

CULTIVATE AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

By Alfred H. Ells



COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

INGRATITUDE. It is so common that it has become an expected, harmless inconvenience of life. We Christians, however, know it is far from harmless. We know ingratitude is like wildfire. It spreads voraciously through groups, causes irreparable destruction, and is usually ignited by a careless few. That is why, with Christ as our example, we are free of this worldly symptom and always live peaceable, God-centered lives. Right? If only.

Best intentions aside, the world makes its way into our ministries much more often than it should. Un-stroked egos, unmet demands, and un-ratified opinions lead to blunt criticism, harsh comments, and ungodly behavior toward church leadership from members.

And it goes both ways. Church leaders out of sync with God's motives may give up their original dedication and selflessness for feelings of resentment, entitlement and malevolence thinking, "If these sheep are going to bite, I'm just going to bite back!"

When others' lack of gratitude affects your own ability to remain grateful, the success of your ministry is at stake. Ask God if you are guilty of this and pray for your drive to be restored. The following six tips and accompanying scriptures may be beneficial during this process.

TIPS FOR CULTIVATING AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

FORGIVE

Ephesians 4:32 | Matthew 18:21-22 | James 3:1

See if this scenario sounds familiar: Your church has so much good going on, yet the elder board can only focus on the negatives. Does it hurt? Does it make you angry? Do you want to retaliate? Resist these human impulses, or risk your credibility as a godly leader. Ingratitude is self-centeredness at its core, and as a leader you are called to a higher standard than those you lead. So instead of sinking to the petty level of the board members, do whatever you need to forgive them. Once forgiven, the incident(s) should not be dwelt on, spoken of, or used as ammunition in the future.

EXAMINE

Jeremiah 17:10 | Luke 17:11-19

Why did you accept this calling in the first place? Did you want to obey God, did you want to feel good about yourself, or did you want people's admiration? Intentions may be pure at first, but unless diligently checked, the desire for tangible human praise easily trumps God's unseen rewards. Remember, only one of the 10 lepers Jesus healed returned to thank him. As a minister you may never be so fortunate. I have gone without thanks many times, receiving ingratitude instead, and I have struggled with my reaction. Christ wants us to serve without expecting anything in return. Only then are our motives faultless.

SCRUTINIZE

Matthew 7:5

Are you an expert on others' weaknesses? Would you be as knowledgeable about your own? Unsolicited feedback can be tough to take, but try to find the lesson in every criticism, even if it seems severe or one-sided. Ask God what he wants you to learn from the experience. If you have done wrong, repent, make amends where appropriate, and move on. Begin the practice of regularly seeking feedback from those around you. You may learn a thing or two, while decreasing the likelihood of more unpleasant critiques.

RESOLVE

Matthew 6:15

As a leader, are you constantly putting others first while denying your feelings, perhaps to an unhealthy point? Recognize this: God sees your pain and does not question its existence, but he does not want you to let it fester into resentment. Recognize when your flesh is putting up defenses against emotional pain and ask God to tear them down, lest you lose the joy of serving altogether.

ENDURE

I Peter 2:19-24

Enduring suffering for doing good is commendable before God. Know that you are doing right, endure patiently and rely on God as the only just judge. Test the spirits to discern which situations, such as abuse, require action, and which ones require deep, abiding surrender.

UNDERSTAND

II Timothy 3:2 | I Peter 1:17

In the last days people will be conceited, rebellious and rude. The zeitgeist will encourage pompous, egomaniacal behavior above deference and decorum. As God's children, we must behave differently. We must cultivate an attitude of gratitude.