

## YESTERDAY'S GRACE BIRTHS TOMORROW'S FAITH OR WHAT GRATITUDE CAN AND CANNOT DO STUDY GUIDE

We are standing on the edge of God's promises about to go where God has designed us to go, to live, to work, to thrive. Just like the Israelites were standing on the edge of their promised land.

Read Numbers 14.6-11. Re-read verse 11. It tells us that we provoke God by not believing in grace tomorrow when there was so much grace yesterday. These people saw the parting of the Red Sea, they saw manna every day. But they did not believe that God's grace would take them into the Promised Land.

People healed by Jesus, experienced miracles, read about present day miracles, people who know God provides, you know what God has done in these services – often are still not expectant about tomorrow. People are casual about tomorrow – they wander in late to church, they come occasionally to church, because they do not believe how much can be imparted in a single service.

An inability to remember and rejoice about yesterday's grace is called ingratitude. And if you do not remember yesterday's grace and do not remember what God has done, it withers your faith in what God can do today and tomorrow.

Faith for tomorrow's deliverance is found by looking at yesterday's deliverance! Yesterday's grace needs to give birth to tomorrow's faith.

Now gratitude is a real power. We should all be grateful people, we should have an attitude of gratitude and we should appreciate things that are given to us that we do not deserve or pay for – things gratis should bring gratitude, free things should make us thankful.

Whenever you get a gift, you should be grateful. You should be grateful for the gift and grateful for the heart that gave it. Gratefulness is a great feeling; it is a real step to joy.

Gratitude is the appropriate response to grace. Gratitude does four powerful things:

- Opens the door to praise. When you start thanking God for His gifts, you start to praise Him for His goodness. Sometimes it is hard to just jump into praise, thanksgiving, gratitude is a great opener to praise. (Read 2. Cor. 4.15)
- Gratitude gives us the real image of God. (Read James 1.16-17)
- Gratitude is the doorway to peace (Php. 4.6-7)
- Gratitude is the power of testimony (Psalm 105.1)

I love gratitude, I believe in gratitude, but today I want to really focus on something gratitude cannot do on its own. We must look back and be grateful for the cross, but there is a danger with gratitude, and it is a huge, big danger. I am seeing so many people fall into this trap, and it is a fleshly trap, so anyone can fall for it.

Gratitude should open the door to praise, give us a real image of God, open the door to peace and empower our testimony. But, we must also remember, we can easily distort gratitude and turn it from gratitude into a sense of indebtedness, a sense of owing.

Imagine I give you a gift for free. Whatever it is, let's imagine I take you to a fancy restaurant and pay for the whole meal. It's a big gift. You are grateful, it's your favourite food and I took care of everything. That's good you should be grateful!

But then your flesh comes in – and it says “Because Ben has done something good for me, I now feel obligated or indebted to pay him back” – that is no longer gratitude. That is not a praise, that is not peace. It is twisted gratitude – it is a sense of debt, and it is you taking your eyes away from grace and getting into works.

True gratitude does not kill grace. Gratitude celebrates grace. It celebrates goodness, it thanks for the free act. Gratitude is the appropriate and correct response to grace!

But satan and your flesh can twist gratitude into a sense of debt. I believe in being grateful, I believe in entering His gates with thanksgiving (Psalm 100.4). Gratitude is not the problem; it is twisting it that becomes the problem.

You now feel you must take me out for dinner, and you will have no peace until you do. You owe me one in your imagination. So, the next week you take me out for dinner, but it is not quite right, because it's not out of gratitude, it is twisted – it is a sense of debt, it is a repaying of a debt. Then my gift is now reduced to currency, the goodness of my gift is now a currency and you feel you must pay back.

Now here is where it gets difficult for our flesh. God has not taken you out for a nice meal, He hasn't got you a big car – He has redeemed and rescued you from all your sin, all your sickness, all your poverty, all the curse of the law – and gave you the new birth, righteousness, health, wealth, abundance, grace upon grace. A whole new life. That gift is off the scale in terms of gifts, it is incomparable. He then returned to heaven and has spent the last 2000 years building a mansion for you!

