

“Real Stewardship: Thanking”

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Luke 17:11-19

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There are two words that I think everyone likes to hear. Thank you. When you've gone out of your way to do something special for someone, you like to be appreciated. That's why it's so important to send a thank you note when you receive a gift. When you are truly grateful for what you've been given, you want to share that with the giver.

But sometimes the task can seem overwhelming. Just ask the newly married couple facing a pile of thank-you notes for their wedding gifts. The problem, of course, is not that they aren't thankful for the gifts. But it can be a real challenge to write all those notes and make them sound personal and warm and heartfelt.

Husbands are especially bad at this. One bride asked her new husband to write a thank you note for a set of kitchen knives they had received. He wrote, "Dear Wedding Guest, thank you for the knives. They will be good for cutting. Sincerely, Dan." Needless to say, his wife ended up writing all the cards. But just as you can easily spot the "thank you" that is forced, you also know when someone is genuinely thankful.

In our reading from Luke's gospel this morning, we have this familiar story of Jesus healing the ten lepers. This passage is all about thanking God for his many blessings. The point of the story is that you and I have been "healed." We have been cleansed by Jesus of so much and we certainly should be thankful.

It seems to me, however, that when this passage is preached the emphasis is usually something like, "shame on those nine who didn't come back to say thank you. Don't be like them." But this morning I want us to look at the one who *did* return to give thanks. What made his reaction different from the other nine? They were all healed, but only this

foreigner, this Samaritan, came back to say thank you.

The key to understanding this passage, I think, comes in verse 15: "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice." The Bible tells us that "he *saw* that he was healed." He became aware of the gift he'd been given. At that point he couldn't help but go back and say thank you. From that moment on his entire life was different. We don't know, but I suspect that he lived the rest of his life thankful to Jesus.

We're told that once he discovered that he was healed that his thanksgiving was expressed by "praising God with a loud voice, falling down at Jesus' feet and giving him thanks." His thankfulness didn't just result in a changed mind, it resulted in changed behavior. He couldn't help it. Jesus then tells him, "Rise and go your way; your *faith* has made you well." Jesus isn't talking about an intellectual faith, he's talking about faith the results in changed behavior; it results in a lifestyle of thankfulness that is expressed in actions.

So what are those actions? I think there are basically three ways that we can show someone our gratitude, three ways we can show our thanks. The first and most obvious is that we communicate our thanks. You let people know that you appreciate what they have done for you. This can be a note or a phone call or thanking them in person. The idea is to let them know. Of course, the way we communicate with God is through prayer, which happens to be one of our principles of stewardship.

A second way we can show our appreciation is by doing something special for the other person. This might involve inviting them over for dinner one night, or helping them with a project around their house. The

idea is that you show your gratitude by serving them. Real stewardship means showing God our appreciation by serving other people in His name.

The third way of showing how much we appreciate someone is by bringing a gift. For example, if your neighbor waters your plants and picks up your mail while you're on vacation, you might bring her a gift that you pick up on your travels. Just something to say, "thank you." As we talked about last week, giving is certainly an important part of stewardship.

Here's the thing, though. While thankfulness is at the center of stewardship, it's not an element of stewardship the way praying, serving, and giving are. Instead, real stewardship is the *result* of thankfulness. And it can't be forced. But as we've seen from this passage, the key to thankfulness is seeing what God is doing in your life. In other words, counting your blessings, and then praying, serving and giving in response as a way of saying "thank you." As you thank God for what He is doing in your life, you will begin to notice *more* ways He is at work and your relationship with Him will be strengthened further.

Before I finish I would like to take a few moments to share with you a few of the things for which I am thankful to God. First of all, I am thankful for my wife Leslie and for our two children, Michael and Robin. They continue to bless me every day. Second, I am thankful for this congregation, for each and every one of you, for the love and concern you have

expressed to us over the past three-plus years. I am grateful that you were willing to take a chance on someone right out of seminary and that you have been very patient as I learn how to do this job. Thank you for the time and money you invest in this church, reaching out to help so many people as we saw at the mission fair last week.

I am thankful for the elders that God has raised up to lead this church and for their willingness to step outside of their comfort zone and to begin to dream about how this church can know Christ and make Christ known in new and creative ways. As the Apostle Paul told the Philippians, "I thank God for your partnership in the gospel."

I am thankful for Roy and the choir, and for Eric and the praise team and their passion to lead us in worship with music that glorifies God week after week. I'm thankful for Cheryl and Mike and Sherri and Lizzy, the staff here at the church, who are a joy to work and minister with. And most of all, I am thankful the Jesus has chosen me as one of his own, forgiven me of my many sins and given me the opportunity to serve Him each day.

So what about you? What are you thankful for? And are you thankful enough that it motivates you to action – to pray and to serve and to give? That's what real, biblical stewardship is all about.

Amen