

The Importance of Thanks

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The recent months of November and December were bleak and trying this year. Of all the causes, I believe the lack of bright white in Ontario took its toll on students and faculty alike. It was during this time of the year, when students and staff were at their busiest, completing tasks before the Christmas break, when I pondered whether the students or our superiors were even slightly aware of the effort supplied the staff. Truly, we are not in this profession for the money, nor the acclaim; however, morale in many ways seemed to be lagging at this normally festive time of year.

It was not that gratitude wasn't present in the hectic rat-race of projects, evaluations, tests, lessons, final presentations, or extra-curricular duties. The perfunctory birthday card was left in my mailbox, the all-call thank-you message was on occasion left on our voicemail, and some staff even received a thank-you note for extra service beyond the call of duty. Officially, the gratitude was expressed and received – yet my mind still wondered whether our service was actually being appreciated.

I completed my commitments to my students and superiors, and headed home for the holidays. Driving home through the bland landscape, I wondered whether my service was worthwhile or appreciated. These thoughts pervaded my Christmas season as I slowly unwound to spend family time without academic obligations. It was during this time that I felt inspired to read Luke. As I pondered this gospel's lessons, I sought solace for this emotional ache.

Luke 17 tells of an interesting situation: Jesus, entering a village, was met by ten lepers. They implored Christ to show mercy upon them. “When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?’” (14-17 NIV). It was at this time that I found my answers.

At first, I mistakenly identified with Jesus in this situation; “Where were the other ninety percent of my students, colleagues, and administrators proffering their thanks for the service I provided?” Surely, the necessity for gratitude was the moral here. I contemplated that they could easily show their thanks, but took my efforts for granted. I didn't feel much better at this point. It was only with some deeper reflection and meditation that I found my consolation.

I reevaluated my interpretation of this scripture; I put myself in the place of the lepers. I asked myself the hard, probing question: was I one of the 10% who showed my gratitude to others over the past four months of school, or was I one of the 90% who ran away from Christ in a selfish bid for personal renewal. I wanted to be in the 10%, but seemed to fall in the 90%. I realized that rather than seeking appreciative accolade, I should be delivering it. Beyond that, I also concluded that gratitude needs certain parameters to fulfill its true potential.

Gratitude needs to be selfless and genuine. One needs to scrutinize the motivation for one's gratitude. Is it being delivered because duty requires it? Is there a hidden expectation within the

thanks? Insincere “gushing” tends to be noticed quickly and ignored. I have experienced heartfelt as well as obligatory thanks. The extra effort provided towards exhibiting genuine thankfulness is never futile.

Gratitude needs to be consistent. Thankfulness needs to be part of our daily walk, and it needs to be delivered to people on a regular basis. Delivering an arbitrary “thank-you” to a person is always nice, but superficial. Offering gratitude to an individual on varying occasions shows appreciation, as well as forms a bond that connects us on a deeper level of brotherhood.

Most importantly, gratitude needs to be personal. I think back to the thank-you voicemails and general group statements and recollect my resultant feelings of anonymity. I also recall our worthy student banquet, where we not only received an all-call voicemail of thanks, but an individual visit by the coordinator to personally thank us for our unique contributions to the event. Between the two displays of gratitude, I preferred the latter. It was the personal appreciation that helped me realize my contributions were noticed and worthwhile; in return, I wanted to help those people all the more when the time comes. Personalization is needed for maximum effectiveness when delivering thanks.

I still want to be thanked and appreciated for what I do; however, I have learned that if I have these wants, others must have that same desire as well. I have realized that I need to show selflessly my appreciation more readily to those who interact with me on a daily basis. Like the leper, I need to return to my Master – daily – to show my thankfulness for His saving grace. I also need to go out into the world to reflect that connection in my interactions with others, and humbly, genuinely, acknowledge their service in a grateful manner as well. It will be all worthwhile when I hear the greatest thanks ever: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt. 25:23).