

# I'M THANKFUL, SO GRATEFUL

Sunday, November 19, 2023

Rev. Richard Maraj

So how many people enjoyed learning math when you were in school? Any people love math? Okay; that's cool! How many people did not like math and still don't like math? Okay. How many people like math, but math doesn't like you? [Congregation laughs} Anybody ...? [Laughs] Okay.

You know, I really believe one of the highlights in our learning and development is learning math: learning to count; learning to add; learning to subtract. But my favorite was learning multiplication. Multiplication to me was like this magical power that transformed and increased numbers in leaps and bounds. It was incredible! Ten plus 10 is 20, but 10 times 10 is 100! To me, multiplication was the superpower of math! And I really believe that multiplication is an important part of our human development, but I also think it's an important part of our spiritual development.

In the Old Testament, it tells us to be fruitful, and increase in number, and multiply and increase on the earth. God said, *"I will make a covenant with you, and you will multiply exceedingly."* And finally, from Deuteronomy it says, *"God will love you, bless you, and multiply you."*

So what it's saying is God is the great multiplier, and that power to multiply has been placed in each of us. Because we've been created in the image and likeness of God. So what are we here to multiply? WE are here to multiply the Spirit and the Light of God. We're here to multiply our love; our compassion; our kindness; our joy; our wisdom; our understanding; our level of generosity and care for one another.

But unfortunately, sometimes we multiply things that we really don't want in our lives. Sometimes we multiply our frustrations; our upset; our conflict; our regret; our resentment; our level of shame. There are all kinds of things that we really don't want that we multiply in our lives. And partly that's because we don't understand the full principles of multiplication spiritually. And so we end up attracting more of the things that we don't want than what we do want.

And I would say that the great multiplier -- if I had to bring it down to one thing spiritually in our lives, to increase the good in our lives -- it is gratitude and thanksgiving.

If we want to multiply the good in our lives, that process of increase absolutely begins by being grateful and practicing gratitude.

Giving thanks and appreciating really kind of opens our lives and opens the door to more good, even -- and especially -- in times when things aren't going great. Jesus' great demonstration of the loaves and fish: there was a situation of lack, and he gives thanks for those few loaves, and somehow they multiply to feed 5,000 and still have more left!

There is something powerful about gratitude. Because it is an affirmation of the good that's there in our lives; it's a focus on the abundance and it opens a path to greater possibilities. To me, gratitude switches our mindset quicker than anything from negative to positive, from lack to abundance, from being resentful to complaining to appreciative and enjoying the good that we have.

It switches us from being unaware of the good to having an expanded awareness of the good and the presence of God in our lives. It absolutely makes sense -- and it sounds great -- that if we just increased the amount of gratitude that we will increase the amount of good in our lives. It sounds fabulous; it sounds simple; it sounds easy! It seems like a no-brainer that we would do this. But the truth is: It isn't always easy for us to feel gratitude and develop an attitude of gratitude.

And here are the two reasons it's kind of challenging and difficult for us. The first one is called a negativity bias. Anybody ever heard of the negativity bias? Let me give you an example of it. So let's say you have

day and things are just going your way: 10, 15 wonderful things happen. And then one not-so-good thing happens: someone's rude to you; or you get in a disagreement; or you made a mistake at work. And you go to bed at night, and the only thing you can think of is that one negative thing. Anybody ever experienced that? [Congregation laughs]

And then another one would be: Tell me which one you'd be curious. You hear some really hot gossip or a really big scandal. Would you want to know the details of that more, or would you like to hear some warm and fuzzy good-news story on the news? Anybody? I think we know the answer. Negativity bias means that we tend to be drawn to negativity and it has an impact on our lives. And we tend to think about it more than non-negative or positive things.

And it's because it's kind of an evolutionary function of our own survival to see out in our world stimuli that might be a threat or danger to us. Well, that's no longer really needed, because bears and tigers aren't really going to come after us in most of our days. But what it is: We still tend to focus on the negative. The negative still tends to have a greater impact on our lives.

You ever notice how negative political ads seem to have more of an impact than the positive ones? We still continue that tradition, even though we don't really need to. And that's one of the reasons why it's tougher to develop an attitude of gratitude.

