

4G Connection

Gratitude, Growth, Generosity, & Grace

July 6, 2025



Today I'll be sharing some memories to hopefully help strengthen your connection with Christ and our community.



I'm home for the summer from *Ozark Christian College*, where I'm working on my *pastoral degree*. But the *Skagit Valley* and *this church* have been my *home* my *whole life*. I have *lots* of stories here, from *VBS field trips* to *worship team practices*, to the time *Noah* saved my life in *Leavenworth* (but you *may* have heard that story from him *before*). All that to say, I *miss* being here and *making memories* together! And this *morning* I'm asking: **What have you forgotten to be grateful for?**

Now, I want to share a memory that stands out: The summer after 5th grade, I was headed up to *camp Firwood*! I was excited, but when we arrived, there was a problem: a recent Norovirus outbreak had triggered stricter health checks. So, I was asked, "Has anyone at home been sick recently?" and in a rare instance of complete honesty from 11-year-old Gabe, I said yes. I was told I couldn't stay, and I was *devastated*.

So I got back on the bus with just the driver and his wife, *Randy* and *Debbie Larson*. I marched my sad little self to the back row and began to sulk. They could tell I was miserable, and decided to do something to help. So we made a surprise stop for ice cream. When we got back on the bus, I sat up front, a *little* less sad and a *lot* more grateful. That simple, generous gift changed my whole attitude!

Small acts of kindness like this spark gratitude, which is a key part of being connected to Jesus and each other. This does make me wonder, though, what other memories have I forgotten to be grateful for? And that begs today's question: **What have you forgotten to be grateful for?** After all, a lack of gratitude is often a lack of memory! Just as I need to remember this memory to be grateful for it and grow from it, we must always make an effort to **remember gratitude, pursue growth, practice generosity, and embrace grace**. And those are the four "Gs" we're exploring today! *Gratitude, Growth, Generosity, and Grace*.

So, let's start with **gratitude!** It's not just a feeling, but a transformative power that ignites true growth. It softens our hearts, strengthens our memory, and reshapes our perspective. Because, like I said a moment ago, just in case you've already forgotten, **a lack of gratitude is often a lack of memory!** And of all we have to be grateful for, what we most often forget is *who the Lord is* and *what He's done for us*, which is why we see so many reminders to remember throughout Scripture!

I will remember the deeds of the Lord – Psalm 77:11 NIV

Remember how the Lord your God led you – Deuteronomy 8:2 NIV

We always thank God for all of you – 1 Thessalonians 1:2 NIV

Our friend Paul echoes these verses to the Philippians when he says:

I thank my God every time I remember you – Philippians 1:3 NIV



Likewise, to *this* church, I say the *same*: I thank God every time I remember you! As believers in Philippi supported Paul, you’ve supported me, guiding and challenging me in my walk with Jesus, for which I’m very grateful! You see, Paul’s modeling gratitude here and showing us how to express it. And this **gratitude isn’t just the occasional politeness, it’s an essential spiritual posture** that we ought to live out daily. So, who has God used to bless your life, and how will you express your gratitude? When reflecting on what the Lord’s done and on the people He’s placed in our lives, **it should be hard not to be grateful!**

However, God doesn’t call us to sit in the past. Gratitude grounds us, but God calls us to grow from that place of gratitude so that something fruitful can spring up from our lives! Which brings us to **growth!** Gratitude and growth aren’t the ultimate goal, though. Because **growth is not about arriving, but abiding in Jesus ... daily.** Paul tells us in Philippians where growth begins:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **[in other words, if there’s anything for which to be grateful]** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, **[and growing into]** having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind – Philippians 2:1-2 NIV



Paul’s encouraging us to grow in unity and perspective, and this **growth only occurs when we remain rooted in Christ.** But how do we grow? Well, Jesus Himself says:



“Remain in Me, as I also remain in you ... I am the Vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I **[remain]** in you, you will bear much fruit; **[Because]** apart from Me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers” – John 15:4-6 NIV

So, if you want to grow, **you need to stay fully connected to Jesus,** not grafting yourself in and out as you please. I’m no botanist, but I know this would result in *lots* of dead, fruitless branches. Which means you’re either growing in Him or cut off from Him. So, in what ways can you be seeking Christ-like growth? Because **God calls us to ongoing growth through daily obedience,** which includes spiritual practices like Scripture, prayer, and fellowship. **Growth fades when we become lazy and it weakens when we let gratitude slip.** Paul emphasizes this same point to the Colossians, encouraging them to:

Continue **[living]** your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith ... and overflowing with thankfulness. – Colossians 2:6-7 NIV

