



IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY: EVOKING AND INVOKING GRATITUDE IN PREACHING

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ABSTRACT

Although gratitude is sometimes mentioned by homileticians as a motivator for discipleship, its place in sermons remains relatively unexplored. This article considers how preachers can intentionally *evoke* (draw forth) feelings of thankfulness and *invoke* (appeal to) these as the impetus for obedience. This grace-gratitude-obedience pattern may be seen throughout the Bible; however, recent New Testament scholarship has underscored the extent to which, in the first century, grace demanded an active response on the part of recipients. This is evident in Paul's letter to the Romans, particularly as he appeals to readers to offer their bodies to God in view of his mercy—i.e., in gratitude for the grace described in the preceding chapters. Preachers can follow his example in their own sermons. However, to avoid moralism, it is important that listeners are genuinely thankful to God. An interdisciplinary exploration of gratitude offers a framework for helping people feel thankfulness that can be used in sermon-crafting. The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola are examined as a model for *evoking* and *invoking* Christian gratitude by personalizing God's love in Christ and calling for an active response. Finally, practical recommendations are offered, applicable to a wide variety of models and methods.

INTRODUCTION

Receive, Lord, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for that is enough for me.¹

This sixteenth-century prayer written by Ignatius of Loyola expresses the overflow of a heart so ravished by the grace and love of God that it cannot help but offer itself back to Him. In beautiful simplicity, it captures the foundation of Christian maturity: surrender of one's whole life to God, recognition that all comes from Him and should be returned to Him for His will, and trust in the sufficiency of His love and grace. Traditionally known as the *suscipe*, the Latin word meaning "receive" with which it begins, this prayer stands in stark contrast with so many prayers that focus on what God can "give" to meet our needs. It articulates the heart posture Paul envisioned when he made his appeal to the Romans (and us) to "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1).

This is precisely the kind of response that most pastors long to see arise in their congregations as they proclaim the good news of Jesus and His call to discipleship. What more could preachers hope to result from their sermons than this kind of whole-life surrender to God? Yet, one of the most frustrating aspects of preaching, particularly to the same people week after week, is the lack of heart-level response from listeners—those in the pew *and* the one in the pulpit! It can seem as if, with the passing of time, Christians become immune to the gospel, unaffected by the grace of God, and unwilling to offer God even a tithe of their hearts and lives. Spiritual journeys that began with enthusiastic abandon drift into a compartmentalized Sunday religion that protects itself against even the most passionate appeals from the pulpit. How can sermons pierce the spiritual Kevlar so many listeners wear under their church clothes? How can preachers dare to hope that their attempts to proclaim the

Word of God—broken and inadequate as they may be—may inspire the offering of sincere *suscipe* prayers in their listeners, as they present their bodies to God as living sacrifices? This paper will explore the transforming power of gratitude as a key homiletical tool to rouse sleepy disciples and spur them to lives of obedience and surrender.

While ultimately it is the role of the Holy Spirit to produce spiritual fruit in the lives of our listeners, neither they nor we are passive in the process. Dallas Willard states it well: “Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude. You have never seen people more active than those who have been set on fire by the grace of God.”² Because of this, it is important for preachers to consider what sets people on fire—what motivates Christians to “make every effort” to progress in their discipleship (2 Peter 1:5, 10, 3:14). Preachers have sometimes employed fear—of hell, judgment, or even earthly “chastisement”—as a means to spur listeners into action. Despite its theological shortcomings and the difficulty of reconciling threats with good news, a fear-based approach has proven effective in some settings. However, in today’s Western culture any hint of scare tactics are immediately and firmly rejected, and modern preaching has largely moved away from this approach. No doubt there have also been times when a preacher could appeal to a sense of Christian duty, simply telling their congregations, “this is what the Bible teaches,” or “this is what God wants,” and at least some would accept it as their responsibility to obey. However, concepts of duty and obligation are becoming foreign to today’s individualistic society and are no longer reliable motivators for behavioural change. Moreover, the dangers of “ought”-focused moralistic preaching have been well-documented, and so preachers today are more likely to simply minimize or avoid concrete application altogether than they are to try to motivate it by fear, duty, or any other means.³ This leads to sermons which, while rightly shining a spotlight on the grace of God, do not pay adequate attention to the call for radical

transformation or what motivates it. It is not difficult to see the results in the Western church today.

This paper will argue that gratitude is a theologically sound, culturally appropriate, and homiletically effective motivator for life-change. Acknowledging the role of gratitude in preaching and spiritual formation is not new. Many homileticians point to thankfulness as an important element in sermons.⁴ According to Milton Crum, the purpose of preaching is to “bring about change and evoke thanksgiving.”⁵ Stephen Farris says sermons should “move the congregation to a more grateful sense of God’s love and a determination more completely to obey God’s will.”⁶ Arthur Van Seters describes discipleship as based on “an ethic of grateful response,” which causes people to want to live out their faith in practical ways.⁷ Brian Chapell discusses the importance of gratitude in practical application, arguing that “believers need to serve God pre-eminently out of loving thankfulness for the redemption he freely and fully provides.”⁸ Paul Scott Wilson portrays active response (or “mission”) as a “chance to express joy and gratitude.”⁹ Yet, while these and other homileticians acknowledge the place of gratitude in preaching, they tend to mention it only in passing—as a theological construct and safety net against moralism or legalism—without focusing on its motivating power. Few have explored *how* preachers can intentionally harness gratitude in their efforts to help people mature and grow spiritually.

In order to better understand gratitude as a homiletical device we must consider how preachers can *evoke* (“inspire or draw forth”) and *invoke* (“appeal to”) gratitude in sermons.¹⁰ Both are essential elements in preaching for grateful response. If people do not *feel* grateful, or if that gratitude has faded into the background, it has little power to motivate. So, preachers must understand how their sermons can *evoke* strong feelings of thankfulness for God’s gifts of life and salvation. But *feeling* grateful is not the only goal, and so preachers also need to understand how to *invoke* that sense of thankfulness in calling for

obedience, self-surrender, and sacrificial discipleship. Furthermore, they need to do so with confidence that preaching in this way is not spiritually manipulative, but is in fact biblically and theologically justifiable.

This paper will bring together insights from three different fields of study to offer a practical framework for preaching for grateful response. First, it will lay a biblical foundation, showing that this interplay of grace and gratitude underlies the moral and ethical teachings in Scripture, particularly in Paul's letter to the Romans. This will demonstrate that *invoking* gratitude in calling for obedience is a standard part of the biblical pattern. Second, recent scholarship in psychology, spirituality, and virtue ethics will offer insights into what gratitude is, what causes it, and how it may be *evoked* in preaching. Third, the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola will be engaged as a case study of how gratitude can be placed at the center of Christian spiritual formation. Although its non-homiletical nature may seem to make it an odd choice as a model, it contains important lessons for preachers on both *evoking* and *invoking* gratitude in their sermons. Finally, simple recommendations for preaching for grateful response will be offered. These principles may be applied to many homiletical models and perspectives, with the ultimate goal of increased commitment to Christ and loving self-surrender to God in all of life.

GRATEFUL RESPONSE IN THE BIBLE

For centuries, Protestant theologians have noted that the Bible contains both law and gospel. On the one hand, both Old and New Testaments contain commands, rules, guidelines, and instructions for living a life pleasing to God. On the other, both Old and New Testaments paint a picture of a God who is loving and gracious, even when people do not follow his ways. Deliverance from Egypt was a gift to the Israelites, and deliverance from sin and death is a gift offered to all people in

Christ. By no merit of our own—only by the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus—we are forgiven, cleansed, and adopted into God’s family. We are dependent on this grace, not only in the beginning of our spiritual journey, but on an ongoing, daily basis. At its heart, Christianity is about what God has done for humankind because of His sheer generosity. This must be the message we preach, clearly and repeatedly, to our congregations. Grace should take center stage in the sermon, as in the life of the Christian.

Recent emphasis on this has led some homileticians to downplay “application” in sermons, lest it mistakenly send a legalistic message. But the Bible contains not only grace, but also law—moral and ethical instructions for living a godly life. To swing the pendulum too far away from the practical aspects of the Christian life means listeners are left with too little vision for living out their faith on a daily basis. In Scripture, God reveals His radical grace *and* He calls people to radical discipleship, and so preachers must include both in their sermons. But how does the Bible relate these two aspects of its message? The progression from law to gospel has been given considerable attention, in which God’s commands bring conviction of sin and prepare the individual to receive the gospel. However, there is also a gospel-law pattern that emerges throughout Scripture, in which thankfulness for the prior grace of God leads to human obedience. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Both for the Israelites and the church, the giving of instructions was subsequent to God’s saving acts, and part of His redemptive work.¹¹ This biblical dynamic of grateful response is a simple but powerful pattern that can guide our preaching.

The Shape of Paul’s Letter to the Romans

This dynamic can be seen in the writings of the apostle Paul, particularly in his letter to the Romans. Paul’s emphasis on God’s grace cannot be questioned. It is largely through his letters that we understand the incredible gift given in Christ. But despite this

emphasis on grace, he does not seem to be concerned that his plentiful and detailed ethical instructions would send a contrary message or lead to a new legalism. In fact, he regularly reminded the churches that accepting the gospel implies radical whole-life transformation. His famous words in Romans 12:1–2 were not written to non-believers, but to those who had already accepted the Christian message:

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The very familiarity of these words blinds us to their radical demands, and to how far short we fall of the kind of whole-life transformation they describe. But like Ignatius’ *suscipe* prayer, they concisely capture the kind of life to which preachers should regularly call their listeners.

However, Paul’s appeal does not occur in a vacuum, but as part of a carefully structured, unified epistle. In fact, although his letter to the Romans provides enough source material to inspire a lifetime of sermons, it is itself much more *like a sermon*—meant to be heard and digested in one sitting.¹² Because of this, it is informative for preachers to consider how Paul leads his readers *to* and *from* the appeal to offer themselves as living sacrifices. The beginning of the twelfth chapter of Romans represents a major shift in the letter, a turning point from “‘the indicative’ side of the gospel to a focus more on the ‘imperative’ side of the gospel.”¹³ The first eleven chapters are spent expounding the Christian message—describing the sinfulness of humanity; our unworthiness before, and even enmity with, God; and God’s gracious and loving action on our behalf through Christ. Through Jesus believers are forgiven, justified, released from slavery to sin, given the Holy Spirit, adopted into God’s

family, made heirs with Christ, and shown enduring love. Paul sees God's grace at work everywhere, even in the heart-wrenching rejection of the Messiah by his own people. All of this builds toward the astonishing conclusion that "God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom 11:32).

