

GRATITUDE: BEING THANKFUL FOR GOSPEL OPPORTUNITIES

The work of making disciples for Jesus Christ is the great mission Jesus has given all His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It should be considered a great privilege for any disciple to take part in fulfilling this mission. Unfortunately, it is possible for the challenges of gospel work to seem burdensome. It is also possible for the gospel worker to take too much credit for the successes of the gospel. To counteract this, you must be diligent to maintain an attitude of gratitude and give God all the glory in every situation. Consider, therefore, some Scriptures to help you be grateful for all gospel opportunities.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:2-10; 2:13-16

Paul had endured some great challenges to preach the gospel in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). As he thought about this opportunity, he did so with gratefulness that God used him to share the gospel with the people there. Even though there were people who caused suffering, he saw the way God worked in the lives of those who accepted the gospel! He was grateful for the way they received the message as being from God. He was grateful for the way they had changed. He was grateful for the way they endured difficulty for Christ. And he was grateful for the way they were sharing God's word!

COLOSSIANS 1:3-8

Notice Paul's appreciation in three directions according to this text. First, Paul was thankful for God. After all, God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who provides the hope through Christ and the good news (gospel) that gives salvation (Romans 1:16), and gives His grace. He is also the One who causes good fruit to be produced in those who hear and obey the gospel (John 15:1-8; 1 Peter 1:22-25; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7). Second, Paul was thankful for the Colossians' receptiveness to the gospel and the fruit that they were producing in Christ. As Paul knew what it was like to watch people reject the gospel, he appreciated those who accepted it and allowed God to work in and through their lives. Third, Paul was thankful for his fellow servants, like Epaphras. He recognized the need

for the gospel throughout the world and his own limited opportunities to share it. So, Paul did not view himself as being in competition with others who were preaching God's word accurately, but as fellow servants and laborers in God's field (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). Gospel workers today must maintain constant gratitude in these same three directions concerning the working of God and the gospel.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

The apostle Paul had been personally involved in teaching the gospel in Corinth (Acts 18:1-11). He had known the great immorality present in the city that this church had been saved from (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Therefore, he was thankful to God for the grace He extended to them through Christ. They had now been washed from their sins, sanctified (set apart) from their wickedness, and declared innocent/righteous in God's sight. Paul knew that none of this, however, was because of his own ability, skill, or righteousness. Rather, he knew it was all due to the power of God and the word of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:10-31)! In the same way, gospel workers today must maintain gratitude toward God for the way He works to transform people's lives rather than boasting and taking credit for themselves. Furthermore, notice how Paul was thankful for them, despite knowing the significant immaturity and the problems that were present within the congregation at that time (which he would address throughout the letter, e.g., 1:11; 3:1-4; 5:1-2)! Therefore, gospel workers can and should be thankful for the way God is working in the lives of people, even when they still have many things to improve/correct and when people have not fully responded to the gospel in the way they would desire! Like Paul, you must recognize there will be different qualities of people who hear and obey the gospel (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Simply be thankful for whatever opportunity you are given and build the best that you can – and leave the rest up to God and each person!

2 TIMOTHY 1:3-5

Paul's gratefulness was not just regarding entire congregations of people who had obeyed the gospel. Instead, he was thankful for the way specific individuals had responded to the gospel and contributed to the Lord's work. Three people are brought into focus in this text. First is Timothy. Timothy had often labored alongside Paul as his son in the faith (Acts 16; 2 Timothy 1:2). Now, Paul was urging Timothy to continue in what Paul had helped commit to him so the gospel could also be shared with others (2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:2; 4:2-5)!

The other two people were Timothy's mother and grandmother. These two women had impacted Timothy by laying the foundation Paul eventually built upon (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-20

Paul had helped bring the gospel to Philippi (Acts 16). Now, as he wrote to them (likely during his Roman imprisonment, Acts 28), he was thankful to God for them. Paul was grateful for the grace they shared in with him through Christ, and for their fellowship in the gospel (involving financial support, Philippians 4:15-18). Paul's prayer was that God would continue working in the Philippians and through them. Notice that Paul was also thankful for the opportunities he had to share the gospel, even in difficult circumstances. Furthermore, Paul was thankful that others were joining and being emboldened in the work of preaching the gospel.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-17

This letter Paul wrote is deeply personal and often highlights challenges that Paul faced (1:3-11; 4:16-18; 11:22-33; 12:6-10). Still, regardless of what Paul experienced personally in his gospel work, he was thankful to God for the triumphal procession He would lead them on (like a victorious army returning from battle, with evidence of victory)! Some would undoubtedly see Paul's life and work negatively. However, others would recognize that God provides victory and life through Jesus Christ! So, regardless of challenges and negativity, all gospel workers today must recognize what God ultimately accomplishes in and through us. He plans victory and life for all those who are drawn to Christ through the gospel! Therefore, we should be thankful for the opportunity to spread that aroma of life, despite some viewing it as an aroma of death!

CONCLUSION

Disciples of Jesus Christ always have the greatest possible reasons to be thankful to God, as they share in the love, grace, mercy, and hope that God provides! Then, gospel workers have the tremendous opportunity of doing work that makes an eternal difference in the lives of other people by sharing the gospel. When the gospel is received, there should be gratitude for the way God is transforming the lives of those people and working through them. But, even when it is not received or when there are challenges, there should be gratitude for the way God has allowed them to be exposed to the soul-saving message!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

Why is gratitude important and helpful in gospel work?

What kind of gratitude should be shown toward God generally?

What kind of gratitude should be shown toward God specifically in gospel work?

What kind of gratitude should be shown concerning fellow gospel workers?

What kind of gratitude should be shown concerning those who accept the gospel?

What kind of gratitude should be shown concerning those who do not accept the gospel?

What kind of gratitude should be shown concerning challenges in gospel work?

What kind of gratitude should be shown concerning the opportunity to work in the gospel?

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