

The Attitude of Gratitude

by Bayless Conley

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I don't know if you brought a Bible with you or not, but if you did, you're going to use it. I'm going to share with you a little bit about the subject of gratitude today. I was thinking this morning about the ten lepers that came to Jesus and cried out for mercy. Jesus said, "Go show yourselves to the priest." We all know the story. They went, and the Bible said, "As they went, they were cleansed. And one of them when he saw that he was cleansed, turned back with a loud voice, and gave glory to God." In other words, he showed gratitude. When Jesus saw him, He said, "Weren't there ten cleansed, but where are the 9?" There's just this one stranger who was not a Jew. He comes back to give glory to God and to show gratitude.

It's an interesting little thing to note. Three times, it mentions they were cleansed. They were cleansed as they went. Then the one guy saw he was cleansed, and then when he came back, Jesus asked, "Were not ten cleansed?" The same word is used every single time. It basically means that the disease has stopped its forward progress and there are no more symptoms. Now they go see the priest, and according to the Mosaic Law, the priest would say, "Okay, there are no more symptoms of leprosy. You can be reintegrated back into society. You can go back to your families." Because up to this point, they had to be separated from family and from society.

The one guy who came back with gratitude, Jesus, said to him, "Your faith has made you whole." Now, talking about cleanse, cleanse, cleanse, but the one guy that had a grateful heart, Jesus said he was made whole. A different word is used there. It means "to be brought back to a state of completeness." You may or may not know, but contagious kind of leprosy causes you to lose digits and parts of your body literally just rot and fall away. Nine were cleansed, but one was made whole. It was the one that had gratitude. There's great power in gratitude.

I think as well. It stands out in the story how rare a truly grateful heart is. We can receive bountiful blessings from God, and good things come to us through people. But I honestly think a genuinely grateful heart is far more rare than people realize. I want to share with you today just three facts about a grateful heart. Number one, God is attracted to grateful hearts. An attitude of gratitude brings both God's presence and His blessings. Consider this verse, and you probably know it, Psalm 100:4 NKJV,

⁴ Enter into His gates (that is God's gates) with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

All right. "Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise." Without thanksgiving, without gratitude, you don't even get through the gates. You don't get into the courts where His presence is. Have you ever been to a place where they've got a little gate code, and you have to punch the digits in, and then the gate will open? We stayed at a place this year. I rented a little house for the family. And all the family and grandkids were there, and they had a long driveway that went down, but there was a code. We had to punch in the code, then the gate would open, and you could drive in.

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Well, you know what? There's an eight-digit code that will get you through the gates into the courts of God. It's T-H-A-N-K Y-O-U. Thank you. That's the gate code, friend. That's how you get through the gates and into the courts of God. It's with thanksgiving and with gratitude. Gratitude also attracts God's blessings. Once we embrace an attitude of gratitude and express our thankfulness to God and people, it's like this big bull's eye gets painted on our back with an accompanying sign that says, "Bless me."

When I was a kid, and I know kids are not nearly so mean today, but we would make a sign in big bold letters that said, "Kick me." We'd put tape on it and go up to one of our buddies and say, "Hey, man, how you doing?" And then slap them on the back. Little did he know he now has a sign attached to his back that says, "Kick me." He's walking around other kids there, and they're walking up and kicking him. He's like, "What the heck's going on?" It seemed like the whole school felt they had permission because of the kick me sign. They started kicking this kid. We thought it was very funny unless we were the ones wearing the sign.

You know what? When you show gratitude, it's like God paints a big bullseye on your back with a sign that says, "Bless me." It's like, "Where's all this favor coming from? Why are all these things are happening? Where's all this goodness coming from?" Goodness and blessing come to grateful hearts.