The second thing is that we tend to take things for granted. We have an abundance in our lives, but we don't always see it, because our mindset is always about more and more and more. We want the bigger house with that nicer car; we want more wealth in our lives. And then ... So what we have is not enough. And then when we see people who have plenty, then what we have is not good enough. And so it's easy to take for granted the good we have, because we're always wanting to strive for more.

So how many of you would agree that the power of gratitude is a powerful, positive impact in our lives when we apply it? Everybody would agree with that. But here's the thing: The opposite is also true. That being ungrateful and the practice of ingratitude actually has a powerful negative impact on our lives.

How powerful in the negative way is being ungrateful? In the Bible in the Book of Timothy -- 2 Timothy, Chapter 3 -- it says being ungrateful is the same as being unholy, unloving, unforgiving, disobedient to your parents, selfish and abusive. Someone once said the hardest sin to excuse is ingratitude. Because what it means is: We're not seeing, acknowledging or appreciating the good that's in our lives. That we are not acknowledging or enjoying the presence of God and the presence of good that we've been blessed with. And it means that we're missing out! That we are robbing ourselves and costing ourselves levels of happiness and joy and fulfillment.

Today the title of the talk is "I'm Thankful, So Grateful." It's a line in one of the hymns. And every time we sing it -- "*I'm thankful, so grateful*" -- it feels like a deep level of appreciation that's so profound that it represents a real consciousness of gratitude and thanksgiving. And I just really love that.

But to get to that place, it takes work. It takes spiritual work with intention to develop a mindset of "*I'm thankful, so grateful*." So today we're going to look at five of the ways to allow gratitude to be a great multiplier of good in our lives.

And the first one is to **RECORD OUR DAILY GRATITUDES**. Writing our gratitudes seems to give us an ability to review and remind us of all the good in our lives that we could sometimes not notice. And it can have a powerful impact on our level of awareness of that good and, therefore, increases it.

Two universities did the very same story about people keeping diaries, daily diaries. One was SMU -- Southern Methodist University in Dallas; the other one was UC-Davis. And so they had hundreds of people in three groups. The first group was to keep a record of what happened that day. The second one was the not-so-good things that happened that day. The third one was all the things that they were

grateful for that day. And over a long period, they did this. And what they discovered was: Those individuals who wrote down daily gratitudes tended to be more alert; more enthusiastic; greater determination; greater levels of optimism and energy. They were less depressed. They were more likely to help other people. And they were more likely to exercise regularly. They tended to make more progress towards their goal; more likely to feel loved; and they created circles and cycles of reciprocal kindness. There was something about recording our daily gratitudes -- writing down the things that we are grateful for -- that creates a sense of well-being. And it actually creates greater social connections.

And I don't know what it is about the writing thing, because they say the same thing about goals. Writing it down. But here's my thought, is that writing those things down has it sink in deeper because it's clear and we're more focused on it, and we're more intentional about it. And so that is a huge and important thing. When you hear people say, "Count your blessings," it's a great thing. And especially -- it's even greater -- when you write those things down.

And one of the things we could all do is: Before we go to bed, write down five things that we are grateful for that happened that day. And when we wake up, write down five things that we are grateful for as we enter the new day. Because practicing gratitude in that way will actually help us overcome our negativity bias and taking things for granted, and have a multiplying effect of good in our lives.

The second thing is to **CULTIVATE THE POWER OF FEELING GRATEFUL**. It's one thing to know the things I'm grateful for; it's a whole different thing to feel grateful. To feel thankful. We always think that thoughts are so important, and they are. But they are even more powerful when a thought is added with a feeling. We think our heads are so smart, but it's even more powerful when our head and our heart are connected.

And so it is consciously using our feeling nature and connecting with our heart to the feeling of gratitude that magnifies it and brings forth so much good.

And the truth is: We have so many things to be grateful for. The question is: Are we feeling grateful for those things? And practicing feeling grateful?