You see, **gratitude and growth work together to strengthen our relationship with Jesus.** And Peter echoes this by saying:

Just as our dear brother Paul wrote ... Be on your guard ... [and] grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. – 2 Peter 3:15-18 NIV

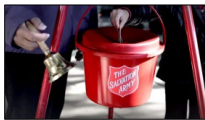
These verses remind us that **we never outgrow God's grace**. We never reach a point where we don't need the Lord's mercy, forgiveness, and love. A few years back, when I was on staff, I was asked to help with *Arktoberfest*, our Halloween event. I was in charge of all things food. And while I love to cook, I'd never worked an event this big. The Ark ladies were a great team who knew what they were doing. And not wanting to seem out of place, I pretended I had everything under control. Even though I was struggling. So I tried to figure it out alone, until the stress caught up with me. And I finally asked for help. **Asking for help was humbling, but it was a launch pad for growth!** I'm grateful for those who helped me, because without the growth that came from this experience, I wouldn't have been ready for the bigger roles and challenges I face today. So, as we root ourselves in Christ, our growth flows from gratitude – a slow, quiet, daily process rooted in the grace we've already received, which enables us to help others grow. And that's because it's the natural outpouring of what God has already given to us. After all, **His generosity is the source of everything!** So, gratitude and growth inspire **generosity!**



[Jesus even says] "It is more blessed to give than to receive" – Acts 20:35 NIV



Put another way, **the more we grow in Christ, the more we reflect His generous nature**. Back in Philippians, Paul talks about generosity combined with a Christ-like perspective, saying:



Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus – Philippians 2:3-5 NIV

This type of generosity isn't limited to *offering* baskets and ringing bells. **To be generous like Jesus is to give the same things He gives us**. Things like our time, resources, forgiveness, and encouragement! So many people in this church family have been so generous to me, especially with their time and mentorship. From my friends' parents opening their homes for meals and advice, to older, wiser folks offering perspective on life. One person in particular comes to mind.

We met volunteering at Royal Family Kids Camp. And we became unlikely friends. That friendship led to conversations regarding career and calling. And one day she offered me a job at a local nonprofit. Her generosity with that opportunity and her mentoring helped me discover my passion for that kind of work. And it ultimately led me where I am today, learning how to pass along that same generosity by serving Jesus and His Church. So we ought to give these kinds of things because:

You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion ... overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God ... [so that] others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else – 2 Corinthians 9:11-13 NIV

And this is because our generosity is a natural response to God's grace, and **Christ-like generosity doesn't settle for good intentions or charitable feelings**, but multiplies into good works.

And these good works point others toward a God who's full of grace! So, how can you be generous in ways that point others to Jesus? **Gratitude** starts the journey. **Growth** sustains it. **Generosity** expresses the Father's love. And God's **grace** holds it all together!

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people – Titus 2:11 NIV

All are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:24 NIV

God is so full of grace, and He'll never run out! In fact:

It is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith—and this is not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God – Ephesians 2:8 NIV

But **resting in God's grace is a privilege we often overlook**, even though without His grace we'd be lost in a confusing world full of noise and pain. But by God's grace, we can hear Him through the noise, and we can see the firm foundation that all four of these "G's" are built upon: the *Gospel*! And the Gospel isn't just the starting point of faith, it's the sustaining power of a life rooted in Christ ...



Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage ... made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:6-11 NIV

We must never forget how humble and selfless Jesus is, so that we can stay rooted in Him. The Good News, the Gospel, is that **the cross was not the end for Him, and it's just the beginning for us!** He rose from the grave after dying for our sins, defeating death forever, and He's offering you new, everlasting life! Even if you think you're too far from Jesus, He still loves you and still wants you! I mean, look at the guy whose letters we've been exploring today! Paul, who used to seek out and kill Christians, said ...

Jesus came to save sinners of whom I am the worst – 1 Timothy 1:15 NIV

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us – Romans 5:8 NIV

And this Gospel is more than just a call-and-response; it's the only thing that can carry us through life! Without the Gospel, gratitude is shallow, growth is impossible, generosity is meaningless, and grace is nowhere to be found. *This church has been a vibrant reminder to me of the Gospel and how **God uses ordinary people to show His love to the world.*** I've seen it. I've felt it. The gratitude I have grounds me, the growth it produces strengthens me, and generosity is simply my joyful service to a grace-filled and selfless Savior. So, family, who has God used to bless your life, and how will you express your gratitude? And in what ways can you be seeking Christ-like growth? And how can you be generous in ways that point others to Jesus? And are you resting in the Lord's grace? In other words, what have you forgotten to be grateful for?