

“Living Gratitude”

By Rev. Jeannette Flynn

Colossians 2:6-7 (Amplified Bible)

⁶As you have therefore received Christ, [even] Jesus the Lord, [so] walk (regulate your lives and conduct yourselves) in union with and conformity to Him.

⁷Have the roots [of your being] firmly and deeply planted [in Him, fixed and founded in Him], being continually built up in Him, becoming increasingly more confirmed and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and abounding and overflowing in it with thanksgiving.



**‘LIVING
GRATITUDE’ IS
ABSOLUTELY
CRITICAL TO BEING
THE MISSIONAL
CHURCH**

So many times we connect being grateful people with turkey and Thanksgiving. Well, it’s a long way off to Thanksgiving – and frankly, I’m thankful for that. However, I have been thinking a great deal lately about the fact that ‘living gratitude’ is absolutely critical to being the missional church.

I meet many folks every day of my life – in the church, in public places and around my neighborhood. I have been stunned by some who have so very much or for whom a great deal has been done for them or given them, and their attitude is one of entitlement. Then I have met others with just as much in their pocketbooks or lives and given just as many breaks and they consistently acknowledge that they are so blessed and intentionally look for ways to give and bless others around them. The only difference? **Practiced Living Gratitude!**

Likewise, I have met those with very little who will probably never hold in their hand what you and I take for granted. Some felt justified in stealing, lying and hoarding the little they had while others just as underprivileged were among the most generous I have known! It is not their poverty or abundance that defines them. It is their living attitude of gratitude OR lack of it that makes the difference.

So while we are preaching the Great Commission, while we are trying to encourage people to get out and impact their community, I keep being reminded that unless we have “living gratitude” as the foundation for fulfilling living out the mission, as Paul was telling the Colossian church, we will only ‘do’ good things like a checklist, but never really be moved to genuine Acts 2:45 living. I think part of getting there is realizing that grace - both in me and through me - is the greatest treasure I’m ever going to receive. When that reality becomes my stake, then I stop worrying about what I’m getting or not getting or what I have or don’t have. I know I’m blessed beyond measure.

**GRACE
BOTH IN ME
AND
THROUGH
ME IS THE
GREATEST
TREASURE
I’M EVER
GOING TO
RECEIVE**

I keep a file I have labeled, “Attitude Adjusters.” It is a file of stories, poems, and cards that I have gathered during my years in ministry. They have been meaningful and powerful to me because God has used them to make ‘adjustments’ in my attitude at times.

Some of them are like two by fours that He used when I was being self-centered and stubborn, worried about whether I was getting my fair share, that I had a right to watch out for me! Some are like the first drops of rain, gentle, cool and refreshing, reminding me of the bounty that God daily pours into my life. I rarely share this file with others because I consider them private love notes from my Lord.

There is one story though that I have read often over the years and share with you now as I think about what "living gratitude" really looks like. "It goes like this"

"A friend of mine in San Diego had just received a new car as a gift from his brother after an enormously successful business transaction. Please understand, we're talking REAL CAR! A new Lamborghini-Gallardo LP 560 - 4. Bright red and shiny!

He was coming out of a downtown shop when he noticed an awestruck 10 year-old...jaw down, eyes wide... just standing on the curb admiring the wheels of wealth.

As my friend unlocked the door and started to get in the boy asked, "Hey, Mister... is this your car?" "It's mine," Ray answered proudly. "Golly... how much did this thing cost?"

"I don't know... I didn't pay for it," he said smiling. The boy's eyes brightened and with breathiness he asked, "Did you steal it?" "Not hardly," huffed Ray. It was a gift, my brother gave it to me."

"Yeah?" queried the boy. "Well, what did he want from you?"

"He didn't want anything from me. He just wanted me to have a beautiful new car. He's my brother. At that the boy's brow furrowed and eyes squinted in disbelief. "You mean... he just gave you this neat, shiny red car... 'cause he's your brother?"

