

LEARN TO SAY “THANK YOU”

“And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: and they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when He saw them, He said unto them, go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, were there not ten cleansed but where are the nine?” [Lk 17: 12-17]

*In the mid-1970's, at an annual musical awards ceremony, the **Best Album of the Year** award went to Paul Simon, one of the best contemporary American artistes. In his acceptance speech, he thanked all those who had contributed to the success of the album (writers, producers, marketers, fans, etc.). Finally, he said, “I thank Stevie Wonder for not making an album this year!” It was this last statement that grabbed the headlines the next day. He was commended for his modesty, a giant praising another giant.*

*Are you in that league? The student who does very well in his degree exams beats his chest saying, **I made First Class [Magna cum Laude]!**” Did his teachers, classmates and school contribute anything at all? The mother whose children are doing well brags about their “strict upbringing.” Are the other less successful mothers spoiling their children? The office boss claims all the credit for his organization’s success. Were the other workers asleep all year? How does it hurt you when you acknowledge other people’s contribution to your success or God’s blessing in your life?*

Of course, God does not miss your gratitude because “the heavens declare His righteousness and all the people see His glory” [Ps. 97:6]. Human benefactors don’t miss it either because, if they are not tired of doing good, in due season they shall receive their reward from God [Gal. 6:9]. Therefore, learning to say “thank you” is for your own good for the following reasons:

- ❖ *God ranks it over sacrifice and when you call Him in the day of trouble, He will deliver you [Ps. 50:12-15]. David wrote the greater part of the **Psalms** and God called him the man after His own heart [1 Sam. 13:14];*
- ❖ *You are required to give thanks in everything “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” [1 Thes. 5:18]*
- ❖ *If you are known to be a grateful person, you will attract more favours from others. David married Abigail when her “churlish and evil” husband died because by her earlier grateful conduct, David saw her as a blessing from the Lord for keeping him “this day from coming to shed blood and from avenging myself with my own hands” [1 Sam. 25: 3,18-42]. Jesus commended the only leper (out of the ten healed) that came to thank Him and rated his gratitude a show of faith [Lk 17:18].*

Every one of us needs help, whether material or spiritual, from God or from man. Unfortunately, some of us don’t like to be indebted to others. We avoid favours like a plague so that we don’t have to be obliged to those offering them. We think that by so doing we can avoid thanking others but can we avoid God?

In today’s lesson, we shall examine how we unwittingly practise ingratitude towards God and human benefactors and how to deal with the problem. Saying “thank you” should be so easy but is it? Let’s find out!

1. What is “thank you”?

The Psalmist says, “O give thanks unto the Lord, call upon His name: make known His deeds among the people” [Ps. 105:1] and “so we Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture will give Thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth Thy praise to all generations” [Ps. 79:13].

The components of a sincere “thank you” can be deduced from the above and here are some of them:

- (a) It should be said to the benefactor [i.e., the person doing you a favour]. If you don’t tell others how much you appreciate their contribution to your success, even if you are exaggerating, how will they know? For example, Isaac Newton is best known for his **Law of Gravity**. Did you know that his more profound law called **Isaac Newton’s Second Law**, states: “If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”? Isn’t that an eloquent “thank you” statement to his predecessors and contemporaries? Jesus always verbalized His thanks to His Father. For example, before raising Lazarus from the dead, He said, “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that thou hearest Me always: **but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me**” [Jn 11:41-42].
- (b) You should tell others about it so that they can help you to thank Him, him or her. It fuels their desire to do good to others and more good to you. Jesus told the man from whom He had cast out legions of demons, “return to thine own house and shew how great things God hath done unto thee” and “he went his way and **published throughout the whole city** how great things Jesus had done unto him” [Lk 8:39].
- (c) If it is within your duty, ability, opportunity or privilege to do something that pleases your benefactor now or in the future do it. Otherwise, He or he or she may be forced to recall the good things they have done for you but which you have forgotten. Whenever the Israelites were disobedient, God always reminded them about how He had delivered their ancestors out of bondage in Egypt and miraculously taken them through the Red Sea on foot, etc. [Ps. 106:1-48]. David had helped Nabal, Abigail’s husband, to protect his flock and workers against foreign invaders. When he became rich, he turned down David’s simple request for food supplies. In fact, he sent a very insulting response through David’s servants, saying, “who is David and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?” [1 Sam. 25:10-11]. But for his wife, David would have in anger destroyed all that Nabal was boasting on.