Far from being a purely intellectual exercise devoid of emotion, Paul's prolonged reflection on God's grace leads to a climactic outburst of praise:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and
knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond
tracing out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been
his counselor?"
"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay
them?"
For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom 11:33–36).

Not only does he remind the Romans in compelling detail that they are the recipients of an undeserved and indescribable gift, he leads them in a response of verbal worship.

But could words possibly express all the thanks due to such a gracious God? For Paul, there is another response that constitutes "true and proper worship." It is here that he introduces the idea of self-offering, explicitly tying it to the undeserved gifts of God: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, *in view of God's mercy*, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...."¹⁴ It is on the basis of the astonishing grace he has spent more than half the letter expounding, that Paul urges them to "be transformed." Douglas Moo explains, "Paul has just summarized that universal mercy of God (11:30–32) and expressed praise for it (11:33–36). Now he calls Christians to respond."¹⁵

There is a dynamic in this passage that is not made explicit in the text. Just what is it that connects the receipt of God's mercy with the response of surrender? Why does Paul think the one should lead to the other? He describes the response of self-offering as "true and proper"—their logical (to play off the original Greek λογικός) act of worship. What is it that Paul assumes is happening in his readers that will naturally lead them from his reminders of God's infinite grace into self-sacrificial lives of obedience? Is it *fear*, lest God, weary of showing mercy, should change his posture? Is it *obligation*, the heavy burden of an unpayable debt? Is it *duty*, a sense that this is the right or honourable thing to do? None of these fits with the context of a joyous doxology within which Paul makes his appeal. Instead, both Paul and his readers lived under a cultural paradigm that recognized *gratitude* as the appropriate response to a gift, and action as its most important expression. Gratitude is the hidden dynamic that connects "in view of God's mercy" to "offer your bodies as living sacrifices."

Grace and Reciprocity in the First Century

There has been considerable attention paid in recent years to the cultural rules of reciprocity in the Graeco-Roman world, and how they differ from modern assumptions. Understanding the first-century framework of grace, gift-giving, and reciprocity that Paul worked within helps to shed light on his approach to discipleship. Thus, it is instructive to take a fresh look at the word most often translated as "grace" in the New Testament: χάρις. In the Graeco-Roman world this "was not a primarily religious, as opposed to secular, word. Rather, it was used to speak of reciprocity."¹⁶ First, χάρις may have described something pleasing or beautiful; second, an attitude of kindness, generosity, or beneficence; and third, a concrete expression of that generosity, through a particular gift or benefit bestowed. A fourth meaning described the response that was appropriate to any of the first three: gratitude.¹⁷

The first-century Roman philosopher Seneca employed the popular image of the “three graces”—three maidens dancing hand-in-hand in a circle—to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the varied meanings of χάρις. He describes the proper dance of these graces as one maiden bestowing the benefit, another receiving it, and the third returning it.¹⁸ Although these three acts do not line up precisely with the definitions of χάρις above, Seneca’s description captures visually the kind of reciprocal relationships that were pervasive in the first century.¹⁹ The mutual interplay of generosity and gratitude in χάρις had to be kept in balance: “Grace *must* answer grace, or else something beautiful will be defaced and turned into something ugly.”²⁰ Nowhere was this dynamic more active than in patron-client relationships, a broad category of mutually beneficial social relationships that saturated first-century life. Wealthy patrons would demonstrate their χάρις (generosity) by bestowing χάρις (actual benefactions) on clients with some sort of practical need. Clients were then expected to respond with their own χάρις (concrete expressions of gratitude). This mutually beneficial patron-client framework applied not only to human relationships, it also shaped common understandings of divine-human relationships.²¹

As the first Christians learned about the grace extended to them in Christ, they would have received it using these cultural lenses. For them, God’s grace would not have been of a different kind than the grace with which they were already familiar; it would have been understood as different only in quality and degree. Moreover, they would have known that the reception of gifts “given freely” laid the recipients under obligation to respond with grace to match (insofar as possible), with the result that much exhortation in the New Testament falls within the scope of directing believers to a proper, “grateful response” to God’s favor.²²

Perfections of the Gift

In his ground-breaking work, *Paul and the Gift*, John Barclay explores how first-century assumptions about reciprocity shed light on Paul's teachings. Particularly relevant to this discussion is his description of various "perfections" of the concept of gift. When different people or cultures idealize gift-giving, they place their emphases on different characteristics. These unspoken assumptions about the "perfect" gift significantly change the implications surrounding it. Barclay outlines six of these possible perfections of the gift: *superabundance*, in which the size, significance, or permanence of the gift is emphasized; *singularity*, which highlights the benevolence of the giver as their sole and exclusive mode of operation; *priority*, which stresses the timing of the gift as prior to any initiative on the part of the recipient; *incongruity*, in which the unworthiness of the beneficiary comes to the forefront; *efficacy*, indicating that the gift fully achieves what it was designed to do; and *non-circularity*, which underlines that the gift is given with no expectation of reciprocity or return.²³

Barclay argues persuasively that it is the *incongruity* of God's gift in Christ that is emphasized in Paul's writings. In some ways, this was in contrast to the surrounding culture, which encouraged benefactors to bestow gifts on recipients who had proven or would prove themselves worthy. Instead, Paul repeatedly highlights that it is the undeserving nature of the recipients that make God's grace stand out: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of his Son . . ." (Rom 5:7-10).

Paul's focus on *incongruity* means that reading his writings through the lens of one or more of the other perfections of grace will skew our interpretation. This is particularly important as we consider his letters from a twenty-first century Western perspective, where the emphasis in gift-giving tends to

be on what Barclay describes as *non-circularity*. In today's society, the ideal gift is given without expectation of receiving anything in return. A gift given with "strings attached" is often seen as manipulative, coming from ulterior motives—or worse, as a form of bribery. Because of this, anonymous gifts which preclude even the possibility of saying "thank you," are seen as the ultimate expression of generosity. Accordingly, recipients learn that to try to "repay" a gift with more than a simple expression of thanks would be to taint the purity of the giver's motivation.

The danger of this cultural emphasis, according to Barclay, is that the ideal of *non-circularity*, is a modern construct. A gift with "no strings attached" is unfamiliar to most other cultures, and completely foreign to people in the early church.²⁴ Gift-giving in most contexts functions as an important way to form and develop relationships. Thus, it necessarily involves reciprocity (and precludes anonymity). This was certainly the case in first century Graeco-Roman culture. Barclay summarizes key features of gift-giving in that context: 1) gifts are generally given in order to create or reproduce social bonds; 2) the rules of reciprocity raise the expectation of return, even in unequal social relations; 3) the recipient of the gift is under a strong, though non-legal, obligation to reciprocate; 4) the gift is often associated with the person of the giver, and is therefore, to some degree, "inalienable"; 5) gifts are usually construed as voluntary and expressive of goodwill, even if they arise from pre-existing bonds of obligation; 6) thus, gifts may be both voluntary and obligatory at the same time.²⁵ Clearly the ideal of *non-circularity* is incompatible with such a relationship-oriented approach to gifts.

When reading about grace in the New Testament, therefore, "we should assume, unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, that gifts carry expectations of a return."²⁶ This is evident in the way Paul structures his letter to the Romans. While he clearly and repeatedly emphasizes the *incongruity* of God's grace, he also understands that divine gifts call for human response. In Barclay's words, his "appeal 'by the mercies of God' may be taken to indicate that grace has 'strings attached.'"²⁷ The

first recipients of the letter would not have been surprised by Paul's encouragement to express their true and proper worship through concrete actions. In fact, their cultural understanding would have already been leading them to the same conclusion as they read: such a great and undeserved gift as God had shown in Christ called for whole-hearted surrender and loyalty, expressed not only through words, but in daily life. This was the only "logical" response.

Painting a Picture of Response

It is important to observe that immediately after his call to self-offering in Romans 12:1–2, Paul launches into extensive and detailed moral and ethical instructions. It is as if he is saying, "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and this is what that should look like." Although he seems to imply that knowing and approving the will of God is a natural result of having their minds renewed, Paul does not leave them to figure it out on their own. He does not assume that the Holy Spirit will guide them in "application," with no human assistance. Rather, he paints a vivid picture of how they as individuals, and as the body of Christ, can live out their worship in daily life—whether in welcoming strangers, submitting to authorities, living in unity with each other, or any of the other detailed ethical instructions included in Romans 12–16.

It is not just the first two verses of Romans 12 that should be understood as a Paul's description of their response to grace. Rather, all of Paul's instructions are to be carried out "in view of God's mercy." Note the breadth and depth of his depiction of what it means to be a living sacrifice, and consider how each relates back to the grace God has revealed in Christ:

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of

you If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (Rom 12:3, 6–14).

Consider what he is implying: In view of God's mercy, who saved you while you were still a sinner, "do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." In view of God's mercy, who loves you with an unquenchable love, your "love must be sincere." In view of God's mercy, who in Christ humbled Himself for you, "honor one another above yourselves." In view of God's mercy, who gave His son for you even when you were his enemy, "bless those who persecute you" and "overcome evil with good." Grace has implications for behaviour which are not only generalized ("offer your bodies") but also very specific ("practice hospitality").

We see Paul moving in this letter from a vivid description of God's generosity, to an appeal for a response of gratitude, to detailed instructions on what that response should look like. This assumption that receiving God's grace implies an active response undergirds much of the New Testament. But it is also a common pattern in the Old Testament. Far from being a legalistic system of earning God's favour, the pages of the Old Testament are permeated by grace. Creation is a bountiful gift to humankind; Abraham is chosen and declared righteous before he has any chance to worship or please God; deliverance from Egypt is an act of undeserved mercy; peoplehood and the promised land are

gifts; the wealth and success of the nation are blessings from God's hand; and despite their infidelity, God remains faithful and merciful, always calling the Israelites back to himself through the prophets, and ready to welcome them with open arms were they to respond. Like Paul does, much of the Old Testament emphasizes the *incongruity* of the gifts received from God. Moses reminds the people in Deuteronomy 9:6, "it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people."

