

WHY GRATITUDE?

Week #1 of a 6-Week "Gratitude" Series

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Have you ever built a house? Anybody ever built a house from the ground up? Couple people? Great; fabulous! I want to talk about building a house from the ground up. And the house that I want to build is a spiritual house, and it's a house of gratitude. And there are three elements that I want to talk about building this house tonight, and it's the foundation; the walls; and the ceiling.

And I want to make and use building a house as an analogy for the process of truly building gratitude in our lives. Because all of us -- you know, maybe since Oprah in the 90s came out with gratitude journals ... Like, the idea of being grateful is a pretty solid thing. You know, in this ministry we've been doing the "40 Days of Gratitude" for 35 years. I mean, we've dedicated the 40 days before Thanksgiving as a time for us, as a ministry, to stop and just give thanks. And over and over again, we come back to the simplest idea: *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

And what's so interesting about this idea is it's so simple, but it tends to just ... Our ego tends to resist it. How many of you can ever find what's wrong with the situation much quicker than you can find what's right with it? When you look at something, does your eye automatically go to what's wrong with it? Or does your eye just hold the beauty that is right in front of you?

You know, the ancient Greeks used to -- whatever they would build, whatever they would create -- they wanted to always make sure there was a flaw in it. Because they believed that only God should be perfect.

Now, I've never had that problem. [Congregation laughs] Because whatever I have created, I seem to always be able to find the flaw in whatever it is! And the idea that gratitude is a process. And the foundational piece for all of us for the next 40 days -- that we're going to build this house on -- is this simple idea: *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

Will you say that with me?

"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"

Now, William Ward said this: *"Feeling gratitude and not expressing is like wrapping a present and not giving it."*

G.K. Chesterton said this: *"I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought; and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder."*

And Robert Quillen said, *"If you count all your assets, you always show a profit."*

And yet, what I want you to see is that we know that gratitude works. But it seems to be so much easier to look at ourselves and our lives and our world and find the thing that is absolutely wrong with it. And that actually has a devastating impact on our soul.

See, what gratitude does is: It burns away the cynicism of life. It burns away the pessimism; and the defeatism; and the gloom; and the negativity; and the hopelessness; and the despair; and the despondency; and the bleakness; and the weariness; and the lack of enthusiasm; and apathy and indifference. And all those conditions, if we line them up across the table, we know the impact they

have on our souls. That when we're in that state of gloom or negativity or apathy or lack of enthusiasm or hopelessness or despair, or being pessimistic, we know the impact of that. And we actually know the cause of that! The cause of that is our own thinking!

And the way that we transform it is simply by moving more powerfully into gratitude. That every time you're having a moment of despair, I want you to challenge yourself and look at: What was the thought that created that darkness? That bleakness? That level of negativity? And challenge yourself: *"Can I at least find five things in my life for which I am grateful?"*

And it's amazing, because there are times in all of our lives where we think, *"No."* [Congregation laughs] *"No! There is nothing in my life that I can, in this moment, be grateful for. It's just a pile! It's awful! It's terrible! There's no good; there's no blessing; there's no light. It's terrible!"*

And it's like, *"Really?"*

"Yes!"

And we can be straight up. We can think everything is terrible, and 100% believe it. And it's like, *"Okay, can you find at least one thing?"*

[Sighs] *"Alright. I'm not dead."* [Congregation laughs]

"Alright; can you find two things."

"Well, my family's not dead."

And sometimes we are that low. And we start digging our way out one gratitude after another. And every time we find something else to be grateful for, we feel better. Gratitude brings us hope, and it gives us self-renewal. And it allows us to dream dreams. It allows us to believe again. It allows us to see possibilities. It allows us to live in faith, and it creates room for a greater life.

For the next 40 days, your foundational idea is simply, *"Thank you, God!"*

Together: [with congregation] *"Thank you, God!"*

For the next 40 days, that's the place you're going to stand on. And over and over again, as you say, *"Thank you, God!"*, I want you to see and feel how your life feels better. How it feels easier to be you when you say, *"Thank you, God!"* That your heart lifts; your soul rises; and your outlook on life changes simply by saying, *"Thank you, God!"*

And the more time and energy you spend in *"Thank you, God!"*, the better your life looks. Possibilities that you never saw before become available to you. And that's our foundation! And if the foundation of our house is cracked, we have a problem. And when we're not grateful, the foundation of our life has a problem. And we have to come back to the thing that makes all things right again.

