



TIME OF GRACE®

Choose Gratitude Over Grumbling: Because of Eternal Joy

Study Notes

Summary

How can you be a grateful person when so many things go wrong? When God takes away your health or your security or the life you long for, how can you thank him? Today's message has the apostle Paul's powerful answer.

- Being grateful is better for _____, for _____, and for _____.
- **2 Corinthians 4:14-18:** ¹⁴ We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
- Thank God for _____ (_____).

Points to Ponder

1. Read 1 Peter 1:24,25. How do Peter's words connect with today's message? What would your upcoming week look like if you kept this passage in mind?
2. Evaluate: Christianity's blessing is not a better life now but a better life to come.
3. Challenge: List at least seven things you will never have to deal with in heaven. List at least seven more things you will get to enjoy every moment of every day in heaven.

Homework for Next Week

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

Time of Grace Ministry
Because of Eternal Joy
2 Corinthians 4:14-18
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Pastor Mike Novotny

There is something really, really important, that sooner or later you need to know about life. And that something is this: there is always something. In your life, and in my life, in a good life, or a bad life, there is always, always, always, going to be something! When you get older, there is going to be something. If you can rewind back 15 years, you would remember there was still something. If I could double your income, or cut it in half, there would be something. You can date this person, or that one, you can stay married, you could get divorced, you could get the job, or you could lose it. Does not matter where you live, who you are, on this side of heaven, this fact is going to be true. There is always something! Always! Because if we want to grumble, we will always have a reason to; and if we want to be grateful, we will always have a reason to. So, you and I are, sooner or later, going to have to figure out the skill of what to choose.

So, I want to ask you, not if you were grading yourself, if the five people who spend the most time with you during the week would give you a grade on your gratitude -- Someone said, "Please do not!" That is a dangerous question, right? Because, it is so instinctual, it is so natural, it is so easy to be negative, and to see what is wrong, and to express our frustration. So, how and why can we change that? Today, we are going to try to answer that question and figure out how to become more grateful people. But before we get there, I want to motivate you with three reasons why. So, if you are watching at home, if you are here in church, grab a pen, let me give you three quick reasons to strive to become a more grateful person.

Alright, here is the first one. Because, first of all, being grateful is better for you. Choosing gratitude today is literally better for you. And here's why. Did you know that the way God wired your brain is that when you choose something today, whatever that something may be, it becomes a little bit easier to choose it again tomorrow, right? We think of this often with substances, drugs and alcohol. If I choose it today, my brain is going to want it tomorrow. If I live without it today, it's going to be easier to resist tomorrow.

The same thing, they say, is actually true for gratitude. There is a researcher from Columbia University named Angela Grice, and she said these words, "The more you do something, the more entrenched that path becomes in your brain, and the more you continue to do it!" In other words, when you are frustrated later today, if you just vent, and no one would blame you, because what you are going through is difficult. If you vent, what is going to be just a little bit easier to do tomorrow? The same thing! But if in the midst of that frustration, you can see the good part, the blessing, the hand of God, and you can offer up a prayer of thanks, guess what becomes easier tomorrow? Our brains are creatures of habit, and if you want to become a more grateful person, it is better to choose gratitude today.

But it is not just better for you, second answer, it is also better for them! Have any of you here done online dating before? Okay, bunch of people. Here in Wisconsin, when I meet couples, they either met at a bar or online, alright? So, have you ever, if you've done online dating, have you ever scrolled through the profiles and come to a guy who led with this, you know, grinning, beautiful picture of him, probably photoshopped and the opening line that says, 'I'm a negative person.' 'I see the worst in everything.' 'I'm looking for a girl who will bring the sunshine, because I got all the clouds and the rain.'

If we were trying to impress someone, we would never ever say that, and why? Because people love gratitude. You and I literally have the power to change the temperature of any room we walk into. We can make people more hopeful, more happy, more peaceful, and more godly! Being a grateful person is not just good for our brains and for our tomorrows, but for their tomorrows too!

