

GREAT FULLNESS

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With Rev. Richard Maraj

MESSAGE

So these guys are walking in this field. And suddenly these two bulls with sharp horns start chasing them, and they're running for their lives to the nearest fence. But the bulls gained on them very quickly; they were right behind them with their sharp horns just inches from their behinds. And the one guy yells out to his friend, *"I'm an atheist! But we desperately need pray! Pray! Pray! Say something! Do a prayer!"*

And the other guy says, *"I don't know what to pray!"*

And he says, *"Just pray whatever you remember! Just pray it!"*

And the other guy says, *"Lord, for what we about to receive"* [congregation laughs] *"... make us truly grateful!"* [Laughs] Alright

So how many people would like to have a life that is fuller, richer and more enjoyable than what you're experiencing now? Anybody would like that? And how many people still believe there's a better and greater version of life available to us, but we just haven't figured out how to make it happen yet? And last one: When you're feeling a bit down, how many people do something to kind of cheer yourself up? Like going for a hike or going shopping; taking a trip; walking with a friend; maybe eating ice cream in your pajamas on the couch watching your favorite movie? How many people do that kind of stuff to cheer yourself up?

And those things are good. And they're helpful in the short term. But for long-term joy and a greater level of fulfillment, it is not so much about do-ing; it is more about be-ing. And the be-ing that I'm talking about transforms and deepens our experience of life; brings us a greater level of joy. And that be-ing is being grateful.

As we begin this Thanksgiving season -- and we are thinking about gratitudes and all the ways that we are blessed -- I still believe that we don't fully understand or utilize the incredible gift and blessing and practice of gratitude. Gratitude is more than just being nice, polite and good to give thanks; it is absolutely a vital and transformational spiritual practice that makes our lives richer and fuller in every way.

There's a ton of research done on experiments on the positive impact that gratitude has in our lives. The number one finding consistently over and over again: there's a high correlation between happiness and gratitude. People who are grateful tend to be very happy, people who are happy tend to be very grateful. People who practice gratitude daily tend to be more positive; have a more positive outlook and attitude. They tend to be more giving; more resilient; see the good in situations; and handle adversity better. They tend to be more confident; more calm; more aware; less stressed; greater job satisfaction; have healthier relationships; and physically, mentally, emotionally have greater levels of health.

I could actually go on; there is so much research that, without a doubt, clearly gives evidence that there are credible benefits in being grateful.

1 Thessalonians says, *"In all things, give thanks, for this is God's will for you."*

In all things, give thanks, for this is God's will for you. So why would it be that God's will for us is to give thanks in all things? It is because being grateful is a really enriching and fulfilling way to live. It's not just a way to something good happens, to feel grateful for something. It is a mindset of being grateful in all things. Of realizing how blessed and enriched we are; how supported we are by God. Gratitude opens our hearts to the fullness and the goodness and the allness of God. That in all things and all circumstances God's will is that we express gratitude and give thanks.

So how many people would say that you agree that being grateful is a powerful spiritual practice and it's got great benefits? How many people would agree with that? How many people would agree that, if you

want a happier life, it must necessarily include being more thankful and grateful? How many believe that?

And yet, knowing that there are all these benefits; knowing that we could be happier, why is it that we don't practice gratitude as consistently as we all know that we could? And there are four reasons.

The first one is: I think **our minds are conditioned to lack**, thinking there's never enough. There's just not enough. It's hard to be grateful when you're constantly believing that there's never enough. And we have this mindset of "more": that being happy necessarily means, "I need more and more." And what happens is: we end up taking things for granted instead of appreciating and enjoying them, because we're always focused on more and more, and that there's never enough.

The second one is: **fear**. That many of us have a fear that there's not only not enough, but we will lose what we have. And having a mindset of being afraid that we'll lose is hard to have gratitude and thanksgiving in it.

Another one is: **negativity** -- always focusing on what we don't have; what we don't like; and what we don't want.

And then the last one is: when **we feel unworthy**. When we feel unworthy, it's hard for us to feel thankful.

Gratitude is important and has a huge impact on our lives. And what's important and what emphasizes how important it is: it's when we're not grateful. Here's what it says in 2 Timothy. It says not being grateful is a sin! Not being grateful is as bad as being unholy; unloving; unforgiving; heartless; and slanderous. And so being ungrateful -- the reason it is considered so bad -- is because when we're not grateful, it is tantamount to not seeing, not accepting, not enjoying or appreciating all the good that God has given us. That when we are not grateful, it is like not acknowledging; not accepting; denying; and even rejecting the blessings of God in our lives.