However, although these benefits were showered on the Israelites without regard to their worthiness, they were not given without expectation of return. Within the ancient covenantal system, both parties had responsibilities. Israel was called to worship God exclusively *and* to follow His Torah—laws which prescribed a way of life that was "holy," distinct from the nations around them. Not only was Torah seen as a precious gift in and of itself (see Psalm 119), but it was to be their way of expressing gratitude for the blessings God had already given. David Pao explains: "It is clear that keeping the commandments is not to be understood as a way to earn favour in the presence of God. Rather, it is a response to the divine acts of grace."²⁸

Because the pattern of grace—gratitude—obedience is a major theme in both Old and New Testaments, it should inform the way preachers approach their task. The supposed polarities of "gospel" and "law," so often placed in tension in homiletical writings, are in fact connected by the strong bond of gratitude. Both are essential aspects of biblical teaching, and neglecting either misshapes discipleship, creating either legalists or nominalists. Preachers should never preach God's grace in a way that discourages human response; and they should never call people to action without first reminding them of what they have been given. Furthermore, unlike Paul, who could assume that his audience would know that receiving the grace of God implied a change in behaviour, preachers in today's Western culture must clearly spell out the necessity of grateful response, lest their listeners project a framework of *non-circularity* on the gospel.

Invoking gratitude in sermons as a reason for obedience is not only biblically and theologically justifiable, it is particularly expedient for preachers today as they work against a culture that has taught people to receive without feeling the need to reciprocate.

However, this does not mean simply telling people that they *ought* to be more thankful and then explaining how they should live. Gratitude cannot be imposed as a moral duty. Richard Lischer rightly warns that used in this way thankfulness can become just another form of moralism.²⁹ Preachers cannot call for grateful response by badgering and berating their congregations. Thankfulness must arise naturally. So, before preachers can *invoke* gratitude as a motivation for the Christian life, they must learn how to *evoke* it in their listeners, which is the focus of the next section.

INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON GRATITUDE

Throughout history, many have recognized the importance of gratitude in moral development. Cicero called it greatest of virtues and the parent of all others. A resurgence of interest in this topic has led to many recent publications—both popular and scholarly—and have made it a regular theme for talk shows and podcasts.³⁰ But just what *is* gratitude? Is it a mindset or an emotion? To what degree are people able to choose gratitude? Why and when does thankfulness lead to actions and transformation? For answers to these questions, particularly as they relate to preaching, we turn our attention to the fields of moral philosophy, spirituality, and positive psychology.

According to Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, gratitude is “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift,” which stems from “the perception that one has benefited due to the actions of another person.”³¹ As an internal posture, true gratitude consists of appreciation, goodwill, and a disposition to act accordingly.³² While a sense of obligation is implied, unlike other debts, gratitude *feels* good, and is

experienced as a positive emotion.³³ “It is not a debt of justice, since the gift is free, and the debt must therefore not be paid *off*; but it is a debt—a debt of gratitude—that binds the recipient spiritually to the giver.”³⁴

One of the recurring themes of recent scholarship has been discovering the personal benefits of becoming more thankful. Gratitude functions as an impetus for becoming a moral person and engaging in pro-social behaviour.³⁵ It leads to happiness, health and well-being; mitigates toxic emotions; curbs antisocial impulses; and is one of the strongest predictors of human flourishing.³⁶ Popular culture has picked up on this and has presented the development of a grateful disposition as a key to a better, happier life. However, despite its clear benefits and its popularity as a discussion topic, gratitude itself does not seem to be on the rise. “A growing number of social commentators contend that gratitude is a diminishing virtue in modern times and that we are less grateful than in former days.”³⁷ Why is this?

One obvious reason is that the idea of pursuing gratitude only for selfish reasons (health benefits, positive emotions, etc.) raises questions about its sincerity. Can one simply decide to be more thankful in order to experience these benefits? This is particularly questionable in a consumer society marked by the pervasive sense of dissatisfaction which Mary Jo Leddy describes as “soul-destroying and dispiriting.”³⁸ Peterson and Seligman see this as rooted in “the perception that one is a passive victim, a sense of entitlement, a preoccupation with materialism, and a lack of self-reflection.”³⁹ Emmons points to increasing secularism, loss of contact with the natural world, loss of a sense of rootedness in a place, and loss of appreciation of the past as all contributing to a state of disconnectedness and individualism.⁴⁰

This individualism can quickly turn to narcissism and the belief that one is deserving of everything. Gifts are turned into rights, and entitlement takes root.⁴¹ Closely related and driving this sense of entitlement is pride, an inflated view of one’s own value. Pride and self-sufficiency are increasingly held in high esteem in today’s society, meaning that any sense of being

dependent on others is resisted, seeing it as a threat to autonomy.⁴² People are even prone to take *offence* at gifts and givers because they threaten their dignity and self-importance. This is certainly the case when it comes to the Divine Giver, whose Gift demands that self-reliance be laid at the foot of the cross, all rights be waived, and gratitude be expressed by becoming living sacrifices.

Today's popular approach to gratitude is "far removed from historical conceptions that emphasized concepts of duty, obligation, reciprocation, indebtedness, owing and being owed."⁴³ Furthermore, critics have lamented that "what passes for gratitude today is a generic and vague feeling of well-being that often does not even acknowledge the presence of a giver toward whom one should direct one's thanks."⁴⁴ As fewer people believe in a *personal* God, it can be difficult for them to express their recognition of the positive aspects of their lives as gratitude, rather than mere happiness or pleasure.⁴⁵

Cultivating Gratitude

Clearly, preachers who wish to evoke gratitude in people today are faced with a monumental challenge. Even in the case of listeners who believe in a Divine Giver, they must battle with the pride, entitlement, and self-sufficiency that are so pervasive. What can be done in order to overcome these barriers and cultivate greater thankfulness? According to Peterson and Seligman, the consensus of scholarship is that true gratitude occurs when three criteria are met: 1) the benefit must be recognized and evaluated positively by the recipient, 2) the benefit must not be attributed to the recipient's own effort, and 3) the benefit must be perceived as coming from the intrinsic motivation of the giver.⁴⁶ Each of these must be present in order to effectively evoke gratitude, and so we will consider each one and its implications for preaching below.

In order for the first criterion to be met, an individual needs to be aware that they have received something, and they

need to evaluate it as something positive and beneficial. Gerald Fagin describes gratitude as the “spontaneous response to the experience of the giftedness of reality,” and so the first step is simply *noticing* the gifts we are receiving.⁴⁷ “To take something for granted is to cease to acknowledge it as a gift given by someone. We lose touch with the giver. The gift is no longer a gift, but a possession.”⁴⁸ Cultivating gratitude must reverse this tendency to take things for granted. This is why practices which encourage intentional reflection, such as gratitude journaling, are so vital to developing a grateful disposition. In addition, saying “thank you” is an important way to increase gratitude. While we often assume that feelings of thankfulness lead to its external expression, the converse is also true. Expressing gratitude helps people develop a thankful disposition. “We become virtuous people by performing virtuous actions.... When we regularly *give thanks* for gifts received, we *become a grateful person* apt to recognize the giftedness of all things.”⁴⁹

So, the first task of the preacher who wishes to evoke gratitude is simply to help people notice (or remember) what they have been given. The focus may be on the goodness of life and creation, and the providence of God in daily life, or His redemptive acts in history and through Jesus, or the promise of a future life with Him. Whatever the subject, preachers must not assume their listeners are already attentive to the gifts they have received. They must point them out—and keep doing so, week after week.

The second criterion necessary for gratitude to occur is that the benefit must not be attributed to the recipient’s own effort. In other words, it must be experienced as unearned or undeserved. A large sum of money is received quite differently depending on whether it is a gift or a paycheque. While an employee might say “thank you” for the paycheque, the gratitude is only surface level because they know they have earned it.⁵⁰ No matter how many or how generous the benefits, as long as the recipients believe they are entitled to or deserving of what has been given, they cannot experience them as gifts. Paul

points out this dynamic in Romans 4:4: “Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.”

Because of this, in order to increase gratitude, any sense that the recipient deserves or has earned the gift must be purged. They must face their own shortcomings, coming to a sense that they have been given far more than they deserve. In other words, they must be humble:

Gratitude seems born of humility, insofar as it acknowledges one’s dependence on both natural and supernatural forces In gratitude and humility the mind is turned to realities beyond itself. Awareness of one’s limitations and basic human dependence becomes keener. In gratitude and humility, however, the myth of self-sufficiency is defeated. The grateful look upward and outward to the sources that sustain them. Becoming aware of realities beyond oneself protects one from the illusion of being self-made, being here by right—expecting everything and owing nothing. The humble person says that life is a gift to be grateful for, not a right to be claimed. Humility ushers in a grateful response to life.⁵¹

Fortunately for preachers, the Christian message is one of humility: “The authentic gospel of the New Testament remains extremely offensive to human pride.”⁵² Unfortunately, most Christians have long ago ceased to think of themselves as spiritually impoverished sinners and undeserving rebels, and have adopted a more comfortable view of themselves as “pretty good people.” While self-loathing is neither healthy nor necessary, it is right and proper that preaching should expose sin and dismantle facades of self-righteousness. To preach for conviction of sin is not cruel and unusual punishment. It is the path to greater joy—if listeners are led from there into a greater experience of God’s amazing grace.

This is because gratitude occurs in the gap between a person’s perception of what they deserve and what they have

received. As that gap shrinks, the closer they come to entitlement. Even worse, if the gap is reversed and they think that they deserve *more than* they have received, it leads to resentment. However, whenever a person senses that they have received more than they deserve, gratitude begins to emerge. When, either by increasing their awareness of the gifts or their unworthiness, they become convinced that they have received *much more* than they deserve, then the kind of gratitude that leads to life-change bubbles up and overflows.

However, none of that can happen without the presence of the third criterion: the benefit must be perceived as coming from the intrinsic motivation of the giver. There are really two things that must be grasped here: that there is indeed a Giver, and that the gift was given intentionally and generously. To return to our prior analogy, a sum of money could be received as a gift or a paycheck, or it could be found lying on the street with no chance of returning it to its rightful owner. In this latter case, the money would neither be earned, nor would it be a gift. It would simply be a stroke of good fortune. This is how many people perceive their lives today, particularly those who believe life on earth is the accidental product of impersonal forces. They might feel “lucky,” but not grateful, at least not in the traditional sense that requires this third criteria. True gratitude can only occur when one has a sense that a gift has been intentionally and generously given by *someone*, out of their own free will.