Now – you should be grateful for that. It's great to be grateful, but your flesh will start to feel you owe God one. But you cannot pay that back. What are you going to bring God? And the problem is gratitude is often used to make us feel debt to make us obedient – in preaching and worship.

Isaac Watts wrote the following words:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

And that is a beautiful verse from a beautiful hymn, about gratitude. But the last bit there says God's love demands your life. That really, for most of us, that takes it beyond heart gratitude and into a sense of debt. I am not convinced Isaac Watts felt in debt to God, but for a lot of us singing those words can make us feel like we owe God one, and for some of you, it definitely has made you feel that you need to pay back God for loving you as well as He has.

And we sing songs like that, and we preach like that. How many of us have heard from the pulpit things similar to:

- Jesus gave it all up for you. You should give it all up for Him.
- God has done so much for you, what will you do for Him?

That is using gratitude to provoke godly behaviour. That is the one big thing gratitude cannot do – gratitude cannot motivate us to step out and live for God!

It's talks about duty and sacrifice and it's noble and pure and wonderful, but it simply does not work. What we do when we try to do this is we make the cross a debt. He died for you, now you should go and die for Him, you owe Him that at least. You have to work for it. That's no longer gratitude, you have reduced the kindness and grace of God into a transaction you have to pay back!

And there is a lot of teaching that goes around with this idea – we are painted out as debtors to God and if we were grateful to Jesus, we would obey Him. No – you have to realize the truth:

Jesus did not die for you and take your place to **MAKE YOU OWE HIM ONE, HE DID IT OUT OF GRACE, BECAUSE HE LOVES YOU.** This is vital. If you look back at the cross and **SEE GRACE**, then you will not feel indebted.

NOW – this idea that we should all obey JESUS because we are grateful is **SO COMMON**, you might be confused a little when I say that this is not why we should be motivated to obey God. I will unpack this most of this year. **LET ME JUST SAY THIS CLEARLY** – There is **NOWHERE IN THE BIBLE** that says gratitude is why you should obey GOD. Nowhere where we should be nice, kind, pray, fast, tithe **BECAUSE WE OWE GOD SOMETHING**, so so much. Because gratitude makes you behave! It does not.

I think if I did a poll of Christians “why obey God” – sort of Family Fortunes style and asked 100 Christians why they should obey God – the top answer would be “**GRATITUDE**” – but it’s not the Biblical answer. If you let this sink in, you will realize we have turned the wrong road – but some of you will be asking – really? Is this so? Well, in the next couple of weeks I will unpack this.

So re-read Numbers 14.11. God showed them grace yesterday by doing great miracles for them. God was not then concerned with their lack of gratitude; He was concerned with their lack of faith in Him! God did not say “If only my people were grateful for miracles”. God wasn’t looking at gratitude as the reason the people were struggling to advance, He saw the true reason – they did not believe in grace tomorrow.

I believe in gratitude. Have I said that enough? You should be grateful for all the good things God has given you in your life: every healing, every financial miracle, every time He comforted you, helped you, taught you, forgave you. You should be grateful. That leads to peace and a great testimony.

But gratitude is not the door to moving forward, it is not the door to radical obedience. We act like it is, we try and stir up gratitude to motivate people to obey, and it does not work. No – the work of Jesus and all the things He has done for you, yesterday’s grace must birth future faith. It must go beyond gratitude.

It is not: Jesus has been really good to you in the past, so step forward! There’s a missing step. It needs to be:

- Jesus has been really good to you in the past
- That births a confidence and faith that Jesus will always be good to me
- Therefore, I can believe that God will get me where I need to be

That is the **BIBLICAL MOTIVATION FOR MOVING FORWARD**. The problem of the Israelites was not a lack of gratitude – their problem was a lack of **FUTURE FAITH**. So we need to let yesterday’s grace birth tomorrow’s faith.

Read Deut. 1.31-32. God has never stopped carrying you around – you can trust Him for tomorrow.

