

THANKS A LOT!

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These two men were walking through a field when suddenly a large, angry bull with pointy horns starting chasing after them. And they took off for the nearest fence. And it was quickly realized that they didn't have a chance; that the bull was going to catch up to them. And he was getting closer and closer with his sharp horns.

And one of them said, "We've had it! There's nothing that can save us! Quick; say a prayer!"

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

He said, "Pray anything!"

He said, "I'll pray the only prayer I remember my dad saying: 'Lord, for what we're about to receive, make us truly grateful.'" [Congregants laugh]

You know, I would say in all the years of my spiritual study, and my personal growth and self-improvement, and my personal pursuit of peace and happiness, the single greatest spiritual practice that has made and had the greatest impact on my life is the practice of gratitude. I believe that the power of thanksgiving is absolutely transformative, because it shifts our mindset from negative to positive, from lack to abundance, from sorrow to joy.

Gratitude absolutely raises our vibrational level. And that increases the flow of good energy that attracts even more good into our lives and changes our lives for the better.

Studies show that the more grateful we are; the happier we are, the healthier we are, the more positive, optimistic, productive, creative, successful, joyful, kind, aware, compassionate we are. And, in fact, that gratitude actually helps all of our relationships-- our social's interactions and as well as our primary relationships. Because people like being around people who are grateful and who are appreciative.

Grateful people tend to be more present and more engaged in life, and feel a sense of fulfillment and a sense of purpose. I also believe that the more grateful we are, it opens us to a level of awareness to deepen our spiritual journey.

Thanksgiving is a wonderful holiday, a wonderful tradition, a wonderful season. And it is a wonderful reminder to be thankful and to practice gratitude. And it's nice, but I would say it just scratches the surface on the power and the importance and the great value of this sacred and powerful practice.

In 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 5, Verse 8, I think it really gives the magnitude and the importance of gratitude when it 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.

"*This is God's will for you*" is saying that giving thanks is actually a directive. It is a command. It is a call to each and every one of us to develop a mindset of gratitude as a way of life, not just a periodic practice ... to the point that we are grateful in all circumstances, in all situations. We feel blessed, we feel loved, we feel supported, and we feel guided and provided for. You know, to give thanks in those times is knowing that we are always in the presence of God, and that we can absolutely trust that all things will work together for our highest good. Even when things are tough and even when we don't know what the result is going to be, we are still all called to give thanks.

Being grateful is so important and so powerful that to not be grateful is a sin. Here's what it says in 2 Timothy, Chapter 3, Verse 1-3. It says being ungrateful is the same as being unholy, unloving, disobedient

to your parents, unforgiving, selfish and abusive! You know, not being grateful is seen as rejecting God and not acknowledging or accepting all the good that is in our lives.

And so, as good and wonderful and powerful as gratitude sounds – and I think we'd all agree with that -- why is it that we have a hard time staying in a mindset of gratitude and thanksgiving? There are three reasons. There are probably a lot more, but I'm just going to give you three.

And the first one: we tend to focus on the negative. We tend to focus on what's wrong, what's not working, what we don't like. And we focus on complaining or blaming our boss, our parents, our spouse. We tend to have our mind immersed in worry and in fear a lot. So, it's hard to give thanks. It's hard to feel grateful in those moments.

Also, we tend to be really busy. We are always on the go, go, go, trying to get the next thing to make us happy. And so much so, we miss a lot of the good that is in our lives.

And the third one is complacency. I think we all develop a level of comfort at a certain level of life, and then we take those things for granted. Like, right now, I'll bet we are all taking for granted that your seats will support you for the entire duration of the service. We take for granted that there's air there available for us. The electricity allows us to have the lights and the sound. So many things we just take for granted, because they're just always there.

So, how many people have ever had something not go well? Like maybe you were standing on a street corner and, during the rain, a car drives by in a puddle; kind of wets you. And then we say something like, *"Thanks a lot!"* You know, when something doesn't go as well for us in our lives, and we say something like, *"Thanks a lot."*

And *"thanks a lot"*: the words sound like they are, but what it actually means is we're not thankful. That we're not happy; that we're upset, we're displeased, which is the exact opposite of what the Scripture is trying to say: that in all things give thanks.

So instead of saying, *"Thanks a lot!"*, we should be saying, *"Thanks! A lot!"* ... to the point that we're saying it all the time. And we use gratitude as a way of life, not just a periodic practice.