I was down in San Clemente with some friends some years back, and there was a dive shop that was having a parking lot sale. We wanted to get down there when it opened in the morning to be the first ones to look over all the gear. We get down there early, and none of us have had breakfast. We pull into this little Mexican drive-thru. We got some burritos or whatever it was. There's this guy when we drive out who's sitting on the curb. And he's got a really sort of a cheeky smile, and then he flips a sign up that says, "Bet you can't hit me with a quarter." We had a bunch of quarters. Man, we tried, and so did everybody else that went through the drive-thru. That guy made a lot of money with his little clever sign.

Most of everyone who threw a quarter at him missed. But, friend, when God sends His blessings, He will never miss you. He always, always hits the bullseye. Second Timothy 3:2 declares that one of the signs of the end times, one of the signs of the last days is that people will be unthankful. That there will be a general disposition of ingratitude that permeates society. So many today, and I'm sad to say it, but especially in our country, have an attitude of entitlement. It is owed to me. You owe me.

Listen, the child of God should stand in stark contrast to that. There's a lot of examples of people in the Bible that expressed grateful hearts and were blessed because of it. When I think about that, the one that comes to my mind first before anyone else, is Ruth. You should read the book of Ruth. There're only a few chapters in it, and it is just absolutely rich. There was a man named Elimelech. He lived in Bethlehem with his wife, Naomi, and his two sons. There's a famine in the land, and he decides he's going to move to another country. That's something that he should not have done, something that God was not leading him to do.

He takes his family and moves to the land of Moab, out from the place where they worship God and into a place that is steeped in idolatry, where they worship a god called Chemosh. They get there, and right off, Elimelech dies. Then, his sons marry a couple of Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth, and both of the boys die. Here's Naomi and her two daughters-in-law; they're all widows. They've got nothing, and Naomi hears that God has blessed Bethlehem and Israel again.

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She's like, "I'm going back home girls." They're all crying. They say, "We're going with you." Naomi says, "Look, go find some husbands. Don't come." One of the daughters-in-law kisses her and goes back to her people, to her gods. But Ruth says, "Don't ask me to leave you. Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people are going to be my people. Your God is my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Nothing will separate me from you except death." She saw something in the God these Israelites worshiped that she had never found in all the idols of Moab. She said, "I'm going." It's quite an interesting contrast because if you look at Naomi, she became very bitter. She accused God of being responsible for all of her problems. "God's the one that knocked the support out from under me." Even when she came back to Bethlehem, they said, "Naomi." She said, "I changed my name. Call me Mara. Call me bitter. I'm a bitter woman. I'm bitter at God and bitter at life." She was bitter.

By contrast, Ruth wasn't that way at all. Ruth says, "Look, Naomi, I'm going to go out in the fields with the poor people after the reapers have gone through. I'm going to follow the reapers, and according to the Mosaic Law, if there's any gleanings left, I can get those. We can get something to eat." She goes out there and happens on the field of Boaz, who happens to be Naomi's relative. Boaz notices her and tells the gleaners, "Hey, leave some extra for this girl." He heard about her kindness to Naomi, et cetera. Then, he engages Ruth in conversation. It's really an amazing story because the only thing that comes out of Ruth is gratitude. Everything she says is bathed in gratitude.

My friend, when life squeezes you, what is in you comes out. Just like you squeeze a sponge, what's in that sponge comes out. When life puts the squeeze on you, who you are and what you're about is going to come out. The only thing that came out of Ruth's mouth was gratitude. She was grateful and verbalized the fact that Boaz took notice of her. She was grateful for his kind words, and she said so. She was grateful for his generosity, and she said so. She was grateful for his protection, and she said so.

She could have said, "I've suffered. You owe me." She could have said, "I helped your relative, Naomi. You owe me." She could have said, "I'm underprivileged, and you are rich. You owe me." There was no entitlement about her at all. She worked hard, and she was grateful for every kindness shown to her, no matter how small, and God blessed her. God gave her a home. God gave her a godly husband. He gave her wealth. He gave her influence. She became the great-grandmother of King David. She became part of the lineage of Jesus Christ.