John Newton said it beautifully:

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
We have already come  
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far  
And Grace will lead us home  
And Grace will lead us home

Grace has got you here, and that grace has looked after you every step of the way – of course, God is going to look after you tomorrow. Yes – we should be grateful for YESTERDAY's GRACE. BUT WE SHOULD ALSO ALLOW YESTERDAY'S GRACE TO BIRTH FAITH FOR TOMORROW. That is what will motivate you to get up and fight, that is what will motivate you to win. THE PROBLEM IS NOT GRATITUDE, you can be GRATEFUL but still not get up and win, get up and enter the promised land. YOU NEED TO BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE GRACE TOMORROW. You need to believe that there will be blessings in the future.

If we realize yesterdays' grace means there will be grace tomorrow, and that births faith for tomorrow then THAT STOPS US letting gratitude get twisted into THE DEBTOR'S ETHIC.

True gratitude exalts the GRACE and looks back at the cross and God's continued benefits every day of our life – but then as we cherish yesterday's grace we have to make this CONNECTION – yesterday's grace means there will be grace for tomorrow. AND then faith for tomorrow rises up inside us and we start to trust GOD FOR TOMORROW.

Read Psalm 116.1-2. We call to the Lord and pray not because "He has done so much for us" out of a sense of debt and guilt! We call to the Lord because we know He will listen today! We know He will hear us and look after us!

Read Psalm 116.12-15. Gratitude for past grace is not enough. We have to expect grace for tomorrow. We have to realize this!

And it all starts here. It all starts with this: realize that you do not owe God a debt. He did not save you so you owe Him one! He did it by grace with no strings attached. God does not want you to repay Him. He wants you to know how good He is and He wants you to trust that He will take care of you today.

I mean really how would you even begin to pay Him back? That's why in Psalm 50.12-13 God says if He was hungry He would not tell us. Why? Because He does not want you to pay Him back!

So, what do I do if I cannot pay God back? Read Psalm 116.14. Offer thanksgiving to God! Be grateful! Pay your vows to the Most High it says in the KJV. Not pay your debts. Your vow is not you trying to repay God for His goodness, it is believing in God tomorrow because He looked after you yesterday for free!

God is going to deliver you, so glorify Him right now!

There is no debt for the cross. God did it for free. All He expects from you is to believe in Him today. Expect great things from God.

YOUR ONLY OBLIGATION FROM THE CROSS IS NOT TO BEHAVE – it is to BELIEVE THAT HAVING GIVEN YOU HIS SON YESTERDAY, TOMORROW HE WILL GIVE YOU ALL THINGS, TOMORROW HE WILL DELIVER YOU, TOMORROW HE WILL HONOUR YOU, TOMORROW HE WILL GIVE YOU ALL THE GRACE YOU NEED.

You will never experience a DAY WITHOUT GOD'S GOODNESS! Because God never stops being good. True GODLY GRATITUDE DOES NOT TURN INTO INDEBTEDNESS because we realize that GOD GAVE OUT OF GRACE, and expects no repayment – all we have to do is look forward and REALIZE GOD WILL BE JUST AS GOOD TOMORROW.

It's awesome. Yesterday's GRACE should not lead to us trying to pay yesterday's debt with future behaviour. Yesterday's GRACE should birth tomorrow's faith.

STOP TRYING TO REPAY GOD – that would be like trying to pay a credit card with a gazillion pounds on it – you could never do it. And even if you did – you would have taken FREE GRACE and turned it into a business transaction. You coming to church today is not a mortgage payment towards your mansion in heaven. You tithing is not your monthly payment for your mansion in heaven. GRACE DOES NOT CREATE A DEBT.

The gratitude of yesterday's grace should not turn into a sense of DEBT, it should turn into confident faith in TOMORROW'S GRACE. That faith for tomorrow is what makes us radical, what makes us bold, what makes us obedient, what makes us heroes, champions, what makes us launch out – GOD IS GOING TO LOOK AFTER ME, HE ALWAYS DOES!

The problem IS THAT we take grace, don't then look forward with confidence and we keep looking back until that gratitude becomes a life-debt, and now we are slaves to that debt. We then do not really believe in grace for tomorrow, we do not really expect grace for tomorrow because DEEP DOWN WE FEEL we have not lived up to yesterday's grace. WE DO NOT HAVE TO LIVE UP TO YESTERDAY'S GRACE! We do not owe JESUS ANYTHING FOR THE CROSS.