Since we all lack one thing or the other, which we can obtain from God through others, it appears that we need to develop a positive attitude towards receiving in order to improve the quality of our gratitude. Let’s first examine ways by which we avoid saying “thank you’ to others.

2. How we avoid having to thank others

We should recognize that we couldn’t thank others if we did not know the favour that they had done for us. For example, King Ahasuerus, Queen Esther’s husband, did not know the role that Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, had played in foiling the plan of his doorkeepers to kill him until he read the records some years later.

He thanked him soon after with a promotion [**Esther 6:1-11**]. It may actually be in God's plan that the favour be not remembered until His appointed time. For example, it took two years after leaving prison for the Pharaoh's butler to remember Joseph's favour to him. There is no record that during those two years that he went back to prison to visit Joseph or smuggle him some food. However, at the time that he remembered Joseph, Pharaoh and Egypt needed him, and that was God's plan [**Gen. 41: 1-9**]. Of course, we also know that some people are inherently ungrateful, such as Nabal in relation to David, and the 9 lepers in relation to Jesus. It could also be due to vanity and pride, such as in the Parable of the Rich Fool [**Lk 12: 13-20**]. That is why we are enjoined not to be tired of doing good "for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" [**Gal. 6:9**].

In general, people (consciously or otherwise) try to avoid saying "thank you" through the following ways, among others:

(a) By perceiving favours as being deserved, earned or as no big deal

Some children tell their parents that they are entitled to certain rights and privileges because they were not responsible for being born their children. Therefore, if they have to eat, go to school, etc., their parents must bear the responsibility. However, in some cultures, the parents who have invested in their children's upbringing and education *expect* such children, when they grow up and become successful, to take care of their aged parents, especially in the absence of public social security schemes. Some bosses claim that workers are paid to do their work. Therefore, why should they be commended for doing their duty?

The evidence from the Scriptures suggests that everybody desires/deserves gratitude. For example, God the Father never missed the opportunity to commend His Only Begotten Son to the world with such expressions as "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" [**Matt. 3:17; Matt. 17:5**]. In turn, Jesus always gave the credit of the success of His ministry to His Father, "the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" [**Jn 14:10**]. At Lazarus' grave, He thanked His Father before raising Lazarus from the dead, just as He did when the 70 disciples brought a good report of their evangelism [**Lk 10:21**]. Also, He commended and encouraged His disciples with such acts as healing Peter's mother-in-law [**Mk 1:29-31**], paying the Apostles' temple taxes [**Matt. 17:24**], and assuring them of earthly and eternal rewards for their sacrificial service [**Lk 18:28-30**]. Even Paul who could fend for himself was very appreciative of favours rendered by the faithfuls. He used such expressions as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches by Christ Jesus" [**Phil. 4: 18-19**]. In most of his epistles, he gave due credit to those who had helped him with his work. For example, in **Romans, Chapter 16**, he acknowledged the contribution of over 35 people to his Roman ministry (see box).

PAUL'S "THANK YOU" LIST [Rom. 16]	
<p><u>Paul's company</u></p> <p>Timothy and Luke (the physician) Jason and Sosipater [v.21] Tertius (Paul's scribe)[v. 22] Gaius (his host) and Erastus (domestic staff)[v.23]; Quartus (Christian brother)</p> <p><u>The people he met</u></p> <p>Phebe (Christian sister, a helper of many)[vv.1-2] Priscilia and Aquila (a husband and wife team that risked their lives for Paul) [vv. 3-5] Epaenetus (one of the first converts in Achaia)[v.5]; Mary (did chores) [v.6] Andronicus and Junia (fellow prisoners) [v.7] Amplias [v.8]; Urbane (beloved/helpers) [v.8]</p>	<p>Stachys(beloved); Apelles (approved in Christ)[vv.9-10] Aristobulus household [v. 10] Herodion (kinsman) [v. 11] Members of the household of Narcissus [v. 11] Tryphena and Tryphoso (labourers in the Lord) [v. 12] Rufus (son of Simon of Cyrene [Mk 15:21]) and his mother [v. 13] Asyncritus, Phlegun, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes and the brethren with them [v. 14] Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them [v. 15]</p>

(b) By minimizing indebtedness to others

We attempt this through the following methods, for example:

i. *When we work for self-reliance*

Modern living is encouraging people to depend on themselves. Computers, gadgets and robots are gradually displacing the need for human assistance. You don't need to thank machines when they work well because "my power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" [Deut. 8:17].

