



The Depths of Gratitude

By Pastor Haywood A. Robinson, III

*I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;
I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.
I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. Psalm 9:1-2*



Our own Minister Ayize Sabater recently distinguished himself by completing all requirements for his Ph.D. degree. There are other wonderful ways in which he distinguishes himself within our faith community – his ethnic attire, jubilant spirit, and passionate preaching, to name a few. One of the traits that stands out to me is his consistent response to the often over-used greeting, “How are you?” Ayize’s answer? “I’m grateful!” It grips me every time. What an awesome way to live each day, simply – GRATEFUL.

Gratitude is one of the important character qualities that we want to build into our lives and instill in our young. All of us express it from time to time. But deep gratitude stands out. The widow’s mite (Mark 12:41-44). Hannah’s offering of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:24-28). The broken alabaster box (Mark 14:3-8). David, dancing out of his clothes (2 Samuel 6:16-23). These are examples of deep gratitude.

Psalm 9 expresses an impressive depth of gratitude toward God that is instructive for us today in several ways. From the opening word, we are reminded that genuine gratitude is **personal**. Listen to the psalmist, “I.” God created us to enjoy fellowship with Him, personally. He loves us, and saved us, personally. He desires to commune with us, personally. One appropriate response to all He has done is gratitude. And, that’s a personal thing.

Gratitude also is **volitional**. He says, “I will....” Gratitude expresses itself on purpose. It’s determined, deliberate, and definitive. From its depths, gratitude pushes beyond discomforts and distractions. The heading of the psalm reads, “The Death of the Son.” Theologians are uncertain as to its exact historical reference. Some argue that it signifies the writing took place following the failed coup d’etat, which resulted in the death of the psalmist’s son, Absalom (2 Samuel 18:9-15). If there is merit to this position, it further highlights the pain or dire circumstances through which the human will often is caused to press in order to express itself. May God cultivate this character quality in us, that it might foster within us a strong will to live holy, honorably, consistently before God.

Similarly, gratitude is **intentional** in its display. “I will give thanks....” “I will recount “deeds.” Gratitude inspires specific actions which are taken in response to specific benefits enjoyed at the hand of God. David is very clear about that for which he will give [thanks] and to Whom it will be given [O, Lord]. Likewise, he identifies what deeds and Whose [Your] deeds he will recount. Among the benefits that David cites within this Psalm are God’s reign (4b, 7), His righteous judgments (4, 8, 16b), His routing, uprooting and ruin of enemies, cities and nations (5, 6, 15), His reputation (16a), His

remembrance of those who seek Him (10b, 12b) and His refuge provided in times of trouble (9). The deeper our gratitude toward God, the more intentional will be our articulation of the praises and thanks we lavish upon Him.

Taking our cue from David, we note that there is an **emotional** dimension to authentic gratitude. It's not merely an intellectual expression. "I will be glad" (2a) is the conclusion derived from recounting God's deeds. When David's wife, Michal, saw him dancing out of his clothes, she was embarrassed and enraged. When the disciples saw the expensive ointment poured out upon Jesus, they were appalled. In both cases, the casual observers concluded, "It doesn't take all of that!" But to those two worshippers, whose lives, in different ways, had been snatched from the vices of the enemy, the dance, the oil, and the tears conveyed gladness, and were inadequate, inaudible and intense expressions of personal gratitude.

One songwriter said it well: "I get joy when I think about what He's done for me!" Perhaps you remember the great singer/storyteller, Pastor Shirley Caesar, quoting Shoutin' John. In the story, the sophisticated deacons and members said John shouted too much in their "City" church. They sent the pastor to visit with John on his country farm to discuss the matter. While talking out in the field, Shoutin' John said, "Hold my mule," as he reflected upon the goodness of the Lord and cut a step!

There's more. According to this Psalm, true gratitude is **categorical** (i.e., without exception, absolute). Notice how he uses the words "whole" (1a) and "all" (1b). These are comprehensive terms. Deep gratitude comes from the fullness of one's heart and it takes into account the totality of the Lord's blessings.

Speaking of the heart, we must acknowledge that gratitude is an **internal** reality. God's *actions* toward us are a direct result of His *attitude* toward us. He loves us, therefore, He feeds us; He protects us; He provides for us; He sacrificed His Son for us. In like manner, our gratitude, like the mustard seed, is at first, imperceptible. But, over time, it grows, leading to the final characteristic of deep gratitude.

Because it is *concealed* in its locus, it remains unknown until it can no longer be *contained*. Gratitude will mount and stir beneath the surface until it finds a way to express itself. Like an erupting volcano, sometimes through tears, moans, and shouts, gratitude bursts forth. Sometimes it's through the clapping of the hands, lifting of the hands or dancing of the feet. Sometimes it's through joy-filled service toward others. One thing is certain, an **external** manifestation of real gratitude is inevitable. This was the sum total of the apostles' ministries and that of the many martyrs who gladly suffered and died as demonstrations of inexpressible gratitude.

May our lives reflect absolute THANKSGIVING and GRATITUDE toward God, in personal, volitional, intentional, emotional, categorical, internal and external ways, as expressed throughout the 9th Psalm, and most especially articulated in the first two verses: I will give Thanks! I will Recount! I will be Glad! I will Exult! I will Sing!

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!