So, understanding the benevolent character and intentions of the giver is also essential for cultivating gratitude. This means that it is important for preachers to describe not only the gifts that God has given, but also the kindness and generosity with which He gives them. While many Christians would affirm that “God so loved the world,” they do not live with a moment-by-moment awareness of God’s personal love for them—or that “every good and perfect gift is from above,” flowing from His fatherly care (James 1:17). Preachers must continually remind their people that God does not just give for the world’s sake, or for His own glory, but out of concern for His individual children.

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matt 7:11). This helps to guard the dynamic of grateful response from becoming transactional, framing the gifts of life and salvation in the context of a personal love relationship.

To summarize, preachers who wish to evoke gratitude in their listeners should help them sharpen their perception of: 1) the goodness and abundance of the gifts they have received from God, both in creation and in salvation; 2) their rebellion against and sinfulness before God, making them undeserving of any good gifts from his hand; and 3) God’s love, kindness, and generosity toward them.

To evoke gratitude in listeners, it is important that all three aspects be given attention. If someone has a keen sense of the goodness of life and the fact that it is undeserved (criteria one and two), but no sense that it has been given by a loving God (criterion three), they will simply feel lucky. If they have a sense of God’s love and an awareness of His gifts (criteria one and three), but no sense of their own sinfulness or unworthiness (criterion two), they will slip into entitlement. On the other hand, if someone has a deep sense of their own unworthiness and an understanding of God’s love (criteria two and three), but no awareness of all the good gifts they have received (criterion one), at best they will settle into the kind of joyless resignation that hopes for eternal life but is blind to present blessings. Even worse, they may fall into the kind of spiritual resentment captured by Jesus in his portrayal of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son: “All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends” (Luke 15:29).⁵³

Two Kinds of Gratitude

If cultivating Christian gratitude is simply a matter of helping people become aware of God's gifts, acknowledge their unworthiness, and understand His love, this would appear to be an easy task, readily accomplished. Surely most Christians, if asked, would affirm the basic gospel truths that God is loving, that He gives good gifts, and that they are unworthy sinners saved by grace. Why, then, do we not consistently see the kind of heartfelt, overflowing thankfulness that leads to people to offer themselves as living sacrifices?

Hichem Naar offers insights that helps to explain the lack of transforming, passionate gratitude in church. Rather than looking a gratitude as a single phenomenon, Naar differentiates between two distinct categories of thankfulness. The first, which he calls "generic" gratitude, is primarily cognitive. It is simply the recognition that one has positively benefited from the benevolent actions of another. This belief may be held intellectually without leading to emotional or volitional response.⁵⁴ Generic gratitude is thankfulness that is consigned to the head, with little power to affect hearts and wills. This sheds light on why many Christians sincerely say they believe in God's love, His many gifts, and their own unworthiness—and may even *say* they are very thankful to God—but their lives do not demonstrate their gratitude in meaningful ways.⁵⁵ It is not that they are completely ungrateful, but that their gratitude is "generic"—consigned to their head and leaving their emotions and lives unaffected.

However, Naar describes a second category which he calls "deep" gratitude. This emerges when the cognitive recognition of a benefit received meets an area of particular concern or "care" for the beneficiary.⁵⁶ In other words, the gift must become personally important to the recipient. At this point, gratitude becomes an "affective attitude or sentiment," a lasting disposition that is connected to, but not enduringly dependent on, feelings of thankfulness.⁵⁷

What is needed in the church is not so much a move from ingratitude to gratitude, but from generic to deep gratitude. In order for this to happen, the incredible grace of God expressed in the gospel must go beyond the realm of beliefs and intellect and become personal and meaningful for individuals. In order to cultivate transforming gratitude in preaching, we must not only give attention to what people *believe* about the three ingredients of gratitude, but how they *feel* about them. Preachers must not only to raise awareness, but also seek to create an *experience of gratitude* in their listeners by personalizing God's love, His gifts, and their own unworthiness and neediness. The next section will examine the *Spiritual Exercises* as an example of how this may be done, and a model of how gratitude can be effectively evoked and invoked in Christian spiritual formation.

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND GRATITUDE

In the same way that Paul's appeal in Romans 12:1 cannot be taken on its own, apart from the larger structure of his letter, the *suscipe* prayer at the beginning of this paper must be understood in its context. The words "receive, Lord, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will," were not intended to be an isolated or spontaneous expression of surrender. Rather, this prayer is the culmination of an intentional journey from apathy to joyful and loving surrender. Found in the climactic "Contemplation to Attain Love" near the end of Ignatius' *Exercises*, it is meant to be the heartfelt expression of a soul captured by grace and overflowing with thankfulness. Since the sixteenth century these *Exercises* have proven effective in facilitating relational encounters with Christ, and in catalyzing transformation in the lives of many who have experienced them.⁵⁸

Jérôme Nadal, a close companion of Ignatius, explained that the "secret" to the effectiveness of the *Exercises* is simply that "they teach a method of preparing oneself to receive the word of God and his gospel."⁵⁹ For the most part, the *Exercises* follow the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as recorded in the gospels—

employing imagination and reflection to make familiar stories real and personal. It is their close connection to the biblical theology of the saving love of God that makes them effective.⁶⁰ Gilles Cusson explains that by bringing exercitants into “admiration and grateful contemplation” of God’s plan of salvation, Ignatius “begets an experience of deepening our Christian vocation and of inserting ourselves here and now into the place God offers us in the unfolding history of salvation.”⁶¹

While the main content of the *Exercises* is not particularly inventive, there is no question that they lead people to experience the gospel in a uniquely transformative way. Is there an internal “logic” that is the key to their success?⁶² While oversimplification is to be avoided, the concept of grateful response which we have been exploring is certainly a major contributor to their effectiveness.⁶³ According to Roger Haight, this is not so much about their ability to stir up thankfulness as a passing emotion, but to form a permanent and fundamental moral disposition of gratitude, and to explicitly call for an active response to the gifts received.⁶⁴ This makes the *Spiritual Exercises*, despite their non-homiletical format, an excellent case study from which to learn. Clearly, there are limitations on what can be accomplished in one sermon as compared to an extended retreat, but there are patterns and principles to be gleaned from Ignatius’ approach that can bear fruit in preaching.

Background

Ignatius’ own spiritual journey began around the age of thirty during a prolonged convalescence after sustaining an injury in battle. Because there were none of his preferred novels of chivalry at hand, he resigned himself to reading religious books to pass the time. Two of these would introduce him to the gospel and change his life: Ludolph of Saxony’s *The Life of Christ*, and a popular book on the lives of the saints, *Golden Legend*.⁶⁵ To his surprise, these books appealed to his romantic notions of knighthood and adventure, creatively redirecting these toward

Jesus and the heroes of the faith who had lived remarkable lives of devotion to Him.⁶⁶ Given ample time to reflect and pray, a resolution began to grow in him to give his life to the service of Christ, whatever that would mean.⁶⁷

Upon his recovery, he gave away his clothes, hung up his sword and dagger, and struck out at the age of thirty-one in the loose sackcloth of a pilgrim. His first destination was the town of Manresa, where he went through a prolonged time of spiritual darkness, plagued by guilt, doubt, and despair. However, eventually this period of desolation was lifted by powerful encounters with God that left him with a lasting sense of peace and forgiveness and convinced him of the truth of the gospel beyond a shadow of a doubt.⁶⁸ He experienced “an overwhelming sense of everything coming to us from the hands of a loving God who desires to share goodness and life. His heart was moved with profound gratitude.”⁶⁹ From that point forward, Ignatius began to turn his focus outward, “to labour with Christ for the salvation of others.”⁷⁰

Because of the transforming power of his own encounters with God, Ignatius wanted to help others have similar experiences. It was during his time at Manresa that he first sketched out and began to lead people through his *Spiritual Exercises*, which would become the hallmark of his approach to formation, decision-making, and teaching others to find God in daily life.⁷¹ Ignatius described their “principle and foundation” as the belief that “human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord,” and that all created things (including one’s own self) and are to be employed solely to this end.⁷² Their stated purpose is to help the participant “overcome oneself, and to order one’s life, without reaching a decision through some disordered affection.”⁷³ The *Exercises* were meant to stir new passion in nominal Christians, and help them make God their first priority in all of life’s decisions—to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” in all things (Matt 6:33).

Exercitants (participants in the *Exercises*) are led through four “weeks” (not necessarily literal seven-day periods) which

include prescribed prayers, self-examination, imaginative gospel meditations, rich metaphors and analogies, and free-flowing colloquies (imaginary conversations) with Christ, the Father, and occasionally Mary. Each “week” in the exercises has a particular theme or themes, perhaps best captured by the “grace” for which Ignatius instructs exercitants to pray. The first week of the exercises consists of a penetrating look at one’s own sinfulness, during which exercitants ask God for “shame and confusion” about themselves, and “sorrow and tears” for their sins.⁷⁴ The second week asks for the grace to “be ready and diligent” to do the will of God, and proceeds through careful reflection on events of Christ’s life leading up to Palm Sunday, with a repeated theme being “and all this for me!”⁷⁵ In the third week the request is for “heartfelt sorrow and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sins.”⁷⁶ Reflection turns to the passion of Christ—the Last Supper, his prayer in the Garden, the trials, his crucifixion, and the removal of his body from the cross. The fourth week takes a decidedly jubilant turn as the focus moves to the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the grace asked for is “to be glad and to rejoice intensely.”⁷⁷ It is in this fourth week, as the *Exercises* are drawing to an end that the “Contemplation to Attain Love” occurs, a profound reflection on God’s grace and the individual’s response that is viewed by many as the summit of the experience.

How do the *Exercises* so consistently evoke a response of gratitude in participants? Greater insight into this can be gained by looking at them through the previously introduced criteria for gratitude: an awareness of the gift, a sense that it is undeserved, and belief in the good intentions of the giver. Each of these criteria can be seen in the *Exercises*, contributing to their effectiveness in *evoking* gratitude. We will examine them below in the sequence in which Ignatius employs them.