So, let's look at four things that can help us express and give thanks -- a lot!

And so the first one is to **ACKNOWLEDGE AND ENJOY OUR BLESSINGS**. To feel prosperous and to live an abundant life, the single most important thing to say, *"I'm living a prosperous life and I'm living an abundant life"* is to enjoy and appreciate what we have right now.

Richard Carlson in his book, *"Shortcut Through Therapy,"* says, *"People who live the most fulfilling lives are the ones who are always rejoicing at what they have."*

On a scale of 1 to 10 -- 10 being the highest -- how much are you digging your life right now? How much are you enjoying what you do and who you are? How much are you feeling how wonderful your life is? And how many people would say that -- wherever that level is right now of how much you're enjoying and appreciating your life -- how many say there's still a little room for you to enjoy and appreciate and rejoice in your life a little bit more than you're currently doing right now? And I tell you: gratitude is the important practice to help us with that.

So, what do you love and appreciate about your life most right now? What do you love about being you? What do you love and appreciate about what you've learned? What you've achieved? Or what you've overcome? Or what you've healed?

I would say there are so many things to be thankful for.

Viki King, in her book, "How to be the Hero in Your Own Life," says, "You won't be happy with more until you're happy with what you have now." I mean, a repeating of that message: If we can't appreciate and enjoy what we have now, we will not be able to appreciate and enjoy what we get in the future.

Gratitude is a powerful way of acknowledging and recognizing the good in our lives, and then also taking time to appreciate and actually enjoy it.

Oprah keeps a gratitude journal. Here's what she said. She said, "My list includes small pleasures: the feel of Kentucky bluegrass under my feet like damp silk. I walk in the woods with all of my nine dogs, and my cocker spaniel, Sophie, trying to keep up. Cooking fried green tomatoes with Stedman and getting to eat them when they're hot. My thank you list includes things too important to take for granted: an okay mammogram; friends who love me; 25 years of the same job and loving it more than the first day I started; a chance to share my vision for a better life; staying centered and having financial security. I won't kid you. Having money for all the things I want is a blessing. But as I look back on all my journals -- which I have kept since I was 15 years old -- 99% of what brought me real joy has nothing to do with money. It had a lot to do with food," [congregants laugh] "but not a lot with money."

So, what's a practice you would commit to do every single day to either journal and write down or even think and reflect on five things that you are grateful for every single day? And it could be grateful for your health; grateful for your work; grateful for your family; grateful for your friends; grateful for vacation; grateful for your home; grateful for this church. There's all kinds of things!

Last week, some of mine included: I had a great physical therapy session, and I stretched a little more than I did the week before. I appreciated that. I have a group of friends that I play cards with, and they infuse my house with laughter and joy, and I feel grateful and blessed to have them all. I paid all my bills last week, and I organized and decluttered my house with a friend. And I feel so thankful that my drawers and closets are decluttered. It just is a happy, happy feeling.

I meditate every Friday with my sister, Ariane, who's in Montreal. We do it by FaceTime together, and it's something I treasure in my life. I love technology. I love my iPhone ... maybe a little too much. And I love anything remote control. I mean, I love being able to remote control my lights on, my thermostat, open and close my garage door. I think it's one of the coolest things ever! And don't get me started with drive-throughs. I am the king of the drive-through! [Congregants laugh] I will find dry cleaners, bank, pharmacy, you name it. I'm going through the drive-through!

And the point I'm trying to make here is: when you commit yourself to just five, you will not be able to help realizing how much easier it is to just keep going. And you realize how blessed you are. We have so many things to be thankful for! The question is: Are you willing to support yourself in having a daily discipline of acknowledging, appreciating, and enjoying what you have to make gratitude a way of life and not just a periodic practice.

The second way to express thanks a lot is to magnify the power of prayer by **INFUSING GRATITUDE INTO YOUR PRAYERS.**

Psalm 95, Verse 2, says, "Come into God's presence with thanksgiving."

Psalm 9, Verse 1, says, "Give thanks to God with your whole heart."

And Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not fret or have anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance, with thankful hearts, offer up your prayers and requests to God."

Philippians 4 is saying: do not pray from desperation or anxiety or fear or disconnect, but start your prayer with thankful hearts.

