

No Thanks

The Fear of Being Indebted

November 27, 2022

I'm Bruce, and I'm a recovering Pharisee. And *today* we're continuing examining one of the crucial elements of any recover program: *gratitude*. And we'll be facing the often ignored and unexplored *fear* and *tension* of actually *being* thankful.

But *first*: **If you knew God's will, for you, would you do it?** Like, *today*? Well then ...



Always be *joyful*. Keep on *praying*. No matter what happens, *always* be *thankful*, for this is God's will for you who *belong* to Christ Jesus. – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NLT



So why are we *less* than *always joyfully thankful*? Well, the prophet Jeremiah made a fairly astonishing statement, saying:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. – Jeremiah 17:9 NIV



See that? There's ***no cure for self-delusion, which expresses itself in self-righteousness.*** Just a *recovery program*. Cuz we're in this battle *together*.



You don't have to *pretend to be* what you're *not*. Cuz ***we're not here to play church, or look religious,*** but to *celebrate* God's *genuine goodness*, and ***to inspire each other to shine our light to show our gratitude.***



Ever have someone give you an extravagant gift, and you said something like: "That's too much; I can't accept it." *Why?* What's the *problem*?



What's going on *down deep* in our ol' *subconscious*? How about the ol' debate over who's paying for the meal? "I got it." "No, let *me* get it," "It's *my* treat." "You get it *next* time." ***Why do we fight for the privilege of paying?*** You say, "I don't." Well, you're either very *mature* ... or a *mooch*.

This is purely an *adult* predicament. Imagine your *kids* acting this way at McDonalds. "I believe you picked it up *last* time, mommy." ***When do we outgrow this?*** *Why* do we outgrow this? *Fear*. Of *what*? Being *indebted*. It's *perplexing*, even *frustrating*, for kids to watch. But what do *they* know? They're like, "Take it and *thank* 'em! It's *free* money! What's *wrong* with you?" What *is* wrong with us? Cuz, we don't see it as *free*. Cuz, ***deep down, we desire to be indebted to no one.*** Ever.

We tell ourselves we're just very *generous* and *giving* and *unselfish*. That's a good *Pharisee* ... *not* a good *recovering* Pharisee. We don't respond that well to gifts, *unless* we can offer something of equal or greater value in return. Otherwise ***it makes us feel weak and needy and oh-so vulnerable to the giver.*** Ever heard the expression "No good deed goes unpunished"? Well *now* you know *why*! "Put your wallet away! *You* will be *indebted* to my unselfishness."



Now, we're fine being *thankful*, as long as we *think* we *deserve* what we're thankful *for*. Which is *crazy*, because **we can't actually be thankful for something we deserve**. You don't *thank* your employer for the "gift" of your paycheck each week – you *earned* it. But if there's an unexpected bonus in there, *wow!* Thank you. You're *acknowledging* how *valuable* I really *am*.



A typical server who receives a *typical* tip is typically **gratified, but not all that grateful**. We confuse the two. Tipping is an expected part of their compensation. Which is why it's *insulting* to find a tip that's *less* than typical.

Generally, **servers will happily express their "gladitude" that you did your duty** and left what was expected for what they feel they deserve. But imagine the surprise of finding a crisp \$100 bill on top of a 30% credit-card tip! From a *stranger*. *After* they leave. It's above and beyond with no way to repay – *and* no weird subconscious sense of vulnerability. There'd be rejoicing in the kitchen! *Why? They're 100% grateful*. *Why?* They see it as being *beyond* what they *deserve*, but without the *baggage*. And *that* wonderful *perspective* is a *struggle* for Pharisees when it comes to God, because it *forces* us to *feel* the *vulnerability* of being *totally* and *utterly* indebted.

Pharisees like to deal in the realm of *paychecks* and *proper compensation*, because **we like the idea of deserving God's mercy ... for being good people**. Whereas *recovering* Pharisees begin to see every good thing as **benevolent bonuses and gracious gifts**. It's a much more *wonderful* life, to *really* realize, when it comes to earning our keep or deserving God's grace, that:

No one will be declared righteous in [God's] sight by *observing* the law; [but] rather, [get this] *through* the law we become *conscious* of *sin*. – Romans 3:20 NIV

The law was *designed* to show us our *hopelessness*, so that *thankfulness* could *abound*. And:

You were *wearied* with the length of your way, but you did not say, "It is *hopeless*"; [because] you found *new life* for your strength, [until your recovery] – Isaiah 57:10 ESV

For Christ is the *end* of the *law* for righteousness to everyone who [actually] *believes*. [in undeserved and unrepayable, Christ-for-righteousness] – Romans 10:4 ESV

... that in *Him* [alone] we might become the [astounding and unrepayable] righteousness of *God*. – 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

As opposed to **self-righteousness that offers gratified gladitude when God does as expected**.



Do you like feeding ducks? Just for the *joy* of watching them *receive* from *your hand* and *heart* what *they* did *nothing* to *deserve*? I *do*. *Unless* it's a flock of *Pharisees*. *They* think our *benevolent bread* depends on how *well* they *swim*, how *often* they *flap*, and how *sweetly* they "QUACK". But *recovering* ducks realize that **the bread depends solely on the goodness of the bestower**.

