

Grateful

Gratefulness is Easy to Communicate

“And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.”

-Matthew 20:8-10

During my family’s years of serving with CVM long-term in Uganda, we had plenty of trouble communicating with people. With 41 distinct indigenous languages in the country, we didn’t have to go far to find ourselves in a different people group with their own distinct language.

For example, the town we lived in was primarily Iteso people, speaking Ateso. But the neighborhood where our church was spoke primarily Kumam. The Bafumbira people speak Rufumbira, but the same language is called Kinyarwanda if you cross the border into Rwanda. The Batwa people speak Rufumbira if they live to the south of the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, but Rukiga if they live to the north of the forest. Languages are confusing.

As I traveled from place to place providing livestock husbandry training in village churches across the country, there was no way I could gain competency in all these languages. While I had to rely on a translator for whatever the local language was in the place where I was working, I could still look for ways to connect with people. That is how I discovered that gratefulness is easy to communicate.

Saying a ‘thank you’ in the heart language of the people I was working with made an instant connection. Uttering a single word was often responded to with an excited “You speak my language!” Making a simple effort to show others that their background is valued and that I was interested in them opened doors for relationships. So, wherever I go, I learn how to express my gratitude:

Asante sana. Eyalama noi. Apwoyo. Alakara noi. Awa'di fo. Webale nyo. Yebare munonga.

A simple *eyalama* goes a long way in expressing gratitude. Our words, or even our lack of words, can reveal the inner workings of our minds and the attitudes of our hearts. In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells a parable of the kingdom of heaven. It is like a master who hires laborers for his vineyard. The payment for labor is agreed ahead of time, but as the laborers toil in the field, the master continues to recruit additional workers from those standing idle in the marketplace.

When all the laborers that had been called by the master come to the end of their work, their wages are distributed with each receiving equally regardless of the length of their efforts. Certainly, there would have been many grateful *alakaras* offered to the master by those who received more generously than their work likely deserved. But as the agreed upon wage was distributed to the first hires, the gratitude was swallowed up in disappointment: “*And on receiving it they grumbled*” (v. 11). There were no grateful words expressed when the wage was

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no longer thought fair: “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat” (v. 12).

The benefits of God’s kingdom are many: justification, adoption, forgiveness, an inheritance as co-heirs with Christ. When we look at these as our rightful earnings, our gratitude flies out the window. But when we remember that the fair wage for our sin has actually been replaced by the free gift of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23), then what other option do we have than to respond gratefully to God: *Yebare munonga!*

Our words can express our attitudes, but our words can also help us redeem our attitudes. Saying *apwoyo* out loud reminds my heart to feel grateful. At the end of a tough day, God still deserves a heart-felt *awa'di fo*. I might not feel it in my circumstance, but sprinkling moments throughout the day to say *webale* reminds me that in Christ I have so much to be grateful for. It is a good thing that God doesn’t give me the fair wage for my labor; I am grateful that He has given me so much more in Christ – and I need to remember to say *asante* every chance I get.

- 1. Where in your life do you fall into the trap of looking for what you ‘deserve’ from God rather than what He graciously offers?**
- 2. How does focusing on Jesus’ work for us rather than our own labors impact our ability to be grateful?**
- 3. Are there areas of your life where you need to practice replacing the grumbling with a thank you? How might intentionally speaking words of gratitude in these hard moments impact your attitude?**



Dr. Daniel Graham graduated from Oregon State University’s veterinary school in 2009, worked in small animal practice, and then moved with his wife, Rachel, to Soroti, Uganda in 2012 where they served for 9 years. Daniel’s work was in the areas of community development, discipleship, and ministry training. Daniel and Rachel have one son, Nathan. Along the way, Daniel also completed a Postgraduate Certificate in International Animal Health and a Masters in Global Leadership. He currently serves as CVM’s Assistant Director of Missions, helping others through the process of preparing to serve long-term overseas and strategizing opportunities to engage Unreached People Groups.

Email: dgraham@cvm.org