of Gratitude**

We have been talking lately about what the trinitarian God has done for us; how Jesus redeemed us from our sinful lives and paid the cost of our sin by dying on the cross for us; how he intercedes for us in the heavenly realm; and how the Holy Spirit helps us to overcome our sin; and last week how the Father loves us so much that he runs to meet us.

When we consider that the all-giving and forgiving father does not measure out his love to us his children according to how well we behave, then we quickly see that our only true response can be deep gratitude.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is that gratitude that I want to speak on today.

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful; a readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness:

Hebrews 12:28 *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe*

I don’t know about you, but I do not spend enough time reflecting on God’s goodness. I tend to finish one job and rush on to the next without stopping and reflecting on a job well done or how God achieved what he did through me. That is the problem with being task focused. Always thinking of the next thing, rather than savoring the achievement or completion and offering thanks to God for his help in getting a job done well.

Karlene and I have a book in our library entitled “Attitudes of Gratitude” by M J Ryan. It is 52 vignettes to be read and savoured. Not to be read through quickly but to sit on each one for a few days to consolidate the learning.

And at the moment, I am doing a meditation series called “Season of Creation 2025 – Star Contemplations”, 10-minute guided contemplations on star clusters, one per week, through Jesuit & Ignatian Spirituality Australia. A time to reflect on the goodness of God and my response to him. It doesn’t tell me what to think but offers questions for me to contemplate.

As a workaholic, I find that I need to be deliberate in slowing down and contemplating God’s goodness and these two tools I have mentioned help me in that.

Gratitude is about recognizing the small things to be grateful for.

Interestingly health science backs up the need to be grateful.

The two emotions most detrimental to health are vengeance and bitterness. Conversely, the most nourishing attitude is gratitude (Hans Selye)[[2]](#footnote-2)

Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other people, according to a 2012 study

Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret. Gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.

Research has shown that gratitude not only reduces stress, but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Feelings of gratitude release positive endorphins throughout the body, creating health (Sharon Huffman) and a sense of wellbeing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “the invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.”

It just takes time to stop and smell the roses, to stop and see the wonderful small things around us.

Brene Brown, an American professor, lecturer and author, known in particular for her research on shame, vulnerability, and leadership, writes: “I don’t have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness – it’s right in front of me if I’m paying attention and practicing gratitude.”

That is the advantage of being in the company of small children – everything they see is new and exciting and they express wonder at the smallest things.

The Canadian writer Amy Voskamp thinking about her children wrote, ““Our kids would get in bed at night and go through all the ways they had seen the hands of God move that day. When they’re counting gifts, they’re really seeing evidence of God everywhere.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

There is a story of a family going to the Grand Canyon, standing at the rim and looking down in wonder at the great hole in the earth. They turn to their smallest child who is staring with wonder at the gravel in the car park. The small things, not the grandiose things.[[5]](#footnote-5)

As we walk by the seashore, gaze in wonder at the stars, or smell the fragrance of a flower, we can sense God speaking to us through His creation. And, seeing Him, we worship and give thanks.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Gratitude is one of the chief ways that God infuses joy and resilience into the daily struggle of life.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Gratitude opens a space that enables beauty to come out of the shadows. [[8]](#footnote-8)

We are taught from a very young age to say thank you when we are given something. We are taught to say grace or a “karakia mo te kai” when we sit down at the dining table before eating. We teach our children gratitude.

But when we are older (and wiser?), we lose that sense of awe and claim it was our own hard work or our own expertise or our own nouse that got things done. We do not recognize where that ability to do or think came from and we do not show gratitude to the one who provided it.

We seldom say ‘thank you” to the God who enables us to get tasks done or achieve success in any field.

Even the world recognizes that being thankful to someone or something is good but Charles Spurgeon reminds us that “the Christian’s life should be one of thankfulness to God.” [[9]](#footnote-9)

Gratitude opens up our eyes to see God’s grace. Only with humility and gratitude can we approach the table of God’s Word to feast there on his eternal love. [[10]](#footnote-10)

The book of Psalms is full of putting praise for our success firmly on the right source. It is full of recognition of what God has done and singing his praises with gratitude in our hearts.

Psalm 9:1 *I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.*

Psalm 52:9 *For what you have done I will always praise you in the presence of your faithful people. And I will hope in your name, for your name is good.*

Psalm 69:30 *I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving*.

In Revelation we hear the multitudes giving praise to God continually, expressing gratitude to him.

Revelation 5:8-10 *When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”*

Our world’s “go-to” is not to God; it is praise of self. This antithesis of gratitude is also mentioned in Scripture

Romans 1:21 *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

When we forget to show gratitude to God for what we have received, and we trust in our own abilities and reasoning and power, we lose sight of that sense of gratitude.

To be thankless is a terrible disregard of God’s goodness.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Without praising the source, we are merely Little Jack Horner pulling out a plum and saying, “what a good boy am I!”

Wake up and be grateful for being alive, for having a home, a bed, food in the fridge, clothes in the drawers or on the floor, for friends and family, for this church family. We have so much to be grateful to God for.