Could you imagine if you began every single prayer with thanksgiving? To acknowledge and appreciate all of your incredible blessings?

Jesus taught us to not just use thanksgiving in prayer as a review, but also as a “preview.” With the loaves and fishes, the first thing he did thing he did – not enough bread! -- he blessed and gave thanks for the loaves, and then he gave thanks in advance that the solution would be there and it would come.

Giving thanks in advance for the solution, for the answer, for the healing, for the clarity and direction that we need. Give thanks in advance that it will come forth. To not just use gratitude as a review, but usually as a preview: to start all prayer and end all prayer with gratitude. It's a powerful way to infuse a sense of power and to magnify the power of prayer.

Remember when Jesus was asked by his disciples, how should we pray? And he said, *“You should pray like this: ‘Our Father.’”* What he was talking about, as I mentioned a few weeks ago: he was talking about praying from a higher consciousness. That you are connected to God; you are connected to the Source.

Well, praying from a place of gratitude is that same high level of consciousness. For, when we are grateful, we are aware of our connection with Spirit. When we're grateful, we acknowledge and are aware of how blessed we are and how connected we are to Spirit. Praying and beginning with gratitude acknowledges God with an open, thankful heart and awareness of how good our lives are; how blessed we truly are. Start and end all our prayers with gratitude; it's a powerful, powerful thing.

Charles Fillmore, co-founder of Unity, said this. He said, *“Let us cultivate this habit of giving thanks: uplifting our thoughts and words to the Spirit of plenty.”* He said, *“Pray and give thanks for love. Pray and give thanks for joy. Pray and give thanks for prosperity. Pray and give thanks for power, for strength, for wisdom. Pray and give thanks that we live in a universe that has spiritual laws that we can all utilize.”*

You know, in the Law of Attraction, the whole thing about attraction: gratitude is one of the powerful practices that creates a magnetic attracting force in our lives. So, gratitude helps attract. And ingratitude actually repels. So that, when we are not grateful -- we're not recognizing the good -- it actually is repelling the very good that we would like to have in our lives.

I would say, without question, there is no area in our lives that will not improve when we infuse our prayer with gratitude and thanksgiving.

And the third thing is to **APPRECIATE AND SAY ‘THANK YOU’ TO THE PEOPLE WHO HELP US.** Two of the most powerful words -- and I would say underrated and underutilized words -- in our language is, *“Thank you.”* It behooves all of us to increase our usage of expressing and saying the words, *“Thank you.”*

Ever had somebody say *“Thank you”* to you? And doesn't it feel good? And doesn't it feel good to tell someone, *“Thank you”*? The words *“Thank you”* are a symbol of acknowledgement, appreciation and affirmation. When you say *“Thank you”* to someone, you almost make this connection, and you can feel your hearts open. You could feel a sense of shared respect and appreciation for each other. I don't think we realize what a powerful gift we have of when we say *“Thank you”* to someone. They feel acknowledged; they feel valued; they feel seen.

I want you to think right now: think of three people in your life that have had a positive impact in your life that you would be willing to tell them how much they mean to you and to tell them, *“Thank you.”* I'll bet we all have at least three people in our lives that we are grateful for that have had an impact that we have not shared that with or not shared it in a long time.

Sometimes you think, *“No; they know it already. I appreciate it; I've said it before. They know it.”* You know, the people the closest to us are the ones we take for granted the most and the easiest because, again, they're just always there. But in those relationships -- and sometimes I would say even especially

in those relationships -- expressing our gratitude and appreciation for each other more frequently would be a valuable thing. Whether it's a brother, a sister; whether it's a family member, an aunt, uncle; a coworker ... whoever it might be, that it is a powerful practice to say, *"Thank you. I appreciate you."*

In Luke Chapter 17, Verse 11-16, it is the story of how Jesus healed the 10 lepers. And only one of them came back to say, *"Thank you."* Nine of them did not say, *"Thank you."* And Jesus was upset. He was a little frustrated. And not because he wanted the praise, but it's because he was saying you are limiting your experience of joy for everyone by not expressing your gratitude. By keeping it bottled up, or holding it within and not sharing it, that you are actually limiting the fullness of the blessings that gratitude and that act of kindness was able to express.

