



TIME OF GRACE®

Choose Gratitude Over Grumbling: Because of 14 Spiritual Gifts You Already Have

Study Notes

Summary

Have you read the Bible's longest sentence? In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul (in his original Greek) set a record for most words used in a single sentence. What was Paul so grateful for that inspired him to go on and on? As he sat under house arrest, what could have inspired such joy? Listen to this message from Ephesians chapter 1 and find out!

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| EXPECTATIONS | |
| THE GRUMBLE ZONE |  |
| EXPERIENCES | |

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| EXPERIENCES | |
| THE GRATEFUL ZONE |  |
| EXPECTATIONS | |

- **Ephesians 1:3-14:** ³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. ¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a

deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

- God, thanks for every _____!
- Through Jesus, we are _____,
_____, _____,
_____, _____,
_____, _____,
_____, _____, and _____
_____.

Points to Ponder

1. Agree or disagree: Even in this life, it is better to be spiritually blessed than physically or financially blessed.
2. Read a similar section of Scripture in 1 Peter 1:3-9. How many spiritual blessings can you find in that paragraph?
3. Which blessing from the list of 14 impacted you the most? Why do you think you chose that blessing compared to all the other incredible options?

Homework for next week

Read Romans 5:1-5.

Time of Grace Ministry
Gratitude over Grumbling: Because of 14 Spiritual Gifts You Already Have
Ephesians 1:3-14
November 19, 2023

Pastor Mike Novotny

Last week, we kicked off this series talking about gratitude and cultivating a thankful heart. And if you heard it, I'm not sure how it impacted you, but I know how it impacted me. Hearing what God has to say about gratitude, it changed me, it stuck in my heart, and it helped me to resist the urge to grumble for about 47 minutes. I got to give that message twice last week, and afterwards, it was a beautiful fall night in Wisconsin. A friend had a campfire, I gathered around, and about two hours later as I was driving home, I thought to myself, "I think I grumbled about everything tonight." You know, something about work, something about getting older and my health, something about life. God's word stuck with me, and I was so passionate about it, and then I was reminded again how difficult this all is.

Alright, it's easy to fill in a blank in a bulletin, it's easy to hear a Bible passage, but actually resisting that urge to grumble and complain and go off, and to stop and to thank God and be grateful is a battle for many of us to fight. And that's why I've been thinking a little bit more deeply about all of this. Why is it you can believe these things that God says, you can know that you're blessed, and yet you still struggle in the moments and are still so tempted to grumble? And I came up with a theory, and my theory is this, that grumbling is a temptation, not primarily because of what we go through or experience in life but of what we expect out of life. Or to put it another way like this, grumbling happens when there is a gap between your high expectations and your low to average experiences.

Now, in case you're a more visual kind of learner, let me show you a picture, I call it the "Grumble zone." When your expectations are way up here, you know, I thought dating would be like this, I thought my health was going to be like this, I thought my bank account was going to be like this, I thought my car was going to drive longer than this, when your experiences don't reach those high expectations, you end up with frustration, you end up with exasperation, you end up grumbling. But what if you had those same experiences, except this time instead of really high expectations, you had very realistic, moderate, or maybe below average expectations? Well, then the picture might turn to this, what I call the "Grateful zone," when experiences exceed expectations, you could actually go through the same thing and end up with a different attitude.

And so, my theory is that your potential to be grateful this week is really not connected to what you go through but rather what you expect to go through. Let me give you two examples to try to prove my point. Let's imagine that you and I both step out of our front doors, and we step into a 66 degree day. Do you grumble or are you grateful? And the answer is, well, it depends. If it's July and you're at an all-inclusive, and you're in Florida, and you finally got a week off, and you

stop, get your swimming suit, your cover up, your towel, your sandals, and 66 degrees. You are not a happy camper, are you? Or your expectations for the weather were way up here.