That heart of gratitude in the midst of the toughest of circumstances, I mean, she lost her father-in-law, she lost her husband, she lost her brother-in-law, she lost her income, she lost her people, she lost her country, she lost everything except God. She was grateful, and it brought such blessing and such richness into her life. Gratitude is so important. In the book of Deuteronomy the 28th chapter talks about the blessings that God has for His people if they'll obey Him and if they'll walk with Him. And then all the curses that'll come upon His people if they disobey Him. He says something really interesting, and I'm reading Deuteronomy 28:45-47 AMPC. The Lord said,

⁴⁵ All these curses shall come upon you and shall pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. ⁴⁶ They shall be upon you for a sign [of warning to other nations] and for a wonder, and upon your descendants forever. ⁴⁷ Because (Everyone say, "Because") you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness of [mind and] heart [in gratitude] for the abundance of all [with which He had blessed you].

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God's hand of blessing and protection was upon them. But when they refused to be grateful, His hand was lifted, and the curse that was already at work in the world descended upon them when God's hand of protection was lifted. God said, "All this stuff has happened because of your lack of gratitude. Lack of thankfulness is what has opened the door to all of these things."

I mentioned a few minutes ago about taking the family on vacation. We try and do that every year. I try and get all the kids and grandkids rounded up, and we'll go stay someplace together. We have family meals together every night, and it's a hoot. It's just a lot of fun. It's noisy. It's chaotic, but it's glorious. Every year, as long as I can remember, every one of my grandsons comes up to me when we're done, and they say, "Papa, thank you. Thank you for giving us a vacation. Thank you for doing this for us, Papa." You know what? It just makes me want to do it again. It just makes me want to do it more. There's just something about it.

I was talking to my folks one day. They had a guy stay with them. He was going through a rough patch. They had him stay with them for about a week. After the guy left, I went to their house and talked to them and asked, "How was it?" They said, "We were never so glad to see someone leave our house." I said, "Really?" I said, "Why?" They said, "He was the most ungrateful person we've ever met. He complained about everything. He complained about the food we served. He didn't like the way it was spiced. He didn't like the time that we had dinner. He didn't like his bed, and he complained about that.

He came and dumped all his dirty clothes." My mom said, "He gave them to me. He expected me to wash them, iron them, and fold them. So I did, and then he complained about the way I ironed his clothes and complained about the way I folded his pants. He was so ungrateful. Never once did he say, 'thank you' for a meal. Never once did he say 'thank you' to us for housing him for a week. Never once did he thank us for a single thing. He acted like it was all owed to him, and nothing was sufficient. Nothing was up to his standard." They said, "We were so glad to see his backside when he left." There's something very attractive about gratitude, and there's something very repellent about ingratitude.

I've shared this story before. But we had one Christmas where everyone in the church who wanted to would adopt a family somewhere that didn't have the funds to have a Christmas. Janet, myself, and the kids adopted a family. It was a couple and their young son. We went out shopping, and we took money that we would've spent on each other. I bought a gift for the husband, something that I thought I would really like. My wife bought a gift for the wife and the kids. We said, "Okay. Kids, this is what we would spend on you. Why don't you go pick some stuff for this little boy?" The kids all got something as well.

We went over to their house. They lived in a very humble two-room little flat. We knocked on the door. They let us in, and we brought all these gifts in and set them on the floor. The husband broke down, and he started to cry. I'll never forget it as long as I live. He lifted his hands, and he started to thank and worship God. And a holy presence rolled into that room. I felt like I needed to take my shoes off. We were standing on sacred ground. God's presence literally filled the room. I looked at the kids. We looked at one another. Everyone in the room sensed it. The husband is there with his hands up and tears streaming down his face. Meanwhile, his son is tearing open everything he can get his hands on, but it was just perfect. There is something divinely attractive about gratitude.