So let's talk about the walls. The walls are built on the foundation. And the walls that I invite you to look at tonight -- to go with that foundation of *"Thank you, God!"* -- is *"God is blessing me now!"*

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"God is blessing me now!"*

Now, what's interesting about that the wall -- that statement, *"God is blessing me now"* -- is: The moment you say it, your mind begins to think, *"Is that true? Is that true that God is blessing me now?"* And you actually begin to have to look at your life and say, *"Can I find any blessing in my life right now? Can I find anything that's worthy of praise? Can I find a blessing? Any blessing?"*

And it's like, *"Okay; there's one. Alright; there's two. There's three!"*

So if you said to yourself ... Let's say it one more time:

"God is blessing me now!"

Together: [with congregation] *"God is blessing me now!"*

Can you think right now of three blessings that you consider true blessings in your life? Can you find three? Could you go to five? Could you go all the way up to 10? Just throw wildness out the window and get to 10! [Congregation laughs] Right? Would it feel better if you could find 10 blessings?

So every time we say, *"God is blessing us now; God is blessing me now!"*, we look around and we have to find the blessing. And we realize that, over and over and over and over and over and over again, it's true.

God is blessing me now!

See, I believe this is the way we move into more abundant living. This is the way we tap into the infinite reservoir of God's good.

Jesus said in the Gospel of Thomas, which is a non-canonized Gospel, but many Bible scholars believe it's the authentic words of Jesus ... The Gospel of Thomas, Verse 113 says this: *"'On what day will the kingdom come?' And Jesus said, 'It will not come while people are watching for it. They will not say, 'Oh, look here or look there or look over there.' But the kingdom of the Father is spread out over the earth, and men see it not.'"*

Now the implication here is that every woman sees it, [congregation laughs] and that's why men don't ask for directions, right? Because we just don't see it! The kingdom of heaven is all around us and, you know, we're just clueless! Right? [Laughs] Right?

But the reality is: If the kingdom of God is all around us, the more that we acknowledge our blessings, the more that we actually begin to perceive the infinite goodness of God. That there is an infinite level of good available to all of us, but not with an eye that is focused on lack and limitation. Not with an eye that is focused on negativity.

If we want to see and experience and live in the kingdom of God, we actually have to lift up our vision and see a greater possibility. And every day, as we affirm and build the walls of gratitude with *"God is blessing me now!"*, we begin to look and see the blessings that often go unnoticed.

Eckhart Tolle said it this way: *"To acknowledge the good that you already have in your life is the foundation of all abundance."*

Frank A. Clark said it this way: *"If a fella ..."* That's what it says! *"If a fella isn't grateful for what he's got, he isn't like to be thankful for what he's gonna get."* [Congregation laughs] Is that spiritually true? Right? [Laughs]

Now, this isn't a rip on guys ... But if a fella isn't grateful for what he's got, he's not likely to be thankful for what he's gonna get!

And I want you to see that the walls of your life are all the things you notice. Are all the blessings that you see. That the walls of your life are actually built by the glory of God that's all around us! And people see it not!

Can you imagine that maybe there's a thousand blessings in your life that you simply have never seen? That you've never noticed? That have been there the whole time smiling at you, loving you, winking at you? And our head was down and we're in our little pity party, and we never noticed?!?

So we stand on the foundation of *"Thank you, God!"* And as we begin to lift up our voice to the world around us, we look around and we say, *"God is blessing me now!"* And we actually begin to see it; we begin to notice all the good that's always been there that we just missed.

And now we need to talk about the ceiling. Because the ceiling represents the limitations that we place upon ourselves and our life. And, you know ... [Laughs] It really is that your life is really defined -- it is limited -- by what we are grateful for.

You know, a couple of weeks ago I did a talk. And the central theme was, *"I love my life."*

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"I love my life!"*

And I remember that I got so much feedback; people loved that talk! *"I love my life!"* Right? And what I didn't share that day is that: That week my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time. And I had to get up here and say, *"I love my life!"*

Can you imagine that there was a little bit of inner conflict about having to say, *"I love my life!"*? Because there was a huge part of me that wanted to say, *"Yeah, I do; but not today."*

And it's sometimes amazing to me how it works with God. That the moment I don't want to do it, God says, *"Go do it anyway. Go do it anyway."*

And it's like, *"No. I'm just going to get up there and stand."* [Congregation laughs] *"I might just get up there and just stand and growl."* Right?

And it's like, *"No, you're not just going to stand and growl; you're actually going to invite them to love their life."*

It's like, *"Really?"*

"Yeah, really."

I love my life. I love my life! I do!

And what I want you to see is, over and over again, that the amount of our life that we love is the amount of our life in which we get to see the activity of God. That I truly believe that the next step -- the ceiling -- for all of us is really opening the space to the next level of good.