But, what if I step out my door, it's a January day in Wisconsin, 66-degree days, how does it feel then? My goodness, I'm skipping, I'm high-fiving strangers. You know, everyone is going to be gushing with gratitude, not because of the temperature but because of what we expected the temperature to be. So, here's my big question for you today, based on your relationship with God, what would you expect from him? You know, as I think back to last week, sitting around the campfire, realizing once again that I'm the guy who can preach it, but I so often don't practice it. My expectations for how God should treat me end up going down day by day. And maybe a bunch of you are in the same boat as I am. Your struggles with living a good, selfless, generous, forgiving life, it's not that you're ignorant of what the book says, it's just that in the moment, you know what to do and you just don't do it. And if you're anything like me and you struggle every day with a thousand different moral things, what would you expect a holy, perfect, beautiful, righteous God to do to you? When we think about our own sinfulness, struggles, and weakness, our expectations get pretty low for how God should treat us, which is why today is really crazy.

Because today, I want to read to you what every Christian gets to spiritually experience because of Jesus Christ. Today, we're not going to talk about your finances, we're not going to talk about your migraines, we're not going to talk about your anxiety or depression, today we're going to talk about the spiritual life that is yours already through faith in Jesus. And I can guarantee you this, if you are aware of your own sinfulness and the expectation is here, God is going to blow your mind with what you get through Jesus.

In fact, today's passage is so good, in the original language that it was written in, it is the longest passage in the Bible. In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul starts a sentence right down in verse 3, and even though my English translation breaks it up into eight separate sentences, in Paul's original language, one sentence started here and ended there. Two hundred and two words, the longest sentence in the entire Bible.

Paul went on and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on. And I think the English translators were afraid of all the English teachers with their red pens and so, they broke it up. But Paul was gushing, and he was praising, and he was grateful even though he wrote this letter while sitting in a jail cell for a crime he didn't commit, and today you're going to find out why.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him, Jesus, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment-to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In Christ we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in

conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory."

Did you catch the praise party that Paul's throwing? I counted four times, verse 3, 6, 12 and 14, "Praise God, the Praise of his grace, the praise of his Glory, the praise of his glory." Quadruple praise from a guy who's been sitting in jail for years for a crime he did not commit. And how can a guy like that be that grateful? He expected this and experienced that. If I was going to summarize Paul's teaching, and if you're taking notes in your program or watching at home, I'd put it this way. Paul looked up to Heaven and he said, "God, thanks for every spiritual blessing. I'm in jail God, I don't have every earthly blessing, I've been abused, I've been persecuted, I don't have every physical blessing, I'm broke, I don't have a bank account, I don't have every financial blessing, but God, I thank you, I praise you and I will forever praise you because every spiritual blessing is mine."

And every time I read these words I think of my good friend, Rebecca. Couple years ago, we had a Bible study in my home, and as we were talking -- Rebecca was very intelligent. She had her ponytail back, her glasses on, like a deep student of the Bible and she looked up and with uncharacteristic enthusiasm, she said, "You guys, every spiritual blessing! You guys!" And that is so good that what I want to do with you today is preach a 14-point sermon. Now, I've got to warn you at my last church, the longest sermon I ever preached was a ten-point sermon, and I'm not making this up, in the middle of it a guy had a heart attack.

So, not doing that today, I actually told the band that if I wasn't done in the appropriate amount of time, I owed each of them a dollar today, so, we're going to move fast. I need you to grab a pen because we're going to go fast, alright? I have 14 blanks in your program, we're going to fill them all in and realize just what Paul made or what made Paul gush with gratitude and blessing. Fourteen things that are yours in Jesus. Ready to go? Alright, here we go.

First of all, Paul says that Christians are chosen. He said you were chosen in Christ. Have you ever been chosen for something? Ladies, did a guy ever choose you for homecoming? Did an employer ever choose your name out of a stack of applications? Did a coach ever choose you to star or play in the varsity team? There's something emotionally unique when there's a big group of people and someone calls out your name. And according to Paul, that's what God did for every Christian. God picked you; he chose you. This isn't some zit faced boy from the sophomore class, this is the holy God of the universe said, "I want you; I choose you, and I pick you."

