

## **How to Become a Thankful Person**

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Responding To God's Extravagant Grace Series

Luke 17:11-19

As many of you know, we are in the process of constructing a new auditorium onto the back of the building. I have talked to you about our new building plans for the last several weeks. We are going to be building a new 3000 person auditorium to this facility and new children's ministry classes, a bookstore with a little coffee bar, a new lobby. All in all, our plan is to more than double the square footage of this building. The reason we are doing it is because of the rapid growth that God has given to Vineyard. We have grown from about 200 people 11 years ago to over 3500 attenders who come to the Vineyard today.

I do want you to mark your calendars for a few key events that are coming up in our church's life. The biggest event that is coming up is November 1<sup>st</sup>, our Celebration Sunday at the Convention Center. On the weekend of November 1<sup>st</sup>, we are canceling our Saturday night service and our three Sunday morning services and our Joshua House service. All of those services are going to be canceled. What we are going to do is pull the whole church together for a gigantic meeting down at the Columbus Convention Center. It will be there that people will make their financial commitments to this building campaign. So you will want to mark your calendar for that event. It is going to be a historic event in the life of our church. Whether you are a member or not, come on down. After our worship service we are going to have lunch and, then, the rest of the day will be spent in what we call "MusicFest" here, which is just a festival of bands from the church and singers. We will have things for the kids in a carnival-like atmosphere. It will be a day for our church to gather together to celebrate and party. That's November 1<sup>st</sup>. So that is not a good weekend to go out of town. If you are planning a little romantic retreat, do it on November 8<sup>th</sup>. If you are planning a spiritual retreat, a golfing outing, hunting, fishing, being sick, delivering triplets—you don't want to do it November 1<sup>st</sup>.

okay, the second date that you will want to mark down is for our Personal Contact Meetings. Those are our informational meetings about the building. If have not gone to one of those personal contact meetings, this is your very last week to do it. So come out on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday nights or Saturday morning. And then we have scheduled two additional meetings on Saturday night right after the service and on Sunday afternoon, right after the third service – so if you haven't been to an informational meeting to see the video, to hear from the leaders, check it out this week. Mark your calendar for that.

The last calendar item is our 24-Hour Prayer Vigil that you just heard about. As a result of the personal contact meetings, we received hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who had written down prayer requests. What I would like to ask you to do is if you are part of the church, sign up for one hour to

come on those October 9-10<sup>th</sup> dates. Just come out for one hour, get a chance to pray. We will pray about the church's future. We will pray for other individuals. People can pray for you.

Well, the theme of this building campaign is "Responding to God's Extravagant Grace." A few weeks ago I told you that you could expect some things as we move forward in our giving campaign. I told you that you could expect that we would conduct ourselves with absolute integrity, that we would not manipulate or twist anyone's arm to give. Rather, everything is going to be above board. We will get the information out there.

The second thing I said is that you can expect some miracles to happen over the next few months. That as people prayed and stretched themselves, God would break through.

I love stories of God's surprises. I love stories of God's interventions. Let me tell you some stories of answers to prayer just in the last few weeks.

Last week I preached on fasting – why Christians fast. I invited many of you to come forward and commit yourselves to take some time during this giving campaign for a breakthrough for yourself and also for a breakthrough for the church. We had nearly 500 people write a commitment to fast during the next 40 days – nearly 500. Now, there are many others who are committing themselves to fast and who didn't sign a commitment card. And then some of the rest of you might want to do that today. Sign one of those commitments in the bulletin and turn it in to the boxes in the back. But we had nearly 500 people last week that committed themselves to fast for a total of almost 4000 days. Some people committed themselves to fast for a day; some for 2 days; some for 3 days. We had 20 people in this church commit themselves to fast for all 40 days of the giving campaign. When we totaled it up, there was almost 4000 days of fasting. Don't you think that God is going to give us some breakthroughs and answers to prayer in individuals' lives and in the life of this church as a result of nearly 4000 days of fasting? And we are just getting started.

