

Leaders who say ‘thank you’

By John Benton

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Flowers love the sunshine.

At night the blooms close. But with the warmth of a new day they open up and show themselves in all their beauty. And people are somewhat the same. They thrive on being appreciated.

Even though it is by God’s grace alone that we work, the Lord thanks those who have faithfully sought to carry out his will (Matthew 25:21).

God’s appreciation

C. S. Lewis reflects on this as he contemplates glory: ‘When I began to look into this matter I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson and Thomas Aquinas, taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures – fame with God, approval or (I might say) “appreciation” by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw this view was scriptural: nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” [...] And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she pleased Him whom she was created to please.’¹ The joy of heaven for us all is bound up with our Father’s ultimate ‘well done.’

And if even God thanks his people, surely so should we. Wasn't Paul indirectly thanking the saints in Philippi when he wrote, 'I thank my God every time I remember you' (Philippians 1:3)? It was an expression of his love for them and his pastoral heart in wanting to encourage them. Isn't that long list of names in Romans 16 shot through with implicit thankfulness from the apostle to so many individuals?

As pastors do we express our thanks to people in the church – especially to those who work hard, long and faithfully?

Satisfaction at work

I was talking recently to a friend who in his career led many training days for people in business. He talked about leading sessions on encouraging job satisfaction.

The *first* thing he told me was that job satisfaction is not primarily linked to salary. Some people do jobs they hate for years simply for the pay. They bear the grind for the money but they can hardly be said to enjoy their work.

The *second* point was that job satisfaction is much more closely tied to appreciation. In particular the personal 'thank you' from the boss is gold dust. This can be verbal or maybe conveyed by a hand written note (which, who knows, may be treasured by that employee). Emails don't have the same impact – especially if they are simply fired out to the team in general.

Isn't there something for pastors and elders to learn here? There are so many churches I know which are fraught with tensions. Wouldn't some expressions of thanks be helpful?

The *third* nugget I learned from my friend was this. He said that often when people are personally thanked they appear embarrassed and will try to play down their contribution. 'I was just doing my job' they will say dismissively. But we are to push through that with something like 'Yes, I know you were doing your job, but what you did really made a difference. So, thank you.' Make sure that you get your message across and that you mean it.

So look out for specific opportunities to say 'thank you' and express appreciation to those who make the coffee or faithfully run the youth group – or indeed anyone who makes any kind of effort for Christ's cause. If your own child had done well at something – perhaps in the play at school or on the football field – you would say 'well done – proud of you.' Just so, before going to church on Sunday morning spend a little time thinking about things you can say 'well done' for to different people.

What sours churches

There are some pastors and church elders who are, sadly, far more at home telling people what to do than with encouraging them. They fail to appreciate willing

servants. And in that situation loyalty gets turned into being taken for granted. Church members have given their time and effort for years, but at last it dawns on them, that the leaders couldn't really care less. Keen Christians are made to feel worthless. Churches go sour. People leave.

The flowers of grace are living in darkness and cold. They close up. And the road to bitterness and self-pity stretches out in front of them (Ephesians 4:31). This is a terrible trap for an eldership to fall into and can bring much avoidable discouragement and decay to a church.

What kind of pastor are you in this matter?

And if pastor you are saying to yourself, 'Well I don't get any thanks from anyone,' then perhaps as you thank others the culture of the church will begin to change. You may just find yourself on the receiving end of some appreciation too!

[1] C. S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory' in *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 101, 102.