And finally, number three, being grateful is better for him, for God. If our friends, family and neighbors who know that we are followers of God see us grumbling and venting, and constantly frustrated, they might wonder, "Well, what is the benefit in being a Christian?" But, if you can still praise God in the midst of a storm, even if it feels like there is a thorn in the side of your flesh. You confess his grace is sufficient for me, even if you are going through the same drama with your family, or your kids, or your work, or your body breaking down. And you confess God is still good, all the time he is merciful, he treats me better than I deserve, then what will happen to people? They will wonder, "Who is this God?" How good does your God have to be if you are praising him, and thanking him for this day which seems so broken and messed up?

Now, the truth is, it is not easy to be a thankful person, but it is better for you, and for them, and especially for him. That is why today, I want to start a conversation with you about gratitude. Today, and for the next few weeks, we are going to learn from one of the most grateful people in human history. A Christian who lived back in the first century, named the Apostle Paul.

If you are kind of new to the Bible, Paul was the guy who wrote almost all of the best stuff on gratitude. And starting today, we are going to learn how Paul did it. We are going to open up to four different sections of the Apostle Paul's teaching, and we are going to study his method, and see if a month from now, you can, I can become more grateful people who will say no to grumbling and yes to gratitude. So, if you are ready for that journey, you have a Bible with you, or you just want to follow along on the screen, here is what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4. He wrote, "We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God."

When Paul reflected on the fact that he had messed so much up in his life -- If you do not know, Paul had actually murdered Christians before he became one -- And yet here, Jesus came to forgive him, and love him, and accept him. And if that were not enough grace and undeserved love, then God the Father raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. That is when we call

Easter. And he conquered death, so that no follower of Jesus ever has to be afraid to die. And if that were not enough to make thanksgiving overflow, did you catch it? Paul said, "And this same God will raise us too." This is what some Christians call, "the resurrection of the dead." That is what you find in the Apostle's creed. Some of the songs that we sing in church that we believe, on the last day, the Jesus who died for us, and who is raised from the grave for us, will come down from heaven to get us. And he will transform our bodies. And every ache, every pain, all the cancer, all the anxiety, all the depression, all the mental health struggles, all the pituitary glands, bad backs, aching hips, rheumatoid arthritis, all of it will forever, and ever, and ever be gone. And when Paul thought about that, that God's coming back for me, never, ever, ever again will I hurt or mourn, or cry, or grieve. What happened in his heart? Even in the midst of all the something, was thanksgiving overflowed.

You know, the last verse I want to share with you today is verse 16. Paul continues, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." He did not say that life would be easy. How does he put it? "Outwardly, we are wasting away." That sounds bad, right? And it is. But Paul just compared all of that, to all of this. Compared to forever? Compared to the glory of God, the eternal weight of it? This? I mean, this would crush me if there was all this! But this is light and this is momentary, compared to that. Seeing the face of my God forever, and ever, and ever. You know, if I want to summarize Paul's teaching, I would put it this way. I'd love for you to write this down. The big idea for today is this: thank God for forever! Or if that is too much to write down, how about: "T.G.F.F." Some people, "T.G.I.F." Right, "Thank God it's Friday." We're so grateful, we get two days off. But Paul said, "No, I get more than two days. I get more than a year. I get forever in the presence of God. Thank God for forever.

Kind of reminds me of this. Some of you have seen me do this before, and heard me teach this before, actually stole this from another pastor in full disclosure. I did not steal the rope from another pastor, by the way, I stole the idea from another pastor. So yeah, Paul's saying, this little inch and a half of black tape at the end of this white rope is the life you are living right now. And Paul says, you might feel like you are wasting away, and that is true, and that is a burden, and that is difficult, but please do not forget, this is not it! Even if the burden you are carrying lasts for another year, or two or 10 or 40. Even if your life compared to some other people on this earth seems unfair, and difficult, and challenging. Even if every day, as you try to go to bed, the worry, and the anxiety, and the fear is like a nightly battle, even if that never ends, you have a reason to be grateful.

Because what God has promised you at your last breath, or the day that Jesus comes back is not this. It is not another 70 years of goodness to balance it out, and he has not promised you this, or this, or this -- I am 6'2", what is that 74 inches? God has not promised you 74 times the happiness for the pain that you have been through. He has promised you forever, and ever, and ever, and ever! God has promised you happiness, and he has promised you joy, and he has promised you acceptance, and he has promised you comfort, he has promised you his face, his presence, his beauty, and his glory.

