Enough Gratitude

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I received forwarded email that I appreciated and wanted to share.

1. Once, all villagers decided to pray for rain. On the day of prayer all the people gathered, but only one boy came with an umbrella. That's FAITH.

2. When you throw a baby in the air, she laughs, because she knows you will catch her. That's TRUST.

3. Every night we go to bed, without any assurance of being alive the next morning but still we set the alarms to wake up.

That's HOPE.

4. We plan big things for tomorrow in spite of zero knowledge of the future. That's CONFIDENCE.

5. We see the world suffering, but still we get married and have children. That's LOVE.

6. A young girl wipes her face, grins, and hugs her daddy after finishing the last bite of a chocolate covered ice cream cone they had shared. That's GRATITUDE.

7. On an old man's shirt was written a sentence: 'I am not 90 years old.... I am sweet 16 with 74 years experience'. That's ATTITUDE.

I can’t think of a better way to live than holding to each of these qualities – faith, trust, hope, confidence, love, gratitude - and wrap them all up in an attitude of joy, charm, and grace. Although each of those qualities deserves its own time, I want to spend just a bit of time this morning specifically on gratitude. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV) *give thanks in all circumstances...*

As Children of God, we have many lessons while we are in these bodies. Difficult lessons in all the areas we have mentioned: how to love, how to maintain the right attitude. But one of the most difficult is being grateful in all circumstances. Boy, that is a tough one for me.

Oh sure, when wonderful things happen I can be as grateful as the next person. Give me a chocolate covered ice cream cone and I’ll smile with the best of them. But I don’t think that is what God’s will is for me. “OK, Patrick, I just want you to be thankful when good things happen; when you are surrounded by pleasantness and beauty and nice people.” I could be wrong, but I think there is more to what God desires for me and desires of me.

Listen to more of the 1 Thessalonians section: *15 Don’t pay back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.*

It is that last phrase that is the key: Do not restrain the work of Spirit; do not block the flow of Christ’s love and joy and peace and gratitude that wants to express.

How many times have I extinguished Spirit’s movement through my life with a poor attitude and lack of thanks? I complain about so things because I compare myself to others in the wrong direction. I compare myself with people or situations that I judge to be in a more favorable situation. I bemoan that someone is not treating me the way I want to be treated. So I compare that treatment to other people who are treating me with respect and kindness -- I compare “up”, to a more favorable circumstance, and in so doing I strengthen my justification for complaining because I have set myself up to be the loser, to be the disadvantaged one.

If you can identify with that, let me ask this … suppose we take this hypothetical situation of being mistreated and compare it with someone who has been injured or hospitalized or even killed for no other reason than their skin color, or their accent, or their religious belief. Doesn’t our self-proclaimed persecution seem a little less important? It’s not that our mistreatment is trivial; it’s just that it seems less critical in comparison. A sore leg is less severe than what the paraplegic is experiencing. Our cough is less of a challenge than the person with lung cancer.

But Patrick, I’m sick and need better health. Yes, let’s work on that, but you are not in the hospital; you are conscious and alive. Thank You, God. But I’m broke and need more income. Yes, that is a challenge; let’s work on that. But in the meanwhile, you’re not living on the street and you have shelter, clothing, and food. Thank You God!

What I am lovingly trying to say is this: yes, things could be better, but things could always be worse; let us be grateful for what we have. There are people worse off than us … like most of the world.

It is sometimes helpful to stop thinking about ourselves, stop being alone with our own thoughts, and get out of ourselves by connecting with others. If we feeling depressed about our situation, it might be beneficial to help someone with greater challenges than ours. Volunteer at a hospital or a care facility. We will either learn that their challenges are significantly greater than ours, or we will refuse to volunteer by saying, “I don’t want to be around those poor sad folks.” Even in this refusal there is an acceptance that what we are facing is less devastating than what they face. We may not stop complaining, but we are slightly more appreciative of our circumstance; we’ve allowed more of God’s light into our hearts.

We have exactly what we need in our lives for the lessons we need to learn. When we stop comparing ourselves to others, either “up” or “down”, we become lighter of heart. Everyone has their own unique circumstances for growth in Spirit.

Mary grew up in Kansas and a bit of wisdom was passed along by her Mom: “You get what you get, and you don’t throw a fit.”

One of my greatest challenges with gratitude is recognizing that what I have is sufficient and I should be grateful for it. Like many people, however, I tend to think I need more than I have; this applies to musical instruments, technical gadgets, and to calories. This might be a sign of ingratitude. I need one more serving of Mary’s green bean casserole. It’s not that I’m unthankful for the first two plates; it’s just that I am not thankful enough.

Exerpted from a story by Bob Perks is this poem:

I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright.

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more.

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive.

I wish you enough pain so that the smallest joys in life appear much bigger.

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.

I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you possess.

I wish you enough ‘hellos’ to get you through the final ‘good-bye’.

The challenge for many people is that although we possess enough – enough things, material possessions, enough joy, or enough love to be sustained, we remain unsatisfied. Satisfaction comes when we allow Spirit’s free flow into our lives. When we can rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances, then we move into satisfaction.

God gives us strength, but are we the strongest person on earth? No. But we have strength enough, and we can be grateful for our strength. Are we the smartest person on earth? No. But we are smart enough. Thank You, God. We are rich enough, healthy enough, capable enough, wise enough, open enough, loved enough, loving enough, joy-filled enough, Christ-filled enough … and we are satisfied when we are grateful enough.

My prayer is that we can look at who we are, what we are, what we have, where we are and where we are going, and be gratefully satisfied – knowing that we are still in the process; we ain’t fully cooked yet. God still has plans for us. There’s still more of God’s good to come to us and more of God’s good to come from us. So in the meanwhile … Thank You, God!

Let us pray…