Like with us and the Bread of Life. In fact, **every paddle, flap and quack should be an expression of joyful thankfulness and gratitude – not gladitude.** Cuz when it comes to picking up *salvation's tab*, He's got us *completely covered* and we're *eternally deep* in His *debt*. But, sadly, Pharisees sabotage themselves – and those around them – by turning *righteousness* into something *seemingly attainable* through all manner of *flapping* and *quacking*. Which is why ...



To some who were confident of their *own righteousness* ... Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a *Pharisee* and the other a *tax collector*. The *Pharisee* stood up and prayed about *himself*: ‘God, I thank You [Oh, good] that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers [Oh, not good]—or even like this *tax collector*. [And here's why] I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’” – Luke 18:9-12 NIV

You see, a Pharisee establishes an attainable standard to measure their *own righteousness*, as well as the *unrighteousness* of *others*.

This self-deceiving system allows us to *evaluate* ourselves by *comparing* ourselves to *anyone* who *doesn't* measure up, *can't* measure up, or couldn't care *less about* measuring up. But when you know that you know that *you've* been given *unfathomable, unrepayable mercy*, you don't care *who* else gets it. Give it to the whole *world!* But **if you think you're in any way deserving it, then they're diluting what you're using to base your self-worth.** Our thankfulness is so tied to God's grace that **the absence of overflowing gratitude is a strong indication we've fallen off the wagon.** Which is why *practicing* being more like Jesus must *always* be in *response* to the *grace* that *He gave* that *we're grateful* for. **The response must come from grateful astonishment.** Like that *tip* on *top* of the *tip*.

Jesus used so many examples of astonished thankfulness in His parables. Like the astonishment of the poor who are invited to a *lavish banquet*, because the *guests* were too *preoccupied!* (Mt 22:1-14) Or the astonishment of the workers who get a *full day's pay* for an *hour's work!* (Mt 20:1-16) Or the astonishment of the *prodigal* who's welcomed with a *robe*, a *ring*, and a *party!* (Lk 15:11-32)

And Jesus compares *heaven's revelry* to a *found-sheep party* thrown by its *loving shepherd*.

When he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and ... calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me’ ... in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine [self] righteous persons who do not [see a] need to repent. – Luke 15:5-7 NIV



But imagine if, when the shepherd got home, the sheep called out from his shoulders, “Look who *I* found!” That's *almost* as *absurd* as *us* saying *we* found *Jesus*. He's our Lifeguard and, at best, we finally stopped *thrashing* and fighting against Him so He could save us. So often in the Gospels, the *teachers* and *Pharisees* are on the opposite *side* of the *tax collectors* and *prostitutes* ... and *Jesus*. Regarding the *prostitute* at His *feet*, Jesus said to Simon the *stunned Pharisee*:

“The one to whom *little* is *forgiven*, *loves little.*” – Luke 7:47 NAB

Which is why an awareness of *our faults* and *God's forgiveness* is crucial to *conscious gratitude* over *unconscious gladitude*. It isn't that Jesus tolerates sin. **He just wants Pharisees to admit their hypocrisy, embrace humility, and join the party** before a *loving, gracious, merciful* God.

Oh, give *thanks* to the *Lord*, for *He* is good! For His *mercy* endures *forever*. Oh, give *thanks* to the *God* of gods! For *His* mercy endures *forever*. Oh, give *thanks* to the *Lord* of *lords*! For His *mercy* endures *forever* – Psalm 136:1-3 NKJ

How often do you get down on your *knees* and *thank* God for *all* that He's done for you?

[Cuz] Three times a day [Daniel] got down on *his* knees and prayed, giving *thanks* to his God [even though he was exiled and trapped in pagan nation] – Daniel 6:10 NIV

So, maybe tonight, **try thanking God for every good thing you can think of, that you've never thanked Him for before.** It'll be a fun exercise. Like joining a *party*!

Give thanks to the Lord for His *unfailing* love – Psalm 107:8 NIV

Give thanks to the God of heaven. *His* love endures forever. – Psalm 136:26 NIV

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever. – Psalm 30:12 NKJ

I will give thanks to You, Lord, with *all* my heart; – Psalm 9:1 NIV

I will give thanks to the Lord because of *His* righteousness – Psalm 7:17 NIV

Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; – Psalm 140:13 NKJ

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? [Did you know that's what the Lord calls *communion*?] – 1 Corinthians 10:16 NIV

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises – Psalm 92:1 NKJ



It's "God's will" *even!* But will you *do* it? Like, *today*. I've found that **a thankful heart neutralizes most flaws of a Pharisee.** Turns out, *thankfulness* is a valuable *weapon* to battle *resentment, pride, fear, selfish ambition, superiority, hypocrisy, and you name it!*

I mean, **why bother hiding your sin if you're truly thankful for God's understanding and forgiveness and on-going guidance?** Why demand the *head* of the table when you're *truly thankful* for simply being *invited*? Why *lust* after someone *else*, when you're *truly thankful* for the *one* the *Lord* brought into your life ... to *provoke* you to *change*? However, like *children* – which is what Jesus *calls* us – **we often need to practice it before we start to feel it.** It took me a long time to realize how addicted I *was, and am, to self-righteousness.* You know, **an alcoholic in recovery doesn't stop being an alcoholic. They simply stop drinking.** Which requires a daily decision. So to with *us* recovering *Pharisees* in *our* ongoing *struggle* with the *sin* *within*.

You know what someone in heaven and someone in hell have in common? Neither one thinks they deserve what they got. But, as you hopefully know, only one "lucky duck" is *right*.