



Gratefulness — The Spice of Marriage

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Over many years of working as a pastoral counselor, I have observed one thing that seems consistently present in the relational dynamics of almost every couple in crisis: They have lost an attitude of gratefulness toward one another. There is little or no thankfulness passing between them. They rarely hear the words: “Thank you” from each other, much less an attitude that conveys cheerful, sincere appreciation.

The purpose of this short piece is to focus on how important it is in marriage to cultivate an atmosphere of gratefulness and appreciation toward your partner. Without it, the daily routine of life will soon taste like a meal of grits with absolutely no flavor—like eating every meal with no salt, no pepper, no sugar, no spice.

The absence or presence of gratefulness toward our spouse seems tied directly to our level of inner peace and gratitude toward God. When we are feeling neglected and short-changed by God, we usually transmit that same message to our marriage partner, right? Undoubtedly, God knew that this would be the case since he has placed so much attention on gratefulness, joy, and contentment in Scripture. Here are some examples:

- **Col 4:2:** “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”
- **1 Thess 5:16-18:** “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
- **1 Tim 6:6-9:** “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”
- **Heb 13:5:** “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”

Here are some observations about living a life of gratefulness:

- Complaining takes no special talent. Anyone can do it. But, learning to maintain an attitude of gratitude takes a spiritual change of our DNA. Ask God to help you see the things in your partner that are worthy of praise and your gratefulness.
- For most people, an attitude of gratefulness is not our natural, “default” mode of operating. Thus, we have to work at it. We must choose to be grateful and cheerful. Make a list of the things that you appreciate about your partner, and then look it over each day for a week. Hopefully, you will think of other things to add to it during the week.

- Most people who radiate grateful cheerfulness have learned to live according to Phil. 4:8:

“...Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Focusing on the positive in your partner often leads to a change of attitude toward them.

- If you have a grateful thought in your heart toward your partner, your failure to speak it to them will rob your partner. We need to be intentional about delivering our grateful thoughts. An undelivered gift is like a camping trip with no campfire—it misses the whole point.
- Most people find it hard to be both depressed and grateful at the same time. If you struggle with depression, a good starting place is to be relentless in finding something to be grateful about—and then voice it to your partner and to God. That will make both of them pleased.
- If things are tough right now, and you are finding it difficult to be grateful, sit down and write out a list of times when God came to your rescue in the past. After making that list, thank God for it and then share it with your partner. It will build up both of you.
- The Apostle Paul was a master at expressing gratefulness to his closest associates. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be married to someone who regularly wrote you something like this?:

“We always thank God for ... you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess 1:2-3)