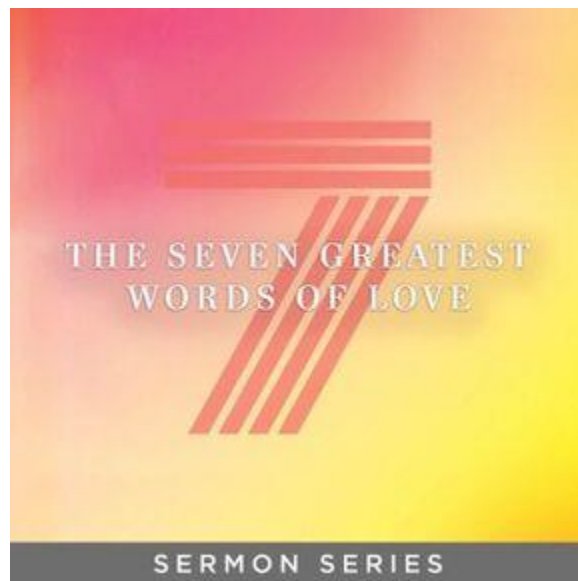


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Part 7: THE WORD OF TRUST
Luke 23:44-47

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 207-212



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:

**“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who honor Him...”
Psalm 103:13 (NIV)**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 207 WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Cry out, 'Save us, O God of our salvation! Gather and rescue us from among the nations, so we can thank Your holy name and rejoice and praise You.'"
1 Chronicles 16:34-35

SHARE THE HIGHS AND LOWS WITH OTHERS

HAVE you ever noticed that some days it's easier to see God's goodness than other days. There are times when we can stay positive, find the good in the moment, and trust His hand is at work. There are also days, or moments throughout our day, when staying positive takes a lot of work or is downright hard to do. And that's okay. Today's passage from 1 Chronicles speaks about our God who is able to deliver and how He shows His goodness to His children. It acknowledges God and returns praise to Him. We can assume that in order for God to need to deliver them, Israel was facing some tough circumstances. In the same way, we walk through the tough times and the great times with one common denominator. God is in it all, and we can thank Him and give Him praise in the middle of it.

Doing this alone, on our own, is valuable, but true beauty comes when we begin to share our gratitude in all things with others. When we cultivate a grateful heart and share with people around us, we give them permission to be grateful too! In our family, we started sharing our gratitude with one another when our children were young. We began by asking questions in a way that magnified God at work in ways they could relate to. We also shared highs/lowers at mealtime. Family dinner time at our home was and is a regular place to cultivate conversations about gratitude. As the children grew up, we added a nightly family prayer time when our family could meet together and focus primarily on "what were we thankful for." This is a practice we still do today. Sometimes, we simply ask, "what was the high and low of your day?" A high is anything good, but it is what was personally good for each one of us. A low is anything that was hard or not fun throughout the day. Sharing these times keeps us attentive to those things that build us up and encourages us

when things weigh us down. In either case, we get to thank God and watch Him use them to shape our prayers and our thanksgiving.

REFLECT: Do you pause long enough to think about the highs and lows you are experiencing on a daily basis? Do you let one overshadow the other? It is easy to become discouraged by the lows and miss the highs or ignore the lows and never deal with the frustrations or disappointments. The best option is to acknowledge and deal with both the high and low times with gratitude and a heart of surrender, willing to let God show Himself in both.

RESPOND: Take your journal and write down some high and low moments. Introduce this idea to your family at meals or in the car when you have a captive audience or bedtime when you can intentionally connect to each other. Or, if you are alone, seek out a friend and begin to share together. These types of conversations give us a glimpse into each other's worlds and an opportunity to share and practice having a grateful heart together.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Loving Heavenly Father, how my heart bows before You in humble and sincere gratitude for all the many blessings You have bestowed upon me, for the life that You have given me, and the ways You have sustained me and cared for me, for which I offer You my grateful thanks. Thank You for my family and friends, my community and church, and all the wonderful ways You have led and guided me through both the joyful times and the difficult seasons of life. Thank You for the wonderful world into which I have been placed and the beauty that surrounds me, the sea and the sky and the hills and the valleys – for all the delights You have placed in my life in such abundance.

