



Making an “Attitude of Gratitude” More than a Mere Platitude

Since November 22 is celebrated by our nation as Thanksgiving Day, I thought it fitting to invite us to consider the issue of thankfulness or gratitude. Another prompt to select this subject was a recent chapel message I preached to the Middle School from Philippians 2. That is where the Apostle Paul tells the saints in Philippi (and us by extension) that one of the ways they were to manifest the mind of Christ (v. 5) in humility like Christ’s (vv. 6-11) and show themselves to “shine like stars” against the dark backdrop of unconverted humanity, is to “do everything without complaining...” (v. 14a). This was convicting to me personally as I reflected on my tendency to quickly fall into grumbling or complaining about things that don’t go the way I prefer. Such a tendency is really the opposite of what the Lord tells us to cultivate—an attitude of gratitude. Not just an act of gratitude now and then, but an ongoing spirit. Think, for example, of Ephesians 5:20: “... always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And again, I Thessalonians 5:18: “...[G]ive thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” There is a “biblical echo” here of James 1:2-4 to “consider it pure joy, my brothers,

whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” The joy is not in the trial itself, but in the gracious purpose for which God has appointed the trial, the maturing of our faith.

God gives us the “big picture” summary of His sovereignty and wise purpose in all of the details of our lives, both positive and negative, in Romans 8:28ff. This passage tells us that God causes all things to work together for good to His God-loving, purpose-called people—to move forward His sanctifying work of conforming us to the image of our Elder Brother, Jesus. Now, let’s step back and put some of these ideas together. In order to move from a spirit of complaining to an attitude of gratitude, we must reflect on and rely on the absolute sovereignty of God over every molecule in the universe and event in our lives. He is orchestrating them all together, not only for His glory, but for our good as well—to make us more like Jesus. Hence, even the annoyances, irritations, hassles, disappointments, and even the tragedies of life are there by His appointment to make us more like Jesus. So, while the particular event or issue may not itself tickle our joy-bone, we can still be grateful for what God intends to do. Therefore, if

we can keep walking daily “by faith” (what God says is true) instead of “by sight” (the way things may look and feel on the surface in the short-run), we have the basis for being grateful to God for the great sanctifying work He is doing in our hearts and lives every minute of every hour of every day to make us more like Jesus.

That means two things. First, whatever comes into your life, little or big, positive or negative, stop and give thanks to God for it--that it is part of His overall plan to make you more like Jesus. Then ask Him for wisdom to cooperate with His sanctifying purpose. Ask yourself: “What might God be intending in my life by this to make me more like Jesus? What sin might He be exposing for repentance? What weakness might He be surfacing for me to look to Him for strength? What virtue or grace might He want to birth or develop in me through this Providential occurrence?

If we could just keep this on the “frontal lobe” of our minds, it could indeed change the whole tenor of our lives and move our sanctification forward exponentially. It certainly would “put a cork” in the grumbling mouth and would instead enable us to make an attitude of gratitude more than a mere platitude—not just on Turkey Day, but each and every day.

~ Ted Lester