The Power of Gratitude
“Becoming A Thankful Person”

Intro: The NBA has a new anti-whining rule (slide) (explain) I love this rule. Not only has the NBA gotten fed up with complaining, but so has God. I don’t think most believers understand how fed up God is with complaining as well. Many people are getting “T”d up by God and they don’t even know it. There’s no power in complaining. It’s just a fleshly / earthly response to problems. BUT…where there is gratitude, there is power! This being Thanksgiving, it’s a great time to evaluate our own grateful hearts and attitudes. 4 ways to become a more thankful person. Even in light of so much discouraging news surrounding us, we can still be thankful people. We can all grow in this area of our lives.

• How do I become a thankful person?

I. Understand That Being Thankful Is God’s Will For Your Life
I Thess. 5:18 “Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (NLT)

• If you always wondered what God’s will was for your life, here it is…at least in part.

  A. Learning to be thankful is not an optional quality but essential

Ps. 105:1 “Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done.” (NLT)

Col. 3:15 “And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.” (NLT)

  1. Being a thankful person is actually a command. It is not an optional activity…it is not an optional quality…it’s not something that should only take place around Thanksgiving once a year.

  2. Being thankful is a quality that should characterize our lives as followers of Christ. Being thankful is an ongoing, continuous activity. “ALWAYS” be thankful…not occasionally, not even mostly, but always.

  3. How is this even possible? Look at what is going on in our world today? There are so many disasters / people starving / people in Haiti dying of Cholera / wars and terrorism / There just seems to be so much evil.

  4. What about all our problems closer to home. People are continuing to lose their jobs / lose their homes / can’t afford their medical insurance / - Recently I read that in Oregon, 20% are “underemployed” – either unemployed or employed at a part-time level.

  5. So, now God wants me to just burry my head and emotions in the sand and act like there are no problems and everything is rosy? How is this possible? Be thankful always? Rather seems like an impossibility.

B. Learning to be thankful is not tied to circumstances, but to God

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Page 1
“Be thankful in all circumstances…”
Ps. 106:1 “Praise the LORD! Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.” (NLT)

1. Our barrier with being thankful lies in our thinking. We connect being thankful only with favorable circumstances. Now, there is nothing wrong with thanking God for things that work out well.
2. 2 weeks ago I was sturgeon fishing on the Willamette and just had an amazing day. (Explain – show picture) It’s easy to thank God when everything goes great! BUT, this is real life…and everything doesn’t always go well.
3. God wants us to learn how to be thankful “IN” all circumstances. I might not always be thankful “FOR” all circumstances, but I can be thankful in the midst of them. HOW?
4. When I remember that the foundation of my thankful heart is grounded in who God is not in my circumstances. My circumstances always change. God never changes. My circumstances are not always good. BUT, God is always good.
5. Becoming a thankful person in all circumstances is a relational thing. It is dependent upon our understanding of who God is. The more you understand who God is the more you can be thankful. The less you understand God, the more your thankfulness is just tied to favorable circumstances.
6. Because I believe God is always good…always loves me…always faithful…always has my best in mind…will always provide for my needs…can use every event for His good purposes…always rewards obedience…I can be thankful no matter what!
   • Story of Paul and Silas in prison. (Acts 16) – What they believed about God = actions
7. I do not believe circumstances are the driving force of my life. I believe God is the driving force of my life. Therefore, even circumstances that I don’t like / maybe even hate / I can be thankful that God is bigger than my circumstances.
8. Do you see why being thankful is a relational process? If you are in the midst of circumstances that are hard / painful / overwhelming…what do you believe about God?
   • The reason God can command thankfulness is because it is connected to HIM! This can allow us to be thankful even when our hearts are broken.

II. Embrace Being Thankful As A Choice Not An Emotion
Ps. 50:14 “Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.” (NLT) Notice the choice…”Make thankfulness”
   A. We choose to get past making thankfulness an emotional response
      1. Some of you are already thinking; “I don’t feel like being thankful!” I’m not going to do it! I don’t want to and you can’t make me! That’s true!
      2. BUT, if becoming a thankful person is ever going to be a consistent quality in your
life as a follower of Jesus we must get past this hurdle. Being thankful is a choice not an emotion.

