

"New Attitudes for the New Year - Be Grateful"

1 Thess.5:16-18

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Rev. Billy Song - St. Mark's Presbyterian Church

Today we are wrapping up our sermon series on "New Attitudes for the New Year," and this morning we are looking at our final attitude and that is the Attitude of Gratitude!

We're wrapping up our series today because next Sunday is Valentine's Day with it's own special theme and then the Sunday after that - we are already in the season of Lent which begins on Ash Wednesday which this year is Feb. 17th. On Ash Wednesday, we will have an evening service and I hope you all can join us.

So today we are wrapping up our sermon series on "New Attitudes for the New Year," and in case you missed any of the past sermons, you can catch them on our website both audio and transcripts.

The Gratitude Attitude

For our final attitude, I'd like to talk about the Attitude of Gratitude and what I hope to do by talking about gratitude is to awaken your sense of gratefulness and deepen a heart of thanksgiving.

Let me begin by sharing a personal story.

Some time ago, I received a very nice gift from a member of our congregation. It wasn't my birthday - it wasn't Christmas, the person gave me that gift to show their appreciation.

So naturally, I wanted to say "thank you" to her and so I pulled out a thank you card and wrote down a few words to express how thankful I was, and then I put it in the mail.

Well about a week later, what should I see in my mailbox at the church office? It was a "thank you" card from that very same person, thanking "me" for sending her a "thank you" card. Can you believe it? Who sends a "thank you" card for receiving a "thank you card?"

Well, not to be outdone, I was very tempted to pull out another "thank you" card, and send that person a "thank you" card for sending me a "thank you" card, for sending her a "thank you" card!

But you all know what would have happened right? That person would have sent me a "thank you" card for sending her a "thank you" card for sending me a "thank you" card for sending her a "thank you" card for sending me a gift in the 1st place! (And so, I decided right then to put an end to the vicious cycle of gratitude!)

It's very natural to send a "thank you" card for receiving a gift, but have you ever heard of someone sending a "thank you" card for receiving a "thank you card?"

Who does that kind of thing? I'll tell you who... a person who has an attitude of gratitude! A person who recognizes every act of kindness no matter how big or how small.

Our Bible passage for this morning, comes from Paul's letter to the Thessalonian church, 1 Thess. 5:16-18. It's a well known verse and I'm sure many of you are familiar with it and this morning I'd like to share two different translations, first the Message translation and the NIV translation.

*"Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live."
(The Message)*

"Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (NIV)

1 Thess. 5:16-18 is a great passage! It's one of those passages that we like to share a lot and one of those passages that reminds us what kind of people we should be.

We should be a people of prayer. We should be cheerful - joyful and in every kind of circumstance and no matter what happens, we should give thanks and give our thanks to God.

Amen?

That's the kind of person that I want to be and that's the kind of attitude I want to have. An attitude of gratitude and a grateful heart.

Of all the different kinds of attitudes that a person could have, having an attitude of gratitude is one of the most important ones. Listen to what a few people have said on the topic of gratitude.

Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.

William Arthur Ward American Author

Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough.

Oprah Winfrey - TV Talk show personality

He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things he has not, but rejoices for those which he has.

- Epictetus, Greek Philosopher

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.

- Cicero Roman Statesman

O Lord that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thanksgiving.

- William Shakespeare Playwright

Give thanks for a little and you will find a lot.

African proverb

It is not happy people who are thankful, but thankful people who are happy.

- pop culture quote

From famous playwrights to philosophers, from TV talk show hosts to elder statesmen, from cultural sayings around the globe to pop culture quotes, the theme of gratitude is a universal attitude.

And for the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonian church, he reminds all of us who live in Jesus Christ, that we should not only live but also breathe and walk in spiritual gratitude.

There's a story about a man who found a barn where Satan kept his seeds, ready to be sown in the human heart.

He found that the seeds of discontent were more numerous than the others and he learned that those seeds could be made to grow in just about any person and in just about any condition.

But when Satan was questioned, he reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which he could never get those seeds to grow.

"And where was that?" asked the man? Satan replied: "In the heart of a grateful person."

Gratitude is a weapon against Satan. It is an antidote to greed. It is a prescription for depression. It brings out the best in us as well as in others, and grateful people are more connected to the world they live in, to the community they belong to, and spiritually - they are more connected to their Creator and their God and their Savior who is Jesus Christ.

This is the attitude that I want for all of you to have this week and not just this week - but all the time.

Gratitude Takes Nothing for Granted.

Developing an attitude of gratitude doesn't happen just all of a sudden. And gratitude for some people doesn't come naturally. Just like little children who need to be taught how to say "thank you," developing an attitude of gratitude takes a little bit of effort.

So where do we start? Start with the little things.



Gratitude takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakened to new wonder, and to praise of the goodness of God"

- Thomas Merton

There's a quote from Thomas Merton that I would like to show to you.

Gratitude takes nothing for granted. Gratitude takes no one for granted.
Gratitude recognizes every gift - not just the big ones from God but also the little ones too.

