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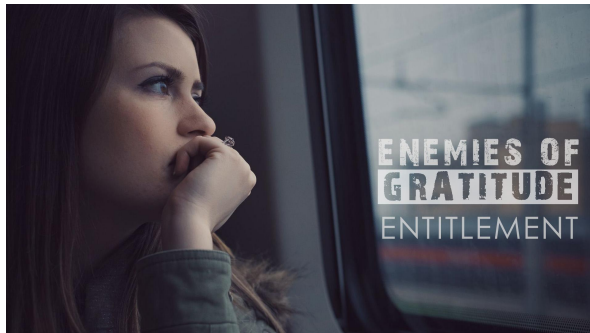
Title: The Enemies of Gratitude: Entitlement

Preaching: Danny Gulden, Lead Pastor, Promise Road Campus

Text: [Matthew 22:1-14](#)

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[Watch Service](#)



Gracious God, you have invited us to this place, setting your table of love for each and every one of us. We come to give praise for the gift of each new day and the possibilities contained in that day.

May we see where your love is revealed. We pray that we may be grateful people, people whose gratitude is overflowing at the receiving of your grace. We confess that we at times feel entitled, that our entitlement closes us off to the stranger and the marginalized in our midst.

God of mercy and love, your nature is to show mercy and love to all of us. Forgive us when we seek to find guidance and power from the idols we create in this world and help us turn to you—the one with compassionate power. Invite us in, even though we are unworthy, Almighty God, and may we have the wisdom to accept your gracious invitation.

Our world is torn by violence and terror, most especially in Israel and Gaza. In the midst of war, so many innocent people suffer. People of the Jewish and Muslim faith around the world are living in fear. We pray especially those who have died; those who are grieving; the injured; and those now without food, shelter or medical supplies. Strengthen and support the work of all relief organizations. We pray for your peace and reconciliation to overcome conflict. We ask that you give wisdom and discernment to our global leaders and those in positions of power who have the ability to impact the course of this war. Help us to be bold advocates and agents of peace in our own communities.

Other prayer concerns:

People

Healing, Ben Carl

Surgery Gabrielle

Death

Mildred Thompson

Gail's mother Georgia Van Cleve

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

We are continuing the series today called *The Enemies of Gratitude*. This is a time of year when we turn our focus on gratitude, on being grateful people. There are things that keep us from gratitude, from being grateful people. Our focus in life gets misplaced, a few examples

- How things used to be better
- How we aren't getting what we think we deserve
- How life's struggles are keeping us down

These things work to keep us from seeing the blessings right in front of us, from being truly grateful people. They keep us from expressing and experiencing gratitude. Using scripture as our guide, we work to return our focus to the blessings in front of us, to live with an attitude of gratitude.

Several weeks ago now, it was announced that Taylor Swift would be coming to Indianapolis in November of 2024. Like every other Hoosier resident, I pre-registered for a chance to get tickets and eagerly awaited the email I would receive that would give me my code for a pre-sale. I figured with three shows in a stadium, there would be enough tickets to go around, and even if there wasn't, surely I would be one of the ones who would receive the code. After all, I'm good to people, I said yes to a call to ministry and serve as a pastor, surely I would get a code. The day came and I received the email that said I was on the waitlist. I thought to myself, that must mean I'm in the second wave; they don't want to overload the ticket system, and they knew—because I am such a good person—that I would gladly wait my turn. After all, who could be more deserving than me? That was on a Tuesday. The tickets went on sale on a Thursday or Friday. A couple of months ago. I'm still on the waitlist, but I have to admit I'm getting impatient.

The enemy or obstacle to gratitude for today is entitlement. When you think about it, there is no positive side to entitlement. And yet, we live in a world where entitlement runs rampant.

Two main definitions to entitlement:

1. The belief that one is inherently deserving over others of special privileges or treatment.
2. That you have a right to everything.

You see the problem, don't you? Entitlement eclipses gratitude. The two can't exist in the same space I resonate with Brene Brown, who says, "What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude."