The day that Jesus comes back, there will be no more crying, or mourning, or pain. There is no anxiety, no depression, no drama, no divorce, there is no abuse -- You want me to keep going? Amazon said it was 150 feet! So, I am waiting! It is forever! And it is ever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever -- Amazon's rope ran out! But not forever with God. Right? And this is what Paul is saying to you. We get so fixated on this tiny little drama that we are going through, but this is not what God sees. He sees forever, and if you can see it too, you would not grumble.

It is like a few raindrops the night before you wake up, and you hear the sound, and the good news is on the way. So, I want to practice with you, because in the next seven days, you are going to have something, alright? So, what I am going to do, is describe a bad situation you might find yourself in, and then I am going to say, "But!" And you are going to say, this is the part where you talk in church, okay? You are going to say, "Thank God for forever!" Alright, so, I am going to say bad thing, "but," -- And you say, "Thank God for forever." Yeah, if you want to -- Just can say it like this, okay? You have got to either say, "Thank God for forever!" Or with relief, "Thank God for forever." And we are going to think about that forever happiness we have with God.

So, some of you are facing some challenging times in school. The pressure of figuring out what you want to do for the rest of your life, the grades it takes, the money that you need, the homework, the drama. It might seem laughable to your parents or grandparents, but for you, it is just a daily pressure you cannot get past. And you thought it would be so good, right? To move away from home, and stay up as late as you want, and eat whatever you want, but now you have got bills. And you have got a manager who does not care and wants you to put your head down and do the job. And it is not a dream, and they are switching shifts, and you are not getting paid as much as you thought, and you just did not realize how much mom and dad were covering for you. And now there is credit card debt, and you get the notification, and you open the app, you feel like you are always behind, and you are never going to catch up, and you are stressed, and you are anxious, and you are afraid, but... But God, thank you for forever!

And your little brother, and your older sister, and your granddaughter who is not representing your family well, and your parents are fighting again, and they do not seem to get along, and you are not the perfect family, and you are not sure if you ever will be. And it is hard, but... But thank God for forever. Right! And politics, but... thank God for forever! That is right, and -- Sometimes Pastor Mike, when he is up front in church, he talks for -- forever, but... thank God for forever! You see what I did right there?

See, I want you to remember that. So often when we grumble, we do this. But Paul did this, and he did this, and he did this. He fixed his eyes, not on what he could see, but what he could not, and because what is unseen is eternal, he had hope, and he did not lose heart. Now, before I say amen, I want to speak really quickly to three groups of you. I want to speak to those of you who are not Christians, I want to speak to those of you who are young Christians, and then I want to speak to you who are old Christians.

So, first of all, if you are not a Christian, and you are here today, if your girlfriend brought you, or you stumbled across this on TV or online, all I want to say to you is this. It is forever! I am not sure why you are not a follower of Jesus. Maybe, you have had a bad experience growing up in church, maybe you have had some questions that no one ever answered for you about the Bible, or about God. Now, maybe your parents said they were Christian, but they were super hypocrites, and you saw it up-close. I do not know what your reasons are, but I do know this, Jesus is offering you forever. To be happy... forever. To never be worried or be afraid for -- Christianity is not just a club where we promise you a few tips and a few years of a better life. It is eternal life in the name of Jesus the Son. And so here is what I want to challenge you, isn't that worth investigating? If you have questions about the hypocrisy of the church, or about creation, or evolution, or existence of God, or all the religions, or why are there people like that, why do bad things happen to good people -- those are good questions -- isn't it worth investigating? To reach out? To do more than Google? But to talk to someone who has thought this through, and let us say it is totally wrong, but if it is right, it is forever!