This past week, I was at Jersey Mike's (a fast food restaurant) picking up a sandwich. It was around 12 noon and so it was very crowded. There were people outside - waiting to go in, as well as people inside - waiting to come out.

Well, the person coming out noticed someone was coming in, and so that person, held the door open for the person coming in. But the person going in - noticed a person coming out, so he held the door open for the person coming out. That person coming out - notice that I was going in, and so that person held the door for me.

It was like a chain of events where people were showing a little act of kindness and each time someone held the door, the other person said "thank you!"

So naturally, as I went inside - I noticed someone coming out and you know what that person did? That person completely ignored me and walked out that door, like it was my job to hold the door open for him!

(No "thank you" card for that guy! So ungrateful!) Gratitude takes nothing for granted - even the smallest of gestures.

Gratitude notices the little things.

The spouse who warms up the car for his wife and kids.

The mom/dad who wakes up early to pack lunch for their kids.

The co-worker who replenishes the community refrigerator,

The janitor who locks up.

The server who brings the food.

The little boy who wanted to share his small lunch with over 5,000 people.

Like the African proverb said:

"Give thanks for a little and you will find a lot."

Be Grateful for everything - even difficult things

Secondly, be grateful for everything. Or as the Apostle Paul put it, "give thanks in all circumstances."

It's only natural to be thankful when something good happens to you and it's also natural to be thankful when people treat you kindly, but Paul in our passage isn't talking about that - Paul is talking about being thankful to God - no matter what happens.

How could he say such a thing you might wonder?

Well, in a different letter to a different church, Paul wrote the following:

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me.

That is why, for Christ's sake, "I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

2 Cor. 10:7-10

That was Paul's way of giving thanks in all circumstances. He wasn't thanking God, for sending the thorns in the flesh, but in that experience (as difficult as it was,) Paul found something to be thankful for.

Be thankful for the "one step backwards" that will help you later on take those two steps forward."

Be thankful for the set-back that set's you up for all the steps ahead.

Be thankful for that difficulty that keeps you from becoming conceited.

Be thankful for that rejection to seminary that keeps you humble,

Be thankful for the rain that canceled your morning plans but caused all the flowers to grow! And don't just be thankful, be thankful to God.

There's a famous poem, called "Footprints in the Sand" that you might be familiar with.

Well in that poem, the author talks about two sets of footprints, hers and the Lords.



But then she noticed that during the hard and difficult moments of her life, she noticed only 1 set of footprints.

Puzzled and confused she inquired the Lord about it and asked: *"Why, when I needed you most, you would abandon me?"*

And the Lord replied: *"My precious child, I love you and would never leave you, never ever during your trails and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."*

That poem changed my perspective. It also changed my attitude and how I looked at my past journey and when I struggled with things.

Be grateful for everything. "Be thankful in every circumstance, for that is God's will for you in Christ.

There's an inspiring story about a woman named Corrie Ten Boom.

She was a part of Dutch Christian family who were all arrested by Nazi German for helping Jews who were trying to escape during the Holocaust.



"God, thank you for the fleas."
- Corrie Ten Boom

For their punishment, they were sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp, where she and her sister were assigned to Barracks #28, which was infested

with fleas - 100's and 1000's of fleas which bit them all night long.

It was unbearable and there was nothing they could do. But one night, she and her sister were reading their Bible, which they had managed to sneak in, and the passage they read was our passage for today - 1 Thess 5:16-18 the part that talks about *"Give thanks in all circumstances."*

So Corrie's sister said to her: *"God wants us to thank him for the fleas."*

But Corrie disagreed with her sister and couldn't believe what the Bible was saying: and so she protested: *"No way! That's taking religion just a little too far. I'm not going to thank God for these infernal fleas!"*

Well, after a little while, their nightly Bible study started to attract more and more women to Barrack #28 and Corrie was worried that they might get caught.

And so, she asked another woman why none of the guards bothered to check in on their barrack, and the woman replied: *"It's because of the fleas. They won't come near this place for exactly that reason."*

That's when Corrie Ten Boom remembered what Paul wrote in the letter and after that she started to pray: *"God, thank you for the fleas."*

(Corrie not only survived the concentration camps but went on to write about her experiences.)

Be thankful in every circumstance. Be grateful for even hardships because it's in those hardships we draw closer to our God.

That was certainly the case for the prodigal son in a parable Jesus told. He was far away from home. He had burn though all his money. He was working at a job, that was feeding dirty pigs, cleaning up after them - pining after what they were eating.

He had hit rock bottom - there was no lower he could go, but that's when he realized how much he needed God, and so he started to head back home - he even prepared a confession.

Closing.

My challenge and encouragement to you this week is to develop and deepen an attitude of gratitude.

Some people find it helpful to start jotting down one or two things a day that they are thankful for (a gratitude journal.)

Others have found it helpful to practice kindness to others or volunteer out in their community or to give to those who are less fortunate.

William Arthur Ward once said:

"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."

Let us go into a new week with attitudes of gratitude.