

## CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Generosity  
Without  
Expectations

By Greg Albrecht

**D**uring the Thanksgiving season several years ago, the leader of a youth group from a prosperous suburb persuaded everyone to help serve meals in an inner-city soup kitchen. Before this volunteer service project, most of these young people had only seen homeless, impoverished locals through their car windows as they and their family drove through a poor part of town.

The teenagers served a predictable Thanksgiving menu of beans, mashed potatoes, yams and turkey to a long line of homeless people.

As they filed past these young people, filling empty plates with generous servings, few of the homeless people made any eye contact with the teens who were serving them a free meal, and fewer

still mumbled a “thank you.”

Then, after all the homeless people enjoyed a delicious meal, the youth group washed all the pots and pans and dishes.

It was a long and hard day for the teenagers. Before their bus picked them up to take them home, the youth leader sat them down and asked them about their impressions of their day of service.

They were exhausted after working all day, and no one said anything, until finally one girl spoke up and said, “I guess I really didn’t like being here—it made me uncomfortable. And then, after all our work, *I guess I would have liked the people we served to be a little more grateful.*”

She was truthful—the people she served were poorly dressed. Some had not bathed for a long time and smelled. Some of them may have

been slightly deranged. A few seemed as if they may have been high on a chemical substance.

The young lady was right—she and all her friends worked hard all day and they received little, if any, appreciation for their work.

*“I guess I would have liked the people we served to be a little more grateful.”*

**Helping Others, Expecting Their Gratitude**

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever extended yourself “above and beyond”—

expecting to be thanked in return, only to receive little or no recognition for what you have done? That’s really one of the oft-recurring stories of life, isn’t it?

- As husbands and wives, when we look back on our marriages, we realize that not only did we fail to express our appreciation on many occasions, but there were many times when we were disappointed when our spouse failed to thank us.

- How about parenting? Well, if you expect that your child will ever thank you for each and every act of selfless and sacrificial love you express toward them, then forget about becoming a parent. You will never, as a parent, receive the thanks, gratitude and appreciation equal to all the time, effort and services rendered on your part. It won’t happen, will it?

We didn’t express enough appreciation to our parents, and in

*Continued on page 3*

Continued from page 1

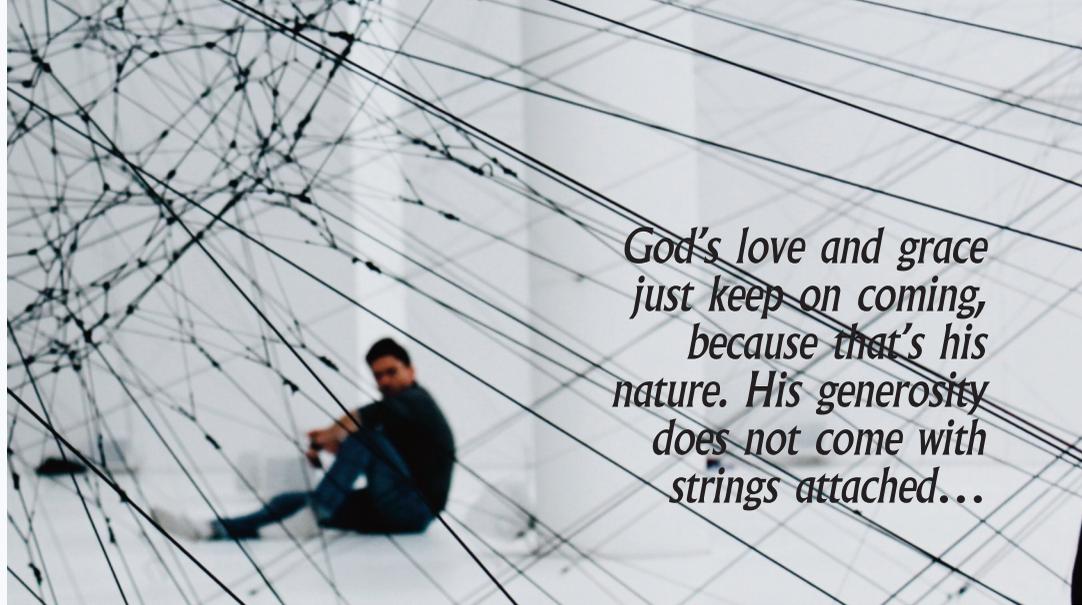
turn, as the cycle of life continues, our children will not express all the gratitude we as parents hope for.

