

Kailua Christian Church Sunday Morning Worship
Thank You, Mahalo & Arigato
Guest speaker, Ted Kawabata
October 9, 2022 – 10:00 a.m.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His love endures forever.” Psalm 136:1

Aloha and good morning, everyone. Thank you for having me. I recognize many faces, and probably some of you recognize me from years past. Your church supported me as a missionary. I spent 14 years as a campus missionary at the University of Hawaii, and 8 years as an overseas missionary in Yokohama, Japan. It has been a blast and a privilege. The Lord led us on many fun adventures, and we were blessed to be a part of many lives being changed. When asked to come and speak here, I said a big YES because I want to say a big THANK YOU to you all for all that you’ve done to sow good seed into the kingdom of God, and into my life personally. Today’s message title is actually Thank You, Mahalo and Arigato!

I now work in real estate, have been for the past 6 years, and enjoying it very much. I work with Keller Williams and The Ihara Team, a faith-based company and a fun group to be a part of. Out of 7,500 realtors, Ihara Team is in the Top 5... so if anyone has any questions or needs for advice or help, please don’t hesitate to contact me. Anything real estate related, we’re happy to help. I’m also an active real estate investor now, slowly growing my portfolio of rental properties that I own personally. God’s grace, I’m telling you! I left a stack of business cards, so grab one on the way out.

Before we dive into today’s sermon, I have a small treat. A little 3-minute video from some of the young people that were reached during our ministry years. So many of them are still going strong and doing big things. This is your fruit... the payoff of your investment. So, let’s play the video. Please enjoy.

(video)

Again, today’s message title is: Thank You, Mahalo & Arigato. Our key scripture is a simple and well-known verse, Psalm 136:1, which says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His love endures forever.”

We’re a little early here in October, still more than a month away from Thanksgiving. But I’ve been enjoying a personal study this year in my morning devotional time, learning about Gratitude, and I felt led to share some of my discoveries with you all. In my youth I kind of thought of Gratitude as an unexciting topic. Necessary, yes, but nothing to write home about. As you grow up, your perspective changes on so many things. And in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, this topic has become more relevant than ever. So many people have struggled with mental health and relational strain. His topic seems to be more important than ever. Why? Because gratitude only matters if you want to be happy!

Gratitude - It only matters if you want to be Happy. What’s your goal in life? Is it to be awesome, or to be happy? No one likes to admit it, but at the end of the day so many people try to find their happiness in being better than the next guy. More money, more prestige. I’m more healthy, I’m more athletic, I’m better looking. We all have to resist this constant pull from our sinful nature. It’s all baloney! We should all be able to be happy together! It’s not a competition! We know this, but it can be hard to live it out. Allow me to share a fun story with you – one that always cheers me up and helps me with perspective every time I hear it.

The Story of the Mexican fisherman. An American investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them. The Mexican fisherman said, “I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siestas with my wife,

Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine, and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life.” The American scoffed, “I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats, eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing, and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then LA and eventually New York City, where you will run your expanding enterprise.”

The Mexican fisherman asked, “But, how long will this all take?” To which the American replied, “15 – 20 years.” “But what then?” Asked the Mexican. The American laughed and said, “That’s the best part. When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions!” “Millions – then what?” The American said, “Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siestas with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos.”

Isn’t that a great story? What is it that we all want? We want to be a Mexican fisherman! Maybe not, but we all just want to be happy, right? Well, I have good news... happiness is within our grasp. No matter where you are on the socio-economic stratum, God is able to provide it, and Gratitude is a huge part of the recipe.

Shameless plug: The Happiness Advantage, by Shawn Achor. I recently attended a seminar by Harvard researcher Shawn Achor, and he shared a ton of stories and surveys and lab data. Though it’s not written in a Christian tone, I highly recommend the book. He shares a ton of information on positivity, but what was so startling to me was that the #1 impact on a person’s happiness and positivity is this idea of gratefulness! It even has a measurable impact on productivity and success. So...