Alright, the second fact about a grateful heart is that a generous heart stems from a grateful heart. There's an amazing story found in Numbers 31, where the Israelites go to fight against

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the Midianites. The Midianites had a much larger force, and Israel decided to take 1,000 soldiers, 1,000 men from each tribe. They come with their 12,000 men, and they battle with the Midianites. Israel was victorious, but it turned out God did something very unusual in that battle. I want to read to you Numbers 31:48-52 NKJV,

⁴⁸ Then the officers who were over thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, came near to Moses; ⁴⁹ and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who are under our command, and not a man of us is missing. ⁵⁰ Therefore we have brought an offering for the Lord, what every man found of ornaments of gold: armlets and bracelets and signet rings and earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the Lord." ⁵¹ So Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from them, all the fashioned ornaments. ⁵² And all the gold of the offering that they offered to the Lord, from the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels.

Now, that's significant, 16,750 shekels, somewhere close to 600 pounds of gold worth conservatively about \$12 million. Extraordinary because they said, "This is the offering that we want to bring to the Lord." That special offering that they talked about is mentioned in Exodus 30, and the law specifically stated that it was to be a half shekel of silver that you brought. Whether you were rich or whether you were poor, the rich gave the same amount for that offering as the poor did. A half shekel of silver is worth about five bucks. That's what the law prescribed. These guys gave 200 times more per man of that which was prescribed.

What's going on? Why such extravagance? Was it payment for God's blessing of protection? Certainly not. It was the response of a grateful heart. Once they realized the magnitude of what the Lord had done, their hearts were overflowing with gratitude. Just imagine the captains over thousands come to their commanders to give a report. He says, "All right. Reuben, how many men did we lose?" "None, sir." "What? No one's missing? We didn't lose a man? Is that possible? Gad, give a report." "Sir, we're all accounted for. We didn't lose a single man." "What? Issachar, give a report." "We lost no one, sir." "Judah?" "No one, we're all here." And they went through every tribe.

This holy hush would have fallen over them as they realized what God had done. They're not going to have to go home to one single wife and say, "Your husband's not coming home." They're not going to have to tell a single child, "Your daddy will never be back again." As they're in that atmosphere contemplating what God has done for them, somebody certainly piped up and said, "I'm doing something. I'm giving God an offering. I am so thankful." Somebody else said, "Me too." Then, finally, the whole lot of them said, "We're all in." They knew the offering that they said they were bringing was five bucks. They'd brought 200 times that per man. Why? A generous heart stems from a grateful heart.

In John 12, Mary's there, and she pours a pound of spikenard, this precious ointment; worth a year and a half's wage, on Jesus' feet. It's an amazing, extraordinary, expensive gift. How much do you make in a year and a half? Would you bring it all to the church and just give it? That's what she did. A year and a half's wage she paid for that in John 12. Why Mary? It just might be that in John 11, Jesus raised her brother from the dead. Chapter 12 opens up that they are in the house of Mary and Martha, and Lazarus is sitting at the table. I imagine Mary standing there. Lazarus and Jesus are laughing. Jesus may say, "What did you see? What was it like on the other side, Lazarus?" Mary's got to be thinking, "A few hours ago, I was standing outside of his tomb. Look what God's done."

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The natural response was this outpouring of generosity. In Luke 19, Zacchaeus is a tax collector. He's a Roman sellout. He's a traitor. He's hated by all of Israel. He's also short. He can't see over the crowd. He realizes Jesus is coming in a press. He climbs up in a tree so he can get a look. Jesus stops under the tree and says, "Hey, Zacchaeus, I'm coming to your house for dinner tonight. That'd be okay?" Zacchaeus hustles down out of the tree, and people say, "Oh, He's gone to dine with a sinner." Yes, Jesus is the friend of sinners. Sometimes, you need to have dinner with a sinner. We can't reach them if we don't interact with them.

