

Psalm 105:1-5

A Habit of Gratitude

Have you heard the story of the young man who was informed by his doctor that he only had six months to live? In shock, the young man asked if nothing could be done. After all, he was so young. There was so much he had wanted to do! The doctor thought for a moment, then gave the young man the following advice. He was to marry the ugliest, most cantankerous woman he could find. One guaranteed to nag and complain every day. Next, he was to buy the most beat-up old pickup he could find and move to the plains of Oklahoma. Somewhat skeptically the young man asked, "Doc, are you sure that this will help me live longer?" "Not at all," replied the doctor, "but **it sure will make six months seem like a lifetime.**"

I was reminded of that story after reading of a medical study of chronic complainers. You know the type. Their lumbago is always acting up. When you go with them to a restaurant, the waiters either don't come by often enough, or else they won't leave you alone long enough to eat your food. This type of person could win the lottery, and then complain about the taxes that they would have to pay. The chronic complainer can find fault with anything.

Anyway, a study was done to compare how constant complaining affects a person's health. According to the researchers, chronic complainers **live longer** than do those with sweet, agreeable dispositions. The study claims that their cantankerous spirit gives them a purpose for living. They begin each day with a challenge to see how many things they can find to grumble about. They derive pleasure from making others miserable. And, apparently, they live longer. Personally, I suspect that they don't actually live longer – it just seems that way to everyone who has to put up with them!

Whether you realize it or not, both gratitude and grumbling are learned habits. You simply develop a habit of focusing on the good things around you or the things you don't like, the things that can make you happy, or the things that add hardship to your life. It becomes a habit to be grateful, or to grumble. Unfortunately, it seems to me that it is a lot easier to fall into the habit of complaining. That is why we need the special encouragement God gives us in His Word to be grateful. Every now and then, we need someone to stand up and say with the Psalmist, "*O give thanks unto the LORD!*" We need to be reminded that God is good. We need to be prodded to remember how He has blessed us.

There are three simple truths that I want us to learn from this psalm about being grateful.

I. Gratitude must be Directed – "*unto the Lord*"

Gratitude must be expressed TO someone.

It's not enough to just *feel* thankful.

We must express our thanks to someone, being grateful for what they have done. That is why we call it "Thanksgiving." We *give* thanks. We don't just *feel* thankful.

We have to **tell** someone what he or she has done that has benefited and blessed us.

There are many who deserve our thanks.

Only God deserves our thanks for many things with which we are blessed.

You can thank God for the air you breathe, the rain that waters the soil, and the abundant variety of foods that grace our table.

You have God to thank for a healthy body, a sound mind, eyes that see, and ears to hear.

You can thank Almighty God for an inspired, preserved Word of Truth upon which we can build our lives.

And you have no one to thank but God for the precious gift of salvation.

Yet, others deserve our thanks for the many good things they contribute to our lives.

When was the last time you thanked a friend for their friendship?

How long has it been since you thanked your mate for their commitment to your marriage?

Have you ever thanked your employer for giving you a job that puts food on your table and a roof over your head?

How about thanking your parents for all the sacrifices they have made to make you successful?

II. Gratitude must be Declared

Gratitude must be expressed.

The psalmist tells us to "give" thanks, to "make known" what God has done. We are to "talk" of all His wondrous works. If you are grateful, tell it, sing it, shout it, but don't bottle it up inside of you. Don't take it for granted that people will know you are grateful, or what you are thankful for.

Both gratitude and ingratitude are contagious.

Don't you find it somewhat depressing that people almost always know of our complaints, but seldom know how we have been blessed? We are so quick to share our latest trials, no matter how trivial, but it takes a "big blessing" before we think to share something good. Can you imagine how different life would be if we spent as much time in sharing our blessings as we do in airing our complaints?

Something strange has been happening in the Zimmerman family that has the potential to be revolutionary if we will allow it. Nathan is old enough to want to participate when we pray before our meals. So, we let him. I can tell you it has been a humbling, yet refreshing experience to hear him. He thanks God for everything. He thanks God for letting him go walking at the mall with his mother, for allowing him to visit Mrs. Lidster or Mrs. Olson, for being able to play in the dirt with a new tractor – just whatever seemed to him to be special that day. Nothing big or exciting. Just a lot of little things. I think we could all learn from him. I hope that it is a lesson I do not soon forget.

III. Gratitude must be Deliberate

It is not enough to be grateful TO someone, but we must also be grateful FOR something.

The psalmist mentions God's "deeds," His "wondrous works," and His "marvelous works." Beginning in verse 6, he begins to list **specific things** God had done in the life of the nation. He thanked God for His **covenant**, His **servants**, His **salvation**, and His **sustenance**. He didn't say, as we are prone to do, "God, I thank Thee for Thy many gifts. Amen." He knew what God had done, and he rehearsed them in this Thanksgiving psalm.

I am afraid that too often we don't spend enough time reflecting upon the specific ways in which God has blessed us. But to be truly thankful, we must be grateful FOR something.

If we would not be careless with God's blessings, we must be careful to remember them.

The psalmist calls his people to "remember" the works of God. (Verse 5) He knew how prone we are to forget. He knew how easy it is for us to focus on our trials, to be weighted down with care, to overlook the many, simple blessings we enjoy in life.

I would like to encourage you to perform a simple exercise. Some time soon (today would be best) get a piece of paper and divide it into three columns. Give each of the columns one of the following headings: God, People, Things. Then, begin to list the things under each column for which you can be thankful. Don't rush through it. Take time to *remember*. When your list is completed, take it before God in prayer and deliberately, one by one, thank Him for the things on your list. Then, you might want to thank the people on that list for how they have been a blessing. Write them a note, call them on the phone, or give them a hug the next time you see them.

Conclusion

I want to close with a brief poem. Let it remind you to be thankful in all things.

The park bench was deserted as I sat down to read
Beneath the long, straggly branches of an old willow tree.
Disillusioned by life with good reason to frown,
For the world was intent on dragging me down.
And if that weren't enough to ruin my day,
A young boy out of breath approached me, all tired from play.
He stood right before me with his head tilted down
And said with great excitement, "Look what I found!"
In his hand was a flower, and what a pitiful sight,

With its petals all worn---not enough rain, or too little light.
Wanting him to take his dead flower and go off to play,
I faked a small smile and then shifted away.
But instead of retreating he sat next to my side
And placed the flower to his nose and declared with overacted surprise,
"It sure smells pretty and it's beautiful, too.
That's why I picked it; here, it's for you."
The weed before me was dying or dead.
Not vibrant of colors, orange, yellow or red.
But I knew I must take it, or he might never leave.
So I reached for the flower, and replied, "Just what I need."
But instead of him placing the flower in my hand,
He held it mid-air without reason or plan.
It was then that I noticed for the very first time
That weed-toting boy could not see: he was blind.
I heard my voice quiver, tears shone like the sun
As I thanked him for picking the very best one.
You're welcome," he smiled, and then ran off to play,
Unaware of the impact he'd had on my day.
I sat there and wondered how he managed to see
A self-pitying woman beneath an old willow tree.
How did he know of my self-indulged plight?
Perhaps from his heart, he'd been blessed with true sight.
Through the eyes of a blind child, at last I could see
The problem was not with the world; the problem was me.
And for all of those times I myself had been blind,
I vowed to see the beauty in life, and appreciate every second that's mine.
And then I held that wilted flower up to my nose
And breathed in the fragrance of a beautiful rose
And smiled as I watched that young boy, another weed in his hand...
About to change the life of an unsuspecting old man.