

Donald Trump and the gratitude gap

By [E. Carrington Heath](#)

July 27, 2016

The realization came to me while watching the “Mothers of the Movement” speaking at the Democratic National Convention. These mothers of children who had died too young and too violently, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, and more, had come to Philadelphia to speak. Sandra Bland’s mom was leading them off with words of faith and grace.

And that’s when I thought about Donald Trump’s speech at his own convention last week, and about the overarching message of fear, intolerance, and negativity that has come to define his campaign. I thought about his calls to “make America great again” and the implied message there that this country is not great, and about how he said that only he alone could fix it.

What a contrast to these women on the stage, mothers who have suffered the deepest of losses, who were expressing gratitude to God and hope for their country.

That’s when I realized what has made me most wary of Donald Trump’s bid for the presidency. Never have I heard him express any gratitude for anyone other than himself and his immediate family. None for God’s grace, none for this country, and none for other people.

Donald Trump is a man who has just about everything he could ever want. Born into wealth, the breaks have always gone his way. Even when he has failed tremendously, he has walked away none-the-worse for it. He has had every privilege, and every advantage of a well-born American.

And yet, he believes only he is responsible for his greatness.

That should not have been surprising to me. This is a man who, despite his professed Christian faith, when asked about whether he ever seeks God’s forgiveness for his sins stated, “I am not sure I have. I just go on and try to do a better job from there. I don’t think so. I think if I do something wrong, I think, I just try and make it right. I don’t bring God into that picture. I don’t.”

Donald Trump's faith is his own, and only he and God know its depth, but as a Christian that is stunning to me. My own understanding of Christian faith is rooted in the fact that we are God's beloved children, and yet time and again we mess up. The good news is that God acts through Christ to forgive us, turn our hearts back around, and set us back on the right path.

This is called grace.

I also believe that the only proper response to grace is gratitude. The only way we can possibly begin to say thank you to God is by living lives that reflect that gratitude. And so, we seek to love others and to make this world better for all not because we are great, but because God is great.

But if you have never acknowledged that it is God's greatness, and not your own, that is amazing, then of course you will not be grateful. If you believe every good thing in your life has come to you because you are special and talented, and that grace has played no part in it, then how could you be?

You've never been repentant. You've never known what it is to be aware of your own failings. You've never understood that only God alone can fix it.

That's when we fall into the most damaging of spiritual conditions: staggering narcissism, unquestioned entitlement, and belief in our own ability to do it alone.

Those are spiritually dangerous places for all of us, but they are even more destructive when they exist in those who would be leaders. The ungrateful leader is not aware of their ability to be wrong. They lack the wisdom that grace brings, and the sense of purpose that is tied to gratitude. They approach their work not with the humility that it demands, but with a cocky self-satisfaction that has the power to destroy those they lead.

There is a saying that those of us who are in recovery from addiction often repeat: a grateful heart will never drink. That means that a person who wants to stay sober must be aware of the grace they have received, live with real gratitude, and always give thanks to God for what has been done for them.

For one who seeks a position of leadership, that saying might read something like this: A grateful heart will never take for granted those whom I serve.

This country needs leaders who know that they have received God's good grace. We need the launch codes to be in the hands of someone who is humble and wise. We need budgets that are written by just and merciful people. We need leaders who can speak with kindness and strength in the same voice.

We need leaders who live lives of gratitude.

I cannot tell you how to vote come November. That is your choice. But I can say that where there is gratitude there is neither intolerance nor mockery, fear nor exclusion, rage nor violence, grandiosity nor idolatry. Gratitude leaves no room for those things.

Originally posted at [Heath's blog](#)