Anyway, Jesus goes there, and Zacchaeus says, "Look, half of everything I have I'm giving to the poor. If I've defrauded anyone, I'm going to repay four times." What was he doing? Paying for Jesus' kindness? Paying because Jesus noticed him? No, it was just the overflow of a grateful heart. Has Jesus come to your house? Did He notice you? Did He embrace you despite your past? He did with me. Generosity is the most normal thing in the world. It flows from a grateful heart. In Acts 28, Paul is on a ship going to Rome. He and 275 others are shipwrecked. The Bible says the inhabitants of the island welcomed them and treated them kindly. But then God's grace showed up in an unusual way. I read to you Acts 28:7-10 NKJV.

⁷ In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. ⁸ And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. ¹⁰ They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

Listen to Acts 28:10 from the Amplified. It says,

¹⁰ They showed us every respect and presented many gifts to us, honoring us with many honors; and when we sailed, they provided and put on [board our ship] everything we needed.

Then it says in Acts 28:11 NKJV,

¹¹ After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.

Now, it began by saying this. They got shipwrecked. There's 276, counting the Apostle Paul. It said that they were entertained courteously for three days. How many think it's pretty extravagant to entertain 276 people for three days? That's a lot of food. That's a lot of lodging. Oh, yes, that's a lot of time. That's a lot of serving. That's pretty extravagant. We just read that they left in this Alexandrian ship after three months. Three days of generous hospitality turned into three months of extravagant hospitality for 276 people.

They blessed them. They gave to them. They honored them. Why? Are they paying for the healing of Publius' father? Were they paying for the healing of all the other people? No, the gifts of God cannot be purchased with money. You cannot buy your healing with money. You cannot buy the blessings of God with money. No, no, no, a thousand times, no. We cannot pay for what God does for us. It is simply the expression of a grateful heart. Generosity is tied to gratitude, and you cannot separate the two.

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Generous people most generally are grateful. A stingy person is not grateful at all. Those two things cannot be separated. I have a friend. He went into Romania when it was still considered the most closed nation in the world. Ceausescu was the leader of the nation at that time, and it was his stated purpose to turn the nation into an atheistic country. They banned Bibles. It was a jailable offense to have a Bible. Romania had been Europe's breadbasket. It was impoverished.

The Church was severely persecuted. It was considered the most persecuted country in the world at that time. My friend said, "I'm going in." He got a whole bunch of New Testaments in their language and had them sewn into the lining of his coat. He could have been jailed for taking those in. He told me that when he was going through customs, they were tearing his suitcase apart. And they asked, "Sir, do you have Bibles hidden in your suitcase, in the lining in any of this luggage?" He said, "No, I do not have Bibles in my luggage." Meanwhile, he's got a coat full of Bibles on.

He gets in. It takes him a few days, but he connects with the underground church, and they don't trust him. It's been several days, and they still don't trust him at all. They think he's a spy for the government to reveal where they meet and who they are so that they can all be jailed. They finally work out that he's legitimate. That he's come around the world by himself to encourage them in their suffering, and they're overwhelmed.

He told me one story. There was a young man there. He gave him one of the New Testaments. The young man handled it like it was some ancient porcelain that was just so fragile. He turned several pages and read it and then handed it back like it was going to break. My friend said, "No, no, no." He looked at it again, read a little, and then gave it back. My friend said, "No, it's yours. I'm giving it to you." He said, "When the young man realized he had been given a Bible, it was the first one he'd ever seen. He fell to his knees, and he sobbed, and he sobbed, and he sobbed."

When my friend left, after having encouraged them for quite a time—All those who live godly in Christ Jesus are going to suffer persecution. It's part of what happens when we walk with Jesus—They did something extravagant. All of them, in this little arm; of this underground secret church, got together. They pulled all their resources, and they bought some pork. None of them had even tasted meat in months and months. They lived on a diet of cabbage. He said, "They pulled all their money together, and it was only enough to buy one serving of pork." He sees all the bowls around the table, and everyone else is just having cabbage, water, and salt in their bowls.

