

Gratitude

Giving

Introduction. On my first day in the office of a church I had just been appointed to serve, I had a visitor. He introduced himself by giving his name and informing me he was the Head Trustee. He then said, “I run things around here.” I was hopeful that merely meant he was the chair of the trustees but I soon learned that when it came to church property and its use, he wanted to control it all. For 40 years, he had held his position of power. Needless to say in the years that would follow, the two of us would butt heads.

A few years later after a somewhat contentious struggle with him to add some parking, the church moved forward with the project. To his credit, he worked with the subcontractor and brought rake and shovel and worked in the hot sun leveling gravel. After the project was completed, I sent a note of appreciation to him. He came to me afterward and told me how much it meant to him. He said in 40 years of being head trustee, no one had ever said, “Thank you.” That expression of gratitude and our interaction, had a very positive impact on our relationship.

Gratitude is powerful. It possesses the ability to transform our attitudes and altitude. Today, I want to journey with me into an intriguing story of gratitude of a great biblical hero. What we experience in this story may have a huge impact on us.

Genesis 14:17–20 (NRSV)

After *Abraham's* return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). **18** And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. **19** He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; **20** and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

Abraham and Lot.

When Abraham answered God's call to leave the security of his family and go the land God would show him, [the great patriarch took with him his nephew, Lot](#). It is likely that Abraham had played a role on nurturing and caring for Lot following the death of Lot's father. As time passed, their business lives overlapped and they helped to provide security for one another.

As their households and businesses grew, [Lot and Abraham came to a critical juncture](#). Because the flock and herds of each man were so large, the land upon which they were living was not adequate to sustain both. Abraham and Lot were finding they were continuing need to settle the feuds between their herdsman and shepherds. Life was growing increasingly tense for them.

So Abraham decided it was time to address the problem they were facing. He came to Lot and made an offer. He shared that was time for them to separate and he gave Lot the option of choosing the area he would inhabit. Abraham told him if Lot chose to go to the left, he would go to the right. So Lot found himself looking at a beautiful well-watered lush valley as the ideal place to pasture his animals.

[In Abraham, we can see his gracious nature shining through as he had taken his nephew along and helped him to be established](#). Then when things were stressed and it was time for them to go their separate ways, Abraham was willing to give Lot the first choice. In Abraham's heart, he was so willing to put others before himself.

After Lot settled in the valley, [he set up his operation near the city of Sodom](#). That however, turned out to be not so healthy move. Sodom was known for being a rather immoral place. Also, an alliance of kings from the east came and overpowered the people living in that area and oppressed them for 12 years demanding tribute and obedience.

So the leaders in the oppressed area decided to stage a rebellion. When they did, the eastern alliance went to war against them, defeating them soundly. Everything of value, including humans they could enslave, the soldiers of the alliance carried back to their homes. You see in that day; the rule was followed that all the spoils of battle would go to the victor. Among the people captured were Lot and his family. Soon news of the victory won by the eastern alliance and the capture of Lot reached Abraham's ears. [Abraham was faced with an important decision: would he act on Lot's behalf?](#)

The decision.

[Lot's situation had in large part been brought on by his own decisions](#). He had chosen to go to the land that looked the best and most appealing. He had chosen to settle close to a city that had less than a good reputation. So the choice of where he was living contributed to his capture.

[Abraham faced a choice of whether or not to intervene for Lot](#). We too face this choice from time to time. People in our circle of family and friends as well as church mission field will often need our help. But they sometimes have made some poor and unwise decisions that have thrust them into that situation. It is sometimes easy to take a cavalier attitude and say, "They made their bed there, now they need to lie in it."

It would be easy and a hearer of Abraham's story to say, "Yes, Abraham would have been justified if he had chosen to do nothing." But being a gracious man who truly loved his nephew, Abraham chose to act.

[I have found that it is not always easy to know what is best way or even healthy ways to act when a person in our circle is needing help and are in that situation because of bad choices](#). Some actions can perpetuate dependency and even worse decisions. Hopefully in the future, we can take on some exploration of this.

Unfortunately, we are not told how Abraham came to his decision to act and how to act. What we do learn is Abraham chose to act from out of the resources he had as his command.