Let's do it. I want you to think about something you're grateful for in your life. And I just want you -- in any way. Just take a deep breath. And I want you to feel grateful. What does gratitude feel like for you? Let me give you one. Feel grateful that you are alive. What does that feel like? I want you to feel grateful that people love you. Feel grateful that you have a home and a place to stay. Feel grateful for this beautiful cooler weather. And finally, feel grateful for getting to be you. Take a deep breath again. And I want you to feel grateful.

There's so many things to feel grateful for, and we need to take time to actually feel it! Because it does three things. Number one, it helps you feel good. You feel good! Secondly, it helps you enjoy what you have, because when you notice -- and are feeling grateful for what you have -- you tend to see it and use it more. And the third one: It tends to attract even more good.

You know, feeling thankful creates a vibrational energy that is attractive, creative power and force. Eric Butterworth says that gratitude is not just a reactionary emotion; it's a causative energy. That being grateful is almost this magnetic power and energy that will attract more things to be grateful for.

So the second way to use gratitude as a multiplier is to feel the power and the feeling of being grateful.

The third one is to **EXPRESS YOUR APPRECIATION**. How many people here have ever taken someone for granted and not expressed your appreciation as much as you know you could? Anybody ever had that? And how many people here have ever seen something that they admired about someone, and they appreciated about someone, but you didn't take the time to tell them? You were nervous to tell them?

Gratitude ... Expressing our gratitude is an important thing, because it helps all relationships be closer. It creates a greater sense of connection. You know why? Because expressing our appreciation is the same as expressing love. And it's a powerful energy to exchange. It brings closeness, whether it's work, or in our neighborhood, or in our families.

But we sometimes feel vulnerable and don't want to always share and put ourselves out to say either, "*I love you*" or "*I really appreciate you.*" And we kind of rely on the, "*Well, they know I love them. They know they appreciate them.*" And the truth is ... What happens is: When we withhold it, it really blocks and robs our connection. In fact, withholding our gratitude and expressing our appreciation is the same as withholding our love, which actually then becomes a subtraction of our good. And it limits our good.

And sometimes we're not comfortable with it, and we need to find our own way. Like the other day, I was in the car, and Jim Croce's song, "I Have to Say I Love You in a Song" ... Anybody know that song? So he's had an argument with his wife; he doesn't know what to say. And so he writes it in a song. So sometimes -- even if we have to find some creative way, although face-to-face is the best. But if it's in a card; or it's in a poem; or it's in a small gift; or flowers ... Find some way to express appreciation. Because the more we express it, it becomes an addition and a multiplication of the level of joy and connection that we feel with others.

And it doesn't have to be every single day! But it's got to be some level of frequency. And just know: You can never overdo it! No couple has ever broken up because one felt overappreciated! [Congregation laughs] I have no empirical evidence; but I'm feeling pretty confident about that. Who doesn't love being appreciated?

So who in your life could you appreciate a little bit more? And maybe this week we could all pick three people: some member of our family to appreciate; somebody in our work; or someone in our community; our neighbor. Or maybe in our church

This week, I appreciate -- I expressed appreciation -- to my cleaning ladies, because they do a fabulous job cleaning my house. And that means a lot; I appreciate that. Second one is: I have a group of friends that I've been playing card with for more than 12 years now. And I wrote them all a note to say "Thank you" for the fun, the laughter and friendship. Because it really is a light in my life. And I've appreciated having my brother visiting here. [Congregation applauds] One: because I love him and appreciate him and enjoy him. And two: because he cooks all our meals, and he's doing a good job! [Congregation laughs] And so I appreciate that very much! Okay. Alright. [Laughs]

And so the next one -- number four -- is to **DEMONSTRATE OUR APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE TO GOD.** Demonstrate our gratitude to God.

So how do you show God your appreciation? And I would say the best way is to make sure we live our best life, and that we put our heart into all things that we do. That we take care of our bodies, because it is the temple of the Living God and a great gift that God has given us all. We demonstrate our gratitude to God by being kind and helpful to other people. Seeing the good, even when things aren't going well

God has given us these great lives, and the greatest way is to live our life the best; to show up in the greatest way that we can in all areas. And especially to be present in the moment, and not defer our happiness until we reach that goal, but to live right now and to celebrate and appreciate these "now" moments. Somebody once said that God's gift to us is our life, and our gift to God is what we do with it.