What is Gratitude? Most dictionary definitions just use basic synonyms and have trouble getting specific. Gratitude = thankfulness = appreciativeness. Duh! That doesn’t really help much! But I looked at a wider set of synonyms, and thought it was pretty helpful Especially these underlined words: *acknowledgment praise obligation requital recognition response thanks responsiveness appreciativeness thankfulness grace thanksgiving gratefulness sense of obligation honor.*

Some modern psychologists are digging into the topic as well, and offer great definitions:

- “...a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives...” – Sansone & Sansone, 2010
- “...an emotion that is typically evoked when one receives costly, unexpected, and intentionally rendered benefits...” – Forster et al., 2017
- “...if we acquire a good through exchange, effort, or achievement, or by right, then we don’t typically feel gratitude. Gratitude is an emotion we feel in response to receiving something good which is undeserved.” – Lacewing, 2016
- “...gratitude is not goods delivered in response to payment. It is a response to a gift ... Gratitude, as a response to a gift, is also a form of generosity, of graciously crediting the other for something that was not strictly owed” – Roberts, 1991

Grace and Gratitude. We all know the definition of Grace: Unmerited favor. It’s when you receive something you don’t deserve. That’s how we get saved... Amazing Grace. God saves a wretch like me... something so undeserved and almost inappropriate... and we are so filled with gratitude... we get right on to the second verse...how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

Gratitude is the complement of Grace... the natural and appropriate response. Gratitude is beautiful. Ingratitude is ugly. You could say that it's "natural" to flow in either direction. It's natural to be grateful, because it just feels right, it feels so automatic to appreciate someone's gift – especially a large one. But we all have a sinful nature as well. And we so easily take things for granted. The question is, how can I actually change... to be more Christlike... to actually become a more grateful person? It's all about habits.

Gratitude can be a habit. (So can ingratitude!) And practical habits will, over time, actually shape your heart. Gratitude can become somewhat of a reflex. Don't you know certain people who are very positive? Watch them... I bet they express gratitude often and naturally. If it's not natural for you, even more so you should do it. That's how we form habits. By doing!

Practical Tips for Gratefulness Habits

Focus on what you have. If you focus on what you have, gratitude often comes naturally. If you focus on what you don't have, you invite a negative mindset (ingratitude). As you focus on new goals (press on towards the goal! Phil 3:14), you should "forget what lies behind" and all the hurts you've been through, but "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" Ps. 103:2. We have a saying at my workplace that we refer to often: What you Focus on Expands. Romans 8 says: Sow to the Spirit... inherit life. Same thing. What practical habit can you start for general positivity? Daily write in your journal? Every time you step in the shower? The start of every prayer time? Find a way to *automatically* trigger thankful thoughts as a part of your routine.

Receive appreciation well. Some people don't know how to do this. You tell them Thank You and they say It Was Nothing. A nice notion, but it tends to minimize something important. In Japan, the emphasis on humility takes it to another level. When being thanked, someone will say "Iie, iie, iie," which means, "no, no, no." That's too much! What would be better? I prefer: My pleasure! Receiving thanks well celebrates the interaction. It validates what's going on and allows positivity to flow. And makes you more keen on being the thanksgiver. You almost get yourself "addicted" to the whole scene.

Thank people specifically. It's good to say, "Thanks for your help." But it's more powerful to say, "Thanks for driving all that way and standing in line to get that important item!" When the person being thanked can feel the way their gift or effort helped you, they can feel the appreciation so much more. Make it a habit in how you say thanks!

Thank people publicly. One of the offices I worked at had a weekly meeting and one portion was called, "Fill someone's bucket." It's one thing to be thanked individually and privately. But it hits different when it's done in front of others. Do it! It comes back to you. In fact, it's a spiritual law: "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." Proverbs 11:25

Thank people personally. Often times people brush off thanks or deflect to "the team." That's a good thing. Share the credit and take the blame. That's a solid leadership habit. But when someone shares the credit, you don't have to stop there. Put it back on them squarely: Really! You didn't have to do that. You went over and above. Thank YOU!

Final Thought. Have you expressed the appropriate gratitude to Jesus? He died for you. Rescued you from eternal judgement. He did it gladly. Was your response a weak, "Cool, thanks."? Or were you like the Galatians... Paul said of them in Gal 4:15... "I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me." What kind of gratitude is appropriate? This is not a built thing. This is an opportunity for happiness. Don't you want all that God has for you? Your response is the key!

If you've never given your heart to Christ "for real kine...", then do it today. Don't be ungrateful. Don't be entitled. Take it for granted. Love Him back the right way... by giving Him your entire life. Make Him your absolute Lord and Savior. You'll never regret it.

And if you're already living that life... Thank you! If you gave hard earned dollars to help my ministry in the past... or to support this church or any of God's important kingdom initiatives... Thank you! Your life is making a difference, and you should know it. Let's all give thanks and receive thanks and become experts in Gratitude together!!!

Amen!