



REALISTIC EXPECTATION No. 13

BE GENEROUS AND GRATEFUL

Like the Top 10 Countdown on *Late Show with David Letterman*, our baker's dozen starts with the last biscuit placed in the basket and finishes with the first. So we begin our countdown with Realistic Expectation No. 13.

At sunset one evening in Colorado Springs, I was traveling west toward Pikes Peak when my heart leaped within me. Remembering God's love in my life, I just cried out in worship: "Your name is Faithful. My name is Grateful!" Ever since that moment, almost always when I sign my name, I include the word "grateful." In light of God's love, if we as His followers are to be known by two descriptive titles, surely *generous* and *grateful* are appropriate. Don't you agree?

BEFORE GOD AS AN OFFERING

In *The Message* paraphrase of the Holy Bible, Rom. 12:1 lays out beautifully the realistic expectation of being generous and grateful. Here it is: “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”

Religion often calls for dead martyrs, but relationships call for living sacrifices. If we choose to allow the Holy Spirit to have His way in our lives, generosity and gratitude will characterize the way we live. If we refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to have His way in our lives, stinginess and dissatisfaction will characterize the way we die.

I want to be an offering for God, not an offense to God. Those who lead alongside me must have the same desires. When God places His thumb on my life, I want to be like a grape, not a marble. When pressed, a marble resists and shoots off in its own direction, but a grape gives all it has to the one doing the pressing.

I’m so glad Jesus was a generous and grateful Son of God and Son of Man. I am also glad He chose to be a grape and not a marble when He came to Gethsemane, the place of pressing. He prayed the perfect prayer to the Father: “Not my will, but

thine, be done” (Luke 22:42, KJV). I’m so glad Jesus obeyed the will of His parents—God of heaven and Mary of Nazareth. At Cana of Galilee, Jesus obeyed His earthly mother’s will and made wine for the wedding guests. In Gethsemane, Jesus obeyed His Heavenly Father’s will and became wine for the whole world. Why did He do it? He was generous and grateful. He proved that *relationships rule* by placing His life before His Father God as an offering.

REMEMBERING PASSION WEEK

During a recent pilgrimage to Jerusalem, my prayer partner, Steve Thigpen, and I chose a Thursday night to share Holy Communion together. We then left our guesthouse within the Old City walls, exited the Zion Gate near the traditional location of the Last Supper, and walked outside the city gate along the Kidron Valley all the way up to Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Whatever you can imagine, it was that wonderful and invigorating and humbling and more. Walking where Jesus walked as Jesus walks within you is an indescribable experience of intimacy for a fully devoted follower of Jesus.

Did Jesus ever prove His generosity and gratitude any more than He did on that Thursday night before His crucifixion? Think about it. The Son of God washing the feet of fishermen? Does it get any more generous than that? Then, once He was in the

olive grove, out of love and gratitude for His Father, Jesus surrendered His own life's blood so we could be in relationship with heaven again. *Wow* is right! When the mad mob came to Gethsemane, Jesus could have easily slipped out the back entrance and escaped to Bethany, but He did not do it. Instead our Lord turned himself over to the bloodthirsty bunch and said, "Let my followers go" (John 18:8, author's paraphrase). Surely Jesus modeled and clearly communicated to His disciples and to us on that night a realistic leadership expectation, the relationship rule that calls us to be generous and grateful. If we want to lead as Jesus led, we will be grateful to God and generous to God and to one another.

As I study the Holy Scriptures surrounding the Passion Week of our Lord, I'm convinced that one woman's very personal and quite public response of generosity and gratitude may have helped Jesus to stay on the Cross. The story unfolds in the first few verses of Mark 14. *The Message* paraphrase records it this way:

Jesus was at Bethany, a guest of Simon the Leper. While he was eating dinner, a woman came up carrying a bottle of very expensive perfume. Opening the bottle, she poured it on his head. Some of the guests became furious among themselves. "That's criminal! A sheer waste! This perfume could have been

sold for well over a year's wages and handed out to the poor." They swelled up in anger, nearly bursting with indignation over her.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why are you giving her a hard time? She has just done something wonderfully significant for me. You will have the poor with you every day for the rest of your lives. Whenever you feel like it, you can do something for them. Not so with me. She did what she could when she could—she pre-anointed my body for burial. And you can be sure that wherever in the whole world the Message is preached, what she just did is going to be talked about admiringly."

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the cabal of high priests, determined to betray him. They couldn't believe their ears, and promised to pay him well. He started looking for just the right moment to hand him over. (Vv. 3-11)

This is a very powerful passage. It ends with the selfish attitude of one greedy male disciple, but it begins with the selfless act of worship of one generous female convert. Let's focus on her selfless act of worship for now. The way I understand it, expensive perfume is very concentrated and intended to be used the way the old hair formula slogan of the 1960s recommended: "A little dab'll do ya." But *no*, this woman had generosity and gratitude that had to

be expressed extravagantly. She dumped the whole bottle on the head of her Lord. I'd say Jesus got the opposite effect of being sprayed by a skunk. I have no doubt that while Jesus was on the Cross, every time our Savior inhaled He could smell the sweet scent of the generous and grateful worship given to Him by the woman at Simon the Leper's house earlier in the week. Surely every time Jesus was tempted to call ten thousand angels to save himself and forget us, He must have remembered the woman worshipper who gave Him her all. How could He do any less than to give His all for her and for us?

Never underestimate the impact of being generous and grateful before the Lord and others. It has the power of very expensive, concentrated perfume being poured out all at once. In other words, when we are generous and grateful, it is simply unforgettable to God and people.

A RELIGIOUS TALK VERSUS OUR RELATIONSHIP WALK

A few years ago Greg Kellam hired our high school son, Grayson, to clean up around his motorcycle showroom. I recall the day Grayson came home with his first paycheck. His grin was contagious. I followed him to his room to talk about God-centered generosity and gratitude—tithing. To *tithe* is to re-

turn to God 10 percent of what He has given to us. If the tithe belongs to the Lord, is it really wrong to say that the remaining 90 percent belongs to us? No, it's not. Well, before I could get my 10 percent tithe talk started, our son stopped me with these words: "Dad, before you say anything, I've been thinking about my offering for Sunday. I've decided that I want to give 20 percent of my paycheck back to the Lord?" Obviously, a religious talk was not necessary. Our son had been closely watching the relationship walk of his parents. We are still humbled and believe God is still honored by the spontaneous continuation of devotion that flows from our son's tender heart. If returning to God His 10 percent proves we are grateful, could it be that gladly dipping into our remaining 90 percent proves we are generous?

Being generous and grateful are realistic expectations taught to us by Jesus. They are also two powerful relationship rules to live by and to lead from. Being generous and grateful is one unforgettable way to live the love of God out loud and to prove without doubt to a seemingly hopeless world that indeed, relationships rule!