And so the question for all of us to ask ourselves is: Am I living my best life? And where can I open up a space to honor God by living in a more positive way? And we can even just pick one attribute -- maybe listening more might be a way that we could demonstrate our love for God. Maybe it's by being more positive or being more passionate or being more peaceful. There are all kinds of different ways; what is

one way that would improve your life and demonstrate to God the fullness of the blessings that we've received and to enjoy them.

In Psalm 9, Verse 1 it says this: *"Give thanks to God with your whole heart."* And the truth: The way we give thanks to God is to demonstrate it with our whole lives -- of how we're showing up. Maybe it's our commitment to live a life of greater faith. Maybe it's to live our life with a greater level of joy or compassion. Whatever it is, what's one thing that you could demonstrate your gratitude to God by living and expressing more fully from yourself?

And finally, the last one is to **PRAY WITH A THANKFUL HEART.**

It kind of reminds of these two guys who go off in a meadow. They were being chased by a bull with really sharp horns. And they're trying to run to this fence to get to safety, but you could tell they're not going to make it. And the bull is right behind him. And out of desperation, one of the guys said, *"Hey, I didn't go to church, but we need a prayer! We need a prayer; say a prayer!"*

And the other guy says, *"I only know one prayer!"*

And the other guy says, *"Say it!"*

And he said, *"Okay!"* And he said, *"Lord, for what we are about receive, make us truly grateful."* [Laughs with congregation] And so, um ...

The great Lebanese writer, Kahlil Gibran, said, "Gratitude, in and of itself, is wholesome and it is a healing force. But when you bring it together with regular prayer, it becomes even more powerful and real."

And those words are kind of echoed in the Book of Philippians when it says, *"Do not fret or have anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance, with thankful hearts, make your requests be known to God."*

And so it is an important thing to bring gratitude and prayer together. And one of the best ways to do that is to begin all prayer by being grateful and thankful, and ending all prayer by being grateful and thankful. Most of the time when we pray, we're a little scattered and desperate ... and that's okay. But the way to get ourselves out of that place, is just to be thankful. To say, *"Thank you, God, for my health. Thank you, God, for my job. Thank you, God, for the sunshine. Thank you, God, for the rain. Thank you for my family. Thank you for my car that works. Thank you that Kyler Murray's back, and the Cardinals finally won a game!"* [Congregation laughs] Thanking God for anything!

Because what it does: It raises our consciousness and raises our energy to become more unified with God's presence. And then we can pray for whatever we want. And sometimes even praying to God for a more grateful heart could be a prayer! And then ending it -- giving thanks in advance. Giving thanks in advance for answered prayer. Giving thanks in advance for a wonderful week, and things can continue to grow and flow.

Meister Eckhart, the 13th century Dominican monk, once said, *"If the only prayer you ever prayed was 'Thank you,' it would suffice."* I mean, that's pretty big, don't you think? If the only prayer you ever prayed was "Thank you"? Why? Because the power of gratitude -- the power of giving thanks -- does so many things for us. It helps us recognize the good in our lives. It helps us feel good; feel grateful. It helps us enjoy what we have. It helps us demonstrate our gratitude to God. It helps us be and live our best selves. And it helps attract more good.

There's no question that gratitude is a powerful, powerful gift and tool. And the thing is: We need to utilize it.

Back to math for a second. I didn't realize how math touches so many things. I didn't realize how important math is in music. And how important it is in art. And how important it is in cooking. And how important it is in construction. There are so many things where math does so much good! It affects all areas of our lives more than we realize!

And I would say the same about gratitude. Gratitude affects every single area of our lives. And if we're willing to practice it, it will multiply the good in our lives.

And here are the five ways to practice: Record. Write down the things you're grateful for ... five in the morning, five before you go to sleep. Feel! Cultivate a sense of feeling grateful, because it sends an energy that will magnify and attract even more. Third is to express your appreciation to the people in your lives. Four is to demonstrate your gratitude to God by living your very best. And then, finally, is to pray with a thankful heart. When you do, good will increase in your life!

And if someone says, "*Hey; how you doing?*", you will say, "*I'm thankful, so grateful.*"

God bless you all!

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