Because Abraham lived in a time when other groups of people threatened his well-being and holdings and there were not national governments with police or armies to protect him as a citizen, he had developed a security force of specially trained forces. *There were 318 of these soldiers who were part of his household.*

Abraham chose to lead this force against the eastern alliance in an attempt to rescue Lot. This hardly seemed like a wise thing to do because the alliance was strong and much larger. What could such a small force do against the greater army of foes? By no means was success guaranteed.

Again we see the gracious nature of Abraham who was willing to intervene at great risk for his nephew, Lot. Often when we choose to intervene on behalf of another, there is potential and real costs involved. Sometimes we place ourselves at levels of risk.

Abraham and his unit caught up with the alliance army and attacked them by night. Their victory was so decisive, the soldiers fled leaving by all the bounty they had taken as well as the people they had captured. Abraham and his soldiers had not only defeated the alliance but they had retaken the bounty the alliance was taking home with them.

Most of us at various points in our lives experience things where God's intervention has taken place for us – one gets the hoped for job even though all odds were against her, healing comes from a terrible disease, a broken marriage is healed, a sin-sick soul is liberated, an addict is set free, a wounded heart is healed, pregnancy comes and the baby thrives, etc. Abraham's victory was an incident where it was obvious, God had acted on his behalf.

Count your blessings.

On his way home, *Abraham encountered one of the most unique and mysterious characters in scripture – Melchizedek.* His name was not mentioned before Genesis 14 and then is found in two other passages in scripture. The other two passages add even more mystery and intrigue to this character.

Who was this character?

- The name, Melchizedek is literally the combination of two Hebrew words meaning – “king of righteousness.” For biblical students, this title carries with it both divine and Messianic overtones. *In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land* (Jeremiah 33:15).
- He is identified as the King of Salem or the King of peace. Again we have the messianic overtone: *For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* – (Isaiah 9:6).
- He has the office of being the priest of the Most High God. In other words, Melchizedek is a mediator between God and people.

When Melchizedek came out to meet Abraham, he gave him bread and wine. While these foods may be intended to refresh the victor, they seem to have also a religious feel to them. He then offers words of blessing to Abraham reminding him that God has given him the victory over his enemies. The priest then offers praise to God.

What we see happening in this encounter with Melchizedek is a high and holy moment. It is not a random encounter but a divinely inspired event.

When we gather for worship here at OUMC whether in person or online, my desire is we encounter the presence of God. I pray that God will bless our lives in special ways and remind us of what He has been doing in among us.

When I was a teenager, the music director of our church loved to sing songs that came from the genre written around the turn of the 20th century. I think of them as the “singy songs” that have sort of a carnival sound to them. One of his favorites was, “*Count Your Blessings*.” The lyrics encouraged the singer during times of tempest, burdens, conflict and discouragement to count one’s blessing –

Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God has done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

Well, Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek was a reminder for the patriarch of what God had done. As his heart was moved, Abraham was compelled to express his gratitude.

That is what happens when we are reminded of God’s blessings and remember what God has done in and through us. Our hearts swell with gratitude.

Gratitude through Giving.

During this month as we have looked at gratitude we have talked about various ways we can give gratitude. In a real sense, Melchizedek gave thanks to God through words of praise. A couple of weeks ago, I shared how we can express gratitude through a life well lived in Christ.

Abraham chose to do something different from these to express his gratitude. He gave God’s priest an offering. For Abraham, giving was an expression of thanks.

Giving gifts is a common way many among us express thanks to others. It is common for families to give me a gift when I conduct a celebration of life service for a loved one. When you are gone from home for a few days, you may ask a neighborhood teenager to feed your cat. When you return, you give him a financial gift. A server in a restaurant does a great job in caring for you and you give a large tip.

Our giving of offerings during times of worship and beyond is a way of offering thanks God. When you place your envelope in the offering basket, mail in a check, go online and give, these are ways of saying to God, “Thank-you.” They are a living doxology of praising God from whom all blessings flow.

It is interesting that the author of this story gives us the amount of Abraham’s offering – 10% or tithe. (By the way, that is what tithe means is 10%). It was a portion of what Abraham had gotten in the spoils not everything.

A tithe of our income is a significant amount but not one that is crippling. It is a gift that has substance to it by the giver. If you made \$100 this week and give \$10 that is a significant portion. But if you made \$10K, it is very little but \$1,000 is significant.

Abraham gave 10th of what he had received as a gift of gratitude to God.

Are you grateful for the blessings God has bestowed on you? I encourage you to allow your gratitude to move your heart to express it through your giving.