At the beginning of the campaign just a few weeks ago, we prayed that God would begin, through the campaign, to miraculously provide financially for people who needed a financial breakthrough. Here is a testimony that I received in the last week or so. I would encourage you to write your testimonies on those sheets and turn them in. Here is a testimony, listen to this:

"This week my prayer was for God to finance our first Silent Brunch, which is the church's first outreach to deaf adults. Friday morning a man called and said that God told him to pick up the entire tab. The man never asked how many people or how much. He even offered to assist the day of the event. [And then she goes on to say] I don't know what his financial situation is, but I have heard that it may not be very good." But whatever the case, she says, "the man was full of joy in being able to give" and her prayer for financial provision was answered.

We had several other testimonies of people getting answers to prayer for financial provision. Here is one from one of our ministry coordinators. We are doing a lot of mailings during this giving campaign. She writes,

“Rich, as you know, I felt pretty overwhelmed looking at the mailing schedule last week. We will be sending out 32,300 pieces of mail in the next few weeks. The amount of man-hours needed was too much for me to process and I prayed for help. After I prayed, I felt I was called to fast both for myself spiritually and for the workers.” So Susan fasted.

“The next day there were three messages on my voice mail throughout the day and continuing into the next week I continued to get calls from people wanting to help. 31 people have contacted me so far.” In fact, people from outside the church contacted Susan.

But within the church, here are just a few folks who decided to help out.

One couple has a terminally ill three-year-old and because of their son’s illness, they asked Susan if they could help from their home. They said they just joined the church and their time and resources are very limited because of their son. But they wanted to serve God and the church in some way.

Several people run mail departments. One person owns a company that sends out mail and said, “My employees have a lot of down time. I would sure like to help.”

31 different individuals came forward in the last week and said, “Can I pitch in?”

Certainly, we are interested in cutting costs on the building. One of our prayers is that we could do this in the most economical way possible. We are committed here to spend money on people, that is our primary goal. To spend money on people and to meet people’s needs. Five different individuals personally approached me in the last several weeks and said, “Rich, I own this type of construction company...or I am in this type of construction business...if I can be of help, I would like to donate my services to the church.”

The testimonies—as I get some of these in that are really, really hot, I want to share them with you. If I don’t read yours it is because there are just too many. We are going to collect these and put them in a booklet and hand them out to those who attend our November 1<sup>st</sup> Celebration. Listen to this one:

“I am a single mom who has been coming to the Vineyard since 1992. I just drove by the church with the purple roof and I thought, ‘That place has to be pretty cool.’ That was six years ago. Since that time the people at the Vineyard have supported my 2 sons and me in so many ways I could fill the entire testimony book. But to name a few the Vineyard has provided: Christmas for my two children, a big brother for over a year, life-changing experiences through Vineyard Camp and just regular love, teaching and friendship through the Sunday services, and small group I could have been a statistic. Sadly, so many are bitter divorced single females raising two boys all alone. Instead, I feel like I am a light, a breath of hope to other single moms that I come in contact with. Through the strength of God and through the fellowship of the Vineyard and through daily submission to walk in God’s path, I found my life is not over and is in many ways just beginning. Thank you for the impact you have had on my family’s life.”

Well, today what I want to do is share a message that I am calling “How to Become a Thankful Person.” Let’s pray.

We are looking at Luke 17:11-19.

We read in verse 11,

"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee." He is traveling from the north in Galilee down to the south in Jerusalem. Let me give you a little geography lesson. If you are looking at the geography of the Holy Land, Galilee is in the north, Samaria is in the middle, and at the bottom would be Judea, where Jerusalem is located. Apparently, Jesus is traveling along the border i.e. he is traveling between Galilee in the north and Samaria in the middle. He is probably going east along the border. There was a road there that would have caused him to cross the Jordan River. Then he would have headed south in order to get to Jerusalem.