He chose you, number two, to be holy. I know many of you don't feel that way because of your sin and you struggle especially if it's sexual in nature, you might feel dirty, but that's not true, you might feel unworthy, but that's not true. Because of Jesus, what is true of you, Paul says, is that God chose you to be holy in his sight. Have you ever heard the phrase "Holier than thou?" Literally and biblically, there is no one on earth that can be holier than thou because Jesus made you as holy as he.

And if that weren't good enough, here's number three, Paul says that you are blameless. That means God's not going to blame you. When you see him, he's not going to point a finger at you. If the angels, who are invisible, would suddenly make themselves known, they won't all look you in the eye and say, "There he is." Now, Jesus took away every sin so that God would not blame you, he would not accuse you, he would not reject you but instead, he would invite you, you are blameless in His sight.

Number four is my favorite, you're also predestined. This means that pre-history, every Christian had a destiny. Paul says before the creation of the world, God picked you and He worked out human history so he could find you. And if you can't fall asleep tonight, I just want you to sit in bed and think about that thought, that if you are Christian, because you heard the good news of Jesus Christ, why did you hear it? Some people never hear it. How did it get to you? How did it reach your ears? Oh, you just happened to be dating that girl? You just happened to be raised by that mother? No, God had a destiny for you to hear the good news, believe it, and be saved, you were predestined.

And if that weren't enough, number five, you were adopted. You can walk around today knowing that you are a child of God and your Father doesn't own a business, he owns the universe, and he cares about you, and he is present for you, and he's never annoyed with you. He's never done with you, he's never walked away from you, he'll never abuse you or hurt you. Our Father in Heaven is holy and perfect, and you, through grace have been adopted into his family. I hope you have a good father but even if your father was the worst, you still have a father who's the best, our Father who is in Heaven.

If that doesn't make you grateful, number six, you are graced. Grace means you get love that you don't deserve. So, I'm sitting around the fire grumbling, sinning, an hour after I preached the exact opposite, but I'm still loved on the way home because God loves people like me who don't deserve it. This week, I was talking with a guy who very tragically cheated on his wife. And he said, "But Pastor, she stayed. She should've taken off, but she wants to work on it and fight for this and fight for us and there's no word for it except grace." And that's what it's like to be a Christian, you just look up to Heaven and you say, "I don't know why you're still here but you are, and God, I love you for it." Paul says he lavished grace on us. He didn't give us a drop, a little bit, an ounce or a cup, we have so much love that we will never, ever get to the bottom of it.

But wait, there's more. Number seven, Paul says you're also redeemed, that means Jesus paid a price to get you back. You would've been lost, you would've been sold out to the devil himself, but Jesus shed his holy, precious blood so that you could be part of God's family and that means we are halfway through. Are you still awake? Still with me? Alright, give me an amen if you're awake. Amen. Alright, let's move on to number eight.

Eight. Christian, you are forgiven. Paul says we have the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. Do you know in the Greek language that Paul wrote what the word forgiven means? It means to send something away. Like, if here's you and here's a big pile of your sin, and God looks at the sin, then He looks at you and says, "Hmm."

What Jesus did is he took that whole pile and He sent it away so that when God looks at anyone who believes in Jesus, all there is, is a sinless person. All there is is a holy person. All there is is a redeemed person. All there is is a precious blood bought son or daughter that has been adopted into the family of God. That is what Christians mean when we say we are forgiven.

And if that were not enough, number nine. Christian, you are also included. This means when you take your last breath and you die, you will not be sitting alone at a lunch table in Heaven. When I was 18, I went to a Christian college and I didn't know a single soul on campus. And it was one of those first days where there's a big mixer behind the cafeteria and all the people who went to school together hanging out and I'm sitting there by myself. And then Paul, one of the more popular kids, said, "Hey, you want to sit with us?" Feels good to be included. And that's what God does with you. The moment you take your last breath and even invisibly in this moment, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sit in a circle and include. God, the trinity that exchanges laughter and love and friendship like you've never experienced before, they have a seat waiting for you because in Christ you were included.

