
Thankfulness and Gratitude

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some of us were raised by parents who were careful to remind us always to remember our Ps and Qs; that is, to remember to say please and thank you. Of course, sometimes you receive a gift you didn't ask for, and so are led to express gratitude then, too; but most certainly, when you get something you actually asked for, following up with a word of thanks is only fitting. Today on *Groundwork*, as part of our look at some virtues urged on us in the New Testament, we consider thanksgiving—gratitude—as a hallmark of Jesus' followers. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now episode three in a six-part series on some of the virtues Christians are to display in their lives. As we said in the first program, beyond the nine fruit of the Spirit, beyond the virtue triplet of faith, hope and love, Paul and others in the New Testament urge other virtues on us as well; and in this series, we have looked already at compassion and humility. Today we are taking up thanksgiving or gratitude. Still to come in the remaining three programs: Generosity, truthfulness and forgiveness.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is interesting how a lot of these overlap with each other, Scott. In the last episode, we talked about humility; a little bit of gratitude and thanksgiving came up in that one; and so, we are going to dig deep into what thankfulness and gratitude are in this episode, so we can cover it a little clearer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think maybe the first thing to note is that when it comes to gratitude, many of us have kind of this keen, intuitive sense that somehow life is out of joint when people do not express thankfulness. If people don't ever say thanks, it is like some loop hasn't been closed.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is kind of a cultural, unspoken norm. If you don't do it, it is a faux pas. You step on a mine and you kind of damage something...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

If you don't say thank you in return.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if you have ever given somebody a gift...maybe something they weren't expecting, you know...you just give an extra gift to somebody...if you never hear back, right? If you never get a thank-you card...if they

never say something...it kind of stings. In fact, it stings enough that, I know I have said this, and maybe you have too, and others, too: Well, that is the last time I ever give *her* anything; boy, you know, I gave her this beautiful gift. It was handmade, you know; I brought them a beautiful meal, and they didn't say thanks when I dropped it off; they didn't drop a card in the mail to say thanks. When they returned the dishes to the church kitchen, they didn't put a note in there. It is the last time I bring them a meal. It just doesn't feel right, does it?

DARRELL DELANEY

No, it doesn't; and no one likes to be overlooked or taken for granted. It is kind of ironic because we can get pretty upset about that as humans, but no one has experienced that more than God himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we had a great story in Luke 17, that shows how even Jesus could be taken aback by the unclosed loop of someone who got something and didn't say thank you: ¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. (But now here is the key): ¹⁷Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in this passage, Scott, Jesus uses the concept of "faithful foreigner", as he is kind of zinging the people of God here by calling the Samaritan out as a Samaritan; and this person, who you despise, is actually showing the way of gratitude by coming back to Jesus and thanking him; and so, the relationship isn't going to be transactional for this person. They actually closed the loop.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; ninety percent of the people Jesus just healed of leprosy don't say a thing to him; and apparently that lack of gratitude...that lack of unexpressed thankfulness...takes God aback even; but as you said a little while ago, Darrell, I mean, probably no being in the universe has more experience with not getting thanked for the things he does than God himself. I mean, think about it: Do all of us always make sure that we loop back to God to say a word of thanks in response to every single request we make in our prayers? Do we always do that?

DARRELL DELANEY

No; we don't, actually, if we are really honest with ourselves. We would know that we would ask God for the gimme, gimme, gimmes before we said the thank-you, thank-you, thank-yous for the things that he has done. I think that, as an exercise, I want to just start a prayer by thanking God for things before I ask. Actually, Jesus gives us that model in the Lord's Prayer, where we put God in his high place, holy and reverent; and we did a series on the Lord's Prayer, where we showed people Jesus' model, where he acknowledges God for who he is way before he asks for bread or forgiveness or anything else.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; yes, you would like to think you had a one-to-one correlation between every request you make and then following up every one with a prayer of thanks. I mean, you know, I don't know about a lot of people, but we rattle things off: Dear God, please keep our kids safe at school this week; please help me to do well in my job this week; please be with Jill on her algebra test. Then, the kids are safe, things go well at work, the algebra test goes fine; and we go on, and we don't say: Oh, yeah; now, before I go to bed tonight, I gotta say thank you the kids are safe; thank you that the job went well; thank you for the algebra test. We leave a lot of unexpressed gratitude out on the field, I am afraid, if we are honest.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is kind of like, I don't know if this is a short-term memory kind of thing, but we move on to the things that we need next before we even acknowledge that God did close the loop on those other things that we say thank you for. It is challenging for us to, you know, actually think about a lifestyle of what it means to live thankfully.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it doesn't speak well of us when we forget to say thanks to God; but maybe that is...especially in our times of worship, we need to give God thanks for everything, even as we admit to God that we have probably received more than we keep track of most of the time; but maybe that is why the Psalms so often make a posture of thanksgiving...a kind of coverall way to come before God. I mean, we will take a few verses here. Here is one; Psalm 69:30: I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.