It says, "As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him." Philip Yancy, who wrote a wonderful book called "Where is God When It Hurts," singles out leprosy as the most hopeless of all diseases. He says, "Physical leprosy seems incurable because it reverses the pain process. Most diseases have pain as an early warning system that assists in healing." In other words, with most diseases, you begin to feel pain. If you have heart disease, you begin to feel pain in your chest. But leprosy is just the opposite. Leprosy destroys the signal system for pain leaving the body without its natural protection against self-destruction. A leper may be burned, cut, or wounded without the warning signal of pain. Skin falls off, fingers, arms, toes and legs die and drop away in defiance of the normal process of the body to heal itself. In the absence of pain, the leper loses hope of healing. And leprosy is also a hopeless social disease because lepers are so grotesque. Respectable society avoids them and sends them into exile. "It is one thing to be condemned to die," Yancy writes, "it's another thing to die in isolation."

Here is a group of people who are hopeless physically and hopeless socially. But apparently, they heard about Jesus. Somehow they had received news that up in Galilee this man Jesus was performing miracles. Blind people were receiving their sight. Crippled people were walking. Deaf people were hearing. These lepers had received news about a man named Jesus who could change their lives and hope was ignited in their hearts.

Do you know the beginning point of a personal relationship between an individual and Jesus Christ? Do you know where it starts? It starts with this sense of hope. Maybe this Jesus can really make a difference in my life. I have been running my head into the wall trying to solve my own problems, maybe what I am hearing about Jesus is true. Over and over again I have seen that the beginning point of a person really opening themselves up to God is this igniting of hope. Maybe the missing piece in my life is Christ. Goodness knows, I have tried everything else.

I have seen this, friends. A single mom struggling to take care of her few kids, feeling really hopeless, feeling overwhelmed. A person is going through a divorce. People with empty, dead marriages, or marriages where there have been a lot of walls built up over the years between the couple. Maybe they have made a lot of money, but are unfulfilled. I have seen it with people who are critically ill, on their death beds in hospitals, have terminal diseases. People who

are so depressed that they are contemplating suicide. People who have climbed the ladder of success and who get to the top and recognize, as Stephen Covey put it in his book "Seven Habits of Highly Successful People", they realize that the ladder they are climbing on is leaning against the wrong wall. I have watched people coming from so many different places begin to open up to God at this point, the point of hope.

Maybe there really is something to this Jesus.

Maybe Jesus can make a difference in our marriage if we build our marriage around Jesus.

Maybe Jesus would make a difference with my kids.

Maybe Jesus can help me out of this addiction.

Maybe Jesus could give me the fulfillment that I lack.

Maybe Jesus could give me a sense of meaning and purpose.

Maybe Jesus could heal me or at least give me the strength to get through what I am in.

Maybe Jesus is the answer for the moral erosion in this country and the fact that the moral bottom has fallen out. Everyone is scratching their heads and saying, "I don't know what to do."

Maybe what we need is Jesus.

You know, the job of those of you who are committed followers of Christ is to go around to people in need to communicate the message, "I know someone who could meet your need, and his name is Jesus."

Well, it says that these lepers, even though they had hope in their hearts that Jesus could make a difference, they stood at a distance from Christ. Look at verse 12,

"As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance..."

See, the religious practice of the day required that lepers be physically and socially removed, religiously removed from the rest of the community. There is a line in the book of Leviticus that reads this way: "The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose. And he shall cover his upper lip and cry, 'unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease, he is unclean. He shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp."

Lepers had to go around yelling, "unclean, unclean" and constantly live outside of the community. And the rabbis just piled on regulations and stipulations to prevent even a chance encounter between a leper and a healthy person that could render the healthy person religiously unclean. For example, the rabbi said that a leper is not permitted to enter any house for his presence conveys uncleanness to both people and the vessels in the house. And if a leper stands under a tree and a clean man walks by, the clean man becomes unclean. It is no wonder that having been instructed by the rabbis and being dealt with like this by the culture, the lepers stood at a distance. They didn't come near to Jesus.

Here is the principle that I get from this. There are many people who have what I call divided hearts. They are hearing about Jesus. Maybe they have met

a Christian who invites them to come to church. They have hope inside secretly that says, "Maybe that's what I need. Maybe that's what my family needs; what my marriage needs; that's what my kids need."

Maybe they secretly say inside, "I sure haven't come up with all the answers for everything without God. Maybe I need a relationship with Christ. Maybe I need to stop running from God and give him a chance." But on the other hand, there is this strong feeling like that of the leper, "but I don't fit with those kind of people, those Christian people, those religious people. I don't fit with them. I don't belong. I don't connect with church, at least not that kind of church."

I have met countless people friends, and this is absolutely the truth, who wanted a relationship with Jesus. They had this hope that he would make a difference. But there was this other thing pulling at them in their hearts saying, "You know, I just don't belong. I can't envision myself being like one of those Christians." Maybe it is because the person says, "My life is just not perfect and I know what church people are like. They have families like the Cleaver Family on Leave it to Beaver—Dad, Mom, Wally and young Theodore." They say, "My family is NOT The Brady Bunch. My family is more like the folks hanging around the Star Wars Bar. My family is more like the Adams Family."

Or they say, "I am not perfect. I have made some huge mistakes in my life. I was pretty wild. If people knew my past, there is no way I would fit in. I want Jesus, but I don't fit in."

Let me read another testimony. I just love these.

"Four years ago I was on a path to nowhere. Drinking and partying was pretty much all I ever did. A good friend of mine was a member of the Vineyard and she tried with no luck to get me to come with her to church for a year. A year later, one Sunday morning after a long night of drinking, I woke up and looked into the mirror. I heard a voice just as clear as if the person was in the room with me. And he told me that if I didn't stop what I was doing, I would be dead by the age of 31. The following week I came with my friend. The message touched me so deeply that I could do nothing but cry. It was very cleansing and healing. From that day forward I quit what I was doing and asked Jesus to come in. It has not been an easy path to walk, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

I don't belong. Maybe I would like a personal relationship with God, but I just don't fit.

Maybe your problem is the opposite. Maybe it is not that you have made a lot of major mistakes. Maybe it is exactly the opposite. You say to yourself, "I am not a loser like people who have been drinking away their lives." I have known a lot of people who wanted a relationship with God, but who had this big problem with the idea that Christianity is for losers. It is just a crutch for the weak. The person says, "I just believe that you make your own luck in life. You don't sit around whining about the hand that is dealt to you. You do something about it." They say, "Life has not been so easy for me, but I worked hard. I got a good education and worked hard in school. I have a good job now and am making money." They stand at a distance from Jesus because they think he is maybe just a crutch for the weak and they don't feel particularly weak.

Well, let me answer that. Is Christianity just a crutch for the weak? I think for some religious people they have used Jesus and religion as a sedative, a little pill, that we swallow that makes us feel a little better. Life is real hard and we need something to take the edge off life, so we will turn to Jesus. But that is not what Christianity is. Jesus challenged people to radical change in their lives. You don't come to Christ for a little sedative – I need to take the edge off. You need to take the edge off a little bit of the harsh realities of life, drink a glass of wine. Jesus calls people to radical change in their lives. To stand up for truth. To stand against lies. To stand up for the dignity and sanctity of human life. To sacrifice and simplify lifestyles.

In this giving campaign that we are engaged in one of the challenges to us in the church is "will you live like a Christian and give sacrificially?" We don't add Jesus to an unchanged life where I continue to do everything I have been doing. My marriage is exactly the same. I treat my husband or wife exactly the same. I relate in business exactly the same, but I get Jesus and he makes everything nice. Becoming a Christian is opening the door to radical life change.

And right now, the challenge, the demand for a radical life change is in the area of finances and giving. But it is always there in some area.

Someone says, "I don't want to become a Christian. I think Christianity is just a crutch." I will bet that if we searched around in that person's life, we would find a crutch. We'd find a crutch of materialism – piled up stuff and insurance policies and bank accounts. Maybe it is the prop of entertainment, the prop of selfishness – living for ourselves, the prop of careerism, the prop of always having a girlfriend or boyfriend, or the crutch of sex. Somewhere along the line, if we scratch around in the life of the person who says "Christianity is for losers," we'd find your sedative – what you do to deal with that hole in your life that is meant for God. You are stuffing it with something. What are you stuffing it with?

But I will tell you, you don't just come to Jesus because you feel weak or are doing poorly in life. You are on your last legs and Jesus offers a lifeline. Lots of people come to Jesus for that reason – you come to Jesus because Jesus is true. Because there is historical evidence for Christ.

Jesus really did live. He was a real person. He really did die on a real wooden cross. If you were there and rubbed your feet on the cross, you would get a splinter. It's real. And Jesus really did rise from the dead after being dead for three days. So it really doesn't matter if you think "I have no needs" or "I have a lot of needs." You open your life up to God because he is true. This is real. Because the historical evidence says that a real man named Jesus did live a perfect life. He taught others to imitate his lifestyle. He really did bleed and die for your sins on a cross and after three days he rose from the dead.

So the question for the person who feels he has no needs is: forget about your needs. If this is true, if Christ is who he said he is, will you acknowledge the truth and bow your knee to Jesus? Will you invite Christ into your life and allows him to rule you from the center of your being?

Some people say, "Well, I am just not the religious type."

I don't know, I have heard this a lot of times, but I don't know what people mean by "I am not the religious type and therefore I can't envision myself doing

what you guys do.” I don’t know if they mean “I am not the type to wear really geeky clothes.” Or you know, a hairstyle that is 20 years out of date. Or if they mean, “I don’t like religious music. I don’t like pipe organs except at a baseball game when I have a beer and a brat.” When people say, “I am not the religious type” I don’t know what that means. Maybe it means they had a negative experience with a religious person. Or they felt mistreated by some church or some Christian. Or they don’t feel like they are very good at kneeling and lighting candles.

I will tell you what: Christianity is not about becoming religious. Christianity is about a relationship with a real person named Jesus. It is about entering a challenging, life-changing relationship. And it doesn’t matter what religion you are coming from – a Roman Catholic, a Jewish, a Muslim or a Methodist background. You need to personally make a decision to enter this life-changing relationship. Christianity is about entering the most important relationship you could ever have. It is a relationship that lasts for an eternity.

Now, there are two ways to deal with this divided heart – on the one hand the hope a person has that maybe what I really need is a relationship with Jesus; and on the other hand the strong feeling of not belonging – I don’t fit for whatever reason. We can let the “I don’t belong” side win out. We can quench our desire for a real relationship with Christ by more busyness, more work, more preoccupation with hobbies, more golf, more TV, more surfing the internet, more shopping. We can quench our desire for God by running through life and not stopping long enough to face the truth, to ask for a life change.

Or we can take a risk like these lepers did. Here were physically, socially isolated people. It says about them in verse 13, that even though they stood at a distance, they “called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us.’” Here are people who took a risk and pressed into Christ. They said, “My desire for a relationship with Jesus is going to simply outweigh all my feelings of alienation. I know I need Christ. I know Christ is true. I need help. My marriage needs help. My kids need help. I don’t care about all this ‘I don’t belong’ stuff, I am going to press in.”

Here are ten lepers. Instead of pressing their face against the candy store window and looking at all the goodies and then walking away, they went in. They cried out, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us.” They let their need for God overcome their fears, their pride and bitterness, the past, and broken relationships.

How many people don’t cry out to Jesus even though they need him? How many people don’t cry out to Jesus even though he is true? These lepers are examples to us. We read in verse 14:

“When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed.”

The OT law in Leviticus 14 required this. The priests were the only ones who had the power to restore people to social and religious fellowship. As they were obedient to Christ, they did what he told them to, they went on their way toward the priests and they were healed.

Now, here is the heart of the story. Verse 15:



“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go, your faith has made you well.’”

Only one showed gratitude for Christ’s blessings and he was a foreigner. Think of it. All of them were blessed. All of them received the same. They all had the same need, a need for healing. They all had the same experience; the leprosy was healed. But only one of them returned to say thank you. and it was the Samaritan. The one whom you would have thought was farthest from God.

Jesus here seems disappointed. He seems upset. He asked the question: What’s the matter that there is only one person saying, “Thank you?” Why is there such a profound lack of thankfulness in the rest? Why are the other lepers who were just as blessed not returning to God to say thank you?

Let me make the issue really plain. Why is saying thank you to God such a big issue for Jesus? Why is Jesus so upset when people do not come to God and say thank you for their blessings?

The reason why thanksgiving is such a big deal is because thanksgiving actually reveals your fundamental view of life. Perhaps nothing reveals more about your basic spiritual orientation than thanksgiving. If you want to figure out a person’s spiritual orientation right down to their toes, you just watch whether they are often saying “thank you” to God. Why is that?

Because either you recognize that God is the source of everything good in your life or you honestly believe that you are the source. See, there are two basic approaches to life. I am the source. I am a self-made man. I built this. Or in thankfulness, we say God is the source of everything good in my life. God is the center. God is the creator. We see this with our children. Either you take credit for everything that is good that is happening in your kids’ lives or you say, “I did what I do, but honestly if they are doing well it is a gift from God, it is just grace.”

I think that with respect to the church, we do what we do around here, but the growth and changed lives, the blessings, the healed marriages it is just God’s grace.

See, theoretically you may believe in God, but practically if you are not saying “thank you” often to God, you are living like an atheist. So biblically one way to measure the quality of your relationship with God is to say, “Do you thank him a lot?” Do you pause in your day often? Looking back at the last week, did you pause in your day off and say, “Lord, thank you?” When you pray, when you have needs, are your prayers filled with thanksgiving? If you read the prayers of people in the Bible, you read the prayers of the apostle Paul in the Epistles, Paul virtually never prays without saying, “In all my prayers, I always give thanks.”

Another way thanksgiving reveals the difference between the 9 men who didn’t return and the one who did is they both got what they wanted. The 9 wanted a healing plus nothing and that’s what they got. The 1 man wanted a healing plus something more, a relationship with Jesus. He didn’t want to just use Jesus; he wanted Jesus himself. What do you want? What do your prayers

sound like? “God I want to use you” or “God I want you and I want to know you.” My goal is God.

Now, why is it that we by and large are not really good at saying thank you to God, much less to other people? May I suggest a few things that get in the way of having really grateful hearts?

The first is, of course, the issue of entitlement, the perspective that what we have we have by some sort of right, that blessing is what I deserve. You can see this by people’s shock and upset with God when things go wrong. If I get sick, “Why God?” If I experience tragedy, “Why, God? Why did you do that to me?” If someone dies; if we experience financial or marital problems, it is “God, why? Why did you do this to me?”

It is so rare that someone has that same sense of “why God?” regarding the good things in life. The good things in life are there for us by way of entitlement. “Of course, everything should go well for me.” Have you ever said, “why am I not sick? Why did my car work? Why do people like me?” We think, “of course I should have great food and lots of attention and lots of love, healthy children, a great education, a great house, and a hot shower.” It is only when the plumbing breaks that I say, “Hey, what is going on here? Something is amiss.” It is the rare person who regularly walks around with a sense that the truly shocking thing is that so much works out well.

And then, of course, there is the factor of greed. Instead of enjoying the pleasure we have now, we want more than God is currently giving. We are not grateful to God because we want more. It is not enough – what he is currently giving us now. Like a child at Christmas who, when after opening their presents, they look at it all, and you can tell something is wrong. They are saying, “Is that all? Is that all the gifts?” Greed crushes a grateful heart.

What is greed? Greed is the internal attitude that whatever I have from God is just not enough. I can’t say thanks for the husband I have, instead I grumble because my husband is not spiritual enough, because he is not affectionate enough, because he is not a great conversationalist.

I can’t say thank you, God, for the wife I have. Instead, I grumble because my wife is not sexual enough, that she is not supportive enough, that she is not thin enough.

It’s this demand for more. Yes, I have a job, but it is not good enough. We have a house, but it is not nice enough. We have clothes, but they are not fashionable enough. Not enough, not enough, not enough. Greed kills thankfulness.

So does forgetfulness. The Bible links remembering and thanking together over and over again. Sometimes we are too busy enjoying all the blessings. We are too busy enjoying our hobbies, our kids, nature, golf, too busy enjoying to just pause and say “thank you.” Sometimes the forgetfulness is a result of the fact that we don’t trace things far enough back up the line to see that really everything does come from God.

A dad was walking with his son one day from the bakery. He said, “Son, where did the bread come from?”

The son said, “The baker.”

“Where did the baker get the bread from?”

“From flour.”

“Where did the flour come from?”

“Well, the baker ground some grain and made the flour.”

“Where did the grain come from?”

“From a farmer.”

“Where did the farmer get the grain?”

“From God.”

We have to say that here in the Vineyard, where did the growth come from? Well, we do Summer Harvest and Outreach weekends and great church services. Well, how do people get to these? People in the church invite them. And why do people in the church invite? They invite because God's Spirit motivated them. How are we going to build the new building? We're going to conduct a building campaign. And what will make that successful? People will give. And how will they be able to give? Because of their jobs. How is it they have jobs and money? Where did you get your intelligence? Your capacity for hard work? Your children? The breath in your lungs? The freedom to worship? To keep most of what you make? Where did you get it from?

Now, truly, friends, thankfulness is something that we have to practice. It is like learning how to play the piano. You have to practice the scales over and over again. It is like learning a foreign language. Thankfulness does not come naturally to self-centered people who believe that all the good things in life are ours by way of entitlement; people who are like us and grumble and complain when things don't go our way; people like us who always feel like we don't have enough, greedy people, forgetful people. Thankfulness is something that you need to practice. It is like a foreign language, a new skill.

I want to challenge you to practice. To get in the practice of writing thank you notes to people who have helped you, have assisted you, have blessed you, and have given to you. To get in the habit of verbally saying “thank you.” Get in the habit of saying thank you to God every time you enjoy something – your hot shower, your bath, your food, the weather, your backyard, your car, a comfortable pair of shoes, other people's appreciation. Get in the habit of regularly saying, “thank you.” Get in the habit of saying thank you to God by giving.

In the Bible, a way that people have to say thank you to God is by responding in giving. They get in touch with the grace that is there and they give back. Sometimes gratitude can be noted most clearly by your checkbook. Thankful people are financially generous people.

Let me close with a couple of stories. The Bible says that we are to be thankful in all circumstances. You know you have practiced the scales of thankfulness long enough when you can play the really difficult melodies of thankfulness in all situations. That instead of grumbling and complaining, instead of sinking into self-pity and depression, in everything you are able to give thanks.

Let me share two closing stories of two people who were good thankers of God. There was a Christian man named Matthew Henry, a Bible commentator, who lived back in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. His power to say thank you was

challenged when he was robbed. The day after the robbery, Matthew Henry wrote in his diary these words: "I have a lot to be thankful to God about as a result of this robbery. Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before. Second, because although they took my purse, they didn't take my life. Third because they took my all, it wasn't very much. And fourth because it was I who was robbed and I wasn't the robber."

Last story. Some of you are familiar with Corrie tenBoom, the author of *The Hiding Place*. As a Dutch Christian, she hid Jews in her house after the German Nazis occupied Holland. The Gestapo discovered what the tenBoom family was doing and they hauled Corrie and her family off to concentration camps. One day Corrie was talking with her sister, Betsy and Betsy was telling her that she needed to learn how to say "thank you" in all circumstances.

Corrie said, "Well, I can thank God for a lot of things, but I sure cannot thank God for the fleas in this concentration camp dormitory."

Betsy said, "Corrie, I am sure that there is a blessing even in the fleas."

Corrie said, "No way. I will never be able to thank God for the fleas."

Sometime later, Corrie noticed that the concentration camp guards never went into the dormitories. In the dormitories, the prisoners had some freedom. They were able to read their Bibles free from harassment. They were able to pray, talk and sing and have conversations apart from the guards.

She asked one of the guards one day, "How come you never go into the dormitories?"

The guard said, "Because of the fleas. We hate the fleas."

Practice being thankful. Work on being thankful. God loves thankful people. God blesses thankful people.

Let's pray.