Bringing Sin into Focus

After a brief introduction stating the principle and foundation of the exercises, the focus immediately turns to sin. Ignatius begins by giving instructions for an exercise he calls the “daily particular examination of conscience,” which focuses on a single sin or fault that the individual wishes to amend. This involves resolving, upon rising in the morning, to guard carefully against that sin. At noon, the exercitant is told to ask God for the “grace to recall how often one has fallen into the particular sin or fault.”⁷⁸ As they review morning, hour by hour, the exercitant is to enter a dot in a chart for each time they fell into the that sin, resolving to do better in the future. This exercise is to be repeated after supper, and every day during the exercises. The chart serves as a visual reminder of the participant’s struggle against sin. Furthermore, Ignatius recommends that “each time one falls into the particular sin or fault, one should touch one’s hand to one’s breast in sorrow for having fallen,” as a physical reminder of the participant’s sinfulness.⁷⁹

While Ignatius states that the goal is to help get rid of the sin or fault, it is clear that he does not expect this to be a quick and easy process. He has exercitants compare their charts from each week “to see *if* any improvement has been made.”⁸⁰ Clearly, he does not have a high view of the human capacity for self-improvement. Why, then, does he begin the *Exercises* with this particular focus? While he does not overtly state it, this attention given to a particular sin, committed many times despite resolutions to guard against it, clearly helps pave the way for more general meditations on sin and one’s own sinfulness.

In the actual meditations of the first week, Ignatius seeks to drive home the seriousness of sin and its consequences. Exercitants are to reflect on the angels that sinned and were cast into hell, on Adam and Eve and the far-reaching consequences of their one sin, and on anyone who has faced judgment and damnation for only one or a few sins. In each case, the exercitant is to consider how much more frequently and flagrantly they

have sinned—although they have (to this point, at least) escaped punishment. “I will call to memory the gravity and malice of the sin against my Creator and Lord; then I will use my intellect to reason about it—how by sinning and acting against the Infinite Goodness the person [who has sinned less than me] has been justly condemned forever.”⁸¹

Ignatius continues building this theme, as the exercitant asks for “growing and intense sorrow for my sins.” He has them examine the “court-record” of charges against them by calling “to memory all the sins of my life, looking at them year by year or period by period.”⁸² As he continues to build a sense of unworthiness, he asks the individual to reflect on their own relative unimportance by asking, “What is all of creation when compared with God? And then, I alone—what can I be? . . . I will consider who God is against whom I have sinned, by going through his attributes and comparing them with their opposites in myself: his wisdom with my ignorance, his omnipotence with my weakness, his justice with my iniquity, his goodness with my malice.”⁸³

Vivid imagery is employed, as exercitants are told to imagine the sights, sounds, and smells of hell. They are to picture themselves as “a sore or abscess from which have issued such great sins and iniquities and such foul poison,” as “a knight who stands before his king and his whole court, shamed and humiliated because he has so grievously offended him, from whom he had received numerous gifts and favours,” and “as if I were being brought in chains to appear before the supreme and eternal Judge.”⁸⁴ Ignatius wants all of this to have an emotional effect on participants. The second exercise, he says, should culminate in “an exclamation of wonder and surging emotion, uttered as I reflect on all creatures and wonder how they have allowed me to live.... How is it that [the earth] has not opened up and swallowed me, creating new hells for me to suffer in forever?” This is followed by an immediate expression of thanks to God for “giving me life until now.”⁸⁵

In a particularly powerful moment, exercitants are told to imagine Christ, hanging in agony on the cross in front of them, and to consider these questions: "How is it that he, although he is the Creator, has come to make himself a human being? How is it that he has passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins? . . . What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?" Then, "gazing on him in so pitiful state as he hangs on the cross, speak out whatever comes to your mind."⁸⁶

What is the purpose of such dramatic focus on sin? As seen in the very first exercise, Ignatius does not expect all of this to lead to immediate repentance. Neither does he wish to inflict punishment or misery as an end in itself. Rather, he is very carefully creating a sense of unworthiness in the participant that will allow them to better receive and appreciate God's gifts of life and salvation. He forces people to confront their own sinfulness, both by tracking their (losing) battle with a specific sin, and by having them reflect on all of the sins in their lives. This also *personalizes* their need for salvation, which, in line with Naar's framework, prepares them to move from generic to deep gratitude. The vivid portrayal of the consequences of sin sharpens the sense of need to an even greater extent. All of this helps to develop the kind of humility that counters any sense of pride and entitlement and leads the participant to a sense of desperation like that articulated by Paul in Romans 7:24: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

What can preachers learn from the way Ignatius begins his *Exercises*? First, although his end goal is a grateful and loving relationship with a good God, he starts with sin and shame. Popular culture today denies sin and rejects shame as something unhealthy and soul-destroying.⁸⁷ Certainly, preachers have been guilty of using shame in ways that are manipulative and damaging, but today there is pressure for them to avoid biblical perspectives on sin, guilt, and shame altogether. The temptation is to focus only on God's grace and love, without ever shining the

spotlight on the seriousness of sin and its consequences. Yet, as our earlier model made clear, unless people sense that a gift is undeserved, they cannot experience true gratitude. Worse, if they mistakenly believe that they *do* deserve God's gifts, they can become frustrated or angry when He does not give them what they want. This means that preachers who wish to evoke gratitude must, counterintuitively, never shy away from proclaiming the seriousness of sin and judgment—even in ways that produce some degree of guilt and shame in listeners. Fortunately, if they continue to follow the model of the *Exercises*, "the grace of shame, confusion and sorrow does not linger...but is reconfigured in a new identity: gratitude."⁸⁸

It is also instructive that Ignatius does not begin with "sinfulness," but rather one particular sin of the individual's own choosing. By raising awareness of this one sin, it paves the way for individuals to grasp the larger reality of their own sinfulness, both intellectually and emotionally. In contrast, when preachers today actually do address sin, they often speak of "sinfulness" in generic terms, expecting their listeners to automatically fill in the blanks. This can make it easier for listeners to relegate sinfulness to an abstract theological idea, with no sense of personal reality. To help people understand sinfulness, they must be made aware of specific sins in their lives—how present they are on a daily basis, and how futile their attempts to overcome them often prove to be.

Although prolonged reflection or chart-making would be difficult in the sermon itself, listeners can be encouraged to do these on their own time. The sermon itself can include brief pauses where the congregation is given a chance to briefly reflect on the operation of a sin in their own lives. Furthermore, the preacher may offer a description (autobiographical or imagined) of what it looks like to struggle with a particular sin on a daily basis, narrating the internal and external dynamics in real-life scenarios. Painting a vivid picture of a particular sin allows listeners to see it in their own lives, shakes them from their complacency, and reminds them that—even if they have been

Christians for many years—they are still unworthy sinners. This takes direct aim at the root causes of ingratitude described earlier—entitlement and pride—and opens the door for a far greater experience of grace.

Experiencing the Love of the Giver

Another necessary ingredient for gratitude is belief in a giver: that good has happened not by sheer luck or chance, but because someone has caused it intentionally, for the benefit of the recipient. As exercitants begin to examine the life and mission of Christ in the second week, the focus becomes the good intentions of God and His plan of salvation. Reflection on the incarnation takes on a cosmic perspective as they consider “how the Three Divine Persons gazed on the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people; and how, seeing that they were all going down into hell, they decided in their eternity that the Second Person would become a human being, in order to save the human race.”⁸⁸ Ignatius knows that salvation cannot be received as a gift if God were somehow constrained to offer it. So, he paints a picture of the Godhead *deciding* to rescue human sinners. This is not to be experienced only as a gift for humankind in general, as revealed in the prayer for “an interior knowledge of our Lord, who became human *for me*, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely.”⁹⁰ Ignatius thus highlights the intentionality of the Giver, and the personal nature of His action. To drive this home, he further engages the imagination: “I will listen to what the persons on the face of the earth are saying; how they speak with one another, swear and blaspheme, and so on. Likewise, I will hear what the Divine Persons are saying, that is, ‘Let us work the redemption of the human race.’” He has them imagine the deeds of humans—wounding, killing, going to hell—while Christ is humbling himself in the incarnation.⁹¹ All of this serves to enlarge the goodness of God, and His shocking generosity.

Not only has God acted decisively for the good of exercitants, but the sacrificial obedience of other people has also been to their benefit. They are to imagine themselves with Mary, Joseph, and the newborn Jesus. “Behold and consider what they are doing; for example, journeying and toiling, in order that the Lord may be born in greatest poverty; and that after so many hardships of hunger, thirst, heat, cold, injuries, and insults, he may die on the cross! And all this for me!”⁹² This, then is repeated for each of the chosen scenes of Jesus’ life leading up to His triumphal entry. “All this for me”—not “us” or “humanity”—becomes an intimate refrain, driving home the personal nature of the gospel. It is reminiscent of Paul’s experience of Jesus as “the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

It is notable that Ignatius does not spend a great deal of time directly dealing with God’s nature. He assumes his exercitants have some degree of familiarity with Christian doctrine and teachings, and so does not need to delineate the goodness of God, his power and sovereignty, or his grace from a theological perspective. Rather, he is trying to create a fresh, personal experience of these realities for those who likely already grasp them intellectually. He does this by prolonged reflection on God’s ultimate self-revelation, the incarnate Christ. Because most of the *Exercises* are reflections on Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection, it allows exercitants to discover God’s gracious character in concrete terms. By the time they reach the end of the exercises, they have come to know the Father by spending many hours with the Son. It is this relational connection that convinces participants of the goodness and love of God to such an extent that, even if they face poverty, sickness, and death, they still respond in trust.

What can preachers learn about evoking gratitude from Ignatius’ approach in this area? First, effectiveness may not be so much about teaching people *about* God’s attributes, as it is about helping them to encounter them personally. There is no greater way to do this than by leading them to Jesus, because there is no clearer or greater revelation of God’s character. Encouraging

growth in this aspect of gratitude is largely helping people see Jesus clearly. As they get to know Him and experience His love and power, there will be no doubt that the good things come from a good Giver. Ignatius' use of imagination is also instructive. His approach helps to personalize the relationship with Christ in a way that theological principles simply cannot. Preachers, too, can leverage this by encouraging people to put themselves into the stories of Jesus—helping them feel his healing touch, hear his words of mercy, see his compassionate gaze. Using the imagination to engage the senses in biblical stories helps to drive home their reality, bringing the grace of God in Christ into the physical world.