And then, number ten, you're also saved. Saved is a fancy Bible word that means you're safe. You're not in danger anymore. You know, some of you think because you have really sensitive consciences that God's angry at you and he's mad at you, and the reason you struggle or lost your job or can't find a work is because there is something in your past and God's getting back at you. No, you are safe from all of that. Anything hard you go through is not God's anger or wrath, because Jesus took every drop of that to the cross. Instead, there is just a God who uses hardships to refine you and you don't have to worry that your abortion, or your cheating, or your critical spirit somehow endangered you, you're safe. You're safe because of Jesus.

Eleven. Christian you are marked, and just so I don't lose a bunch of money with the band, let's put twelve, Christian, you're also filled. When you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God put his mark on you, his name. And just like you care very much about things that have your name on it, God does too. First, he marked you like a little girl with her backpack, and then he filled you up. He filled you with the Holy Spirit himself. This is so amazing to me. The Bible says that if you believe in Jesus, what lives inside of you, is not just some, like, twisted, weak, fallible heart. What lives inside of you is the Holy Spirit himself. Can you fathom that? God -- Do you know that there are Christians who literally will take weeks off of work, spend thousands of dollars, fly around the world to Israel to see the place where the temple of God used to be? But do you know today where the temple of God is? Let me save you some money. That is so unbelievable to me that God himself, God is here. He's not far away, he's not distant. I might feel alone, but I'm not. I might think I have to do this with my own strength, I don't. I am filled, marked by God and filled with his spirit.

If that weren't enough, number 13, Christian you are also an heir. When you take your last breath, when this inch or two that we call life is over, there will just be happiness, and love, and affection, and acceptance, and some of you are so close. Statistically, I just crossed the half-way mark. I'm like, "I'm closer to seeing the face of God than I was before." And my inheritance and your inheritance is so great, we can't even fathom it. Front row tickets? Nothing compared to God. Falling in love? Nothing compared to God. Holding a grandchild? Shooting a 16 point

buck? That joy that you would feel in that moment is nothing. It's not a drop in a five-gallon bucket, it's not a drop in the ocean of what you and I will get to experience forever, and ever, and ever, and ever.

If that weren't enough, we go on to the last blank. How am I doing on time? Christians, through Jesus, we are also God's possession. We're God's own. You love your stuff, your car, your phone, your laptop, and God loves his stuff. He loves his people. He adores them. A couple days ago I was at a wedding. Two people, young people from our church got married, and I had the most spiritual experience; because there's one thing I do at every wedding. You should do it too. You should not look at the bride when she walks in, you should look at the groom. Have you ever done that before? This guy was a mess. And it was so beautiful. He had this... I don't even know how to describe it, he just bit his lip and he was... As his beautiful bride comes walking towards him. And what got me in that moment is the book of Isaiah says that as a groom rejoices over his bride, so God rejoices over us.

So, as you and I pursue gratitude, I have a bit of homework for you. Here it is. I want you to write down these 14 words and phrases somewhere where you can see them for the next 14 days. Okay? If you want to, jot them down on a little note card and stick it in your cup holder in your car or tape it up on your bathroom mirror. Or you can do what I did. I typed all 14 of those words into a note file, I snapshotted a screen picture, and I made it the wallpaper on my phone. I'm chosen, and holy, and blameless, and adopted, I'm graced, redeemed, forgiven. I'm included, saved, marked, Spirit filled. I am an heir of eternal life. I am God's, I'm God's.

And it's still a fight. But man, how good is it to know that every spiritual blessing is mine and yours in Christ? Let's pray.

Jesus, it's hard to imagine the face of our Father right now. Not angry, not frustrated, not annoyed, but his face shining upon us. Looking on us with favor. Better than a groom who is head over heels for his bride. Thank you. God, if you kept a record of sins, none of us could stand before you. If we could just see a print out of all the messed up things we've ever done, none of us would expect anything from you. But God, you threw that list away and you called us your own. Today, God, help us to remember that. We don't deserve a good life from you but we have eternal life from you. Help us to remember that no matter what happens to us this week or this day, nothing can touch all 14 and the many more blessings we didn't talk about today. Thank you, God, for the sentence that never seems to end; just like the life of yours that will never end. We're so grateful to be your own and we praise you today with grateful hearts because of everything that your Son has done. We ask it all in his name, and all of God's people say, amen.