2026 11 08 Acts 4:32-35
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Looking with Gratitude



Let us begin with a picture of the first church. Listen to Acts 4:32-35. “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

It is a remarkable record after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. At that time, people thought that the Lord would come back quite soon. They had one heart and soul in the pouring of the Holy Spirit. The sharing of possessions was the fruit of their heart.



Here is the key to this passage, as simply as I can say it. Trusting in Jesus does two things to the human heart. First, it binds the hearts of people together. Second, it loosens the heart in its relationship with things. Faith in Christ creates a bond of love to people, and it cuts the bond of love to things.

They were doing exactly what Jesus said in Luke 12:32-33, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms.” St Francis listened to the word by chance and followed the word as it was. He sold everything he had and gave it to the poor. And God promised him his name to be continued until Jesus comes.

In giving and receiving, we are grateful in both ways. So, gratitude is more than delighting in a gift. It is a feeling of happiness directed toward a person for giving you something good. It’s happiness that comes not merely from the gift, but from the act of giving. Gratitude is a happy feeling you have about a giver.

It all starts from the hand of God, as all other good things. Above all else, God gave us his son, Jesus, to rescue us from this dark world. Every morning I give thanks for this fact. In the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit works powerfully in our hearts. In other words, gratitude flourishes in the sphere of grace of God.

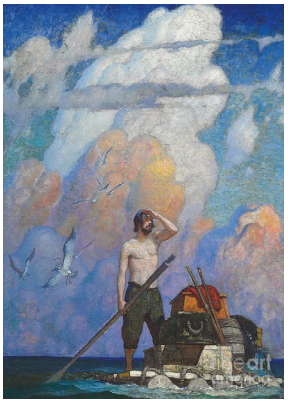
The word, *grace*, itself explains it more. 2 Corinthians 4:15 states, “For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” Here, the word **Grace is *charis* in Greek,** and **gratitude is *eucharistian* in Greek** because gratitude is a response to grace. Gratitude is the feeling of happiness you feel toward somebody who has shown you some undeserved kindness, that is, who has been gracious to you. **Grace is the gift coming down, and gratitude is the thanks going back up.**

If you have ever received Holy Communion, you have already heard this word. We call the Lord’s Supper the *Eucharist*, which is simply *Thanksgiving*. The communion table is a means of grace. It is where we practice the shape of the whole Christian life: grace received, thanks returned. Gratitude is grace received in the heart. Which is the gift of Jesus that lets us be loved, forgiven, and held by the Father.

Once, God told me, “people come to me, ask me, and receive from my hand what they requested. And they turn and forget me. But you didn’t…” God’s voice was very sad. People were focused more on the things from the hand of God, not on the person, God, who gives to us all endlessly.

However, we all forget very soon. Grace is like a miracle, but it's quickly taken for granted, and God is saddened. A new job feels like a miracle on the first day, but by the third month, it becomes just another place we go. A healed body feels like a wonder for a week, but then it's just the body we have. Bread, water, light, a roof, and a friend who answers the phone.

When we take for granted the good things in life, we soon begin to feel entitled to them. Once we feel entitled, we hold onto them tightly, like a clenched fist. This mindset diminishes the beauty and joy of wonder that life offers. So, I'd like to borrow a thought experiment from G.K. Chesterton.



Imagine you are sailing across the ocean, and a great storm wrecks your boat. Like Robinson Crusoe, you end up washed up on a deserted island. For days, you're stranded there with nothing but the rags on your back. Just you, sand, salt, and the inescapable sun.

Then a barrel washes up on the beach. You open it to find water — sweet water. Imagine how grateful you'd be. Imagine the exuberant thanks you'd offer God for this liquid gift. He didn't have to give it to you; it could have been lost forever at sea.

Next, you find a crate floating in the shallows, packed with food: bread and butter, cheese and dried fruit — and, oh, a slab of chocolate! You marvel at these delicacies fit for a king, shed a tear at how good everything tastes, and savor God's grace in each bite.

Over the following days, other things come ashore. A padded chair. Some clothing. A hammock. Two shoes. A waterlogged Bible. Each item you snatch from the sea seems like a peculiar treasure with God's fingerprints on it. When one of your shipmates stumbles out of the waves, it's almost too much to take in. What else could you say in that moment but *thanks be to God*?

In Susanville, California, I received a package from my Korean friend. I opened it. There were a couple of books and Korean noodles that I love so much. She didn't know that I liked the noodles! I didn't request it. It was simply sent! I knew God sent it to me! I was very, very grateful for the detailed love of God for me. He didn't need to, but God wanted to give me something that I love.

One more story here. When I started my seminary studies, I had nothing. Nothing from my family. But God prepared a long time for a very wealthy family to establish a scholarship foundation. I became the first recipient of the scholarship. Wow!!! God knows already what will happen to you in the future and prepares what you would need in the future. The scholarship was not partial; it covered everything until my studies finished. I had tears of gratitude. God works and gives you grace, a free gift. Eucharist is there and great thanksgiving! It's filled with gratitude.

Gratitude begins when we stop assuming that things are owed to us and start seeing them as gifts. A gift cannot be hoarded the way a possession is guarded. A gift is to be shared.

When the giver is full of gratitude to the Lord, the person on the other end does not feel pitied. They feel loved, because the gift carries the warmth of a heart that knows it was given first. So, the chain looks like this. **Grace is received from the Lord. Gratitude rises in giving and receiving.** The grip on things loosens. Our hearts are connected more closely to people. And the things we hold become how we love them.

Let me read you one more passage, **Ephesians 5:18-20**. **"Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

A spirit-filled life sings. It makes melody in the heart. And it gives thanks "at all times and for everything." This is why heartfelt gratitude glorifies God.



So, I want to offer a step for this week, in small parts. First, live like a shipwreck survivor always with surprise, joy, and gratitude. You might need to slow down a bit to be surprised. Oh, water! Oh, coffee! Oh, warm bed! Oh, my friend! All are gifts of Heaven. Each morning, write three things in your gratitude journal about which you did not make and cannot take credit for, and thank the Heavenly Father for them. Make them more specific, like a particular voice, a particular meal, a particular kindness. Second, let one of those thanks become a gift to somebody. Money, a bag of groceries, an hour, a ride, a phone call. Choose one thing and put it into someone's hands, because you were first given to. That is life in the Spirit at work, tying the heart to people and loosening it from things. In that life, there is a freedom that no possession can buy and no loss can take away.

Breathe deeply of the Spirit. Walk in the grace of our Heavenly Papa and Mama, where every heartbeat of pure joy echoes back to the Lord. This is the exhale of a brand-new, weightless life—an unburdened soul soaring on grace. Jesus whispered: "Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."