Counting Every Blessing

Ignatius was keenly aware that Christians often took God's gifts of life and salvation for granted and saw this as deadly poison to the spiritual life. In a letter to Fr. Simon Rodriques, dated March 18, 1542, he writes:

It seems to me . . . that ingratitude is the most abominable of sins and that it should be detested in the sight of our Creator and Lord by all of His creatures who are capable of enjoying his divine and everlasting glory. For it is a forgetting of all the graces, benefits, and blessings received. As such it is the cause, beginning, and origin of all sins and misfortunes.⁹³

Because of this, the idea of noticing God's gifts and giving thanks pervades not only his *Exercises*, but the whole "Ignatian" approach to spirituality. Ignatius advised busy scholars to forego long periods of meditation, and simply become more aware of God in daily life. They were to notice "the presence of our Lord in everything: their dealing with other people, their walking, seeing, tasting, hearing, understanding, and all our activities. For his Divine Majesty is truly in everything by his presence, power,

and essence.”⁹⁴ Accordingly, the *Exercises* are saturated with this simple expectation that God is close at hand, and that His grace is offered generously and continually.

The “General Examination of Conscience”—found in the *Exercises* but also practiced on an ongoing basis as the “Daily Examen”—provides a regular reminder of the need to express gratitude to God. “The First Point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits I have received from him.”⁹⁵ For Ignatius, these benefits include life itself, daily providence, and God’s redemptive work—the gifts of salvation *and* creation.⁹⁶ The *Exercises* devote prolonged attention to Christ’s self-gift, and the spiritual benefits bestowed through it. However, Ignatius does not diminish God’s more ordinary gifts. In the “Contemplation to Attain Love,” he has participants carefully and creatively consider all the richness of life, pondering “with deep affection” what God has done for them:

I will call back into my memory the gifts I have received—my creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself. . . . I will consider how God dwells in all creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence I will consider how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth. . . . I will consider how all good things and gifts descend from above.⁹⁷

It is as if he seeks to overwhelm the exercitant with a sense of being surrounded and supported by countless tokens of God’s love. As they “count” their blessings, sincere gratitude cannot help but arise.

What can preachers learn from Ignatius about this third aspect of evoking gratitude? Simply that people easily forget or take for granted God’s blessings in life and salvation and need to be reminded—often. Preachers may assume that their congregations already “know” all that God has given them, and so fail to articulate His benefits on a regular basis. But *knowing* is different from *remembering*. Ignatius explains on the very first page of the *Exercises* that “what fills and satisfies the soul

consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savoring them interiorly.”⁹⁸ Regularly bringing people back to the foot of the cross, where God’s greatest gift was given, is not to treat them as biblically illiterate. Neither is it treating them as spiritually or emotionally immature to remind them of the gifts of everyday life. Rather, helping people notice again the grace of God is to recognize that, like the Israelites in the Old Testament, we are spiritually forgetful. This is why the Psalmist urges his own soul to “forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2). Reminders from the pulpit of the giftedness of life is a true gift to listeners, and can be a breath of fresh air to those who are burdened with its difficulties.

The Action Question

Although Ignatius was clearly concerned about helping people experience gratitude, he was not content to simply leave them *feeling* more thankful. He wanted their thankfulness to lead to life-change. “Ignatius intended the *Spiritual Exercises* to be a transformative process, in which we would be so moved with gratitude for God’s bountiful goodness that the resulting love would evoke generous desire to give in return.”⁹⁹ He believed that gratitude and love were the proper motivators for the life of discipleship—but he did not assume that it would happen automatically. Instead, he repeatedly brings exercitants back to what Fagin calls “the action question.”¹⁰⁰ What kind of concrete response is called for by this grace and gratitude?

The “action question” comes into sharpest focus near the end, but throughout the *Exercises* Ignatius is carefully leading participants in that direction. In the first week, as exercitants contemplate Christ on the cross, imagining their Lord beaten, bloody, and in great pain, Ignatius has them ponder, “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?”¹⁰¹ Examining one’s past and present service to Christ in plain view of the cross is, to say the least, humbling—and an effective way to evoke the sorrow for sin that is essential

to that first week. In this context, the third question (“what ought I to do for Christ?”) functions more as a foil for the participant’s sinful reality than a guide for the future. However, as the first week’s focus on sinfulness is left behind, the “action question” takes on a more future-oriented tone.

In week two, Ignatius uses an analogy to remind exercitants that Christ is on a mission and has invited them to join Him. He paints a picture of a good, kind, and generous earthly king on a mission to conquer the world, pointing out that anyone who refused to answer the call of this earthly king would be “scorned and upbraided by everyone.” He then reasons:

How much more worthy of consideration is it to look on Christ our Lord, the eternal King, and all the world assembled before him. He calls to them all, and *to each one in particular* he states: “My will is to conquer the whole world and my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father. Therefore, whoever wishes to come with me must labor with me, so that through following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory.” . . . All those who have judgment and reason will offer themselves wholeheartedly for this labor.¹⁰²

Ignatius uses culturally appropriate imagery and emphasizes the individuality of Christ’s call to drive home the concept of mission in a fresh way. He does not hide or sugar-coat the cost of service to Christ, but has exercitants offer themselves in prayer, expressing their desire and decision to imitate Christ even in “bearing all injuries and affronts, and any poverty, actual as well as spiritual.”¹⁰³ The King is not inviting his subjects to an easy journey, but the fact that he will travel with them makes the hardships easier to bear. In a similar vein, the image of the Three Divine Persons looking out over the earth and sinful people, and deciding “to save the human race” captures the heart of the *missio Dei* and roots the “action question” in the prior action of God.¹⁰⁴

In the third week, the exercitant reflects on the Last Supper, betrayal, judgment, crucifixion, and burial. As they do so each day, Ignatius has them consider, “how he suffers all this for my sins,” and then return to the earlier question: “What ought I to do for Christ?”¹⁰⁵ This time, though, the question is not meant to contrast with past failures, but to prepare the participant for a new reality, rooted in the joy of the resurrection and in response to God’s indescribable gift. All of this leads to its culmination in the Contemplation to Attain Love. By this point, exercitants are well aware of their own unworthiness, the goodness of God, and the many gifts they have been given. Now Ignatius spells out the dynamic of grateful response most explicitly, as participants ask for “interior knowledge of the great good that I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve his Divine Majesty in all things.”¹⁰⁶

To “stir up” this gratitude, Ignatius has the participant consider at length the many gifts of God: “my creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself. I will ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much he has given me of what he possesses, and consequently how he, the same Lord, desires to give me even his very self.”¹⁰⁷ It is at this point that the *suscipe* prayer occurs, as the exercitant considers what the proper response to such divine generosity might be:

Then I will reflect on myself, and consider what I on my part ought in all reason and justice to offer and give to his Divine Majesty, namely, all my possessions, and myself along with them. I will speak as one making an offering with deep affection, and say: Receive, Lord, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for that is enough for me.¹⁰⁸

Three more times the exercitant is led to think through various gifts of God, to consider their appropriate response, and to pray the *suscipe*.

What can preachers learn about invoking gratitude from all of this? First, it is important not to simply spring the idea of grateful response on the congregation at the end of the sermon, to motivate future “application.” Rather, they can be encouraged at various points to consider their own response to Christ—what they have done, are doing, and ought to do for Him. This does not need to be made explicit or given prolonged attention—brief allusions to the expectation of discipleship will suffice to raise the listener’s awareness.

Second, it is important that, like Ignatius, preachers learn to ask the “action question”: What are you going to *do* in response to God’s grace and mercy? Sometimes the answer to this question will be explicit in the text or implicit in the particular shape that grace takes: you have been forgiven, show your gratitude by forgiving others; you have received material blessings, meet the material needs of others; you are embraced by God’s love, imitate Him by living a life of love. Other times, God’s grace will call for a more general response of love, surrender, and submission to God. Whatever the case, the “action question” needs to be presented, and the listener needs to be given time—if only a few moments of silence—to consider the answer for himself or herself. Part of the power of the *Exercises* is that they are not overly prescriptive, but leave room for individual responses. It can also be powerful to verbalize this new commitment in prayer. Depending on their own preference and liturgical context, preachers could write a prayer of response and commitment, as Ignatius did in the *suscipe*, or simply leave space for listeners to pray in their own words.

One final, but significant lesson for preachers comes from observing the way in which Ignatius frames the exercitant’s response. From the very title, it is clear that the goal of the final contemplation not to produce surrender, commitment, or even gratitude—but “to attain love.” In keeping with that, Ignatius

prefaces it with two “preliminary observations” on the nature of love: first, that it “ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words,” and second, that it “consists in a mutual communication between two persons. That is, the one who loves gives and communicates to the beloved what he or she has, or a part of what one has or can have; and the beloved in return does the same to the lover Each shares with the other.”¹⁰⁹ The Christian life is a matter of a love relationship between the individual and God, in which each gives and receives. God has taken the first step, expressing his love not just through words but through deeds—by coming to earth, suffering, dying, and rising again. Such a love could never be equalled, but how could it be left unrequited? In view of God’s self-offering, how can the beloved help but reciprocate, offering himself or herself as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God? By framing the “action question” in terms of relationship, mutuality, and love, Ignatius protects against a transactional or obligatory view of the Christian life that might indeed lead to action but is not the kind of relationship God wants with his children.

Preachers who wish to harness the motivating power of gratitude must also be sure not to turn it into a mechanical or duty-driven process. Increasing gratitude is not, in the end, a way to get Christians to behave better. It is, rather, a means to help them experience God’s love and express their own love to him in the context of a growing relationship. Preaching for grateful response is about helping the personal connection between the individual and God grow and flourish. In this way, it is less like selling a new product to boost spiritual vitality, and more like providing marriage counselling. It may include making listeners aware of their own shortcomings in the relationship, bringing them face-to-face the destructive tendencies of their past and present behaviour, helping them rediscover and admire their spouse’s good qualities, and challenging them to make changes to better show their appreciation. But all of this is done with the goal of increasing love in a covenant relationship. Grateful response to God is more

about intimacy than reciprocity. It simply uses the power of gratitude to catalyze the kind of love-in-action that breathes new life into this sacred relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

Evoking and Invoking Gratitude in Sermons

The primary goal of this paper was to explore how preachers could harness the motivational power of gratitude by *evoking* and *invoking* it in their sermons. We have covered a great deal of material, so a summary of what was discovered about each of these concerns is in order.

