

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

The apostle Paul was one grateful person. I am sure this is one of the reasons why he was effective in his ministry. He had an “attitude of gratitude.” Like many of his letters, Paul began his letter to the Corinthians this way: “I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:4 NIV). Not only does Paul continually give thanks in his letters, but many times in scripture he strongly encourages us to do the same: “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 KJV).

One of the reasons we come to worship is to give thanks. As we sing hymns and say prayers, we are giving thanks to God. Why? Not only because God is worthy of our thanksgiving and worship because there is healing power in gratitude. There is substantial medical evidence that suggests that a sense of gratitude is critical to a healthy life. Gratitude can make all the difference in the world. It can transform us and our relationships. There is power in gratitude.

A pastor tells of how he saw the power of gratitude firsthand while eating in a mall food court several years ago. It was during the Christmas holiday season. He said, “The area was packed with people. It took a while to find a table. When I sat down to eat my meal, I noticed a family sitting next to me. They had just sat down to eat as well. They asked their young daughter, maybe four years old, to say the blessing -- and she prayed for everything but the kitchen sink. She prayed for Santa and Rudolph. She prayed for her parents, the weather, and her dog. She covered everything. As she prayed, something interesting happened. It got very quiet in our section of tables. When she finished her prayer, people had smiles on their faces. For a moment, the stress of the holidays had been replaced with gratitude.

He goes on to say, “the little girl’s prayer changed our mood. I think everyone sitting near that child felt more grateful not only for the food in front of us but also for the blessings around us. We had peace and joy in our hearts.”

If only we could feel that way more often. We live in a grumpy, selfish world. It is so easy to get caught up in ourselves and what we don’t have. It’s so easy to get irritated over what people do or don’t do. And it’s so easy to get discouraged over what doesn’t work out.

Maybe that is where you are today. You struggle with having an attitude of gratitude and you want that to change. You want to be more at peace with life and experience more joy and thanksgiving.

How can we capture the peace and joy of gratitude more often in our lives? Well we can go back to scripture. Once again, the apostle Paul shows us exactly how to experience more joy through gratitude. In the first chapter of Philippians, Paul gives us the key: “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:3-5).

Paul is expressing his gratitude for all the special people in his life and ministry. As he remembered his friends, he was filled with gratitude -- and that gratitude led him to pray a prayer of joyful thanksgiving to God. By his example, Paul shows us how to experience gratitude in our hearts. If you struggle with feeling grateful, just take a moment to remember your blessings. You’ll discover rather quickly there is much to be thankful for. For example, you can begin today by remembering what you have.

What would your life be like without your blessings? Kent Crockett, in his book *I Once Was Blind, But Now I Squint*, tells about his father who had to undergo radiation treatments for throat cancer. Rev. King Duncan commented on the book, saying, "The therapy damaged his taste buds so that he couldn't taste food. His inability to enjoy a meal made eating a dreaded duty. The doctors told him his taste might return after the treatments were finished, but no one could say for certain.

"Weeks passed, then months. Every meal became a forced feeding to keep him alive. After eating flavorless food for over a year, he sat down for dinner one evening. Reluctantly, he forced the fork inside his mouth and discovered that his taste had returned. What most people would call a bland dinner had become the best meal he had eaten in his life.

Through losing his taste and then regaining it, [his] father learned to relish each morsel as never before. He became thankful for the ability to taste because he now had a reference point. He would never forget what it was like to eat tasteless food.

"You don't have to lose something in order to be thankful," says Crockett. "You can develop a taste for your blessings by simply realizing what life would be like without them."

Think about some of the blessings you enjoy. Imagine you lost those blessings. Now imagine you found them. Just think how grateful you would be! Someone said that "Christians are people who do not have to consult their bank account to see how wealthy they are."

Do you want to feel thankful? Remember what you have. But I also encourage you to remember who you have. What would your life be like without the people you love? In the book *A Window on the Mountain*, Winston Pierce told of his high school class reunion. A group of the old classmates were reminiscing about things and people they were grateful for. One man mentioned that he was particularly thankful for Mrs. Wendt, for she was a special teacher who had taught him not only school lessons but also lessons about life. Acting on a suggestion, the man wrote a letter of appreciation to Mrs. Wendt and addressed it to the high school. The note was forwarded and eventually found the old teacher.

About a month later, the man received a response. It was written in feeble handwriting and read as follows: My dear Willie, I can't tell you how much your letter meant to me. I am now in my nineties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, and feeling very lonely. You will be interested to know that I taught school for forty years and yours is the first letter of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning and it cheered me as nothing has for years. Willie, you have made my day.

Remember the special people in your life. Take time to write them a note or to give them a call. This will help you feel the power of gratitude. Most of all, the best way to experience the power of gratitude is to remember who has you.

Consider the statement, "If it had not been for God..." how would you complete it? Think about it. Where would you be right now without God? Empty? Without purpose? Lost? Reflect on God's faithfulness to you. I also encourage you to write down what you share about God's faithfulness. Writing down the ways you are thankful to God can be a powerful resource down the road. If you ever get lost in life, just take out what you have written about God's faithfulness to you -- and it will encourage you.

If you remember what you have, remember who you have, and remember who has you, you will always be filled with gratitude.

All glory be to God.