ii. *When we refuse offers of assistance even when we badly need it*

We fear that every favour has strings attached. You don't want your freedom of action to be encroached upon should you accept any favours. Yet, deep down in your heart, you are crying for help. The Shunammite woman who had been kind to Elisha, having built him guest- quarters, was childless. But when the prophet asked what he could do for her, she said that she didn't need anything. Even after the prophet's servant had told him of her barrenness and the man of God had pronounced that she would be the proud mother of a son in a year's time, her reply was, "do not lie unto thine handmaid" [2 Kgs 4: 8-17]. It is not a weakness to accept help from others if we don't mind helping others because "with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" [Lk 6:38]. By refusing help from others, you could be limiting God's ability to answer your prayers [Job 42: 7-12].

iii. *By reciprocating as soon as possible*

It is embarrassing how some people do it. Rather than express gratitude (by phone, e-mail or card or by whatever means), they send almost immediately a gift of almost equal value. That settles the matter and they don't owe any more gratitude! Naaman the leper came to Israel with ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold and ten changes of clothes as gifts for whoever would cure him of his leprosy [2 Kgs 5:5]. After his miraculous healing, he offered Elisha those gifts (worth today millions of US dollars), which the man of God turned down [vv. 15-16]. Can you reciprocate God's gifts and blessings? What can you pay Him for your peaceful sleep, escape from instant death in an auto crash, miraculous healing of a brain tumor, even the breath we breathe every moment?

iv. *By avoiding receiving but always wanting to give*

We would like others to remain indebted to us while we remain the centre of attraction. Jacob's father-in-law, Laban, gave his two daughters in marriage to Jacob in order to trap him into indebtedness for 14 years [Gen. 29:14-28]. Do you know why? By taking advantage of Jacob's love for his younger daughter Rachel, Laban trapped Jacob because of God's blessings that flowed to him through Jacob [Gen. 30:27]. However, as soon as God opened Jacob's eyes to escape, Laban pursued him with all his might [Gen. 31:22-24]. Just as we don't want to be placed in a position of indebtedness, so also others want to be set free from our trap of benevolence. Solomon was the richest man in the world in his time. but he gladly accepted the gifts presented by the Queen of Sheba when she visited him [1 Kgs 10:10. 13-14].

3. Conclusion: learn to say "thank you"

"O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever. I called upon the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me and set me in a large place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear, what can man do unto me?" [Ps. 118:1, 5-6]

Gratitude to God is a major key to drawing His attention to our needs. Unlike the case with human beings, we can **never** repay God for what He does for us. Therefore, the one important way to show our indebtedness is to thank Him at all times. Since He provides for our needs through fellow human beings, it follows that we should not shy away from being thankful to our benefactors. We should, therefore, meditate on the following suggestions:

With respect to God;

- a) Make it a point of duty to do thanks offering during service in church, even when the going is rough. Pay our tithes and fulfill our vows. We would then see our blessings grow [Ps. 50: 14-15; Mal. 3; 8-10].

- b) Form the habit of thanking God *every minute*. The Psalmist says, “seven times a day *do I praise Thee*” [Ps. 119:164]. Thank Him when we wake up each morning. After all, anything can happen to us while we are asleep. While brushing our teeth, we should thank Him that we even have teeth to clean! How about our jobs, businesses, schools, homes, food and appetite? Not everybody has such privileges! We have problems- childlessness, unhappy marriages, robberies, fires, etc? Things could have been much worse! So, we should learn to thank and praise Him for all things and in all situations [1 Thes. 5:18].

With respect to others:

- (a) We should stop taking things for granted. We should thank our parents, children, siblings, colleagues, subordinates, fellow workers in the Lord’s vineyard, strangers, etc., for our indebtedness in such areas as cleaning and washing, cooking, paying school fees, making coffee, writing reports, counselling, etc. We should commend people for their contribution to our successes and give due credit at the appropriate time.
- (b) We should use one hand to receive from those who meet our needs (material, physical, spiritual) and use the other hand to meet the needs of others [Lk 14:13-14]. In this way, we thank those whom we cannot repay and receive thanks from those who cannot repay us. At any rate, our reward in both instances will come from God.

“Thank you” is a pleasant phrase which is “as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones” [Prov. 16:24]. Therefore, we should learn to thank God and our neighbours for our own good and blessings.