To *evoke* gratitude, preachers need to raise awareness in their listeners of three things: the abundance of the gifts they have received, their own unworthiness as recipients, and the loving and gracious heart of the Giver. Furthermore, they need to make each of these areas personal, seeking to move their listeners from a generic head-gratitude to a deep, transformative heart-gratitude. Illustrations, metaphors, times of silent reflection, self-evaluation, and even a healthy amount of guilt and shame can help to rouse sleepy disciples and recapture their hearts.

To *invoke* gratitude, preachers need to learn to ask “the action question”: what are you going to do in response to all the good gifts God has given? Rather than presenting the “application” part of the sermon as a list of instructions, they need to leave room for listeners to come up with their own response, where possible. While prescription is to be avoided in application, description can be very helpful—like Paul, they should not shy away from spelling out obedience with specificity. Of course, this should always be tied back to the grace received from God, whether it is specifically tied to a gift of God (“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,” Rom 15:7) or generally tied to God’s graciousness (“In view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies,” Rom 12:1). Moreover, gratitude

should be highlighted as foundational for the Christian life, although preachers should ensure that the pattern of grateful response does not become transactional or mechanical. Rather, it should be framed in the context of a loving relationship, emphasizing intimacy above reciprocity.

The Structure of Grateful Response

Many homileticians have pointed out the theological implications of sermon structure. Dennis Cahill writes, "Sermon design is not just a matter of what works. Sermon design also relates to theology, literary form, and to the culture of the world in which we live."¹⁰ Fred Craddock went so far as to say that "it is probably a clearer and more honest expression of [the preacher's] theology than is the content of sermons."¹¹ The intent of this paper was not to propose a rigid new framework; yet, preaching for grateful response does have important implications for the way that preachers structure their sermons.

In essence, there are two structural principles that may be derived from what we have considered in this paper. The first is that sermons should generally be constructed so that a proclamation of God's grace precedes the call to obedience. Proclaiming grace without calling for obedience runs the risk of lackadaisical Christianity and antinomianism. Calling for obedience without offering grace is inevitably a recipe for legalism and moralism. Both must be present in sermons; however, the order is also important. If the call to obedience comes first *and then* grace is offered it can create confusion for listeners. It is as if the preacher is saying, "do this, because it is what God desires" and then following it with "it does not matter if you do this, because God is gracious." On the other hand, moving from grace to obedience brings much greater clarity: "God is gracious regardless of your behavior," and then, "here is how you can show your gratitude to him *by* your behavior." Preachers should be aware of these structural implications and endeavour to move from grace to obedience when possible.

The second principle which may be derived from our study is that grace and obedience should be *explicitly* linked by gratitude. It is not enough to simply imply that response is to be grateful. Granted, Paul was able to do this in his letters because gratitude would have been read between the lines by his recipients. However, in our culture that encourages gifts to be received without feeling a need to reciprocate (non-circularity), the expectation that gratitude should be expressed through actions must be repeatedly and clearly driven home for our listeners. The goal is that over time grateful response becomes so ingrained that it affects their thinking on a day-to-day basis as they face moral and ethical choices: “In *this* situation or decision, how can I best show my gratitude to God for all that He has given me?”

This intentionality in structure does not mean a dramatic reworking of a preacher’s established style. It may be incorporated into existing approaches with only subtle shifts. While an in-depth analysis of how these principles interact with well-known sermon models would be instructive, it is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a few preliminary thoughts and possibilities are offered here as examples.

Paul Scott Wilson describes his four-page model as moving from trouble to grace—our ‘no’ to God (and God’s ‘no’ to us) to God’s ‘yes’ to us.¹¹² This could be tweaked to include a “fifth page” of grateful response, painting a picture of our subsequent and responsive “yes” to God.¹¹³ Eugene Lowry’s homiletical loop already follows the first structural principle, moving from the fourth step “experiencing the gospel,” to the fifth, “anticipating the consequences.”¹¹⁴ Simply linking these expressly with an appeal to gratitude will offer greater clarity on their relationship and the motivation behind practical changes. In a similar way, in Henry Mitchell’s celebratory approach to preaching, grateful response can be the natural outflow of the joyful climax.¹¹⁵

While they do not prescribe a structure per se, Haddon Robinson, Sidney Greidanus, and Thomas Long each suggest

that it is important for preachers to consider not only what a sermon wants to *say*, but also what it wants to *do*. They describe these as idea and purpose, theme and goal, and focus and function, respectively.¹¹⁶ Preaching for grateful response calls attention to *how* the sermon will do its work in listeners—at least when the goal is a change in behavior. While it would be an overstatement to claim that the idea/theme/focus should always be the grace of God, and the purpose/goal/function should always be some form of grateful response, this could certainly become a regular pattern in preaching.

What is essential, though, is not that the idea of grateful response come to the forefront of every sermon, but that it becomes a background principle for preaching in general, and that the basic pattern of *grace–gratitude–response* becomes an ingrained way of thinking about the Christian life—both for preachers, and their listeners. Learning to think in these terms will naturally affect all kinds of sermons, whether inductive or deductive, expository or topical.

For Further Study

Further consideration of how preaching for grateful response interacts with other homiletical models and strategies promises to be fruitful. There remains much work to be done in other areas, as well. The goal of this paper has been largely practical, rooted in the difficulties that preachers face in motivating their listeners. While biblical justification for employing gratitude as a motivator was briefly outlined, deeper theological reflection is needed. John Calvin wrote extensively on the role of gratitude in the Christian life, especially as he considered what he called the “third and principal use of the Law.” His theology of union/participation offers an important safeguard against a human-centred approach to spiritual formation. Insights from his theology can further enhance the concept of preaching for grateful response.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, while we looked briefly at Paul's letter to the Romans, space did not permit a deeper examination. A more robust study of how Paul evokes and invokes gratitude in this letter are needed.¹¹⁸ We have reflected on how he appealed to gratitude at the beginning of chapter twelve. However, initial observations indicate that in his first eleven chapters, Paul employs all three strategies we have explored. He describes the incredible gift of Jesus, makes it clear that it was completely undeserved, and enlarges the goodness and love of God—in a way that brings each home on a personal level, targeting hearts as well as minds. For example, his use of different voices in painting a picture of human sinfulness seems to be intended to bring his readers from cognitive proposals to personal conviction. He moves from third-person description ("*They* have become filled with every kind of wickedness," Rom 1:29), second-person confrontation ("*You*, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else," Rom 2:1), and first-person confession ("*I* do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do," Rom 7:15). In-depth analysis of how Paul leads his readers to the point of offering their bodies as living sacrifice could provide additional insights for preachers.

Final Words

This paper has not presented a new model but has simply called attention to an old pattern. Bryan Chapell writes of preaching which stimulates greater love for God:

This is how Scripture has always motivated and empowered obedience. Even Moses preceded the Ten Commandments with a recounting of God's deliverance, not only so that the Israelites would not believe that their salvation had been by their hands, but also so that their hearts would turn toward God.¹¹⁹

What we do—and what our congregations do—matters not because it affects God’s feelings toward us, but because it expresses our feelings toward God. As Ignatius pointed out more than five centuries ago, love ought to express itself more by deeds than words. Where fear and duty are no longer effective, gratitude has the power to break through the body armour of entitlement and pierce the hearts of long-stagnant Christians. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and rooted in the gospel, preaching for grateful response has great potential for preachers who are frustrated by the lack of transformation they see in their own lives and those of their listeners. It represents a stable pathway between the pitfalls of legalism and antinomianism, a simple framework for discipleship, and an effective way to lead our listeners—and ourselves—to become living sacrifices. May we learn to say, with utmost sincerity and overflowing gratitude, *suscipe Domine universam*: “receive, Lord, all.” Amen.

NOTES

1. Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 177.
2. Dallas Willard, “Live Life to the Full,” *Christian Herald (UK)*, April 14, 2001, <https://dwillard.org/articles/live-life-to-the-full>.
3. See, for example: H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958); Milton Crum, *Manual on Preaching: A New Process of Sermon Development* (New York: Morehouse, 1988); Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon As Narrative Art Form*, Expanded Edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Paul Scott Wilson, *Setting Words On Fire: Putting God at the Center of the Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008); Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, Revised Edition. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018).
4. Well-known theologians such as Augustine, John Calvin, and Karl Barth have also identified gratitude as an important key to spiritual formation.
5. Crum, *Manual on Preaching*, 16.
6. Stephen Farris, *Preaching That Matters: The Bible and Our Lives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 17.
7. Arthur Van Seters, *Preaching and Ethics*, Preaching and Its Partners (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 16.

8. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 198.
9. Wilson, *Four Pages of the Sermon*, 195.
10. R. E. Allen, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Eighth Edition. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).
11. Stephen Farris, "Preaching Law as Gospel," in *Papers of the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics* (Presented at the The Academy of Homiletics, Toronto, 1998), 8.
12. Reading the letter aloud as a sermon in English would take approximately 60–90 minutes, depending on the preacher's pace and style.
13. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 745. Moo describes these as "two sides of the same coin," emphasizing that application is integral to the letter and its purposes, not somehow an "add-on" or afterthought to the "main business" of grace.
14. Emphasis added. It should be noted that there is some debate about whether or not "in view of" God's mercy is the proper translation. Literal reading is "by the mercies of God." This may be understood as "with appeal to" but could also indicate "by means of." It is clear from Paul's "therefore" that he is tying the grace he has been talking about together with the obedience he is about to describe, and as will be demonstrated in this paper, appealing to grace as a motivation for actions fits well with his cultural environment. See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 709.
15. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 749.
16. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, Purity*. 104. James R. Harrison (*Paul's Language of Grace*, 2) agrees: "By the first century AD χάρις had become the central leitmotiv of the Hellenistic reciprocity system."
17. Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York: De Gruyter, 2004), 132–135.
18. B.J. Oropeza, "The Expectation of Grace: Paul on Benefaction and the Corinthians' Ingratitude (2 Corinthians 6:1)," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24, no. 2 (2014): 216.
19. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, Purity*, 105–106.
20. *Ibid.*, 109.
21. The Graeco-Roman cultic system is often characterized as being based on the transactional principle of *do ut des*, "I give that you may give." However, Barclay argues that while there is truth to this, it does not do full justice to the relationship between humans and gods, which could also be initiated by an unsought divine favour. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 27.
22. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, Purity*, 122–123.
23. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70–75.