If gratitude is so connected to happiness, ingratitude is connected to unhappiness and frustration and negativity in our lives.

Do you remember when Jesus healed the 10 lepers, and only one came back to say, "Thanks"? He was upset and disappointed, not because he didn't get praise ... Because he couldn't believe they would rob themselves of not feeling a sense of appreciation and gratitude and thanksgiving. Because they robbed themselves of a deeper and more joyful experience of life by not being grateful and living in a more thankful way.

The good news is that a grateful mind and a grateful heart is something we can cultivate and develop and improve in ourselves. Being grateful is absolutely the key and the secret to a life of great fullness. And today we're going to look at four gratitudes that can help us live a fuller life.

The first one is to be **GRATEFUL FOR LIFE ITSELF**. Somebody once said that God's gift to us is life, and our gift to God is what we do with our lives. And we've all been given this incredible gift of life. We get to be in these physical bodies for a while to create; to experience; to enjoy; to share and grow; and to love. I mean, it is an amazing privilege. Our lives are not perfect, and they're not supposed to be. But they're our lives! And it's still an amazing and wonderful gift that we all get to have and experience.

A friend of mine -- Bob Koehler from Richmond, Ontario -- said one of my favorite quotes. You've heard it before! And you know why I love it so much. It says, "*On the day you were born, you were given the opportunity of a lifetime.*" [Congregation laughs] So what are you doing with your opportunity of a lifetime? What do you feel like you've done so far up until now? And what would you like to do from here on with this opportunity? With this great gift that we call life?

To live a great life, it first starts with just being grateful that we have life! And grateful for all the things in our lives.

On a scale of one to 10 -- 10 being the highest -- how grateful are you for your life? And everything in it? Being thankful for our lives and everything in it helps us make the most out of our lives. Because the

more thankful we are for our lives, the less we complain; the less we compare; the less we wish we had somebody else's life. The more we are grateful for our lives, the more we can be: the more present; the more engaged; the more alive. And it is to appreciate all that we have. To appreciate the body we have. To appreciate the family we have. To appreciate the talents and the abilities that we have. To appreciate the problems and the challenges that we have. To appreciate the homes and the cars and the money that we have. Be grateful in all circumstances. Be grateful for this incredible gift of life.

There was this Zen Master woman, and her name was Sono. And she claimed the path of enlightenment in one affirmation. And she had many people have a difficult time with it. And here are the two lines: *"Thank you for everything."*

Let's say that together: [with congregation] *"Thank you for everything."*

And here's the harder part: *"I have no complaints whatsoever."* [Congregation laughs]

Let's say that together: [with congregation] *"I have no complaints whatsoever."*

So I prepare my talks on Saturday. I work at home. And I've got my computer, the Internet; it's a beautiful experience. And yesterday my Internet went down. And so I was really kind of stressing, because I like access to my stuff to create. And so I was feeling a little anxious, so I ended up calling Cox. Spent an hour-and-a-half on the phone with Cox. Couldn't fix it. They couldn't get someone out until today.

So there I am trying to prepare this talk: "In All Things Give Thanks." [Congregation laughs] Thank you for everything! I have no complaints whatsoever. [Congregation laughs] Needless to say, it tested my spiritual centeredness. And so it was just really tough!

So I had to slow myself down and realize: so here I am at home; safe; with a beautiful day; in my flannel pajamas; preparing a talk. And even though I didn't have access to all the info that I would really have liked, I still felt very blessed when I calmed myself down. My brother, Brian, is visiting me, which is a great gift and blessing AND he was making food for me and bringing it to me while I prepared. So that was a smokin', cool deal.

Sometimes we let one or two things stop us from realizing what a great life we have. How blessed we are.

"Thank you for my life."

Let's say that together: [with congregation] *"Thank you for my life."*

"Thank you for everything!"

[Congregation]: *"Thank you for everything!"*

"I have no complaints whatsoever."

[Congregation]: *"I have no complaints whatsoever."*

And when we see these little things that kind of get at us, when we remind ourselves, we really realize we don't have that much to complain about. We have these unique and wonderful lives. And, yes, our struggles are part of it. But we get to live! We get to appreciate! We get to move through all of these things in wonderful ways.

I want you to think about your life. And think about what a great gift your life is to you. And I want you to think of: What are you going to do with the opportunity of the rest of this lifetime?

Everything in your life is there for you; it's not against you. It's to teach you and help the evolution of your soul. Don't let those small things stop you from realizing how blessed and wonderful your life is.

"Thank you for my life."

Together: [with congregation] *"Thank you for my life."*

"Thank you for everything!"

