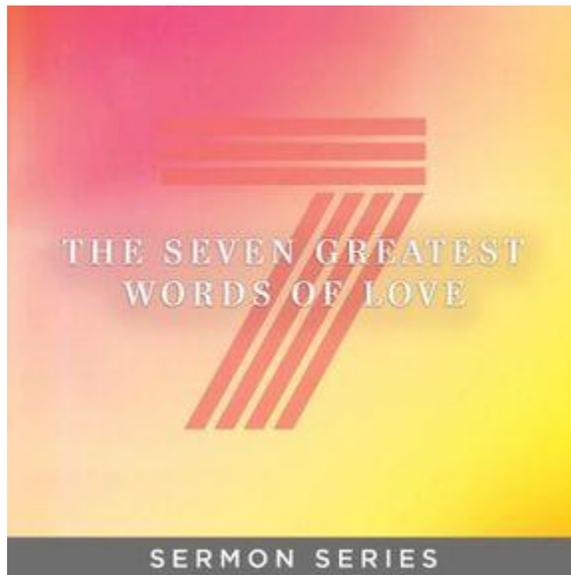


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Part 6: THE WORD OF LOVE
John 19:28-30

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 201-206



THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Jesus walked this earth teaching about God's LOVE. But do you know what that kind of love really means? Discover anew the meaning behind the last seven words Jesus spoke during his final hours on the cross. These powerful words of Jesus, full meaning and amazing blessing, are His message to us before His resurrection — words of forgiveness, assurance, love, trust, and so much more.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**"I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.'"
Psalm 91:2**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 201

WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

“Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

THANK GOD IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

THE flight delays. The sick child. The front row parking spot at the grocery store when you are in a hurry. The donuts at the office on the day you didn’t have time to grab breakfast. The message at church that spoke directly to your need. The person who called and invited you to lunch. The unexpected extra 10 minutes in the car all by yourself. The song that came on the radio as you were driving frantically to your doctor’s appointment.

These are just a short list to summarize the long list of circumstances we encounter in any given day. God’s Word is clear and makes no mistakes. He says to give thanks in ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. Last time I checked, all means ALL.

So how do we give thanks IN all circumstances? We ask God to help us see our circumstances through His eyes and thank Him for who He is in the midst of them. Most of us will not learn until much later how the circumstances we face are shaping us, protecting us, and pointing us to God, but regardless of how we feel about our circumstances or the impact they are making on our lives, we can still thank Him IN the moment. And by thanking Him, we will often find a change in our perspective so that we can truly praise Him IN all circumstances.

REFLECT: Is there anything that’s keeping you from giving thanks IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES? Can you share that with God? Then, think about God's character, and begin to thank Him for who He is. Thank Him for being there, for helping you in time of need, and for His promises to always be with you, even in the difficult circumstance.

RESPOND: Write out a few “good” circumstances in your life right now and a few “not so good” circumstances in your life. Offer up a prayer of thanks to the Father for at least one of His characteristics that you know to be true in these circumstances. Then thank Him for His Word that points us to Him in all things.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Teach me to offer You a heart of thanksgiving and praise in all life's daily experiences. Teach me to be joyful always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances, for this is Your will for my life (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). I long to please You in all I do, so I ask You to receive my sacrifice of praise and use it to break the power the enemy may have in any area of my life. Change my outlook and attitude into one of joy of You which is my strength in my present circumstances, and help me to keep my eyes on You, who are able to offer hope in the middle of each storm. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 202

WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever. . . . You are my God, and I will give You thanks; You are my God, and I will exalt You. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.”
Psalms 118:1; 28-29

REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN HARD TIMES

IN Psalm 118, the psalmist calls all the people to give thanks to the Lord, then launches into a testimony of how God delivered him (or her) from every disaster, and ends with the same declaration to give thanks to the Lord. It is easy to look at the hard times in our life and assume we are all alone, and there are countless stories in the Bible of men and women whose trials could make them feel like they were completely alone and abandoned by God. The truth, however, is that He is right there beside us through the good times and hard times. His Word says He will never leave us or forsake us. The word never means NEVER. Not even for a moment are we alone.

God is faithful to use the difficult things we walk through in life to teach us about His nature, lead us to His truth, and protect us from the enemy. That college rejection letter shifted where you went to school and the friends you made. The hard meeting you had with your boss pushed you to press into an area of weakness. The argument with your spouse opened up doors for you to talk through things you've been needing to talk about for a long time. The loved one in the hospital created an opportunity for reconciliation between family members in the waiting room.

We face opportunities to remember God's faithfulness in the hard things every day. As we shift our focus away from what is not, we can better see what is. God is there in the middle of the hard thing you are walking through right now. You just have to be looking for Him, and when you see Him, shift your focus.

REFLECT: What hard thing(s) are you walking through right now? Is it work, your marriage, your kids, a friendship, something else? What are you learning or experiencing in this hard moment that you have never noticed or walked through before?

RESPOND: In your journal or notebook, write out the hard things in your life right now that you are choosing to be thankful for. Have you seen God in the middle of that hard thing? If so, write down how you've seen Him show up on your behalf and what you have learned as a result of His presence in the circumstance. If you haven't seen God yet, keep looking for Him and ask Him to show Himself to you in a way that you will see Him at work in the hard time today.

TODAY'S PRAYER

God of Victory, I thank You because I know that I can do all things through You. It is You who strengthens me, and You are my greatest weapon against the adversary. Therefore, I will prosper, and I will be of good cheer because You have overcome the world. For this reason, I thank You for what You will do through me in the future. Lord, I lean not on myself and I trust solely in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 203

WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

"Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. . . . be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 5-16; 18b-20

ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT IS AROUND YOU

GOD'S Word clearly tells us to give thanks for ALL things ALL the time. We can rest in what we have been given by God as His provision for His children. Whatever you have, it's yours, and is a reflection of God's provision in your life. He gave you the skills and desires to do the job you do that generates the paycheck you receive which purchased the things you own. Then, there are the things that have been given to you from others. That speaks to an even bigger blessing. What we may resent as a hand-me-down is a well-loved version with a history being used in our story.

Sometimes precious items are passed down to us, like the woman whose mother gave her all of her grandmother's pearl necklaces after her grandmother passed away. She could be frustrated that she didn't have any real pearls of her own, or she could be thankful that the ones she was given were given to her by someone who loved them and wanted her to have them.

REFLECT: Take a look around you at everything you have. Instead of thinking about the things you don't have, take a mental inventory of what you see. Everything you

see is an opportunity you can turn into praise, thanksgiving and gratitude.

RESPOND: Take your notebook and write down a FULL page of what you see from where you sit. EVERYTHING. The pen you're writing with, the table you are writing on, the chair you are sitting on, the clothes you are wearing...then shift your eyes so you see your possessions as God's blessings.

TODAY'S PRAYER

[In your prayer time, tell God what you are grateful for. To take it a step further, tell Him why you are grateful for the things around you.]

Lord, Thank You for Your amazing power and work in my life. Thank You for Your goodness and for Your blessings over me. Thank You that You are able to bring hope through even the toughest of times, strengthening me for Your purposes. Thank You for Your great love and care. Thank You for Your mercy and grace. Thank You that You are always with me and will never leave me. Thank You for Your incredible sacrifice so that I might have freedom and life. Forgive me for when I do not thank You enough for who You are, for all that You do, and for all that You have given me. Help me to set my eyes and my heart on You afresh. Renew my spirit, fill me with Your peace and joy. I love You and I need You this day and every day. I give You praise and thanks, for You alone are worthy! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 204 WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

"That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."
2 Corinthians 4:16-18

MAKE YOUR FOCUS INTENTIONAL

AS we have seen so far, there are many ways to cultivate a grateful heart. Another way to cultivate our forever-grateful heart is to fix our eyes on what is eternal instead of the temporary things right in front of us. When we focus on the temporary and seen things instead of the unseen and eternal, our focus is diverted from God to ourselves and other people. If we want to be grateful, we must avoid at all cost those things that move us toward dissatisfaction, comparison, and jealousy. When you are prone to want something, stop and remember instead. As you wander the aisles of Target or the sporting goods store and see all the things you want but don't have right now, turn your attention to what you do have. The car that you drove to the store, the feet you used to walk through the aisles, and the eyes to see and take it all in.

When we shift our focus from our wants to what we have, we give the praise to our Provider. Let your focus be on what is around you, what you have inside your home or in your closet, and how you can allow those things to fuel your praise. When we intentionally focus on seeing God in the midst of the "stuff", we redirect our attention and a powerful shift happens in our heart.

REFLECT: When you think of your normal day, what do you tend to catch yourself focusing on? Is there anything you are currently focused on that you need to lay down so you can shift your focus to your Creator?

RESPOND: Today's list will look a little different. Write down the things that have your focus right now. Right or wrong, good or not so good, take a minute in prayer and surrender those things to the Father and thank Him for them. Ask Him to shift your focus away from the things that are NOT Him toward the things that are for and about Him.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Quiet my heart and still my soul as I wait on You during these moments alone. I recognize You are a holy and majestic God—One who deserves great praise and glory. All of creation testifies to Your awesome and unique works. There is no one like You, no other god worthy of honor.

I want to focus on You, Lord, and to shut out all the distractions of the world. For these next few moments, it's just You and me, God. You are Spirit, but You are a God who knows me so intimately. I like to imagine You literally sitting here beside me because of Your promise that You are Emmanuel—always "with us."