24. *Ibid.*, 74.
25. *Ibid.*, 183–4.
26. *Ibid.*, 23.
27. *Ibid.*, 558.
28. David W. Pao, *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 44. He argues that the Hebrew understanding of grateful response was at least as influential on Paul as the culture of the Graeco-Roman world.
29. “Moralism isolates a single human quality, gratitude, and makes it the motive for a life of discipleship. Certainly, thanksgiving plays a major part in the lives of Christians, but human gratitude forms a shaky bridge between God’s action in Christ and the new obedience of the Christian life.” Lischer is not against gratitude per se, but against upholding human response as the primary driver of the Christian life, without the empowering grace offered in the gospel. Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, Revised Edition. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 45.
30. See, for example: J. Harold Ellens, *Radical Grace: How Belief in a Benevolent God Benefits Our Health* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); Robert Emmons, *Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007); Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018); Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Margaret Visser, *The Gift of Thanks: The Roots and Rituals of Gratitude* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009).
31. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 554.
32. *Ibid.*, 555.
33. Therefore, if indebtedness is experienced as a negative emotion, it is likely not gratitude, but a sense of obligation or a desire to be “even.” Robert C. Roberts, “Gratitude and Humility,” in *Perspectives on Gratitude: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. David Carr (New York: Routledge, 2016), 60–63.
34. Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 143.
35. For a brief overview on scholarship related to gratitude as a moral motivator, see Michael E. McCullough et al., “Is Gratitude a Moral Affect?,” *Psychological Bulletin* 127:2 (March 2001): 250–1.
36. Robert A. Emmons, “Is Gratitude Queen of the Virtues and Ingratitude King of the Vices?,” in *Perspectives on Gratitude: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. David Carr (New York: Routledge, 2016), 151.
37. *Ibid.*, 147.
38. Mary Jo Leddy, *Radical Gratitude* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 28.
39. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 564.
40. Emmons, “Queen of the Virtues?,” 147.

41. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 564.
42. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, 143–4.
43. Emmons, “Queen of the Virtues?,” 141. Emphasis added.
44. *Ibid.*, 141–2.
45. Because of this, there have been attempts to describe a kind of “transpersonal” or “yogic” gratitude that embraces a generic sense of thankfulness for the life one has, as well as the support given by people and “the universe” that allows it to continue. However, it seems this posture is actually closer to simple happiness than what is traditionally thought of as gratitude, which assumes a giver to whom thankfulness can be addressed. See Jeremy David Engels, *The Art of Gratitude* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018); Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 555.
46. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 558.
47. Gerald M. Fagin, *Putting on the Heart of Christ: How the Spiritual Exercises Invite Us to a Virtuous Life* (Chicago: Loyola, 2010), 29–35; Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, 136. refers to this a learning to see with “grateful eyes.”
48. Fagin, *Putting on the Heart of Christ*, 28.
49. *Ibid.*, 10. Emphasis added. In addition to helping individuals become more aware of the gifts they have received, expressing thanks is also a way of raising their awareness of the Giver, the third criterion.
50. Of course, one may be grateful for the job itself, or the generosity of the wage, or other things which may be associated with the ability to earn a paycheck—but it is still different than the thankfulness felt for a gift.
51. Emmons, “Queen of the Virtues?,” 149.
52. John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 309.
53. The father is dismayed. Not only does this son not consider togetherness a gift in itself, but he also fails to notice the father’s liberality: “everything I have is yours” (Luke 15:31).
54. Hichem Naar, “Gratitude: Generic versus Deep,” in *The Moral Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. Robert Roberts and Daniel Telech (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 15–23.
55. While gratitude and religiosity are often thought to correlate, one recent study found no noticeable increase in gratitude-motivated prosocial response between non-religious and religious people—even when the religious people were explicitly reminded of their beliefs. See Jo-Ann Tsang, Ashleigh Schulwitz, and Robert D. Carlisle, “An Experimental Test of the Relationship Between Religion and Gratitude,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 4, no. 1 (2012): 40–55.
56. Naar, “Gratitude: Generic versus Deep,” 26.
57. *Ibid.*, 24–5. He compares this to a married couple whose life-long love for each other is rooted in emotion, but is not dependent on its continual operation to be real.

58. Philip Sheldrake calls the *Exercises* one of the most influential texts in the history of Christian spirituality *Spirituality: A Brief History*, Second Edition. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 125. While some aspects of Ignatius' theology and methodology are decidedly Roman Catholic (e.g. his incorporation of prayers to Mary and his occasional language of penance and satisfaction for past sins), as a whole his *Exercises* are Christ- and gospel-focused and contain important insights for all Christians, including Evangelicals.

59. Quoted in Gilles Cusson, *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises: A Method Toward a Personal Experience of God as Accomplishing within Us His Plan of Salvation*, trans. Mary Angela Roduit and George E. Ganss (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988), 41.

60. George A. Aschenbrenner, *Stretched for Greater Glory: What to Expect From The Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola, 2004), 4.

61. Cusson, *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, 40. It is only by beginning at this soteriological starting point does Ignatian spirituality lead to its well-known approach to finding God in all things (319–20).

62. While many have tried to boil the *Spiritual Exercises* down to their essence (e.g. the imitation of Christ, the metanarrative of the biblical plan of salvation, or the essential role of human freedom) Haight argues that there is no formula that synthesizes their entirety. Roger Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections of The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 68–9.

63. "Gratitude is a central theme in the *Spiritual Exercises*. This is most clearly seen when we look at the structure of the final Meditation, the Contemplation to Attain Love, through which Ignatius attempts to deepen our love of God by expanding our sense of God's generosity to us." Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *The Grateful Heart: Living the Christian Message* (New York: Paulist, 2011), 47–8; Fagin agrees: "Though there are only a few explicit references to gratitude in the *Spiritual Exercises*, gratefulness is at the heart of the dynamic and movement of the *Exercises* and the experience of the one making the *Exercises*." *Putting on the Heart of Christ*, 29.

64. Roger Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections of The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 66.

65. George E. Ganss, "General Introduction," in *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 25. Although raised in a Catholic environment, to this point Ignatius knew little of Christ because of the inaccessibility of the Scriptures to those who did not understand Latin. Like most people, he had to rely on popular books in the vernacular like *The Life of Christ* in order to learn more about who Jesus was and why he had come.

66. Brendan Comerford, *The Pilgrim's Story: The Life and Spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola* (Dublin: Messenger, 2017), 16.

67. Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 71. It was at this point that Ignatius also began to pay greater attention to the stirrings within, noticing that times of comfort (consolation) came after thinking about the things of God, while times of depression (desolation) overtook him when he focused on the things of this world.
68. Ganss, "General Introduction," 29–30. Most of his mystical experiences were "intellectual" (rather than corporeal) visions, offering insights and a quickening of his understanding to comprehend the mysteries of God and the gospel.
69. Fagin, *Putting on the Heart of Christ*, 28.
70. Ganss, "General Introduction," 31. This eventually led him to gather a community of like-minded men and found the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) as a community of people "totally dedicated to [Jesus], bearing his name, and carrying on his work" (42).
71. Ignatius continued to revise his original notes over the course of his life, however by 1535 he had developed them to a form very close to the version we have today. *Ibid.*, 37.
72. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 130.
73. *Ibid.*, 129. Ganss explains that there is long-standing controversy over whether the ultimate goal of the exercises is "election" (making a significant decision) or "perfection" (growing spiritually). See note 11 on 389–90.
74. *Ibid.*, 137–140.
75. *Ibid.*, 146, 150.
76. *Ibid.*, 167.
77. *Ibid.*, 174.
78. *Ibid.*, 130.
79. *Ibid.*, 131. Ignatius notes that this is subtle enough to be practiced in public without drawing the attention of others.
80. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.
81. *Ibid.*, 138.
82. *Ibid.*, 139.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*, 139–142.
85. *Ibid.*, 140–141.
86. *Ibid.*, 138.
87. Brené Brown describes guilt as "I did something bad," and shame as "I am bad." While behavior-based guilt can be helpful and transformative, she argues that shame is damaging and unhealthy. While this is certainly true on a psychological level, there is a theological shame that goes hand in hand with the gospel. Biblically, I have not only done things that are bad, because of the fall, there *is* something wrong with me—and every other human being. The gospel overcomes this shame, not by denying it, but by addressing it. Further work needs to be done to distinguish a healthy biblical sense of one's own

fallenness and the kind of emotionally damaging shame that is rightly critiqued by many today. See Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Avery, 2012), 71–72.

88. George A. Aschenbrenner, *Stretched for Greater Glory: What to Expect From The Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola, 2004), 59.

89. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 148.

90. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

91. While Ignatius emphasizes God's graciousness, he is not afraid to portray God as a just judge who sends angels and humans into the fires of hell. However, he makes it clear that a fear of hell and judgment is only useful for a Christian "if through my faults I should forget the love of the Eternal Lord." *Ibid.*, 141.

92. *Ibid.*, 150.

93. Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola, 1959), 55.

94. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 353.

95. *Ibid.*, 134.

96. Au and Au, *The Grateful Heart*, 7–8. They describe this as combining "ascetical" and "aesthetical" spirituality.

97. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 176–7.

98. *Ibid.*, 121.

99. Au and Au, *The Grateful Heart*, 49.

100. Fagin, *Putting on the Heart of Christ*, 68.

101. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 138.

102. *Ibid.*, 147.

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*, 148.

105. *Ibid.*, 168.

106. *Ibid.*, 176.

107. *Ibid.*, 176–177.

108. *Ibid.*, 177.

109. *Ibid.*, 176.

110. Dennis M. Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching: Theory and Practice in Sermon Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 9. He suggests that a preacher's approach to form is particularly affected by three things: her view of Scripture, view of humans, and theology of preaching (49–55).

111. Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 52–53.

112. Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Revised Edition. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 168.

113. Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, Revised Edition. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018), 15–16.

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114. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon As Narrative Art Form*, Expanded Edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 26.
115. Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching*, Revised Edition. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 40–45. As one of the most notable homileticians who have given attention to the dynamics of emotional experience in preaching, his work has implications for preaching for grateful response that need to be further explored.
116. See Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 37–44, 108; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), loc 3379-3396; Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Second Edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 108.
117. Calvin's theology of grateful response is a major part of my dissertation (in progress).
118. David deSilva offers an interesting precedent for this in his work *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). He looks at Hebrews as a sermon, meant to stir up gratitude and call for response.
119. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 318.