"That's right," said my friend. "Pretty good brother, huh?" "I guess so," came the incredulous. Then the boy added, "Hey Mister... you know what I wish?" Yeah, kid, I know what you wish... but go ahead and tell me anyway."

"Well, Mister... I wish I could be a brother like that!"

Little wonder that Jesus said, "Unless you become as children..."

We often think that if we're really grateful then it will mean we always remember to say, "Thank you." Being grateful is sometimes defined as recognizing what others have done before you, and for you. The pastors and lay leaders that sacrificed and built before your feet ever walked through the doors. And that is part of "living gratitude" to be sure.

Some have even suggested that "living gratitude" is whatever we are given (those Father's Day ties with green and yellow butterflies on them or the bright orange and pink Mother's Day scarf) we express appreciation. And if you're really magnanimous... you wear it, because it is not the gift but the giver that you love!

We would unanimously agree that all of the above is a part of “living gratitude.” But I believe that the Word pushes us to a deeper level. If we are truly people who “live” gratitude, then we not only appreciate what comes to us, but we live in a “giving” posture! “Living gratitude” no longer looks for what is coming my way, from family, friends, congregation or the world around us. “Living gratitude” means we have **tap-rooted** deeply enough into the mind and nature of Christ that we begin finding our greatest fulfillment and joy in living out of giving!

“Living gratitude” is not necessarily natural. Even being saved, sanctified and in love with Jesus may not unlock “living gratitude.” Oh there are generous people to be sure, and I find most pastors and their spouses to be among those very often. However, “living gratitude,” goes way beyond generosity. It reaches deep into the heart, soul, and resources of a life, makes huge withdrawals and gives because that person values others and they value giving.

The example of the life of Christ bears witness to us, that “living gratitude” is not only possible, it is actually God’s plan for our lives! From the wealth of heaven to the poverty of earth, for no other reason than, “He so loved.... That He gave.” From the fullness of life to the shame of a cross for no other reason than, “Greater love has no one, than he would give up himself for another.” From being the sole inheritor of the riches of heaven to paying the ultimate price for us to be joint heirs for no other reason than, “He gave to us in Christ the blessing of every spiritual richness in the heavenly places.”

Beating each other up over worship styles, governance styles, buildings and facilities is clear evidence that we have not yet tapped into “living gratitude.” If we had, the only question asked about worship styles would be, “What would minister to the lost so they could hear God’s love?” The only fuss about who serves on boards and committees and who votes and who ratifies should be, “How can we minimize structure and maximize mission!” The only fighting about selling or keeping or transforming facilities should be about fighting the enemy of souls and using all our earthly resources to serve the communities we live in.

**BEATING EACH OTHER
UP OVER WORSHIP
STYLES, GOVERNANCE
STYLES, BUILDINGS AND
FACILITIES IS CLEAR
EVIDENCE THAT WE
HAVE NOT YET TAPPED
INTO “LIVING
GRATITUDE.”**

Undeniably and repeatedly, God continues to display and call us to “living gratitude!” Our heavenly brother, Christ, certainly has given far more than we can ever hope to repay. All He asks is that we too “live gratitude!” Not foolish giving or giving that ingratiates us to others or magnifies our generosity. Not giving out of what has been given to us, not giving out of what we owe, but giving that comes from the singular posture of simply giving because we have been loved and are now free to love!

As I write this, Google tells me I have 266 days left until Thanksgiving. Feels like I have lots of time to practice “living gratitude” before Thanksgiving. To learn to disconnect gratefulness from just being a thankful person and deeply secure gratitude to boldly fulfilling the mission of reaching those around us – whatever the personal cost. That’s John 3:16.

I wonder if we explored more deeply true genuine biblical “living gratitude” if we could help our congregations live more fully the Great Commission? I wonder if I practiced the Holy Discipline of “living gratitude” If would more closely model a life lived on purpose – on mission? I would love company on the journey.

Praying for you and with you,

Jeannette