So, whether it is your barista who has made your morning coffee, say *"Thank you; I appreciate that."* If it's a colleague that helps you in work, say, *"Thank you. I appreciate that."* If there's a stranger that opened the door for you, say, *"Thank you. I appreciate that."*

A heartfelt thank you, I guarantee, will make someone's day. It will open their heart. They will feel appreciated. And there will be a boomerang effect because, I guarantee you, they will want to express more kindness. And us saying it will want to express and experience more kindness.

And the thing about it is: it's easy and it's free. You could say, "Thank you" as many times and to anyone you want! *"Thank you. I appreciate you."* *"Thank you. That really made a difference."* You know, *"Thank you. I always appreciate that you have a smile on your face and something positive to say."* There are so many people in our lives that we can thank and we should thank.

And so, who in your life do you want to say, *"Thank you"* to more? And who in your life could you say more this week to thank? And who in your past you'd be willing to make a call and thank them? I have called people from high school and reached out to them and said, *"You know, when we're in high school, boy, I really appreciated how you did this or that."* I Facebooked a teacher, you know, 30 years later from high school and said, *"What a difference you made,"* and what a role model I thought he was. There are so many people in our lives!

And one thing I've come to realize is: gratitude does not have an expiration date. I guarantee you, whether it was last week, last year, or 10 years ago, someone on the receiving end of your *"Thank you"* will feel blessed, uplifted and acknowledged.

The fourth thing to be able to express thanks a lot is to **BE GRATEFUL FOR ALL THAT CHALLENGES US.**

How many people know who Kanō Jigorō is? Okay; let's talk about him. [Congregants laugh] I'm just messing around. He invented judo. That's how you might know who he is. And he designed judo, not to be about brute force. He actually designed it to build character; to build discipline; to build respect; and to have an intelligent use of our physical, emotional, and mental energies. And the principle behind it was to have maximum efficiency with minimum effort, and also for the well-being and the mutual benefit of all.

And so, here's what he said. He said, *"Before practicing Dōjō or engaging in a match, opponents bow to each other. Bowing is an expression of gratitude and respect. In effect, you are thanking your opponent for the opportunity to improve your technique."*

So that anyone that we consider an opponent in our lives, what he's basically saying is: we should bow to them within ourselves and thank them for the opportunity to become a better person, or to grow or to learn or expand our awareness. *"Thank you for the opportunity to be more patient."* *"Thank you for the opportunity to be more loving."* *"Thank you for the opportunity to set better boundaries."* *"Thank you for the opportunity to stand up for myself."*

Anybody have a person in your life who kind of rubs you the wrong way? You don't see eye to eye? Okay, I'll lend you one of mine, because apparently none of you do. [Congregants laugh] But I would say anyone in your life where you've got a little energy with -- to quietly in your heart, bow to them with respect and gratitude and say, *"Thank you for the opportunity for learning, for growing and being a better person."* Any situation in your life that you find challenging: for that situation, bow to it and thank it for the opportunity to grow and to become stronger.

1 Timothy, Chapter 4, Verse 4-5 says this: *"For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if received with thanksgiving."* It's saying: receive all challenges in your life with thanksgiving and as an opportunity to practice and to develop as a greater spiritual being.

So right now, I want to give you three jokes that I want you to receive with thanksgiving. [Congregants laugh]

What side of a turkey has the most feathers? What side of a turkey has the most feathers? The outside. [Congregants laugh]

What do you call a turkey that springs? Fast food! [Congregants laugh]

What did the turkey say when he met the president? Pardon me! Very good! [Congregants laugh]

And I just want to say, *"Thank you"* for the opportunity to tell jokes, and not have laughs, and still feel good about myself. [Congregants laugh]

"In all things give thanks, for this is God's will for you." And that's saying: in all situations, realize that you are loved and blessed and supported by this incredible Spirit. That, in all things, express gratitude as your way of life, your way of living, your way of showing up in all your relationships and for yourself.

And the four ways for us to practice to acknowledge and enjoy your blessings: write down the things you're grateful for and appreciate what you have. Infuse the power of prayer by magnifying it with gratitude. Start and end your prayers with gratitude. Third is to appreciate and say, *"Thank you"* to those people in your life. Acknowledge, appreciate, and affirm them. And be grateful for all the challenges; you bow within yourself and thank it for the opportunity to develop your character and to help you in making gratitude a way of life.

And those are the lessons in helping us express: *"Thanks! A lot!"*

God bless you all.