

“Gratitude Adjustment”
Grow Up Series, Part 5

Did you all hear about the nurse who was arrested in Florida this past August? Apparently, this lady had been working as a nurse at a hospital from July 2023 to January 2025. It all sounds normally until we find out that she pretended to be a nurse. She never had credentials. She was posing as a licensed nurse. The crazy thing is that she treated over 4,400 people and was even promoted at the hospital. However, what she was doing was dangerous and illegal so she was eventually caught and eventually arrested.

I don't know what this lady's motive was. Maybe she wanted nurse money but didn't want nurse education. There may have been something off in her brain. We don't know. But one thing is for certain, this kind of thing happens all the time. I am not talking about people posing as nurses without the education. I am talking about people claiming to be one thing and living a different life than they proclaim. It happens in Hollywood all the time. How often have we seen reports that these actors who look so wholesome on TV end up being the rudest and meanest people off camera? It is so easy to point a finger, but you and I need to be careful that we are not doing the same thing in our faith. We are called to be children of God who walk in love, purity, and power. There are many Christians who act one way on Sunday and live completely different Monday through Saturday.

Today we are going to continue our series through the book of Ephesians. Specifically, we are going to look at how we are to operate as children of God. Remember that in Ephesians 1-3 Paul lay the groundwork for Theology and doctrine. In Chapters 4-5 we are seeing our Christian duty and practice from that doctrine. **Genesis 1:26-27** speaks about humans being made in the likeness and image of God. God is good, God is love, God's lovingkindness is everlasting. As His children and followers, we are called to mirror His image in the land. If you have been washed by the blood of Christ and your name has been changed, you should act differently than the unsaved in this evil world. People should notice that you are different. You should be getting questions like, “Why are you always so happy?” Or “Why aren't you worried or scared right now?” We can be happy and live with joy at all times because our hope is not in this world. Our hope is in Jesus who has overcome the world. The hard part then is putting that truth into practice. How do we live not as hypocrites? How do we live in a way that mirrors the heart of God in this fallen world? I am so glad you asked. We are going to find that answer today in chapter five of Ephesians. If you have your Bibles, please go with me to the book of Ephesians chapter 5 and we are going to read verses 1-21. I am not going to read that part about family and marriage today. What the Lord put on my heart is very specific so I will save the marriage aspect for next time or another time. There is a very specific word I want to break down from this passage. Let's begin in verse 1:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Paul uses the conjunction “therefore” which means we need to know why it is there for. He is transitioning from chapter 4 where he was speaking about unity and how believers should treat each other.

Verse one is one of my most favorite verses in the Bible. The Greek word for “imitate” looks like the English word for mime. It is like to mirror or imitate and only used six times in the Bible. Each time it is used in the exact same way. Paul tells us to imitate God. We are to mirror God’s nature and attributes. So, we are supposed to be loving, kind, good, holy, powerful, and more. But the reason this verse means so much to me is *how* this verse tells us to imitate God. It tells us to imitate God *as* beloved children. Not just as children, but as beloved children. Rich kids live different than poor kids. Kids with two loving parents in the home live different than those without. Kids raised in a Christian home will live differently than growing up in a home without Jesus. So, you a dearly loved child of God, should live differently than everyone else in the world. Notice that Paul is not telling us to just think about God or admire God but is calling us to imitate God meaning we act like Him. We practically live our lives like God.

Because we are dearly loved we should live differently. Paul says we should “walk in love.” In the book of Ephesians the word “walk” means the way we conduct ourselves and the manner in which we live. It means more of our lifestyle. Paul says that we should conduct ourselves in the love of God. The reason we should love unconditionally is because we were loved unconditionally by the Lord.