You see the difference, right? One blogger says it like this:

Opportunity is priceless, and having a chance is a gift, not an entitlement. ... I have access to education, medical care, clean water, electricity, safe housing, well paid jobs, and as much food as I please. I can follow my passions such as playing sports, learning musical instruments, reading, writing, swimming, watching movies. I have the opportunity to create my life how I choose. I am privileged not just for WHAT I have, but for the OPPORTUNITIES I have. By forgetting I have these opportunities, I am behaving with entitlement.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is on his way to the cross. He is on his way to being betrayed, arrested, and crucified. And he tells a parable about a wedding banquet. When speaking of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus often compares it to a wedding. He knows his time is limited. He's trying to get a point across:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding party for his son. ³ He sent his servants to call those invited to the wedding party. But they didn't want to come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants and said to them, "Tell those who have been invited, 'Look, the meal is all prepared. I've butchered the oxen and the fattened cattle. Now everything's ready. Come to the wedding party!'" ⁵ But they paid no attention and went away—some to their fields, others to their businesses. ⁶ The rest of them grabbed his servants, abused them, and killed them.

⁷ "The king was angry. He sent his soldiers to destroy those murderers and set their city on fire. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding party is prepared, but those who were invited weren't worthy. ⁹ Therefore, go to the roads on the edge of town and invite everyone you find to the wedding party.'

¹⁰ "Then those servants went to the roads and gathered everyone they found, both evil and good. The wedding party was full of guests. (Matthew 22:2-10)

This is a strange parable. But Jesus' time is short. This parable is an allegory. If you forgot what an allegory is, just ask one of our high school students.

Who is the king? God.

Who is the son? Jesus.

An extravagant banquet thrown by God.

Throwing a wedding banquet, throwing a party, like this can be overwhelming. Especially when it's God throwing the party. Jesus wants his message to be heard: God doesn't rest until the dining room is full. Think about the most crowded place you have ever dined. God doesn't rest until the dining room is full.

During seminary, as part of our degree program, we had to do a year of work in a social setting. It was assigned and mine was to work as a student chaplain in the Metro State Women's Prison. In the state of Georgia, around 85 percent of incarcerated females had been abused by a male figure in their life. To say that I was apprehensive as I began was an understatement.

My first assignment was to lead a grief group for women who had recently lost a loved one. Many know the pain of losing a loved one, but imagine not being with that person. Imagine not being able to attend a funeral because you are incarcerated. The pain, guilt, and shame. I learned quickly that all I had to offer was space to listen and a reminder that God often does God's best work in the worst of circumstances.

One day, one of the women stayed behind, tears coming down her face. She looked at me and said, "I just never knew. I never knew God's grace was for me. But now I know... it is for me and it is better than I could ever imagine."

A new appreciation.

A new spirit of gratitude for the grace of God, which had been there all along.

For the God who does not rest until the dining room is full.

What I shared is not the end of Jesus' parable. It continues:

Now when the king came in and saw the guests, he spotted a man who wasn't wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' But he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to his servants, 'Tie his hands and feet and throw him out into the farthest darkness. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.'

¹⁴ "Many people are invited, but few people are chosen." (Matthew 22:11-14)

At first glance, this parable about grace and God's heart seems to take issue with what a wedding guest is wearing. And the price he pays for being underdressed is being thrown into the darkness.

But it's not about what he is wearing. Jesus is trying to get his hearers' attention. Matthew is trying to get our attention. Some scholars believe that upon arrival, there is an endless supply of wedding clothes, provided by the host. Fine tuxedos and evening gowns for all to wear to the party. A gracious invitation.

But there is one guy who refuses to put on the wedding clothes and refuses to join the party. We can speculate why, but we can guess that he doesn't like the guest list. He is entitled to this party, to the grace of God, but surely most of these people aren't.

This party should only be for him, because he is entitled to it. This nice food should be all for him. The open bar, all for him. These others don't deserve this, most especially from the king. He doesn't even think he needs it, but it should only be for him over others.

He is spiritually entitled. And the king says, there is no room for entitlement in the life of faith. Because it's all a gift. All of life is a gift.

If we are entitled, we cannot be grateful. They do not exist in the same space. If we show up to the party and think we are the only ones who deserve to be there, then we don't know the heart of God. It's no way to go through life.

So hear this invitation once again:

The meal is ready

Everything is prepared

Come to the party.

Yes, you, by the grace of God—each and every person.

Let us pray.