Thank You most of all that although I deserved nothing but punishment, Lord, yet You in Your great mercy sent Jesus to die on the cross to save me from my sins, covering me with Your own perfect righteousness and raising me up to sit with Him in heavenly places. Thank You that You have freely given me all things to richly enjoy. Words cannot express the gratitude that is in my heart. Help me, Lord, to be the person You would have me to be and to live out my life as an expression of gratitude to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 208

WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

“Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.” Proverbs 16:24

NAVIGATE YOUR WAY OUT OF NEGATIVITY

TODAY'S verse in Proverbs tells us that our words can be sweet and healing or, as some versions say, healthy. If you were to take a “health assessment” based upon your words, what do you think they would rate? It’s easy to let down our guard and allow our words to cross from gratitude to negativity, gossip, and complaints.

The anecdote to complaining is gratitude. Make a mental note today to stop and stand still for ten seconds every time you catch yourself complaining. During those ten seconds, re-evaluate and redirect your heart to thankfulness in order to combat the critical thoughts. When we put into practice regularly acknowledging what we are grateful for, everyone around us is impacted. Our outlook on life and attitude changes. People around us can see and feel the difference. Our countenance changes. Our face tells a different story when we are grateful than it does when we are sitting in the negativity.

REFLECT: What do the people around you see on your face? What do the people around you hear when you speak? Do your words, actions, and attitudes tell the story of God’s goodness and faithfulness?

RESPOND: This may seem strange, but write out your top three complaints today. Jot them down in your journal and spend a minute thinking about them. Then surrender your rights to those “complaints”, and ask the Lord to change

your heart or the situation. As we practice surrendering our negative thoughts, words, and complaints to Him instead of allowing them to spill over onto those around us, He can redirect our thoughts, words, and actions to Him and His ability to work and move on our behalf. A grateful heart can be displayed in what we don’t say just as much as it is seen in what we do say.

TODAY'S PRAYER

O Lord, my Redemption, be my Protection. Direct my mind by Your gracious presence, and watch over my path and guide me with Your love through the hidden snares of life. I desire, Lord, for my words and actions to reflect Your hope and peace to those around me. As Psalm 119:14 says, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Help me in those times when negative thoughts creep into my mind to fix my heart and mind on You as I go forward and, following in faith, arrive at Your goals for my life. In Jesus’ powerful name, I pray, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 209

WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

“We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

THANK GOD FOR THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU

ONE of the quickest ways to cultivate a grateful heart is to be thankful for the people God has placed in our lives. Paul modeled this in the beginning of his letter to the Thessalonians as he wrote, "We always thank God for all of you." It can be easy to be thankful for the people we are closest to, but what about the teller at the bank or the person who bags your groceries at the grocery store? Do you notice the lady who checked you in at your doctor's appointment or the waiter who took your lunch order? Sometimes we can become so busy with what we are doing that we actually quit noticing people.

That is directly opposite to what our Savior did. Jesus knew people were the most important of all creation, for people are the only part of God's creation that are made in His image. Nothing else compares. In fact, on each day of creation, God proclaimed that what He had made was "good", but on day six, the day He created people, we read that God proclaimed His creation to be "very good." (Genesis 1:31) So Jesus, knowing how important people were, went out of His way to see people with less than perfect backgrounds and less than glamorous jobs. He took time to notice, serve, and thank His Father in Heaven for them. Likewise, there are people all around us that we can and should be grateful for. Our expression of gratitude to our Father impacts how we see and treat them. When we express gratitude to the people we encounter throughout our day, we have the opportunity to allow our words and actions to impact their lives, and we reflect God to them.

REFLECT: Take a look at the people around you - the ones you interact with on a regular basis and the ones you see sporadically. Who are they? Do you exhibit gratitude to those around you? Would they say you are friendly?

RESPOND: Make a list of the people you see regularly. Beside their name, write down one specific thing about them for which you are grateful. To take it a step further, if you see them today or run into them this week, look them in the eyes and tell them how grateful you are for them.