Second, to you young Christians, who of you here today has not yet gotten their first wrinkle, anyone? Couple of you, a bunch? I remember those days. Can I tell you this? It is forever! When you hit your teenage years, and your 20's and your 30's, you are going to face all the same opportunities and temptations that middle age guys like I did. There is going to be the job, and the career, the dating, the family, maybe the kids, the diapers, the friends, the activities, the bar leagues, the everything, but I just want you to remember this, Jesus is offering you forever. There will be 100 different opportunities to make something else besides Jesus the number one spot in your priorities and heart, but none of them offer you forever. The boss is going to say, "Extra hours but extra pay," and you know what is going to compromise your faith. You know you will not be able to make it to church, you will be too exhausted to have time, and energy, and focus, to open up your Bible, your boss cannot offer you forever. And you might meet a guy, and he is charming, and he is funny, and he is committed, like so few guys out there in the world, but if he does not help you get closer to God, he cannot offer you forever! I am all about sports, I love playing them, I love watching them, but there is not a single game in my entire life that has offered me forever. And so, I hope, and I pray, and I beg, that you would not get hustled into thinking that temporary things are eternal, and eternal things are temporary. Younger brothers and sisters in Christ, do not let anything get in the way of your forever. Jesus loves you.

Finally, you old Christians. Where are my wrinkly brothers and sisters in faith? Get it proud! Yeah! The Bible says, we have wisdom! Do not be ashamed of that! Older Christians, we are even closer to forever. You know, as we get older, and I get this, as our bodies start to hurt, as our sight starts to go, as hearing loss happens, as heart failure, and issues with arthritis; it is so natural to grumble. But think about this, we are closer to forever! Dying, the process is not fun, but death gives us forever! So, let us turn the Old Folk's Christian Club into the most grateful group on earth! We are one step closer to forever! Paul said, "outwardly we are wasting away, but inwardly, we are being renewed day, by day, by day. You might have wrinkles on your faith, but you can run the race of Jesus like an Olympic sprinter if you fix your eyes on eternity. You can have a kind of freshness of faith that puts a freshman to shame, because you are looking at what they are not looking at. You are looking at forever! So, as we get older, it might get harder,

as our bodies start to ache and moan and groan, but let us remember what Paul remembered. Jesus is coming back for his people to present us with himself and it lasts forever.

So, whether you are not a Christian, a younger Christian, an older Christian, I hope that you can follow my daughter's example. My oldest daughter, Brooklyn, is a 12-year-old, and she has become a passionate lover, maybe addict, to Broadway musicals. During the Coronavirus, when everything was going crazy and we were stuck at home, Brooklyn decided to write personal handwritten letters to all of her favorite Broadway singers. And then one day, what showed up in the mailbox? A letter from New York City! And who is it from? A cast member of the musical "Hamilton". And not just a backup singer or a backup dancer, the supporting actor, the supporting actress, guess who wrote my daughter a letter? Mr. Hamilton himself! My daughter was so happy! I think she was running laps around the house! It made her bring her in before it was time for dinner! She was so, so happy! And, it was so beautiful! It was not a stock letter and photo, he hand-wrote her a letter, answered the questions -- Crazy that he would do that for her! And Brooklyn framed it and she put it up in her bedroom, but she did not put it next to her bed. Because, as amazing as that moment was, what is next to her bed is something eternally better. Right next to her clock, is a little sign that says, "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you." Mr. Hamilton is great, but he's temporary. The unfailing love of Jesus is forever. In a world where there is always something, thank God for forever. Let us pray.

Dear Jesus, thank you so much for giving us everything. In this world, you said, you promised, we would have trouble, but you have overcome this world. You said to two grieving sisters, that the person who believes in you would live, even if they die, and so, I pray that you will make us grateful people. We have had something today, and we are going to have something tomorrow, but we have something so much better than all the something's. We have you, we have eternity, we have heaven, we have the new earth, we have the resurrection of the dead in a glorious body.

God, when we see the negative, when the glass feels half full, help us to remember forever. I pray today for every non-Christian hearing this message, so that you will spark in them a bit of curiosity, just to investigate, to humble themselves, and ask the questions to someone who might know. Maybe it is the way that you will change someone's forever.

I pray for my own daughters and every young Christian here today. God, the world feels so important when we are in the midst of it. Volleyball feels like everything, our job feels like everything, our relationship feels like everything, but compared to forever it is nothing. Help them to remember that, keep their eyes fixed on you, that they can grow old with Jesus as their number one forever, and ever.

I pray, in a grumbling world, you will raise up more and more Christians who have this gratitude, to the Apostle Paul. We need good examples, God, so make us those examples, that we can inspire people and tell them that we have fixed our eyes on the one thing that endures forever. Lord, we give thanks to You today, for You are good, and Your mercy endures forever, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.