You know ... [Laughs] When I was a kid, Unity had a television show in southern California. And it was called *There's a Way*. And it was hosted by Arthur Hamond. And one of the guests one day was Dale Batesole. And if you don't know anything about Dale Batesole, he lived in Scottsdale and he started Unity of Sedona. And he taught Psycho-Cybernetics in workshops. He did a lot of good.

And I heard an interview with him on the show, *There's a Way*. And he said that, if you want to change your life, give thanks for life the way it is and watch it be transformed.

And at the time I heard that, the thing that I wanted to transform in my life was my crummy little apartment. Have you ever had a crummy little apartment? I had a crummy little apartment. I was in my early 20s, had a little crummy apartment. And it was only a block from the beach, but in my mind it was still a crummy little apartment, right? Like, it doesn't matter how good it is; if your mind says it's a crummy little apartment, it's a crummy little apartment! But it was a block from the beach! But in my mind, it was a crummy little apartment that I ... On a good day, I feel like I could reach my arms out and touch all four walls. Like, it was that small! Like, it was one room with a little bathroom, with a little kitchen.

And what he said was: Go to every corner of your room and say, *"Thank you, God! I love my life!"* Or, *"Thank you, God! I love my apartment!"* Or, *"Thank you, God! I love the healing that's happening in my body."* And he said go to every corner.

So I took him at his word, right? So it wasn't a lot of work. I went and stood on the bed, which was in one corner of the apartment and said, *"Thank you, God! I love my apartment!"* And I didn't really feel it, because it was a crummy little apartment, right? So I said it again: *"Thank you, God! I love my apartment!"*

And then something began to happen. *"Thank you, God! I love my apartment!"* And after I said it about half a dozen times I was like, *"Okay; I'm in the spirit of it."* Right?

So then I went about four steps and I got on my sofa. [Congregation laughs] And I'm standing on my sofa in the other corner of the crummy little apartment and I say, *"Thank you, God! I love my apartment!"* And it was easier that time. *"Thank you, God! I love my apartment!"*

And then I went into the little kitchen; it was another four steps away. *"Thank you, God! I love my apartment!"* And then I went into the bathroom. And by the time I was done, I was in the experience of loving my apartment.

Within 90 days, a friend called me and said, *"Richard, we've got somebody moving out. Do you want to come up here and look at this place? We're looking for another roommate."* And it was on top of Signal Hill, if you know anything about southern California. Top of Signal Hill. It had a view from Palos Verdes all the way down to Laguna. And my bedroom was solid glass. [Congregation murmurs] There was no way I could call that a crummy apartment. [Congregation laughs] Right? It was the equivalent of a million-dollar condo

And I watched, in that moment, how my thinking limited my good. And the more I was willing to say, *"Thank you, God!"* and the more that I was willing to say, *"I love my life!"*, it became the reality.

So as we move through this 40-day period, I want you to really look at: What have you judged in your life as not good? As wrong? As bad? As terrible? And I want you to actually begin to say, *"Thank you, God!"* for the good in that situation that is greater than the problem. That is greater than the healing. That is greater than the situation. Because I know that the power of God at work in your life is greater than you can imagine. And as we begin to give thanks for the good, thanks for the blessings, thanks for the healing, thanks for the miracles, we are no longer limited by our own thinking. We actually move ourselves to a higher level of good.

"Thank you, God! I love my life!"

Together: [with congregation] *"Thank you, God! I love my life!"*

One more time: [with congregation] *"Thank you, God! I love my life!"*

So you've got three affirmations from me. You get to pick!

The foundational one that I want you to play with over the next 40 days is -- over and over again -- *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

Together: [with congregation] *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

The next one that builds the walls of your life is, *"God is blessing me now!"*

Together: [with congregation] *"God is blessing me now!"*

And the thing that puts the ceiling at the greatest level of good in your life is, *"I love my life!"*

Together: [with congregation] *"I love my life!"*

And I guarantee -- I guarantee! -- that if you engage these 40 days in the spirit of gratitude, you cannot be the cranky son-of-a-gun you've been today. [Congregation laughs] Because you can't hold both! You can't be pessimistic or sad or disappointed and hold gratitude. Gratitude demands transformation! It burns away everything that is not in keeping with its goodness.

"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"

Together: [with congregation] *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

Will you pray with me?

And I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to a profound sense of gratitude. That, for the next 40 days, we live a simple life. In everything, we say, *"Thank you, God!"* In everything, we say, *"God is blessing me now."* And in everything, we say, *"I love my life!"* And watch as the good blesses you in greater and greater and greater ways. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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