Pray and ask the Lord for open doors and opportunities to share with the people around you what you are grateful for and why. When you share about people, add a specific reason why you are grateful for them. Make it a priority to notice people and share with them why you are grateful to know them.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for Your great love and blessing over my life. Thank You that Your favor towards me has no end. It lasts for eternity through the richness and power of Christ. Forgive me for sometimes forgetting that You are intimately acquainted with all my ways, that You know what concerns me and You cover me, as with a shield.

I ask for Your guidance so that I might walk fully in Your blessing and goodness today. May Your face shine upon me. As I go about my day, may I stop to really see those people You have placed in my life. Help me to express my gratitude for the blessing they are in my life, and may no one I meet be made to feel unnoticed or unimportant by my words or actions. Establish the work of my hands today. I pray You would open the right doors and opportunities for my life and for my loved ones, and work powerfully to close the wrong doors, too, protecting me from what I need to walk away from. Bring to fulfillment all that You have given me to do in these days. I pray You would make my way purposeful and my footsteps firm out of Your goodness and love. Give me a heart of wisdom to hear Your voice; please make me strong through Your huge favor and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 210 WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

"So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do." Ephesians 5:15-17

SAY THANK YOU TO SOMEONE TODAY

STUDIES show that gratitude helps you make friends, deepens friendships, and makes you friendlier. I don't know about you, but I want to be regarded as a friendly person. When I cultivate a grateful heart, the people around me are impacted.

There are many ways we celebrate the people we are thankful for. We do this in our prayers and with our words, both out loud and in writing. A personal word of encouragement from someone expels the lies from the enemy and the doubts in our head. If someone tells me they are thankful for me, I'm immediately grateful for them, their words, and the effects of their words on my heart. Handwritten thank you's, another personal way to say thank you, are one of the most tangible ways to share and show gratitude. People often recall to others how a written thank you note came at just the right moment and how they needed to hear exactly what the writer had written. It is as if God was speaking directly to their heart through the note.

Noted author, C.S. Lewis, wrote about the importance of sharing a word of thanks with others. Consider this quote from him:

"It is important to keep on giving thanks. Otherwise, as one continues to pray for the others who have not yet been

relieved, one simply fails to notice how many of one's intercessory prayers have been granted—never notices how the list of 'Thank-you's' grows and perhaps outstrips the list of mere 'Please's' " (C.S. Lewis, in a 1955 letter to Mary Van Deusen).

REFLECT: Who are you thankful for today and why? Have you told them lately? Who do you need to reach out to with a personal thank you or gift of gratitude?

RESPOND: Take a minute today and write a good old fashioned thank you card. You're not done until you deliver it or put it in the mail. As you send your card, lift up in prayer the person you're sending it to, praying specific prayers of thanksgiving for them.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for all of Your blessings to me, for the strength You give me each day, and for all the people around me who make life more meaningful. Thank you especially for those individuals who have touched my life and made a difference in my day. Letting others know how thankful I am for their kindness shown toward me is one way I can reach out to them with Your love and brighten their day. Help me to look for ways and opportunities to say thank you to others each day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 211 WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

"When all the people had crossed the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, 'Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. Tell them, 'Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight.' So Joshua called together the twelve men he had chosen—one from each of the tribes of Israel." Joshua 4:1-4

PUT YOUR GRATITUDE ON DISPLAY

WHAT do you do when you have a grateful heart? In today's passage, the Lord's commands to Joshua on a way to show his gratitude to God. He was told to gather twelve stones from the Jordan and, at the time when God commanded, to put them in place for everyone to see as a testimony of God's faithfulness. Some refer to these as stones of remembrance. Today we, too, can also have our own stones of remembrance to tell the story of God's faithfulness and our gratitude.