Yesterday's grace should produce tomorrow's FAITH – that's the only vow – that we would expect more GRACE. The only obligation from God's goodness is we expect HIM TO KEEP BEING GOOD. Abraham did not offer Isaac through gratitude, IT CANNOT DO THAT, HE DID IT BY FAITH. By faith Noah built an ark. By faith Moses left EGYPT. By faith every hero changed the world. There is no "by gratitude" chapter. We cannot live by gratitude, we live by faith. We cannot walk by gratitude, we walk by faith.

Paul told the Galatians who were falling into legalism that obeying the law or not does not even matter, but the only that matters is faith that works by love. Gratitude does not work by love, faith does!

When the disciples were worried that their food needs would not be met, that they would never have clothes again if they launched out into ministry – Jesus didn't say "Oh you of little gratitude" he said "Oh you of little faith". YESTERDAY'S GRACE SHOULD MAKE US GRATEFUL, but more importantly IT SHOULD BIRTH TOMORROW'S FAITH!

I am not trying to pick things apart here that are not important – this is vital – you cannot live for CHRIST with gratitude, it cannot empower you to win. I am not against GRATITUDE – we should all be grateful, our worship should begin and end with thanks for God's goodness and great acts on our behalf. We should all never stop being grateful for the cross. BUT TO CHANGE THE WORLD WE NEED TO LIVE BY FAITH – not gratitude.

GRATITUDE SO EASILY TURNS INTO A SENSE OF DEBT – a SENSE OF INADEQUACY, A DRIVE TO REPAY – that GOD DOES NOT USE GRATITUDE TO INSPIRE US TO LIVE FOR HIM! You have to realize how vital this is – if we try to pay back grace, even with 1 penny, even with one prayer – IT IS NO LONGER GRACE, it is a transaction. If we see our obedience as paying back God we have turned GRACE INTO A MORTGAGE WE WILL NEVER BE FREE FROM!

Imagine your salvation is YOUR HOUSE – it protects you, it has food, that never runs out, it will never decay, never fall apart, renewed every morning, living there makes you healthy and wise, every window look out and see glory. GOD BUILT IT AT THE COST OF HIS OWN SON AND GAVE IT TO YOU. That is the NEW COVENANT IN HIS BLOOD – not IN HIS BLOOD AND YOUR REPAYMENTS. The purchase deed for SALVATION says BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BELIEVE AND RECEIVE.

But we in the church got a lawyer in, demon-possessed – who through that contract in the bin and we got a new one “Here are the monthly payments, you must do this and that, and pray, and fast, and give, and go to church and you can keep the house” – and the house is NO LONGER A GIFT, it’s a PURCHASE! God is no longer gracious in this covenant, you are no longer a SON you are a slave, and GRACE IS DESTROYED. BUT SO MANY PEOPLE STILL DO THIS!

YOU HAVE NO DEBTS BEFORE GOD – YOUR DEBTS ARE FORGIVEN. God knew you could not pay HIM BACK.

Grace does not make you a debtor. Justice is what made you a debtor. God is just and you sinned. GRACE DOESN’T MAKE YOU A DEBTOR, GRACE PAID YOUR DEBT. The cross doesn’t put you in debt to GOD – IT STOPS YOU BEING IN DEBT TO GOD! EVERYTHING HAS BEEN PAID IN FULL for free – so you can trust GOD WILL LOOK AFTER YOU TOMORROW!

So, your first step is to stop trying to pay God back. Your second step is to realize not all the glory of God is in the past. There is new glory for tomorrow. We should look back at God’s glory in the past – healing us, forgiving us, helping us, and it should make us grateful. But it should also birth in us a confidence that there will be more glory tomorrow.

You do not live in the past – you live in today, and you will live in tomorrow. YOU ARE NEVER GOING BACK TO THE PAST – so when I use the past to TRY AND GET YOU TO LAUNCH FORWARD, IT DOES NOT HAVE THE POWER. But if we use the PAST GLORY TO REALIZE AND ASSURE OURSELVES THERE WILL BE GLORY TOMORROW then – WE HAVE POWER because TOMORROW IS WHERE WE ARE GOING.

Gratitude cannot handle and expect FUTURE GRACE, only FAITH CAN. Gratitude is not a strong enough wire – it is not a strong enough wire to HANDLE THE VOLTAGE OF GLORY GOD WANTS TO GIVE YOU. Only faith is! You need a stronger wire! Gratitude tries if that is all you have, but it is NOT ENOUGH. It will try and make you feel bad and guilty and indebted to try and get you to move forward, but it cannot do it, PAST GRACE CAN INSPIRE YOU, but not for long. It burns out and becomes LEGALISM! BUT IF PAST GRACE LEADS YOU TO REALIZE THERE IS FUTURE GRACE – LEADS YOU TO START HAVING FAITH FOR TOMORROW THEN THAT IS MORE THAN INSPIRATION – THAT IS EMPOWERING!

The problem is here that the past-looking gratitude leads to us feeling in debt eventually and THEN YOU FAIL TO REALIZE HOW MUCH GRACE IS AVAILABLE FOR YOUR FUTURE. SO MUCH! SO MUCH GLORY! SO MUCH OF GOD'S GOODNESS IS AHEAD OF YOU! This future grace is to be trusted and lived on. IT WILL MOTIVATE YOU TO BELIEVE, TRUST, OBEY, LAUNCH OUT!

Yesterday's grace should make you grateful. BUT if that is all it does, you have not honoured it enough. IT ALSO NEEDS TO MAKE YOU AWARE OF FUTURE GRACE – it needs to make you believe you will enter your promised land. You will enter God's promises, your tomorrow is GLORIOUS. He looked after you so far, HE WILL KEEP LOOKING AFTER YOU!

When you realize what JESUS DID FOR YOU AT THE CROSS – you should be happy God has done you a huge favour. BUT THERE IS ZERO obligation to repay the favour. BUT OUR FLESH LIKES TO DRAW INTO THAT – I WILL PAY YOU BACK! Gratitude looks at past grace, then it needs to birth FAITH IN TOMORROW'S GRACE! Or it has not done its complete work!

WHEN GRATITUDE GIVES BIRTH TO FAITH IN TOMORROW'S GRACE you don't fall into the trap of feeling the debt. You are too busy getting excited about tomorrow's GRACE to feel unworthy of yesterday's grace!

RIGHT NOW – stop living as a DEBT. There is no debt.

START EXPECTING GRACE AND GLORY TOMORROW.

The logo for Tree of Life Church features a stylized tree with a trunk and branches, and leaves in shades of green, yellow, and orange. The text "Tree of Life Church" is in a large, serif, light green font. Below it, the tagline "where dreams come true" is in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font.

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where dreams come true

## YESTERDAY'S GRACE BIRTHS TOMORROW'S FAITH OR WHAT GRATITUDE CAN AND CANNOT DO STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Why was God provoked by the Israelites in Numbers 14?
2. What are some of the benefits of being grateful and developing an attitude of gratitude?
3. What happens with gratitude is twisted? What does it turn into?
4. Have you felt indebted to God because of a message on gratitude before? Have there been times when your gratitude has become twisted and you felt you owed God something?
5. What must gratitude for yesterday's grace birth inside us to stop us feeling in debt?
6. Do you believe the same grace that has brought you safe thus far will bring you home?
7. What should motivate us to pray? To move into God's promises? If it isn't gratitude?
8. How do you feel about the following paragraph from the study; does it motivate you?

YOUR ONLY OBLIGATION FROM THE CROSS IS NOT TO BEHAVE – it is to BELIEVE THAT HAVING GIVEN YOU HIS SON YESTERDAY, TOMORROW HE WILL GIVE YOU ALL THINGS, TOMORROW HE WILL DELIVER YOU, TOMORROW HE WILL HONOUR YOU, TOMORROW HE WILL GIVE YOU ALL THE GRACE YOU NEED.

9. How can we stop trying to repay God?
10. How can we start expecting glory tomorrow and remind ourselves that there is more glory tomorrow?
- II. How can we expect great things from God?
12. What about the sermon Sunday inspired you, encouraged you or challenged you the most?

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