3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Paul goes into specific detail about the way you should act as a believer. He lists all kinds of sexual sins. The word here for “Immorality” is the word in Greek *porneia*. That word is obviously where we get the word pornography. Paul lists all kinds of ways we can sin sexually, even just joking about it. There is something very, very important to understand. Paul is not saying, “Avoid these things so that you can live as a saint.” I believe that many Christians believe this. That they believe if they purge their life of sin *then* they will live as a saint. The big problem with that way of thinking is that *you* are the one earning it. We don’t earn salvation and freedom through good works or behaving the right way. We are saved and set free only through the grace and finished work of Jesus. So, we don’t avoid sin to be a saint, we *are* a saint so therefore we should not sin. As an example, imagine you are at a grocery store. You see a police officer walk in the store, grab a candy bar, and then proceed to walk out of the store without paying. Now I know there are a lot of business owners who don’t charge first responders. I think that is fantastic, but in this scenario let’s imagine this cop stole the candy. Your first thought would be “The police officer who is supposed to be enforcing the law is breaking the law. What an oxymoron.” The same is true about the believer. We are saved, forgiven, healed, and delivered. We need to act as if we actually gave our lives to Jesus and made Him *Lord* of our lives. It is easy to say the sinner’s prayer, but it is difficult to make Jesus Lord or Master of your life and live in a way that reflects that.

Paul then says that no immoral, impure man will have an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Some people believe this means that if you keep on sinning you will lose your salvation. I don't believe that. I don't believe that for many reasons. The first is that our identity is a child of God. A person who is not saved is a sinner or in this case an "immoral person." I believe Paul is referring to unsaved people in this passage. Notice that in verse three Paul says you (believers) should not walk in *immorality*. But then he speaks of those who are *immoral*. However, I also believe that even though Jesus has blessed us with every spiritual blessing and given us authority from heaven, doesn't mean we always walk in it. Everyone has a Bible; it doesn't mean every studies it.

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. – Ephesians 5:1-21 NASB1995

I am very fascinated by how Paul finishes this portion of Scripture. He encourages the believer to not be a sleeper and to always give thanks. The Greek word here for sleeper is very broad. It is used in the Bible when Jesus took a nap on the boat in the middle of the sea. It was used when the little girl died and Jesus said, she is not dead only sleeping. It was used when the disciples couldn't stay awake when Jesus was praying before His crucifixion. When you are asleep the world keeps going. When you are asleep, you can't help people, work, pray, etc. You're just asleep. So, in the same way you can't do these things when you are physically sleeping, there are many things you are not doing when you are spiritually sleeping. Another way of saying this is "spiritual sloth." You are either too distracted, too exhausted, too deceived, or other things and you cannot fulfill what God is calling you to do. We need to be careful that we are not sleeping awake.

Then we get to the word I want to focus on today. The word "thanks." I saw a picture online that I want to share with you. It is a picture of a front lawn where a guy put a blow-up Santa on the ground and a blow-up Thanksgiving turkey standing on Santa with a sign that says, "Not so fast Santa!" Isn't that so true? We see Halloween decorations in the stores in July now. We see Christmas decorations for sale before we can even eat the bird! So much attention is given to Halloween and Christmas that thanksgiving seems to be forgotten. I believe that in the same way

our culture overlooks Thanksgiving, if we are not careful, Christians can overlook being thankful in all things. Paul is very clear on living with a thankful heart. In **1 Thessalonians 5:18** Paul says, “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Did you know that the number one question asked to pastors is “what is God’s will for my life?” Well, Paul just answered it. God’s will for your life is to give thanks in *everything*. Ouch. In *everything* Jesus? Wow how do we do that? Well, let’s first begin by understanding what thanksgiving does.

POINT #1 – Thanksgiving produces Intimacy, Joy, and Faith.

Psalm 100:4 says that we “enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.” You and I are on this planet for the glory of God. God’s glory is His manifest presence. It is when we encounter Him. The Bible tells us that if we want a greater experience of His presence, we need to be thankful. As we are about to celebrate Christmas and we will be exchanging gifts we all know one of the best gifts anyone can get is the gift of thanks. A parent is overjoyed when a child expresses thanks. Marriages become stronger and more romantic when there is thanksgiving. If thanksgiving is that powerful among humans, think about how powerful it is when you express thanks to God! Listen to what a professor from the University of Florida says:

When we feel gratitude, Lazarus explains, our brains release hormones associated with happiness and joy — dopamine and serotonin. “Those are two crucial neurotransmitters that are responsible for our emotions,” he says. “When we release these hormones, they make us feel good. They immediately make us feel happy from the inside.” Lazarus, who is the past president of the National Association of School Psychologists, adds that studies have shown that people who feel grateful have reduced levels of cortisol, the “stress” hormone; have better cardiac functioning; and are more resilient when they face emotional setbacks or negative experiences. Gratitude also reduces anxiety and depression and helps people manage stress more effectively. Additionally, studies have shown that keeping a gratitude journal or engaging in thankful thoughts help ameliorate the effects of physical pain such as injury. The bottom line: “There’s no negative side effects of feeling gratitude,” – Philip Lazarus, associate professor psychology.