So, there is just kind of like a default setting. This is just what I do. I am going to praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.

DARRELL DELANEY

What I like about these psalms, and we are going to read another one here soon, is the fact that these were continued in the context of worship, so that you could thank God for big things and for small things. Look at what it says in Psalm 95:2. It says: Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

So, it is all completely together, singing and thanking God in music.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And very famously from a familiar psalm to many of us; Psalm 100:4: Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

What is interesting about all three of these psalm lines that we just read, Darrell, they are not saying: Give thanksgiving to God for this, this, and this, right? They are not saying, you know, bring a list with you and... No; they are saying: You just generally enter in a posture of thanksgiving; you recognize that you have received more than you have kept track of; you recognize that you haven't kept up with giving thanks to God for every single thing that you have received from God. So, just enter his gates saying: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. And if somebody says to you: What are you thanking God for? You say: Everything...everything.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and that is how we are supposed to live. In just a moment, we are going to talk about the nature of gratitude, and why it is only fitting for this to be the kind of posture that Christians should follow when they follow Jesus. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Darrell, some while back, I realized that in some languages there is this curious verbal link among the words that can mean please, the verb that means to ask for something, as well as what you say when someone thanks you and you say some version of well, you are welcome. So, in German, for instance, the word *bitte* means please; the verb *bitten* means to ask for something; but when you give something to someone, and maybe they asked you politely and said: Bitte—please, could I have that? When you say here it is, then the

person who says you are welcome also says *bitte*. So, *bitte* means please, *bitte* means ask, *bitte* means you are welcome. An Italian friend of mine said the same is true in Italian: *Prego* means both please and you are welcome. So, it is like almost verbally in some of these languages, Darrell, the connection between please...receiving, and thank you and you are welcome...they are all in the same soup.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes; and so, it also happens in Spanish, you know; *gracias* means thank you in Spanish, and *grazie* means thank you in Italian; and so, the *grazie* that is coming through is actually the root word that we get *grace* from; and that is really powerful to see that *grace* is connected to thanks as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And indeed, in the Greek in the New Testament, the word for *grace*, when Paul says you are saved by *grace* and so forth, that is *charis*, but thanksgiving is *eucharis* and as you could already hear there...probably a lot of people...that is where a word that some traditions use for the Lord's Supper comes from. We call the Lord's Supper *eucharist*. We commune with God at the table of *eucharist*. It is a table of thanks.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a table of thanks and a table of remembrance; and so, we see in 1 Corinthians Chapter 10 Paul making it clear. He says: ¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. So, he calls them thanksgiving and participation in Christ's body.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, which is, again, where *eucharist* came from for the Lord's Supper. It is a table of thanksgiving; it is the cup of thanksgiving; and again, we see there what we saw in some of the psalms in the previous part of the program, that were just kind of in a posture of abiding thanksgiving. It is an appropriate posture for Christian disciples of Jesus. I mean, we have already been given the greatest gift in the world, salvation by *grace* alone; and that just puts us into a spot of gratitude. Paul puts it this way in Romans 5:

⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

So, the entirety of our lives as saved people, Darrell, is because we got *grace*.

DARRELL DELANEY

Where I come from, the prayer that we pray is if we don't thank you for anything, God, we thank you for everything; because the very most important thing you have done for us is, even if you don't give us the car, even if you don't give us the relationship, even if you don't give us the job or the raise, you sent your Son Jesus to die; gave us the best gift ever—salvation for our souls—and we thank you for that, if we don't thank you for anything else.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We marinate in God's *grace*; we swim in it. I saw a book a while back: *Grace* is where we live. I like that, and I think they maybe got that idea from a little bit farther down in Romans 5: ¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this *grace* in which we now stand.