But here's the question—do we give only if we receive a “thank you?” Is the purpose of giving to be gratified by the thankfulness of the person to whom we give? **What about generosity without expectations?**

Generosity without expectations is very much like the grace of God. When Jesus went to his Cross as the supreme demonstration of divine love for all humanity, he knew full well that many, if not most, would never thank him.

Jesus did not sit down at the table with humanity and say, “Okay, here's what I am going to do for you. But before I do, I want some guarantees that the magnitude of the love that I am going to pour out will be noticed and appreciated.”

The night before he was crucified—details of which are recorded in five chapters (13-17) of the Gospel of John—Jesus gives what has been



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called his “final discourse” to his disciples. Here was the perfect opportunity for Jesus to make clear what he expected from his disciples. He could have said to his disciples, “I'm going to do this for you and here's what I expect from you in return.”

**Jesus is our perfect example of generosity without expectations.**

### **Grace is Without Expectation of Payback**

The grace of God is given, without any payback on our part. The grace of God is lavished on us even though God is fully aware that we are incapable of realizing the staggering implications of his grace and responding in kind.

God's grace is *generosity without expectations*. The grace of God, as it lives in us through the risen Lord Jesus Christ, is grace without any expectation of a return on our “investment” or our efforts.

This dynamic is the reason that so many people don't get God's grace to begin with. When

they hear that God does not love in return for our obedience—when they hear that God's grace cannot be earned—many presume that God is setting himself up for disappointment.

If there are no conditions to God's love and grace, what's to stop human beings from taking and taking and receiving and receiving—without ever truly deserving God's grace and without ever truly giving God the thanksgiving he deserves?

Indeed, that's just what unconditional love means—it means that God's love and grace just keep coming, because that's his nature. His generosity does not come with strings attached, his generosity does not stop if and when people fail to appropriately give him thanks.

That's why it is *amazing* grace—it is grace without expectations. That's real love, that's real grace—without expectations.

- Giving *with* expectation of a return is not grace, it's a business proposition.
- Giving *with* expectation of a return is a contract, not a gift.
- Giving *with* expectation of a return is a quid pro quo— I will help you if I see and hear an appropriate return on my investment. You help me, I'll help you. You pat me on the back, I'll return the favor. That's not grace.
- **Grace is generosity without expectations.**

On our part, generosity without



expectations means that our Christ-centered giving—our service—should not be measured in exact proportion to gratitude we receive. Giving is what we do as Christ-followers—we give without reservations and without conditions.

We don't treat others with respect and generosity only when we think they will return our kindness and gifts. Rather, we love others indiscriminately—when Jesus lives his life in us and we live a life of *generosity without expectations*.

### **Giving—No Reservations— No Expectation of Recognition**

On our part, as Jesus lives in us, generosity without expectations means that our love and our service to others will also continue, it will always flow—as does the river of God's grace—even when we receive little or no recognition.

If and when we stop giving, helping and serving because we do not hear or see much in the way of appreciation and gratitude, that will not mean that people will suddenly start being thankful or begin expressing their gratitude.

Our generosity, love and service (if we are truly in Christ and he is in us) is not conditioned by the amount of thanksgiving we hear and receive. If we are truly in Christ and he is in us, then we will live lives of *generosity without expectations*.

Here are three thoughts to help us be more intentional about thanksgiving—about the gratitude that we make sure we express:

1) Give thanks for the ordinary and the small things. Don't forget to thank those who are close to you (your family and your friends) for little things. Don't assume they know you are thankful. Say it loud and say it often. Send thank-you notes. Give people a call on the phone—even if it is just to say "thank-you."

2) Find ways to be thankful even when times are desperate, even when you are in the middle of adversity. It is much easier to give thanks when everything in our lives is going well—but it's a far different thing to thank God even in the midst of trials and difficulties. For while we obviously are not thankful for suffering and pain, the presence of pain and suffering does not mean that we still have other things for which we can be thankful.

3) Look for ways in which you can help and serve—look for circumstances and people you can reach out to. Maybe you can make someone a meal—maybe you can just call them on the phone and talk, or visit them, helping alleviate their loneliness.

Yield to Jesus who lives his life in you so that your generosity does not depend on expectations of someone recognizing you and thanking you. □

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