

Thankful Counselors

By Wendy Wood



An often overlooked practice is the one of thankfulness. It seems like we believe thankfulness to be a childish activity that we mature on from to higher levels of theology and worship. We focus on getting our kids to say “thank you” at such an early age that often, it seems, we think of thankfulness as a childish way of responding. Once our children are consistently saying “thank you” when we give them something or serve them something, we move on to teaching higher level skills of thinking and doing. But, the Bible is clear that thankfulness is something we should never outgrow. The lists that include ungrateful people in scripture are among the worst lists of sins and evil people. It’s not merely the words “thank you” that make the difference, it is the heart attitude of grateful dependence that changes an ungrateful person into a godly person.

Let's consider some of the ways God talks about unthankful people in His word. 2 Timothy 3:1-2 says, "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy..." Here, ungrateful people are listed among those who love themselves and money more than God. They are proud and arrogant. Ungrateful people are those who think and feel that they deserve good things and good treatment from others. Because they think so highly of themselves (proud and arrogant), they are unable to see the ways that God blesses them through other people. Because they love themselves and money, they are focused on getting more for themselves and are never satisfied with what they have. Unthankfulness is both the root and fruit of selfishness. It is the vicious cycle of thinking you deserve more than you have so you are not thankful for what you receive, which leaves you wanting more.

Another text that describes unthankfulness is Romans 1:21. Paul is describing the downward spiral of sin that takes people from not acknowledging God in creation and His attributes on display for the world to see to worshipping themselves and giving themselves over to complete depravity of every sexual indulgence. "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened." The link between honoring God and thanking God cannot be separated. When we see and know God for who He is, thankfulness is the only appropriate response in worship. God has graciously revealed Himself in creation, His word, and His Son. As we see His eternal power and divine nature on display, gratefulness for all that God is wells up inside of all His children. In Romans 1:19, God calls not honoring Him not giving Him thanks both ungodly and unrighteous. Ungodliness is the attitude of not thinking about God and unrighteousness is the actions that result from that. An ungrateful attitude, an ignoring of who God is and what He does, leads to the unrighteous actions of greed, lust, disobedience, heartlessness, slanderous, and being unappeasable, just to name some (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

On the other hand, a thankful person is humble and knows his dependence on God. He knows that He would have nothing and not even exist without God. God is the giver of life, breath, and everything (Acts 17:25). All that we have and all that we are, comes from God. It is God who knit you together in your mother's womb (Psalm 139) and it is from God that every good and every perfect gift comes (James 1:17). There is literally nothing that is not a gift from God. First Corinthians 4:7 asks, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" Unthankfulness is a prideful response that lies and says "I did this" or "I'm responsible for this blessing". Ultimately, ungratefulness takes credit for what God has done.

As Biblical counselors, we must cultivate thankfulness in our counselees. We cannot change their hearts. We cannot make a proud person humble or an ungrateful person thankful. But, we can lead them to scriptures that open their eyes to truth. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." It is God's will for us to be thankful for whatever situation He puts us in. The circumstance is God's will for us, or whatever is happening would not be happening. Therefore, we can be thankful in all circumstances because a good, wise, loving, sovereign God has placed us there.

Psalm 106:1 tells us to "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good!". God never stops being good. We are often tempted (and so are our counselees) to think God is not good when our circumstances are bad. However, we must fight the temptation to give into this lie. God is good. All the time. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31). God gave his very own Son. Paul argues from the greater to the lesser in making this argument that God will not withhold what we need. If God gave us His most precious gift in His Son, is He going to withhold something small that we need? Of course not!

First, we need to get our counselees thinking about the cross and sacrifice of Christ. As they meditate on God's love and goodness seen in the cross, a thankful attitude

should start to grow. Have your counselees meditate on the costly sacrifice of Christ taking all the sins of believers, past, present, and future sins, on Him as He suffered and died for them. **Second**, have your counselees study God's purpose for suffering. When our counselees see that God counts suffering as a gift (Philippians 1:29) so that we are drawn closer to Christ and His heart, suffering takes on a great purpose. Our counselees who love God will desire to give thanks for that which matures their faith and develops perseverance, character, and hope in Christ. **Third**, have your counselees spend time daily writing down things that they are thankful for. This typically starts as a list of things that are enjoyed. But as your counselee matures in this discipline, encourage him or her to think of how God has given intangible gifts, even difficult circumstances or relationships, as an act of love. Maybe it's a conversation that involved uncomfortable conflict but ended in the counselee sharing the hope of Christ with someone. Maybe it is a time when he or she is struggling with computer issues that result in your counselee stopping to pray and committing to trusting in God when things are not working out as hoped. **Fourth**, make sure your counselee thanks God for each gift. Thankfulness is given to someone. When we pray and give thanks, we are acknowledging that God is truly sovereign and good. We are not simply thanking the universe or thinking positive thoughts. God is the giver of gifts and the receiver of specific thanks.

A thankful person is humble and truly knows that they are nothing without God. A humbly person is a godly person who lives in constant awareness of their dependence on God. This godly living produces the righteous acts of giving thanks and living obediently to God.

What do you need to give thanks for?