He said, "And my bowl was full of pork." He said, "It was my turn to cry." He said, "They gathered around me, and they stood. They made me sit at the table, and they began to sing. 'We love you with the love of the Lord.'" He said, "I couldn't take it. I couldn't eat the food." He said, "It was the most extravagant gift I had ever been given in my life." Why such extravagance? Where does such generosity come from? It comes from a grateful heart. "You jeopardized yourself. You smuggled Bibles to give them to us. You came around the world to encourage us in our faith. We are grateful." You can't separate the two.

All right. Finally, the third fact about a grateful heart. Gratitude and generosity are the natural response of a heart that has been forgiven. There's a story in Luke 7, about another woman, very similar to Mary, but not the same woman. Jesus has accepted an invitation to go to Simon's house. Simon's a Pharisee. He's having a meal there, and this woman somehow sneaks into the house. Every indication is that she was a prostitute. It says she was a notorious sinner, and she stands behind Jesus as they're kneeling and having a meal in the typical

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Eastern fashion. She begins to cry. Washes His feet with her tears, wipes His feet with her hair, and pours perfume on His feet. Then Simon looks and thinks to himself, "Oh if this man were a real prophet, He'd know what kind of a woman is touching Him." Then, this is what happens in the story. Luke 7:40-47 MSG,

⁴⁰ Jesus said to him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Oh? Tell me." ⁴¹⁻⁴² "Two men were in debt to a banker. One owed five hundred silver pieces, the other fifty. Neither of them could pay up, and so the banker canceled both debts. Which of the two would be more grateful?" ⁴³⁻⁴⁷ Simon answered, "I suppose the one who was forgiven the most." "That's right," said Jesus. Then turning to the woman, but speaking to Simon, he said, "Do you see this woman? I came to your home; you provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on my feet and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she hasn't quit kissing my feet. You provided nothing for freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with perfume. Impressive, isn't it? She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal."

My friend, we have been forgiven so much. When we were enemies of God, Christ died for us. Such an amazing pardon has been granted to us. I, for one, have not forgotten where I've come from. I remember the man I used to be before Jesus Christ walked into my life, and I am so thankful. I got up early this morning, and I thought about a story that I'd read years ago. Something that came across the desk, as it were, of the Supreme Court many years ago.

In fact, it was from 1829. There were two men: George Wilson and James Porter. They robbed the United States Mail carrier and committed several other crimes. In the process of time, they were both captured, put through a trial, and convicted, and their sentence was execution by hanging. There was a set date when that was going to take place. Mr. Porter was hung on time, but George Wilson wasn't. It seems he had some influential friends who went to President Andrew Jackson and pled for mercy on his behalf. Andrew Jackson issued a pardon to George Wilson that he wouldn't have to die for his crimes, and George Wilson refused the pardon.

It went before the Supreme Court. These are the words that the Supreme Court wrote about that case on that day. It says, "The court cannot give the prisoner the benefit of the pardon unless he claims the benefit of it. It is a grant to him. It is his property, and he may accept it or not as he pleases." He committed the crime. He was caught. He was convicted. He was sentenced. A full pardon was granted by the President, from the highest authority in the land. To reject the pardon is to choose to die, and he rejects the pardon. Some people would think, "What a fool! Who would reject a pardon from the death sentence?" People do it all the time.

The Bible says, "We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death." The whole world stands guilty before God. The whole world stands condemned, but God issued a pardon through His Son Jesus Christ. Listen to these verses from Isaiah 55:6-7 NKJV. They're prophetic, pointing to Jesus. It says,

⁶ Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

The question is, will you accept the pardon, or will you reject it? It's a gift. It's almost too good to be true, but it's still true. It's still true. I got off on a little rabbit trail in the last service. I think about when I got saved in a little street mission in Medford, Oregon, so many years ago.

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There are probably still people in the world who only remember me as the Bayless Conley I used to be 50 years ago. They remember my crimes. They remember the stuff I did, and forever in their minds, that may be the way they have me fixed. But you know what? If you look at the ledgers of heaven, you look up my name, there are no sins listed. Canceled, washed clean by the blood of Jesus.