Not only is your life better emotionally when you give thanks to God, your physical body is transformed. We are literally wired to give thanks and thrive when our hearts reflect it. Now, the bad news. The opposite of giving thanks is complaining. Complaining is a cancer to the soul. Fill out point number two:

POINT #2 – Complaining produces Callousness, Discontentment, and Sin.

I heard a story from a pastor the other day about a weird smell in his car. Many of us have faced a “mystery smell” in our car or home. On the first day the smell was different but not bad. On the second day the smell got a little worse. On the third day the wife of the pastor got in the car and said, “What died in your car?!” Finally, the pastor took time to investigate and found that a box of salad greens had slipped out of the grocery bags and hid itself under the passenger seat. The greens just continued to grow worse and worse in the heat of the car. Ungratefulness festers. If you live with constant complaining, it is like that box of nasty salad greens. One pastor said, “complaining only proves how well you can hear the devil’s voice.” Complaining should be foreign to the Christian mind. The apostle Paul tells us in **Philippians 2** that we can prove we are

children of God by doing all things without grumbling or disputing. It is so sad that for some, complaining is such a consistent and normal part of everyday life that if complaining were removed from conversation, you would have no idea what to say. If we truly knew what complaining was producing in our lives, we would stop it today.

The big question is “how can I be more thankful?” I believe it is with these three things:

POINT #3 – You are more thankful when you are Aware, Vocal, and Consistent.

The first thing is to be aware. **Psalm 9:1** says, “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of Your wonderful deeds.” Changing your heart to give thanks in all things begins by looking around seeing what you can be thankful for. There was a pastor who gave a testimony one time where he and his wife were paying bills. They had a tiny little home and were gathered around a little dining room table they got at a thrift store. When they were done paying bills and balancing the check book, they realized that they barely had a penny left. They sat there for a minute in silence and discouragement. Then out of nowhere the pastor says, “I’m so thankful for this table. I really like this table.” The wife smiled and said, “I am so thankful for our little home.” The pastor looked down at his hunting dog that was a gift from a friend and said, “I’m so thankful for my dog.” This went on for an hour. You can really be thankful if you just look around.

The next thing to help you be more thankful is to be vocal. Thanksgiving is a vocal expression of your trust in God. And here is a really, really good piece of advice: if you can’t find anything to be thankful for...then at least shut up. If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all. But here’s the truth: even if you can’t find anything to be thankful for, you can still be thankful. Don’t believe me? Well, Jesus took a little kid’s lunch of a couple fish and loaves of bread and did a miracle by feeding five thousand. But do you know what he did before the miracle? He gave thanks. He held in His hand what was *not enough*, and He gave thanks! Your thanksgiving is a vocal expression of your trust in God. Your vocal, out loud thanks to God is your offering. It is your sacrifice you bring to the Lord. You need to find ways in your own personality and life to give thanks to God. You may need to journal or write things down first. Maybe you and your spouse make a new discipline before bed that you will give thanks for one or two things. Husbands, always say you are thankful for your wife. Big brownie points.

Finally, be consistent. Every 5-7 years I buy a new Bible to start fresh with underlines and notes. I got this awesome single column goatskin NASB but it is so pretty I didn’t want to mark it up. I don’t really like to write in my Bibles because it gets hard to read it later. So I was online looking for a wide margin Bible that might work for my regular reading. I found these awesome spiral loose leaf journaling Bibles and they are awesome. It is a collection of five books because they are so large. I bought the Poetry section collection and the whole New Testament. Every day I read one Psalm and one New Testament chapter. I open up my computer and do all the word studies and write down all my findings and questions. I thought to myself, in one year these things are going to be filled and marked up. It is going to look like all I did was read and study the Bible all day every day. In reality, I spent 30 mins a day. The key is consistency. It is amazing how much consistent little things build up over time. I challenge you to try this with thanksgiving. Write down one thing you are grateful for every day. Say out loud on thing you are

thankful for every day. Pray one thing you are thankful for every day. You might be amazed at how much changes in your life emotionally, relationally, and even physically.