As I think about the truths in Your Word, may the meditation of my heart be sweet and honoring to You. I am not trying to clear out my mind. I simply want You to empty me of self and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 205 WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like Him. In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and He lives in all of us. Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.”
Colossians 3:10-14

BE MINDFUL THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY

OUR normal everyday routines are filled with opportunities to turn our hearts to gratitude. From the moment you wake up until the time you go to bed, be mindful of what happens as you go about your day. You don't have to have a lot to develop a heart full of gratitude. In fact, having a good deal may actually be a barrier to giving thanks because we can overlook the basic items we have been blessed with. Take, for instance, those who live in the areas of Africa. The people who literally don't have anything have been seen by those who have visited Africa to be some of the most grateful people. They are thankful for the things we take for granted. There, even clean water is truly celebrated as a gift!

As you brush your teeth today, thank God for the clean water and a personal toothbrush. As you go to the bathroom, do you realize that you have cleaner water in your toilet than some have to drink? And the plush toilet paper, that's something to be grateful for too. There are many things we have become accustomed to which you may notice if you take the time to look for them. Today's passage from Colossians instructs us to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things. As we learn to shift from selfishness and indifference to gratitude, we begin to see everything

differently. If we are looking for God to show up and show off, we will see Him, but it takes a purposeful heart to see God and recognize His handiwork.

REFLECT: Do you recognize God throughout your day? How can you remind yourself to redirect your thoughts from your busyness to His goodness that can fuel your gratefulness?

RESPOND: Set a reminder on your phone for today for two different times and schedule a reminder so you ask this question, “How have I seen God?” or your own version of that question. By doing this, we can become intentional to notice God and be mindful of the God-things going on around us throughout our day.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, I pray that You will make Your presence known in my life today. Give me faith to believe that You can change me through prayer and through acts of love and compassion. Let Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Help me to cultivate Your presence in my life. I repent of any pride or personal idols that have taken me away from having You in first place and being completely Yours. Remove the distractions in my life that keep me from Your presence.

I want to worship only You, so take me deeper in my prayer life and in intimacy with You, and help me to walk in Your light and holiness. I want to know You more. Your word says, “Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim You, who walk in the light of Your presence, O Lord” (Psalm 89:15) Give me joy in Your presence and help me to bring joy into the lives of others. Psalm 16:11 states, “You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.” And Psalm 27:4 and 7 continue, “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple... Hear my voice when I call, O LORD.” Today, I desire to dwell in Your house, to gaze on Your beauty, and seek Your face. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 206

WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

"Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with Me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.' . . . He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then He took the seven loaves and the fish, and when He had given thanks, He broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over."
Matthew 15:32; 35-37

GIVE THANKS FOR OUR DAILY BREAD

HAVE you ever noticed that the things we experience regularly are the easiest for us to take for granted. Some things like a roof over our head, running water, and electricity, which are more often than not a reality for most of us, can easily be taken for granted. Three or more meals a day with more food than we could possibly eat in a sitting can often be overlooked as just another part of life. But in reality, they are a huge blessing for which we should daily pause and give thanks.

When Jesus walked on earth, He modeled for us what it meant to have a heart of gratitude as He “gave thanks” before both miraculously feeding the multitudes and announcing the New Covenant at the Last Supper (Matthew 15:36, Matthew 26:27). In the story of the loaves and fish, the people who gathered were more concerned with what Jesus had to say to them than they were about their basic needs. As we consider the story, it is easy to assume they were hungry. They had been with Him a long time and any “picnic lunch” they had packed for their journey would have long been eaten by the third day. And yet no matter how hungry everyone was, Jesus did not forsake or skip over what He knew was important to His

Father. He gave thanks for the simple provision of bread and fish. We please our Father when we follow after Jesus' example and give thanks even for our most simple blessings.

REFLECT: Do you regularly practice “giving thanks” at meals? Do you give thanks privately or out loud with others? How can you share your gratitude with those with whom you “break bread” or share a meal?

RESPOND: Make it a point today, whether in public or the privacy of your home or office, to give thanks before your meals. Thank God for the provision that surpasses your needs and fulfills the majority of your wants. If you are sharing a meal with a co-worker or family member, invite them into the practice with you and tell them why. Let them know that as you cultivate a grateful heart, you want to share it with those around you.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for loving me so much that You would come to earth and suffer and die so that I might be saved by grace through faith in You. Words cannot express the depth of gratitude and love that I have for You, knowing that You love me so very dearly. As I consider the vastness of Your creation and realize how enormous You are, I am always astonished that You should care for me. How can it be that You died for me when I was dead in my sins and at odds against You? Thank You that You provide for me day by day and that when I am weak and fearful, You hold me up. Thank You that You have promised to be with me always. Lord Jesus, there is no end to Your goodness and there is no end to my love and gratitude for all You are to me. Praise Your holy name for ever and ever, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve