

GRATITUDE

Scripture used: [Matthew 20:1-16 \(NIV\)](#)

OVERVIEW

We are just coming out of Thanksgiving, a holiday with a tradition of being grateful for things in our lives we are thankful for. Yet, catching and holding onto gratitude is elusive, particularly in stages of pain and hardship. Our Scripture today challenges us to follow Jesus in a different way of establishing a permanent foundation of gratitude for our lives. We learn that apart from Jesus, gratitude is often based on temporary circumstances or comparison, and such gratitude can be toxic and fragile. In contrast, Jesus gives us a foundation of gratitude that is strong and secure, and the transforming power of gratitude on all of our relationships can be profound.

KEY POINTS

1. Jesus' ministry had a reputation for being friendly to sinners, and the parable is constructed to reflect the feelings of the religious leaders and teachers of the law who were scandalized by Jesus' ministry. The workers who started at the beginning of the day had ups and downs of gratitude, but they are left with anger and frustration when others (who are perceived as less-worthy) unfairly get recognized and rewarded. In the same way, our days can be full of frustration. **Gratitude is fragile and toxic when based on comparison.** Even religious inclination can be tainted by comparison, such as when Jesus teaches in Luke 18:10: The Pharisee gives God praise by saying "God, I thank you that I am not like other people... even this tax collector" This is unhealthy gratitude, as comparing oneself to others generally leads to either pride and boasting, or resentment and envy. The circumstances that lead to our gratitude are often temporary, which results in a fragile basis for sustained gratitude.
2. Jesus is teaching knowing He's going to give His life as a payment, or ransom, to set us free. His teaching brings freedom, forgiveness, and a saving and unconditional love. Goodness tips over the scale - no matter what else we face, nothing can rob us of our gratitude. We celebrate the blessings that come our way without hanging on to them as if they are our sole source of joy. **We know the foundation of our gratitude is secure when it is rooted in God's goodness and love.**
3. In our Scripture, the relationship between the early morning workers and the boss is strained. In that case, they are all unable to go deeper in partnership. To be used as a positive force, gratitude has to be communicated. In the church, worship creates space for gratitude, intimacy, deeper relationship with God, and awe. **Uncommunicated gratitude has the same effect as ingratitude.** For some of us, we are in strained relationships because even though we are generally grateful, we haven't communicated our gratitude for a long time. Instead, we all feel taken for granted. Thanksgiving is the act of articulating gratitude - if we don't communicate our gratitude, the feeling is wasted, and worse, it has no power to deepen our relationships. When we follow through in communicating our gratitude, it has the potential to transform every relationship in our life.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - Do you identify with your feelings of joy and gratitude often feeling temporary and shifting with circumstances? What have you recently been most grateful for? What has taken away your gratitude? Have you noticed the impact that comparison can have on your feelings of gratitude?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Consider [Matthew 20:1-16 \(NIV\)](#). Who do you identify with most in this parable? One of Pastor Tilden's teaching points is that the surprise teaching of the parable is that God has been unfair to each one of us – in our favor. That's what grace is: unmerited or undeserved favor from God, that permanently tips the scales of "fairness" on our behalf in an eternal and permanent way. How has God made a difference in your life through His grace? What causes you to forget how good God has been to you? What practices might help to keep you centered and sensitive to the foundation of God's grace that is able to sustain permanent gratitude, even in the face of life's challenges?
- 3) **DO** - You are encouraged to continue the "Gratitude Challenge" that Pastor Hurmon gave last Sunday. Spend time each day remembering God's goodness. In addition, make sure you communicate your gratitude to both people and God! Remember that next Sunday, December 4, we will ONLY have live Gatherings in San Jose at 9 AM and 11 AM (Redwood City campus will be closed due to a schedule conflict with our host site). Pastor Hurmon will be in San Jose teaching live at both Gatherings as we begin our new series that will take us to Christmas, "Have you heard?" Come join us!