There is a story of one family who decided to do just that - to publicly display their "stones of remembrance" as a testimony to share with others. They chose to use a shadow box full of small objects that serve as reminders of what God has done, the ways He had answered prayers, miraculously healed, provided supernaturally, and loved them specifically. These small items represent a greater story of God's providence that built faith and unity within the family. As God continues to move in mighty ways in their family, they never want to stop giving thanks for those milestone moments. These items are on display for two reasons. First, so the family can be reminded and second, so that when people ask, they can share the amazing God-stories. Displayed in their home, the items also serve as a reminder to their children, grandchildren and future generations. Periodically, they will pull an item out from the box and tell the story to their children so that one day, they will tell the story (and their stories) to their children. As individuals and as families, we go through rough waters, unforeseen tragedy, and faith-building moments. So many times, God comes through for His children in the most unique ways, and because we have learned to look for Him in the celebrations and the struggles, He makes Himself known. The testimony of His

goodness serves as a stepping stone for others to come to know Christ personally and, therefore, impacts eternity.

REFLECT: Is it easy for you to remember and to be grateful for God's incredible love for your family? Do you have any tangible way to celebrate and remind yourself of His faithfulness? It's never too late to start. What would be a creative way for you or your family to remember and share about His faithfulness? Some families love hiking and finding cool rocks; for others who travel, it can be hotel keys or just writing the date and the event on a note card and keeping them in a box. How you do it isn't as important as doing it.

RESPOND: Pick one way you can start your own "stones of remembrance" for yourself or your family to serve as a testimony of God's love and faithfulness. Allow your gratitude to fuel this project. Start by writing down significant moments in your life. If you're doing this as a family, have everyone give their input about your family history. Then, decide on the best way to set up a physical reminder for yourself, or collaborate with your family on the best way to set one up for your family.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, How I wonder at Your love for me in that while I was yet a sinner, Jesus came to die for my sins so that, in Him, I might become Your child and be made the righteous of God. Father, it staggers the thoughts of my heart to realize that while I was cold, rebellious, and hostile towards You, You purposed the glorious plan of redemption in Your heart of love, so that guilty sinners could be declared righteous, through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, Who died to pay the price for our sins with His own life-blood.

Thank You that in your overflowing grace and mercy, you have not only saved me but have blessed me by your faithfulness to me in so many ways. As I go through life, it can be easy to forget your past goodness to me, Lord. Help me to discover a way to set up my own "stones of remembrance" so that I might be able to recall to mind the things you have done and share them with others so they may be encouraged to hear of your marvelous works. Thank You for Your unchanging and unconditional love towards me. Help me more and more to come to a new and deeper understanding of what Your love towards me truly means and continue to mark those moments of blessing with "stones of remembrance." This I ask in the name of Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 212

WAYS TO CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL HEART

"And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom He gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Colossians 3:15-17

THANK GOD FOR YOUR CHURCH

IN today's passage, Paul instructs the believers of the church of Colossae to act in love and unity toward one another. Because Jesus has established peace and because we are all part of Christ's body, we should be at peace with one another. He also encouraged them to sing to God from a heart of gratitude, and to do *everything* while giving thanks to God.

Just as Paul spoke directly to the church at Colossae, so today, we are the church. The people we worship with on Sunday mornings and the believers we fellowship with on a regular basis are our church, and we must be active, diligent, grateful members of the body of Christ as together we express our gratitude to God through our actions, words, and attitudes. God established the church to be a place to minister to the believers as well as serve the unbelievers to win them over to God with the love of their Savior. As believers, we have an obligation to love and serve the church with all five of our Kingdom currencies: time, talents, treasures, touch, and words.

REFLECT: How often do you thank God for your church, the place you worship, and the leadership who serve

faithfully? Does your gratitude show in how you serve the church and speak about the church and leadership? Is there anything that you need to lay down or the Lord needs to shift in your heart so that you can love and serve the church with a grateful heart?

RESPOND: Write down a couple of people that help lead at your church and why you're grateful for them. Also write down why you're grateful for your church, why you love being a part of it, or how they've ministered to you or your family. Take a minute and lift those things up to the Father in prayer.

TODAY'S PRAYER

"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Lord, Thank You that You created me for relationship with You and with other people. Thank You for giving me ways to connect with other believers in worship at church so I can encourage others and be encouraged. Fill me with the power of Your Holy Spirit this day and show me the ways I can make a difference with those believers. Thank You for Your joy, Your wisdom, and constant reminder that Your presence will go with me wherever I go. I choose to trust You today and believe You will accomplish Your good work in and through me and through my church. Show me how to do the good works You have planned in advance for me to do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve