

Series: Words
5. A Grateful Tongue
Hebrews 13.5

One of the greatest contradictions of our time is the fact that we are some of the most prosperous and privileged people that lived on earth but we aren't necessarily happier. We have more of everything and it feels that we aren't content.

We live much longer and our standard of living is better than the one our parents and grandparents had. We have more and better medical care and opportunities to study. We have more of everything but less happiness. The percentage of Americans that say to be "happy" has not changed since the fifties, and an estimated 7% suffer from depression. Most folks live with more anxiety than gratitude, with more bitterness than contentment and that impacts the way we speak. Surprisingly the paradox of progress is that the better our life is the worse we feel.

What God expects of Christians in times like these? According to 1 Thessalonians 5:18 the will of God for those who belong to Christ Jesus is to be thankful in all circumstances. But how is that possible to achieve? How can we live a grateful life that is reflected in the way we talk?

Our speech is a reflection of what is in our heart so if I want to have a more grateful tongue, I have to change my way of thinking and this requires that I:

1 Think less about what I don't have, and be grateful for what I already have.

As a child I did not know that my family was poor because everyone who lived around us were also poor. It was only when we moved to the city that I discovered that we had very little compared to our neighbors. We didn't have the things that before we didn't miss, but that later became "needs".

The problem of living today is the extreme commercialization of everything. Television presents what we don't have and could have such as fantastic cars, nice clothes, electronics, dream vacations, etc. The stores are full of things we do not have, or better things than we have. Catalogs are sent to our homes to "help us discover what we need." Businesses do not want us to feel satisfied and strive to create needs in us that they can meet. Besides, we have friends who buy this or that and we feel that we also have to buy the same or better.

It is not wrong to want a better life or to have good things, but it is wrong when that determines the entire direction of our lives. When our focus is not balanced and we use all our energy, passion and time to reach certain thing, whatever that is, not only our gratitude will disappear but also our spiritual life and the desire for the things of God. It leads us to focus on what we don't have and forget the blessings we already have.

Paul speaks in particular about greed and warn: **People who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. (Why?) Some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows** 1 Timothy 6:9-10 Some think that:

a. If I could be with someone else then I would be happy! But that's not true because discontentment is an internal issue and not an external problem; it is how I respond to what happens to me and how I respond to people. The problem is that it is easier to "change" chairs than to deal with the problems. But when we change seats we are simply exchanging one set of problems for another! And if we are the problem, then we carry them with us.

Unhappy people spend their time chasing illusions which are outside of their reach. **A man was lost in the desert and desperately wanted something to drink. He saw a lemonade stand in the next sand dune and he ran but when he got there the lemonade stand was in the next dune. And so it continued until he died of thirst chasing an illusion.** Many people today die chasing illusions of what they believe to be happiness.

b. **Others think if I could go elsewhere then I would be happy!** Another false idea. I notice though that quite often and despite some exceptions, going elsewhere is a way to avoid problems or avoid whom we should face. If I'm not content where I am I won't be content where I am going. Often what makes the difference is not in the place where I am, but my attitude in the place where I am.

c. **Others think if only I could get something more, then I would be happy!** There are people who always need more. They believe that if they can get that one more thing finally they will be content. But like someone else said: contentment is not achieved when you have all you want, but when you want everything you have. To which I would add: contentment will be achieved when you become thankful for what you already have.

Contentment comes when we look into our hearts and discover that despite the circumstances in which we find ourselves and despite people, God is with us from above, behind and beneath. Hebrews 13.5... **Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."**

- Occasionally you may experience problems at work with someone and decide you're going to leave and work elsewhere. Listen, the same people work in the place you're going, only the faces and the names are different. Maybe God wants you to face the problem and allow Him to change you or change your way of looking at things. Our responsibility as Christians is to be a blessing for those who give us jobs and make the work of those who lead us easier.

- Occasionally you may experience problems in your marriage and decide you're going to leave your partner and find another. Listen, you will find the same person only the face and name is different!

- Occasionally you may have a problem in church and think to leave and find another one. Listen, the same people go to that other church, only the faces and the names are different.

If we are not content with what we have we won't be content with what we are going to get. God wants to bless us but if we are not content with the little He gave us why expect more? 1 Timothy 6.17 **Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.** Let's learn to enjoy what God gives us.

The solution is not to change seats but maybe a change in our hearts. Think less about what we don't have and be grateful for what we already have. I will have a more grateful tongue if I:

2. Stop wanting always to receive, and start giving. Stop looking for all the blessings you can get and start to be a blessing. This is something that even our children have to learn. A mature church is a church where folks look for opportunities to help more than receive.

Many come to Christ because of a need and God supplies. But as we grow in our faith we come to the understanding that as He blessed us, he wants us to bless others. The resources we have, the time and energy that God gave us are to be used to bless those around us.

The strange thing though is that the more we have the less grateful we are and the more we want. Someone who doesn't have much money finds it easy to give but when they get more it seems to be harder to give. But even if we have all the money in the world that doesn't mean necessarily that we'll be happy. It is God who gives meaning to life and gives a happiness that comes from the inside out.

We need to stop looking for all the blessings we can get and start to be a blessing whenever possible. We find life as we share it with others. Jesus says: **If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.** Mathew 10:39 Give your life to God, live with others in mind and you'll receive true life. Live only for yourself and you'll lose your life. Sow blessings and you'll harvest blessings.

Jesus set the example. He gave his life so that we might have life and life abundant. He could have demanded to be served but chose instead to serve others. Blessing others will make us more grateful people. I'll have a more grateful tongue if I:

3. Stop living only for today but also for eternity.

I was watching a Christian commercial where a family was having breakfast together. A voice said that within 10 minutes the husband would die in a car accident. The person added: **"Fortunately he has life insurance and saved for the future of his family. The only thing he didn't plan for was eternity. Are you this person?"** We all know that one day we'll die but we live like that day is never coming. We believe heaven to be a wonderful place but we don't want to get there too soon. The fact is that death may come at any time it might even be today but the question is whether or not we are prepared for eternity.

We work hard to ensure a better future but what about after we die? What have we prepared for then? If this world is all we have then we may have reasons to despair. Paul reminds us that: **if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.** 1 Cor. 15.19-20

We serve a Savior who prepared a place for us in heaven. We have a future and a hope. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4.8; 16-18: **We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.** Paul shows gratitude for the hope he had. His eyes are on eternity.

How do you ensure eternal life? We can't purchase a place in heaven but Jesus has reserved a dwelling for all who want it. It's your decision. To receive this undeserved gift of God you have to recognize that you are a sinner, ask for forgiveness of your sins and invite Christ to dwell in your heart as you allow Him to direct your life.

Do it today. "God, I know that I have sinned against you and am deserving of punishment. But I know as well that Jesus Christ took the punishment that I deserve so that through faith in Him I could be forgiven. With your help, I place my trust in You for salvation. Thank You for Your wonderful grace and forgiveness - the gift of eternal life! Amen! True happiness is found in Jesus Christ who can quench your thirst!

Conclusion:

If I want to have a more grateful tongue, I have to change my way of thinking and this requires that I:

- 1 Think less about what I don't have and be grateful for what I already have.
- Stop wanting always to receive and start giving
- I realize that our suffering is temporary and that Christ has reserved a place for us