

Giving Out Of Gratitude

As I write this article on gratitude and the connection it has to giving, I realize for many people across our diocese, state and country, this year has been difficult. A growing number of Americans have recently lost their jobs or have not been able to find gainful employment for years. This has led to stress in their lives, marriage and family structure. The lack of employment, have led people to file for bankruptcy, or they may have even lost their homes. For those people, gratitude is probably the last thing on their minds. They are angry at life, government agencies, mortgage and insurance companies, and maybe God. However, for some, even in the midst of hardship and uncertainty gratitude is immediately part of their character and a reason to give praise to God each day.

As I think about our own surroundings in the "Lowcountry", we have plenty to be grateful for and have gratitude about. We live in a beautiful part of the south and the fall weather has been splendid. The economy does not seem as bad in this part of the nation as others. Boeing Corporation has built a manufacturing plant in North Charleston, for a new and innovative airplane called the Dreamliner. Smaller companies have already relocated or planning to build new plants in the area to meet the needs of Boeing. The tourism industry is strong in the Lowcountry. This area has a long and rich history that will continue to attract many a visitor or vacationer. We are blessed to be in a great diocese that has Godly leadership at all levels. We have plenty to be grateful about in this part of America.

Jonathan Edwards, American preacher and theologian, says in his *Treatise for Religious Affections*, that there exist two types of gratitude. One type of gratitude is natural gratitude and the other is gracious gratitude.

Natural gratitude streams out of us freely when good things happen to us. An example could be something big like receiving an unexpected tax refund in the mail or as small as someone letting you go ahead of them in the grocery store checkout lane. These occurrences in our lives require no effort on our part. They are unexpected, sometimes spontaneous acts of kindness and delight us when they happen. We can easily and naturally display emotions or behavior of gratitude when these types of good things occur in our lives. These unsolicited events, gives us energy, optimism and even melts away the concerns of life or worries of the day. We are happy that a positive occurrence has found a way into our lives. Do these unforeseen events in our lives necessarily please God - probably not? As we feel grateful for these acts, it is simply too easy. Sort of like a batter hitting a slow baseball pitch or a basketball player making the easy layup. It requires very little challenge to our faith.

Gracious gratitude is different from natural gratitude. In **Gracious Gratitude**, we express our love, devotion and commitment to God and His goodness even when we are confronted by difficult circumstances. Gracious gratitude is about not abandoning our faith and belief in God when we receive the notice that our job is terminated or the prognosis from the doctor about our illness is not good. Is this type of Christian faith easy to accomplish or to live out daily? For most of us the answer is no. With gracious gratitude, it's rejoicing in God's character and love for us, knowing as St. Paul said in Romans "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Through worship, prayers and individual ministries, we can show our gratitude to God for life itself. We express our gratitude to God explicitly, knowing God's love will not abandon us.

One of the great hymns we have in our hymnal is Harry Emerson Fosdick “God of Grace and God of Glory.”

In the third verse it says, “bend our pride to thy control; shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss thy kingdom’s goal.” Our goal as Christians is to make stewardship a daily way of life. Because of our faith, gratitude, and formation, **we can** proclaim to the world our ministry of time, talent and treasure and not be ashamed. At times due to forces beyond our control or because of our own sinfulness, the ministry of stewardship will not be easy. During these pressure points in our lives, we need the strength, wisdom and courage of God, to help us make the right decisions.

Johann Sebastian Bach would add the initial SDG after a composition. SDG means *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is *Glory to God Alone*. I pray your stewardship decision for your church will have appended at the end SDG – **Glory to God Alone.**

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