I like that idea, Darrell, we are standing in *grace*.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love it, too. There is an old hymn that says we are standing on the promises of God, and we are standing in *grace*. It is literally taking over our lives, and we are steeped in it. It is a beautiful thing, but I am curious to know how conscious are we of the fact that we live this gratitude-filled life?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is always a danger, because grace is invisible, right? I mean, it is a little like oxygen. You and I are breathing oxygen right now, and we need it, but you cannot see it; and so, you don't spend a lot of your days thinking about oxygen. About the only time you do think about oxygen is if you get stuck in an elevator and think: Are we going to run out of air? But otherwise, you know, you just don't think about it. You are in it all the time...in oxygen...but you do not think about it; and grace can be that way, but the danger there is that if we do forget about grace...right...if we do forget about it, then we turn things on their head, because often, I think, what we pay more attention to instead of grace, Darrell, is our own good works and morality.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; grace needs to be the spiritual air that we breathe, and sometimes we do take that air for granted; and if we do take it for granted, like you are saying, we are going to default back to what we did, what we did right, what we did better than that person over there, and we are going to start comparing again to people around us, and trying to pull ourselves up by what we think are our bootstraps in this false meritocracy; but when we realize that our whole life is grace, then we actually can thank God for all the good things that happen to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The good works we do are the fruit of grace, not the root of it. God doesn't grade us on the curve of our morality. He saves us while we are *immoral*; he saves us while we are yet sinners.

So, you have to keep the right things in view, and it reminds me of Moses in Deuteronomy 8. You know, the Israelites 40 years in the wilderness. Well, they knew they were dependent on God, right. Miracle manna had to appear; water had to come gushing out of dry rocks in an arid place. They knew that they were dependent on God, but Moses knew things were going to change in the Promised Land, and so in Deuteronomy 8 he has a warning for the people.

DARRELL DELANEY

He says: ¹⁰When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he had given you. ¹¹Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹²Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase, and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁷You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸But 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.

Do not forget the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Remember and do not forget is the theme line of the whole book of Deuteronomy. You know, when you get water out of a rock, boy, you know God gave it to you. When you get water out of the well you dug, it is like, God didn't give me the water, I did. I dug the well. God didn't give me food, I went to D&W, to the grocery store, and you know, I bought a Stouffer's lasagna and it is in the fridge. God didn't give it to me, I went and bought it with my own hard-earned money. Don't do that, Moses says. Remember grace. Basically, he is saying remember grace; and that is what we are saying. We have to remember that we live in grace; we live neck-deep, marinating in grace; and that ought to foster an ongoing, daily posture of overall thanksgiving.

What could we do even more to make sure that that happens? Well, as we close out the program, we will think about some practical ideas; so, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we have said so far in this program, the third in our six-part series on Christian virtues...and we are looking at gratitude...we have said that our please-God list is usually longer than our thank-you-God list; and we also just noted that sometimes grace gets eclipsed, and we kind of pay more attention to what we have done than what God has done; and that also can short-circuit being grateful people. So, what do we do to avoid those pitfalls?

DARRELL DELANEY

I love the concept that you brought up in the last segment about abiding thanksgiving; and I think one of those things we can do to have an abiding thanksgiving is that we can couple it with prayer; and if we remember in our prayers, then we put gratitude in the front of our prayers. We have been teaching this to our kids. Before they go to school in the morning, we want to make sure that they learn to pray, and they thank God for everything that he has done before they ask him to protect them as they go in all the things; and so, praying is very important, and rejoicing is important. It is also brought up in Philippians 4.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

A lot in those few verses, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, man; it is so good. So, scripture is not redundant. We know this when we study scripture as pastors, but also, anybody who studies scripture, when you see words repeated, it is God's underline—it is God's all caps—it is God's emojis. He wants you to understand: Rejoice; I say it again: Rejoice! If we live a life of rejoicing, we don't have much room for complaining. We actually become more grateful when we rejoice in what God has done. Even in the negative times, we can find ways to rejoice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I like, too, that Paul says even when you are asking God for stuff, do that with thanksgiving. Present your petitions with thanksgiving. What does that mean? Well, maybe it is an anticipatory thanksgiving, you know; I am asking you for this, God, and I am doing it with thanksgiving because I am thinking you are going to give it to me; and I have a little retrospective thanksgiving. You have given me lots of things I have asked for in the past. So, even when we are saying: Please, God, we are saying thank you, God, at the same time. You can do it that way, Paul says. You can present your petitions with thanksgiving. Do that.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is beautiful because, I mean, faith works this way, Scott. Faith speaks as though things have already been completed. So, you have already received what you ask God for when you pray; and so, you can thank him for that, but you can also thank him for what he has already done. But then, Paul turns the challenge over to us thinking about the things that are good and pure and acceptable. So, he wants our minds to be focused on positive things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Accentuate the positive: true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, praiseworthy...a big, long list there. Think about those things, right? I mean, it is so easy in our lives, and let's admit we all have things that are challenging.