Colossians 3:16-17 with *gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

In this confusing world, we do not always know what is right. It is not always clear whether or not we should do this or that. What we should say is not known in every situation. But there is one word which should never be far from our lips. It is ‘thanks’ (1 Thess. 5:18).”[[12]](#footnote-12)

*1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Even in the bad times:

It’s hard to give thanks for the consequences of evil. Gratitude in bad circumstances goes counter to our natural inclinations. But we are told to give thanks under every circumstance of life (Eph. 5:20).[[13]](#footnote-13)

Ephesians 5:20 *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We are not to complain when we’re in bad circumstances; we are to cultivate a heart of thankfulness instead. If you’re not a thankful person, it may be because you think you deserve better circumstances than those you currently have. But if you got what you deserved, you’d be in hell. That goes for all of us. So we are to be thankful for whatever God gives us. That will take all the sourness out of our lives.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Helen Keller lost her sight and her hearing after a bout of illness when she was 19 months old but was the first deafblind person in the United States to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. She reportedly said “I thank God for my handicaps. For through them, I have found myself, my work and my God.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, quadriplegic after a teenage diving accident commented: My weakness, that is, my quadriplegia, is my greatest asset because it forces me into the arms of Christ every single morning when I get up… As a matter of fact, God isn't asking you to be thankful. He's asking you to give thanks. There's a big difference. One response involves emotions, the other your choices, your decisions about a situation, your intent, your 'step of faith.’

Nick Vujicic, Australian born with no arms or legs: “Often people ask how I manage to be happy despite having no arms and no legs. The quick answer is that I have a choice. I can be angry about not having limbs, or I can be thankful that I have a purpose. I chose gratitude.”

Horatio Gates Spafford decided his family should take a holiday in England, knowing that his friend, the evangelist D. L. Moody, would be preaching there in the autumn. Horatio was delayed because of business, so he sent his family ahead: his wife and their four daughters – 11, 9, 5, 2. On 22nd November 1873, while crossing the Atlantic on the steamship, Ville du Havre, their vessel was struck by an iron sailing ship. Two hundred and twenty six people lost their lives, as the Ville du Havre sank within only twelve minutes. Only his wife survived from his family. Safely on shore she sent a telegram to her husband, which included the words “Saved alone….” Spafford went to England to comfort his wife and commented in his diary: “On Thursday last, we passed over the spot where she went down, in mid-ocean, the waters three miles deep. But I do not think of our dear ones there. They are safe….. dear lambs”. He returned to his cabin and wrote the hymn “It is well with my soul” there and then, the first line of which is, “When peace like a river, attendeth my way..”

And just one more, someone you will not know. Phil Toth from California. He was diagnosed with ALS, better known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. It is incurable. The disease destroys the motor nerve cells in the brain and spine and causes the muscles to deteriorate. Prognosis 2-5 years from initial diagnosis. Yet he was able to write on his website: “I thank God for leading me through this. It has brought me closer to God. It has taught me to depend fully on the Word of God. The benefits of my situation are endless.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Phil lived for 5 years after his diagnosis.

Gratitude lifts our minds off ourselves, our worries and issues and lifts our thoughts to higher things.

If you want to know the shortest, surest way to all happiness and all perfection, tell yourself to yourself to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

But as I said earlier, it takes work to remember to be grateful to God. Samuel Brengle wrote: “Truly, we have much to thank God for, but if we would be thankful, we must set our hearts to do it with a will. We grumble and complain without thought, but we must think to order to give thanks.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

At the end of the day, could I suggest that we take time to Examen the day? Where did I see God in my encounters and busyness of my life this day? What can I praise God for his involvement in our day? What I am grateful for?

Prayer for Gratitude

Dear God, thank you for your amazing power and work in our lives, thank you for your goodness and for your blessings over us. Thank you that your Word teaches us the power of gratitude. Thank you that you are able to bring hope through even the toughest of times, strengthening us for your purposes. Thank you that you are always with us and will never leave us. Forgive us for when we don't thank you enough, for who you are, for all that you do, for all that you've given. Help us to set our eyes and our hearts on you afresh. Renew our spirits, fill us with your peace and joy. We love you and we need you, this day and every day. We give you praise and thanks, for You alone are worthy! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

1. Henri Nouwen *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Peter L Steinke *Healthy Congregations: a systems approach* 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201504/7-scientifically-proven-benefits-of-gratitude?msockid=0b4dfdc4c73b66401931ebb1c6c16796 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ann Voskamp: Seeing God at Work. In, *Study the Word: 12 Christian Leaders on Bible Study*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tommy Tenney *The God Catchers* 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Larry Richards, *The 365-Day Devotional Commentary* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *The Quiet Place* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Mike Riddell *With Every Breath* Highlight Loc 775-77 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, vol. 5* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Marva J. Dawn *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Lynn Garder, *What the Bible Says about Suffering* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Wayne Detzler, *Living Words in Philippians* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Al Detter, *Nelson’s Annual Preacher’s Sourcebook* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. John MacArthur, *The Master’s Plan for the Church* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Nick Vujicic *Unstoppable 48* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Samuel Logan Brengle, *Take Time to be Holy* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)