HOME GROUPS

Hello Home Group Leaders!

Hopefully, all of you will know that this Sunday is our annual Thanksgiving service. In line with the service, we invite you to lead your group in a time of sharing of gratitude for the various ways you have seen God at work. Below are a series of scriptures and questions to reflect upon, which we hope will stir your heart and mind toward gratitude and contentment. If you would like a bit more inspiration, I have also included a short article on gratitude at the end of this document.

Begin your time by encouraging your group members to take a few moments to reflect (or send this document to them before your meeting time) and then invite them to share with the group.

We hope that this is a rich time of sharing and fills each group member with a heart of gratitude toward God.

Rob

Scriptures

"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"
—Psalm 107:1

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
—1 Thessalonians 5:18

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"
—Psalm 150:6

For Discussion

What blessings has God brought into your life this year that you want to thank him for?

How have you seen God working through the circumstances of your life to shape and grow you in ways you can thank him for? Even the painful and challenging ones.

Where can you give thanks for ways you've seen God at work in your family, friends, or the people around you?

What biblical truths or spiritual practices have come alive to you this year that you can thank God for?

What has been an encouragement to you in the ministries you are involved in?

What new opportunities for ministry have you experienced that you can thank God for?

What other ways have you experienced God's goodness in your life that you can thank him for?

Beyond Cheap Gratitude[1]

Whether Christians should thank God for parking spots is an ongoing conversation in my household. The answer might seem trivial: "In every thing give thanks," Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians, which not merely gives us permission to thank God for the most mundane benefits or goods that we enjoy but effectively requires us to do so. We might be uncertain about whether it was God's will to give us the parking spot, but it is certainly God's will that we be grateful for it: "for this the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you," Paul concludes.

Gratitude is constitutive not only to being a Christian, but being a human. "What do you have that you did not receive?" Paul asks, a question that covers not only the standing we have before God but the wealth and luxury we might enjoy. Our lives as Christians are *extra nos,* outside of ours, grounded "in Christ." The life we have as human beings is given to us: we had no say in our origins, and we have no say in most of the conditions that allow our lives to continue. Human life is inherently conditional; gratitude for our lives happens when we see the truth of them. As Karl Barth has written, the "being of man, can and must be more precisely defined as a being in gratitude." While this means gratitude is "in the strictest sense a natural human action," it is also more than that. The life of gratitude must be understood "radically": it is not "a quality and an activity," nor is it "merely a change of temper or sentiment or conduct and action." Instead, gratitude is "the very being and essence of this creature." Human being *is* gratitude, rather than being "merely grateful."

Yet it is hard to know how to live in gratitude without being *cheap*about it. Lofty rhetoric about how gratitude is constitutive to human life does not necessarily help: within the

[1] Anderson, M. L. (2025, November 26). *#722: Beyond Cheap Gratitude*. The Path Before Us. https://matthewleeanderson.substack.com/p/722-beyond-cheap-gratitude

rhythms of an ordinary day, the thought of relentlessly giving thanks for trivial benefits or goods risks hollowing gratitude out. It is difficult to think of gratitude as the kind of attitude or act that thrives when it is compelled. Making gratitude obligatory necessarily suffocates it. Using a 'gratitude journal' (which are popular in some quarters) might improve someone's mood for a while, but hardly seems to get at the kind of fundamental orientation of gratitude that Barth has in mind.

How can we be grateful, then, without being flippant? One way would be to adopt what we might call 'parking-spot parity': if you are grateful for the convenient parking spot, then you might also be grateful on days when there is no spot available—because it is just on those days that one is given the opportunity to cultivate patience or accept the humiliation of sweat from walking across campus. Paul's injunction to "give thanks in all things" takes the form of a command only because the 'all things' includes so many contexts in which gratitude is the farthest thing from our default response. If gratitude for *apparent* benefits is going to be meaningful, then we must learn to cultivate gratitude for *hidden* benefits as well—even when they are cloaked in suffering or inconvenience.

The publican, **who cries out in the Temple for mercy**, is in this way the paradigmatic form of Christian gratitude. The Pharisee thanks God that he is not like other men (Lk. 18:11), a self-elevation that effectively claims possession of what has been given: the Pharisee thinks that the reason for his election lies in himself, and so cannot be grateful for it. The Publican understands better: in refusing to look up to heaven and pleading for mercy, the Publican expresses gratitude in an inverse form. His contrition is predicated on the reality that he is nothing except that which he is given, that his being and life and happiness lie not within himself but in God. Gratitude is not only impossible without contrition, but constitutive of it: only those who are contrite know they have nothing that they have not received.

This is not generally how Christians think about or express thanks. Yet as our grace is cheap, so also is our gratitude. Some of us live in luxury, where we may not be given inconveniences or pains on a regular basis to help us practice 'parking spot parity.' Yet we have our sins, our temptations to sin, and the thoughts that distort the world and make sin more plausible—all of which are a regular opportunity for us to 'taste and see' the Lord's goodness and so make our

gratitude to God in all things *real*. It may not resolve whether and when we should give thanks for parking spots, but it might give our gratitude depth.