



The last five years have seen a flurry of articles written on what has been called the “Me generations” or “millennials” – those born between 1980 and 2000. Social studies - along with specific polling, has revealed an acute deficiency among these generations not generally found in the preceding generations. They lack thankfulness. That being said, many millennials would disagree. Not that they lack thankfulness, but that such should be viewed as a problem (or deficiency). The “new thinking” is that thankfulness is a hindrance – or mental obstacle that keeps people from truly being happy, successful or pursuing a more meaningful path in life. Ironically, suicide and depression has plagued these generations more than any prior. Equally so, the work ethic and perseverance necessary to upward movement in career or the business world has proven to be the worst among the Me generations. That being said, millennials are not the only ones affected. The predominance of such thinking has also influenced older generations. We are progressively becoming a “Me America”, a place where thankfulness no longer exists. Unfortunately, ignorance as to what constitutes and secures thankfulness - as well as what God teaches to be the consequences of lacking thankfulness, have caused not a few Christians to follow this destructive path. Hence the reason for this study on the subject of Thankfulness.

*“Gratitude [Thankfulness] is the alpha, the point from which all virtues must begin...it is the heavyweight champion of virtues” –Jonathan Last (Author of *The Seven Deadly Virtues*)*

“Ingratitude is the most horrible and unnatural crime that a person is capable of committing.” – David Hume (18th century Scottish philosopher)

“No other vice is so hostile to the harmony of the human race as ingratitude.” – Seneca (Ancient Roman philosopher)

What (then) we (as Christians) need to know to about thankfulness:

1. Being thankful means possessing deep sense of gratitude toward God recognizing Him to be the primary cause of all grace/goodness shown to us.

(1Ch 29:10-17; Jam 1:16-18; e.g. 1Ti 1:12-17)

2. Experiencing/feeling the deep sense of gratitude that accompanies/defines thankfulness doesn't happen without regular and constant calling to mind what God has promised to/done for us.

(Deu 4:9; Psa 9:1, 103:1-19, 104:14, 24-34; 1Ch 16:8-17; Deu 7:9, 8:18; 2Co 1:20; Rom 8:28-32; Eph 1:15-2:1-9)

3. Where there is genuine thankfulness, there is also reciprocation, a giving back (to God) of faithful obedience. Our obedience is the return God expects for His gift of goodness/grace to us.¹

(Phi 2:12; Eph 2:10; Rom 12:1-2)

“A historical awareness makes it clear that equating gratitude to solely an inner feeling is insufficient. In the history of ideas, gratitude is considered an action (returning a favor) that is not only virtuous in and of itself, but valuable to society. To reciprocate is the right thing to do.” – Scott Kaufman (Dept of Psychology, University California Davis; “Is Gratitude Queen of the Virtues and Ingratitude King of the Vices?”)

“There is no duty more indispensable than that of returning a kindness” – Cicero (Ancient Roman philosopher and lawyer)

¹ “[Grace] is best captured by the anthropological category of gift. This category is broad, but covers a sphere of voluntary, personal relations that are characterized by goodwill in giving of some benefit or favor and that elicit some form of reciprocal return that is both voluntary and necessary for the continuation of the relationship...A modern Western dictionary tells us that ‘gift’ means something handed over ‘gratuitously, for nothing.’ But even the slightest knowledge of antiquity would inform us that gifts were given with strong expectations of return – indeed, precisely in order to elicit a return and thus create or enhance social solidarity. Those of us brought up in the West are likely to be surprised (even shocked) by the gift practices of non-Western cultures today. We should expect a similar or even greater surprise when we encounter ancient practices and opinions...In archaic societies, the gift-system was basic to, and the glue between all the realms which modernity has distinguished – economics, law, kinship, religion, aesthetics, ritual, and politics...In such societies the exchange of [gifts] constitutes a unifying social choreography: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to return. Each of these interdependent moves carries the force of social necessity, since they constitute the most important bonds of society (and of the relations between humans and gods). Families and groups (tribes) are tied together internally and externally by the offering and receiving of gifts – an unwillingness to receive is a sign of hostility or mistrust...In many contexts gift-giving operates as a substitute for war – soothing or sublimating hostility with gifts...The gift is therefore at one and the same time what should be done, what should be received, and yet what is dangerous to take. This because the thing that is given itself forges a bilateral, irrevocable bond [of reciprocation]... ‘Why is it that a gift is received with a burden attached?’ Because the thing or service given is not detachable from the person who gives it, and that tie with the donor can only be acknowledged by a counter-gift. [A] loss of honor...would result from failure to reciprocate.” – John M.G. Barclay (*Paul And The Gift*)

4. All forms of unhappiness (depression, discontentment, unfulfilled living, feeling sorry for yourself, etc.) and poor performance (laziness, lack of productivity, etc.) can be (and often are) signs of lacking thankfulness/gratitude.

A 2008 study involving almost 400 participants concluded that thankfulness (or gratitude) determines a person's happiness more than any other factor – irrespective of their particular personality type or trait (The “Big Five”: Conscientious, Extraverted, Neurotic, Agreeable, Open).² Furthermore, numerous studies have shown happiness to be a key factor to productivity. The correlation between these three should therefore be obvious. Where there is a lack of thankfulness, there often exists also indications of unhappiness and a struggling work ethic (e.g. Gen 4:3-5)

“Scientific studies have revealed that gratitude is foundational to well-being and mental health throughout the life span. From childhood to old age, accumulating evidence documents the wide array of psychological, physical, and relational benefits associated with gratitude. In the past few years, there has been a tremendous increase in the accumulation of scientific evidence showing the contribution of gratitude to psychological and social well-being. Clinical trials indicate that the practice of gratitude can have dramatic and lasting positive effects in a person’s life. It can lower blood pressure, improve immune function, promote happiness and well-being, and spur acts of helpfulness, generosity, and cooperation. Additionally, gratitude reduces lifetime risk for depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders (Emmons, 2007, 2013; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Given the range of benefits linked with gratitude, it has fittingly been referred to as the quintessential positive trait (Wood, 2010), the amplifier of goodness in oneself, the world, and others (Watkins, 2014) and as having unique power to heal, energize, and change lives (Emmons, 2013).” - Scott Kaufman

5. The consequences of not being thankful are _____.

They include:

5.1. _____ (Rom 1:21-23)

5.2. _____ (Rom 1:24-27)

5.3. _____ (Rom 1:28-32)

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION/CHALLENGE

² See “Gratitude Uniquely Predicts Satisfaction With Life: Incremental validity above the domains and facets of the five factor model” by Alex M. Wood, Stephen Joseph, John Maltby of the University of Warwick, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, School of Psychology (January - February 2008).