Yes, I made restitution to those I had harmed everywhere where it wouldn't do more harm, everywhere it was appropriate, once I got saved. That's the right thing to do, and the Scripture teaches that as well. But again, that was the response of a changed heart. Although some people may have me pegged a certain way until the day I die, God doesn't. He sees me through His Son, Jesus Christ.

I have accepted the pardon, my sins have been forgiven, and I've been washed clean. Friend, it's available for you wherever you are, wherever you're watching right now. If you're out on the plaza, hey there. I see you. Actually, I don't, but you see me. Wherever you might be, anywhere in this auditorium, listen, there's a pardon for you. If you're a prodigal son or prodigal daughter away from God, God's not mad at you. He loves you, but you need to receive the pardon. It does you no good if you won't act upon it and make it yours.

I got my phone up here. I read those verses from the book of Psalms about Israel a little earlier on in service. If I said, "Here, I want you to have my phone." You'd say, "Oh, nice phone," and you'd hand it back. "No, no, no. It's yours. I'm giving it to you." "Oh, pastor. That's expensive." "Yes, it was expensive. I want you to have it." "No, I got to give you something for it." I said, "No, no. It's a gift." "Look, let me at least give you \$100. That's an expensive phone." "No, no. It's not a gift if you want to buy it. You can't. Keep it." "I'll give you \$50 for it. That's fair." I said, "Yes, it's fair, but it's a gift. You can't pay for it." "Pastor, I got to give you something. I'll give you \$20." "No, it's no longer a gift if you try and pay for it." They say, "Well, at least let me give a dollar. I'll give you a dollar for it. I got to give something."

You can't. We cannot give anything for our salvation. We can't give anything for our pardon. We cannot pay for any blessings of God. Now, we can respond out of gratitude and generosity after the fact, but that's not what causes it. It's strictly His grace. By grace, you're saved through faith. That's not of yourselves; it's the gift of God. Not of works, not of anything that you do lest any man should boast.

Will you bow your heads and close your eyes just for a minute? You need to know God sees you. I know there's a person here; if I could describe your life right now, it's a giant question mark. Man, you got questions about God. You got questions about life. You got questions about how could this be fair? This happened to me. It's just like this huge question mark is written across you. You know what? God has answers that will satisfy your heart, but you need to come to Him first. It's about trust. He does speak the secret language of your heart. At the proper time, He will answer your questions. I know because He's done it for me.

With some of them, I wasn't ready for the answers till much later than I thought I was. He's been faithful to answer all of those questions. Jesus said, "The one that comes to Me, I will not turn away. I won't cast out." The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." You may have known better, prodigal son, prodigal daughter, and you have gone back into the pigsty. God loves you. He loves you. In the story of the prodigal son, when the father saw his son a long way off, he was in rags. He smelled of the pigsty, but the father went and embraced him and kissed him. He didn't care where he'd been. He didn't care what he smelled like. He

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decided to come home. The Father had mercy and grace for him. The Father has mercy and grace for you.

I want to lead you in a simple prayer. Out on the plaza, wherever you might happen to be, if you'll tie your heart around these words that we're going to pray together and sincerely speak them to God, you mean business when you say it. If you mean business, God will hear you. I want you to just pray right now. In fact, if it helps you, maybe put a hand on your heart. If everybody in the house will do it. Let's talk to God. Say,

Oh, God, thank You for Your grace. I am so grateful that You love me and that You sent Your Son to die for me. Jesus, thank You that You would take my place and that You would pay the penalty for my sins. Thank You for taking the punishment that belonged to me. I believe You died on the cross, that You were raised from the dead, and I give You my life. I bow my heart before You, and I say "yes" to You. I say "yes" to Your will. I say "yes" to Your way. Lead me, and I'll follow You, Jesus. It's in Your precious name, I pray, amen.

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