[Congregation]: *"Thank you for everything!"*

"I have no complaints whatsoever!" [Laughs]

[Congregation]: *"I have no complaints whatsoever."*

Okay the second thing to be grateful for is: **GRATEFUL FOR LOVE**. I believe there is no greater feeling in this world than to feel that you are loved, and the joy of getting to love other people. And all the success in the world could never replace how sweet that feeling is: to know that you're loved; that you're cared for; that you're supported; that you're cherished.

When the Apostle Paul said, "Love is the fulfilling of the law," he meant that love the thing that really fulfills life. It is the thing we all seek. It is the thing that we all yearn and desire for more than anything else in the world. A fulfilling life is about being grateful for love.

I want you to think of all the people in your life that you love right now. And I want you to think of all the people that love you. And I would bet you is more than you can imagine and more than you even realize.

Sometimes we think that we have no love in our lives, or that we don't have enough love in our lives. But we have plenty of love. It's just unfortunately we sometimes take it for granted. But like that song says, *"Love is all around us."* It's there for us just to recognize; and to appreciate; and to give thanks for it.

I believe that all the success we could have in the world is heightened and greater when we have people we love to share it with. And I believe all the struggles and challenges of life are lighter when we have people who love us that are there with us.

One of the things I really love about love is all the different shapes and forms that we get to love people in. Like loving your mom; loving your dad; loving your brothers; loving your sisters; loving your friends; loving your nieces; loving your nephews; your grandparents; your grandchildren. We could go on! Your friends; your people at work; people in the community. We have so many various channels and ways to experience God's love. It is incredible! I think our hearts cannot help but to be filled to overflowing with love and gratitude when we realize how much love we have in our lives.

Martin Sleigman did one of the first experiments on gratitude. And what he did: he asked people to write someone specific a note of gratitude and appreciation for their life. And to not only write it to them, but to hand-deliver it to them. And they found that writing a note expressing your gratitude and thanksgiving to someone absolutely increased people's levels of happiness and satisfaction and future predictors of how their lives would be absolutely increased. All those indicators increased! And it lasted for one month!

And the point is: That was one letter! Could you imagine expressing gratitude on a daily basis? The impact it would have in our lives?

There was another study done with friends. A control group of friends to just continue on. And the other group expressed their gratitude to their friends. And what they found is: their bonds of friendships deepened and connected. There were levels of trust; there were deeper levels of joy; deeper levels of caring.

I would say the single greatest way to show our gratitude for love is to express appreciation for the people in our lives. Every single layer and level of relationship will be enhanced if we were to express more appreciation and gratitude. In an intimate, romantic relationship with a partner or spouse, it will be improve. They've shown studies within families expressing gratitude; the kids feel more support and care and trust of their parents. I mean, whether it is at work, whether it's a friend, expressing more gratitude absolutely makes a huge difference.

Think of one person in your life that you could hand-write a note to just to express your gratitude and deliver it to them by hand. Unless you live in another state; you can mail it. [Congregation laughs] But ...

And then: Would you be willing to make a commitment to verbally express your appreciation to people? Just kicking gratitude up a notch in your everyday life will absolutely enhance your level of happiness and the fullness of your life.

To even just say *"Thank you for your kindness"* or *"Thank you for that card the other day"* or *"Thank you for being so thoughtful."* *"I really appreciate your style and the way you dress."* *"I really appreciate how smart you are"* or *"how funny you are."* *"I really appreciate that you're a great singer."* *"I really appreciate that you're really good at parallel parking."* [Congregation laughs] It doesn't really matter! [Laughs] It doesn't really matter! But it's expressing your gratitude and appreciation for people that you love. I guarantee you, it will make our lives richer and fuller.

The third one is to be GRATEFUL FOR LEARNING. Okay; answer this question: The greatest amount of learning comes from:

- A) Classroom education;
- B) Watching others;
- C) Workshops and conferences; or
- D) Experience and failure.

[Congregation shouts out answers]

D! I think I heard a resounding "D." The greatest successes in life -- and the thing that makes our lives the fullest -- is when we learn from our mistakes and our failures. And we all make mistakes; we all have failures. And sometimes you think, *"Oh, man! I failed at that; that relationship didn't work."* Or *"This investment didn't work!"* And we think, *"Oh, it's all done. I'm ruined."* It's not! When you are grateful for the ability to learn, it means we can get stronger; we can get wiser; we can get better; we can get even happier if we're willing to learn from the mistakes and challenges of life.

Learning is a great gift from God that we should be thankful for. It helps us keep advancing, growing and unfolding mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It says in the Bible, *"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and understanding."*

Einstein's name is synonymous with genius and intelligence and, yet, he couldn't speak fluently until he was 9. He got expelled from school. In 1921 he won the Nobel Prize in physics. Do you remember last week that I talked about PT Barnum and Walt Disney, Henry Ford, Heinz and Hershey ... and they were great, great successes! The one thing they all had in common was they went bankrupt at least once. And clearly they learned from those to rise above and to create levels of success.

The truth is: we are all a work in progress! We are all in a state of "becoming." And the only way to grow and expand spiritually is to make a commitment to learn.

The word "heaven" comes from a word that means expansion. And it is a heavenly experience when we expand our awareness; when we expand our faith; when we expand our love or our compassion; our joy; our wisdom and understanding. And the only way you expand it is a commitment to learn; a commitment to grow; a commitment to improve.

Life is always trying to show us lessons. And they're always there. The question is: How willing are you to learn? How willing are you to realize that there is some nugget of truth or wisdom in there to help me get better and help me get stronger?

So ... so far, what's the number one thing you think you've learned in your life so far that helps you? And what else do you still want to learn? Or are still after learning?

Here are five things that people learned in life. I read this in an article.

Number one: Be true to yourself. Walk your own path and trust your gut.

Two: Take care of your health early and consistently. You'll be glad you did!

Three: Tell those and show those that you love that you love them.

Four: Remember it is our attitude towards life that determines life's attitude toward us.

And finally: People deserve a second chance.

Life has much to teach us. Our spirits are here to expand and grow and to unfold. It's not failure when you make a mistake. We shouldn't be embarrassed; we should actually be excited to see what we could gain and learn from this to have a richer and fuller life.

And the final one is BE **GRATEFUL FOR LAUGHING.**

The teacher says to Little Johnny, *"Little Johnny, if I give you two cats and two more cats and two more cats, how many cats will that be?"*

And he said, *"Seven."*

And she said, *"Let's try that again. So if I give you two cats and two cats and two cats, how many cats will you have?"*

And he said, *"Seven."*

And she said, *"Okay; let's try a different way. How about if I give you two apples and two apples and two more apples. How many will you have?"*

He said, *"Six."*

She said, *"Great! Let's do it again with the cats! If I have you two cats and two cats and two more cats, how many cats do you have?"*

He said, *"Seven."*

She said, *"Why do you keep saying seven?"*

And Little Johnny says, *"Because I already have a freaking cat!"* [Laughs along with congregation]

Besides love, one of the greatest feelings in the world is to have a good laugh. To feel joyful and playful; it lightens things up! It brightens things; it gives us perspective. And even though it doesn't change anything in life, it changes us. And it opens us in great and amazing ways.

When the Bible says, *"To enter the kingdom you must become as a child,"* it's to let that playful, innocent, joyfulness in ourselves be expanded.

Somebody said that laughter is like chocolate for the soul. And a day without laughter is a day that has been wasted.

These three engineers and three accountants to a conference by train. And at the station, the three accountants buy their three tickets and then they watch the three engineers only buy one ticket between them. And the accountants say, *"How can three people travel on only one ticket?"*

And then one of the engineers said, *"Watch and you'll see."*

So they all get on. And the accountants take their seats. And the engineers all cram into a little restroom and close the door. The train takes off. The conductor comes and goes to the door and kind of knocks on it and says, *"Ticket, please!"*

And then one little hand kind of moves out and hands him the ticket. Punches it and then they finish. And they get to go on.

On the way back, the accounts say, *"Oh, man! That was a clever idea! We can pull this off!"*

So the three accountants bought only one ticket. And then they notice that the engineers bought no tickets. They said, *"How are you going to travel without a ticket?"*

And then one of the engineers said, *"Watch and you'll see."*

So they all get on board. And the three accountants fit into one tight little restroom and the three engineers fit into a tight restroom. And the train moves on, and one of the engineers comes out of the

restroom, walks to the restroom where the accountants are, knocks on the door and says, "Ticket, please!" [Laughs along with congregation]

Marcus Aurelius said, "It takes very little to have a happy life." And one of those little things include laughter. Having fun. And not always taking it so seriously.

Laughter and humor is relaxing and it is healing. It is uplifting. It lightens and brightens our day. And I would say, without question, makes our lives fuller and richer and more joyful.

Jesus said he came that we may have life and have it more abundantly. And I guarantee 100% of living life more abundantly means living life more gratefully and more thankfully.

Four things we're going to focus on: to be grateful for life, because it is a great gift. Second is to be grateful for love, and express love to all the people in all the different ways. Be grateful for learning. And be grateful for laughing.

Practicing grateful truly is the secret to a life of Great Fullness.

God bless you all! [Congregation applauds]

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