3. Choosing to be thankful is a lot like choosing to love. There are plenty of times I have to choose the loving response even when I don’t feel like it. There are times when the loving response is to sit down and watch “Dancing with the Stars” with my wife when I’d rather be watching Monday Night Football or “Gladiator”.

4. Being thankful is like this. It is choosing to be thankful even when I don’t feel like it. It is choosing to not let a complaining, critical, hopeless attitude or words come out of my mouth.

5. It is a choice to focus on the unchanging and predictable character of God rather than my circumstances. When circumstances go south, we all have a choice despite our emotions.

B. We embrace that thankfulness is sometimes a sacrificial choice

Ps. 107:22 “Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and sing joyfully about his glorious acts.” (NLT)

1. In these times, being thankful is a sacrifice. Sometimes being thankful can hurt. We often think of thankfulness as this happy / joyous / fun thing. Sometimes it is. At other times, it is a gut wrenching choice in the midst of our pain.

2. Why would God want us to choose to be thankful even when our hearts are broken? Because it gets our eyes back on Him where they belong. Painful circumstances pull our focus and attention off God and on to problem. Choosing to be thankful places our eyes back on the character of God where we find our help.

3. We can be in the midst of an overwhelming problem crying out for God to help us but that doesn’t mean our eyes are on Him. Usually it means our eyes on focused completely on the storm and we want Him to alleviate the pain.

4. It is when we offer up a sacrifice of thanks in the midst of the storm that is a better indicator of where our focus is at. If we can choose to be thankful in the midst of the circumstances it reveals our eyes are on Him.

5. Offering a sacrifice of thanks is refusing to allow despair to wrap itself around your life. It is a statement of faith to yourself / to this world / and to God. / It’s powerful! I believe the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise in the storms of life unleash the resources of God. It is a response that Satan fears and causes heaven to cheer.

- Casting Crowns Video: Praise You in the Storm
- Becoming a thankful person is making the choice to thank and praise God despite the storm and not wait for the feelings.

III. Realize That Being Thankful Makes You A Witness To Others

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Page 3
Phil. 2:14-15 “Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.” (NLT)

A. When we complain we lose our witness to the world
   1. Complaining is the opposite of being thankful. Complaining is a faithless response to the circumstances of life that changes nothing. Complaining is acting just like the rest of the world. Anyone can complain. Takes no skill, maturity, or faith whatsoever to complain! It just comes naturally. It takes no practice.
   2. Complaining is very different than pointing out that something is wrong or needs to be changed. There is complaining and then there is helping to correct things. These two are very different. Let me explain.
      - Complaining doesn’t care about people. Complaining tears people down.
      - Complaining is self-centered. It’s all about how I feel.
      - Complaining doesn’t want to help correct the problem.
      - Complaining always lays blame on others for the problem. (fault finders)
      - Complaining never sees God in the circumstances. (hopeless attitude)
   3. Christians who are complainers do more damage to the advancement of the Kingdom of God than almost anyone I know. They damage their own witness / they damage the witness of the church they go to / and they give Jesus a bad name.
   4. WHY? Because the world looks at them and conclude; “If that’s a Christian…if that’s what their church is all about…if that’s what Jesus is all about…NO thanks!
   5. When the followers of Christ start acting / sounding like the world, the world criticizes the church…for good reason! The biggest complaint from unchurched people is that church goers are all a bunch of hypocrites who can’t get along.
   6. We forget that often the greatest witness we have are not the actions of our lives but the attitudes we demonstrate on a daily basis. You can do the right thing with the wrong attitude and completely turn people off.
   7. **For example:** The right thing for us as a church is to feed hungry people. What would happen if we serve needy people with complaining attitudes? What’s going to happen when we serve with thankful, joyous hearts? People see Jesus!

