

LET'S JUST BE GRATEFUL TODAY



There's something fundamental about gratitude. Something basic. That's why we teach our kids to say "thank you" and make them write thank-you notes when someone gives them a gift. It's hardwired into us, I think, that it's only right to be grateful when someone does something for us. But just because it's hardwired into us doesn't mean that we always remember. Though God may have created us with the capacity for being grateful, the damage sin does in us includes turning us inward. The consequence is a self-centeredness that tends to notice only what we don't have while forgetting the blessings we've been given. The result is that we become unable to be grateful.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:15-17 TNIV).

There are basic spiritual sicknesses for which gratitude is really the only existing remedy. Selfishness. Bitterness. Hate. Greed. Lust. All of these have a common cause: obsession with

ourselves and what we perceive to be lacking in our lives. Gratitude, however, calls our attention to what we have and to how much of it has been given to us by God for no other reason than that He loves us. When we're thankful, our attention is on Him and what He has blessed us with.

You can talk about how thankful you are, but gratitude is one of those inward attitudes — like love and faith and hope — that aren't real unless they bring about a difference in the way we live and the things we value.

That's why God told the Israelites to give thank offerings — not because He needed their cattle and goats, but because they needed to express gratitude that cost them something. And you don't think, do you, that just because we're not Israelites we're somehow exempt from gratitude that costs us something? You don't really think, do you, that we who have heard the good news of Jesus, who have been saved from 'death' by His sacrifice, have only to nod and wink and say, "Thanks, God?"

God has done for us something that we could never have done on our own. He's forgiven us, saved us from 'death', given us hope, and made us a part of what He is doing in the world. He's done all this through an amazing gift: He gave His Son to the world and allowed the world to do with Him what it would.

I'm concerned that we don't always consider the implications when we use the phrase "in Jesus' name." Maybe it's too often something we just tag onto the end of our prayers, but to think about doing everything we do "in Jesus' name" sets your head spinning! To do everything in Jesus' name is to take His agenda for our own. It's to allow His priorities and values to supplant our own. To do everything in Jesus' name is to claim not a minute of your time, not a part of your life, not a piece of your heart as your own. It's to open your life to His scrutiny and live it out by His command. That's a huge commitment, to be sure, and not one that can be honored with only one decision. It works itself out over the course of our lives.

For a start, though, you can begin to imagine what it would look like if you did your work, not for the company or firm that employs you, or for your own financial security, but for Jesus. Would it change your priorities? Would it alter the way you spent your time? Would your interactions with your colleagues

be different? How about with customers or clients? Would you work more? Less? More responsibly?

Or what might it look like if your school days were lived out in Jesus' name instead of in the name of pleasing your parents or teachers or your desires for securing admission to a better college or a higher-paying job? Would it change how hard you worked? How honest you were? How you lived with your fellow students, teachers, and administration? Would it make a difference in the goals you worked toward?

And how would it change life with your family if you were committed to doing everything at home in Jesus' name? How about friendships? How would things at church be different?

It's impossible, of course, to repay God for the gift He has given us. Thankfully, that's not what He asks. He asks us to show our gratitude simply by offering Him what we have. By doing the things that we do each day in Jesus' name. While that's not always easy, it's something we can do.

So, whatever you have planned for today, whatever is on your schedule — go ahead and do it. Finish that project at work. Clean your house. Take a break. But do it, do everything you do today, in the name of Jesus. Offer it to Him: to His use, to His glory, to His pleasure.

That's what worship is, of course: gratitude that costs us something:

"I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." That, Paul told the Christians in Rome, is "true worship" (Romans 12: 1).

Our calling is to offer ourselves — our energy, our priorities, our possessions, our passions — as a thank offering to the God who has shown such mercy to us.

What do you think people will remember about us? My prayer is that they will remember me as someone who was saved by God's grace through Jesus and who lived a life of thanksgiving. I want them to remember me as someone who had gratitude in her heart and who did everything she did as an expression of

thanks to God. Not so they'll speak well of me, but so they'll remember the God whose grace for which I was so thankful.