

Three Reminders for Cultivating Gratitude

It's easy during the holidays to lose perspective and forget how much God has blessed us. Luke 17 tells the story of 10 men who had much for which to give thanks. As lepers, they were complete outcasts. You couldn't get any lower in society at this particular time in history because leprosy was an incurable disease steeped in stigma and misunderstanding. Jesus crossed the cultural barrier when He miraculously healed them. Yet only one took the time to return and give thanks to God.

At that moment, Jesus asked a probing question that He still asks us today: "Where are the other nine?"

How insensitive and selfish of those nine that they would not express gratitude to Jesus after He changed their lives forever. How like me and you to forget to thank our God. We're so quick to come to the Lord when we're in times of crisis. Then when He comes through, we dare to blame it on dumb luck. We often fail to stop and think God was a part of our miracles.

There are three things we must realize in order to give gratitude its proper place in our minds:

God is in control.

To give thanks to God, we must realize He is in control of all circumstances surrounding our lives. It's easy to give thanks for things we perceive as good; it's not so easy to give thanks for what we perceive as bad. But God, in His sovereign wisdom, works all things together for the good of those who are called according to His purpose. Apostle Paul tells us. "All things work together for good for those who love God" (Rom. 8:28).

God is looking out for our eternal benefit.

God loves us and always wants what is best for us. Satan will try to convince us otherwise but even if what we are going through at present is painful, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NIV) says, "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." We can be confident that God loves us and works on our behalf, even when we can't see the complete picture.

God is wiser than us.

Though we wouldn't admit it out loud, our actions reveal we often think we're wiser than God. He tells us what is best and then we go our own way. He has blessed us with free will and we foolishly use it to chase after lesser things. God spoke to the prophet Isaiah and said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). When we realize, like Isaiah, that God's ways are higher than ours, we will reap the benefits of lives lived in gratitude to Him.

Jesus asked the grateful, healed leper, "Where are the other nine?" Today, He asks us, "Have you given thanks to God for all the things He has done for you?" Our blessings are innumerable—good health, a free country, a safe home, the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance awaiting us in heaven, to name a few.

This year, let's use our Thanksgiving tables as communion tables, providing a visual reminder of the incredible sacrifice Jesus made for us. The Lord has given us Thanksgiving as a time to revisit the cross and the risen Christ, as well as countless other blessings. May we not take any of them for granted. {eoa}

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