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We live in a challenging world...a war-torn world...there are things that are genuinely distressing; things we genuinely have to lament in our prayers—true. We do not bracket that out just to try to be happy-clappy all the day long; but we try to counterbalance the sad realities with a focus on what God has already given that is good: That is noble, true, right, pure, lovely, admirable, praiseworthy; and you think about that stuff long enough, you are going to be in a posture of gratitude. That is one idea. Pray that way. Teach your children, as you said, Darrell, to pray that way.

A second idea is a practice of that I learned about from my colleague, the theologian Neal Plantinga, who has a new book coming out on gratitude very soon. Neal encourages people—husbands, wives, roommates, family members—never let a day end without asking each other what is one thing that happened today for which you are thankful? And Neal says he and his wife do this every night before bed, and even on days that kind of were lousy in other ways, even on those days, they could always each find one thing they are grateful for.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, what we did in our family is that we created a shoebox...I don't know if I spoke about this before...but we put the shoebox...we decorated it, and on the front of the box we put the big letters: FJTD—For Jesus To Do. And so, we would put prayers of all kinds in the box, and at the end of the week, or at the end of the month, we would open the box and say: Look at what God has answered! He answered that prayer. You were praying for friends; he gave you two. You were praying for this anxiety on the test; look, you passed the test. So, we are able to reflect on what God has done, and we started doing a tradition of thanksgiving, where we put a cloth out that we could write things that we are thankful for, so over the years we would see all of the things that we are thankful for God to do in our lives, and he has done in our lives. The idea is to have a long memory of God's grateful and faithful service in our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But again, even on days that are challenging. You know, the day I worked on this script for this *Groundwork* program, Darrell, my son's car had broken down at my parent's house, so I had to arrange for a tow truck to bring it to the shop, and it was kind of a hassle; it interrupted the day; and yet, even in the middle of that, I was grateful. The tow truck operator was friendly and courteous. He had a good sense of humor. I was grateful we have tow truck operators, you know. You don't need a plumber and an electrician or a tow truck driver every day, but thanks be to God when you do need them, God has called people into those things; and so, even on a day where things are a little challenging, you can still find reasons to give thanks.

DARRELL DELANEY

I had a leak in my basement I had to call a plumber for, and I was thankful to be able to call a plumber, because I would have messed it all up.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am really glad that God has given people with those kinds of skills. When we live as people who are in a posture of thanksgiving, we actually stand in direct opposition to the world's way that says we should complain about all the things that are going wrong. So, we are actually in protest of what the world says we should do when things don't go our way, when we give thanks in the midst of challenges.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Colossians 2:6: So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, (now this line:) and overflowing with

thankfulness.

I like to think of Barbara Brown Taylor, the preacher said: Think of your life like a multi-tiered water fountain. The grace of God bubbles at the top and it spills down into the next tier of your life and gives you great gifts; then that spills down into the bottom tier, where you can do things that make other people grateful. You serve them in humility, like we talked about in the previous program of this series. We overflow with thanksgiving. We noted earlier the connection between the word for grace: *charis*; and the word for thanks in Greek *eucharis*. There is another word there, Darrell: *charismata*, which is the word for gifts—gracelets—mini-graces.

DARRELL DELANEY

Graces are the gifts that God gives us. So, all of life is a gift, and we often end these episodes by saying thanks be to God. So, it would be pretty weird if we didn't say thanks be to God at the end of this one. So, we will end it by saying: Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we learn about the Christlike virtue of generosity. Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com. There, you can tell us what *Groundwork* means to you and make suggestions for future programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

Groundwork is a listener supported program produced by ReFrame Ministries. Visit reframeministries.org for more information.

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Printed on February 22, 2025