B. When we are thankful, we stand out like lights in a dark world
   1. When the world observes us being thankful despite the circumstances…despite the hardships we encounter, we stand out. They can’t help but notice that we respond radically different than everyone they know.
   2. We don’t need to go door to door inviting people to church to be witnesses. We just need to embrace a different lifestyle then everyone around us. We need to learn to be thankful. That alone would be a discussion starter and create questions.
• Years ago when I was a youth pastor I was volunteering at the HS helping to lead D&A groups. The counselor one day asked; “What makes you so high on life?”

3. Just look at the prevailing mood of our city / state / and country. On a emotional scale of 1 to 10, where would you rank it? There’s not a lot of thankful people running around out there.

4. Can you imagine the impact if all of us embraced thankfulness right now in light of this prevailing mood. Talk about standing out! Talk about a witness. What if Foothills became a thankfulness “hot spot”? We’d become a magnet that people could not stay away from! What makes us so high on life?

IV. Know That Choosing To Be Thankful Is Choosing Your Results

James 5:9 “Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!” (NLT) A serious word of caution!

A. Complaining invites God’s discipline

Heb. 3:7-8 “That is why the Holy Spirit says, “Today when you hear his voice, don’t harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness.” (NLT)

1. Complaining is a faithless response to adverse circumstances. This is why God disciplines us for this behavior. Complaining is actually an assault on the very character of God. This is what Israel did. (Explain the OT story)

• The nation of Israel had a complaining problem.

Ex. 15:24 “Then the people complained and turned against Moses. “What are we going to drink?” they demanded.” (NLT)

Ex. 16:2 “There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron.” (NLT)

Ex. 17:2 So once more the people complained against Moses. “Give us water to drink!” they demanded. “Quiet!” Moses replied. “Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the Lord?” (NLT) This went on for 40 years!

2. This is also why our complaining invites God’s loving discipline. We are disrespecting God. We are telling Him He doesn’t know what He’s doing…He isn’t faithful…is not very loving…He’s not very trustworthy…

3. When our kids were disrespectful, there were consequences. When we stay in a complaining mindset and refuse to move away from it, we are actually inviting consequences.

4. You’re not going to get God to move on your behalf trying to manipulate him with your complaining. That may work in your marriage, at work, or with your friends, but it’s not going to work with God!

5. What moves the hand of God is a faith response. What moves the hand of God is thanksgiving!

B. Thankfulness invites God’s blessing
Ps. 50:23 “But giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me. If you keep to my path, I will reveal to you the salvation of God.” (NLT)

1. Choosing to be thankful regardless is how we keep to His path. Being thankful is His will therefore, it is His path. Being thankful honors God! If we stay on this path, He will reveal to us His salvation.

2. When the Bible uses the term “salvation”, many times refers to much more than just going to heaven when we die. It refers to the entire salvation experience. All of God’s promises…God’s presence and power…all that is ours from our relationship with Christ. This is what God wants to reveal to us.

3. By choosing to be thankful, we live in a way that honors God and we open up our lives to even more blessing. WHY? Because obedience = blessing. Complaining does not honor God. Being thankful does.

4. Because being thankful is God’s will / because being thankful honors God / because being thankful is a statement of faith / Because being thankful is a witness to the world / I believe when we make this choice, we unleash the presence and power of God into our lives and circumstances.

5. There is tremendous power in choosing gratitude. Being thankful is a Kingdom of God attitude and behavior that creates a supernatural ripple effect. (Explain: If I throw a rock into a pond, it creates ripples. If you choose to throw thankfulness into your life and circumstances, it will create ripples of influence you will be amazed at.

- **Assignment:** Hand out commitment card of Thanksgiving (Refrig/ mirror / at work /

- Let’s create some ripples in our lives, in our circumstances, in our community, and for the Kingdom of God.

**The Thanksgiving Card**

Today, I choose to be thankful…

1. Lord, I choose to be thankful today because it is Your will and the path of blessing.
2. Lord, I choose to be thankful today for who You are and what You have done.
3. Lord, I choose to be thankful despite my painful or unpleasant circumstances.
4. Lord, I choose to reject any despairing, critical, or complaining attitude today from taking control of my mind and emotions.
5. Lord, I ask You for the strength and courage to live this way today in order to become a more thankful person.