

The Secret Weapon of Spiritual Growth

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[0 : 00] Well, my friends, my heart is full this morning. It's so good to be with you. I've missed you. It doesn't feel right. On a Sunday, we feel like pagans!

I know as I was singing and thinking, I was surveying a little bit, sneaking a peek around at you guys and saw this little one. Man, I'm telling you, just the blessings that we enjoy from God's hand and all the reasons that we have to be thankful to God.

And we just don't want the hardship of life or our enemy, the devil, to steal away the joy of being thankful to God. And I want to share a quick word with you because it was so poignant to me. The day before Thanksgiving, I saw in one of my neighbors, I was out in the yard and this car drives up and this guy walks up to the door with handfuls of bags and drops them at the doorstep and leaves.

And this is my neighbor that has resisted all of our attempts to be kind and offer her the Gospel and pray with her and that kind of thing. And so she hates God and she hates the world and she's a very bitter person.

[1 : 39] She's old and has had a hard life and we go weeks and never see her. That kind of thing. Thanksgiving Day came and as hard as this season is for us right now on a physical level, I have Suzanne.

You know? I have Suzanne in my life. For 42 years, my best and dearest friend. And that woman next door had nothing. And no one.

She's driven everybody out of her life. Everybody. Her relatives don't have anything to do with her. She has no friends. And she spent Thanksgiving totally alone.

Hermited away in her home. That's not a way to live, is it? That's not a way to live. And as heartbreaking as that is, it helped me to reflect on the goodness of God in my life that except for His grace, that's me.

That's me. I would hate God. I wouldn't care about you. And it would be all about me in some way. Isn't that true? Of all of us?

[2 : 55] And so that corresponds to the theme this morning that I want to bring to you. I want to leave Abraham for just a little while.

He's fine. The Lord has visited him and made him a promise. And so he's eagerly awaiting nine months when they'll have the baby.

And then Sodom and Gomorrah happen, right? We're almost on Sodom and Gomorrah. So if you've wondered about what that is really about in the Bible, what is Sodom and Gomorrah really about?

What this whole pillar of salt stuff and all the weirdness going on and stick around and let's see what the Bible has to say about God's judgment on the cities of that valley.

But for this morning, let's turn to a different flavor. I want to talk to you about the freedom of growth in Christ. This is a series that I did in Poland and I've tweaked this message to be more of something we can do on a Sunday morning.

[4 : 00] I was going to teach this a few weeks ago on our final Wednesday night session for the season and the stuff with Suzanne happened and I couldn't. So I held it over and said, oh good, actually, I'll just do this for the church because I wanted it to teach it on a Sunday anyway.

I wanted to do it. So we all get the benefit. What we'll be talking about is the secret weapon of spiritual growth. Now, you've heard me talk a little bit about this before and some of you already know what that secret weapon is.

But nevertheless, let's get into this together and it's going to afford me some passages that allow me to use some talking points to express to us this biblical attitude of gratefulness or thankfulness

to God about our lives.

Alright, so try and stay with me here as we move through this. There's much to say. Now, to begin with, do you agree that sometimes our Christianity doesn't look very Christian?

Can we say that about us though? Not about the person sitting next to us or a relative that professed Jesus. But can we say that about our life? Okay. Alright, see if you can relate to some of these admissions that I've heard from other Christians and in some ways experienced myself.

[5 : 11] I just don't seem to have much joy in my Christian life. I keep sinning the same way over and over again and it is so depressing.

I don't know what I'm doing wrong. One day I feel close to God and the next day it feels like I'm not even saved. Have you ever had that before?

Have you ever had doubts about your Christianity because of sin in your life? Have you ever thought, can God really forgive me for this again?

Isn't He getting tired of me doing this? Now, if we were honest about this, I think each of us could say, well, if we analyzed each one of our lives about those kinds of issues, we could probably come up with all kinds of differing reasons why those kinds of things happen in each of our lives.

It might be one thing for Ben and it might be another thing for me. But nevertheless, there would be a number of reasons why we experience things like that as a Christian. I don't even feel saved.

[6 : 20] I don't have any joy in my Christian life. That kind of thing. But I want to focus on one of those reasons that's common to each of us. And here it is. The Christian life is hard.

The Christian life is hard. making your life about Jesus doesn't make your problems go away. Right? Making your life about Jesus doesn't make suffering go away. It doesn't make your difficulties go away.

So the question then I want to ask, is there something we can do to help focus, steady, and calm our hearts in our battle with sin and with self?

Because we're not supposed to necessarily battle suffering or battle the trials. As Suzanne and I experienced this one right now that you know, very, very prominent in my life.

[7 : 23] I don't want to find myself battling against what I know God is wanting to do in our hearts through this trial. I don't want to find myself so focused on the problem itself that I miss relating to the Lord in a way that keeps my heart open to what He's wanting to show me as I get squeezed.

And that is happening. That's happening in my life. It happened profoundly this past week in particular. Sometimes the answers don't come as quickly as we would like and that can discourage us.

But what is it that can help focus and steady and calm our hearts in this battle with sin and self?

Well, there is something that you can do in your walk of faith with the Lord Jesus.

It will help you fight against stubborn sin. It will also help you have a more joyful outlook on your Christian life so that those circumstances don't drag you down and cause you to do this.

And you can actually see this in the posture of people as we suffer under these hard things in life that Christians are not immune to. You start to see this.

[8 : 40] You actually see it in the posture, don't you? You see people and what's happening is in a way that we can use an analogy, your focus, the focus of your heart is becoming more earthbound, more earthly.

You're becoming more earth-minded as that problem just absorbs you, right? Pulls you into yourself instead of lifting you and helping you stay heavenly-minded.

It's just, it's part of life. The Lord knows that and He's helped us understand what we're to do about this. So, we'll go to a familiar place, familiar to all of us.

It's one of my favorite places in the Bible. You know that. It's in Colossians 3. And I'm not going to camp out in this passage, but I am going to use it to help us develop some talking points about this subject of gratitude to God.

It's Colossians 3 and it's 15 through 17. The Bible says, Let the peace of Jesus Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body, one family, and be thankful.

[10 : 00] Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom, teaching, and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and then doing what?

Singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, doing what?

Giving thanks through Him to God the Father. So in each of these verses, Paul connects three spiritual actions with the same spiritual attitude of your heart.

And what is that heart attitude? It's being thankful and giving thanks to God. Now being thankful is that. It is a state of being. So being thankful is a way of saying this is who you are.

This is who you are in Christ. You have, in Jesus, become a thankful person. If you think about your life before Jesus, if you were old enough to live some life before you were converted, you can probably look back and say, you know, my life wasn't characterized so much by gratitude.

[11:09] gratitude. It might have been characterized by a whole bunch of other stuff, but not necessarily gratitude, right? Did you know that complaining, complaining, is a way of exposing a lack of gratitude in your heart toward the Lord, toward Jesus?

Jesus. So as we talk about this state of being, we then can move out of that and say, giving thanks to God flows from who I am in the Lord Jesus as I look to Him in gratitude.

I give thanks because I am thankful. And that's the way it works. Now, you need to hold on to that little statement there up on the screen because that's going to be the dividend for us as we move through this material.

You're going to see why that statement is so important and why I put it up there. Being thankful and giving thanks to God is the answer that we see here in Scripture about the secret weapon of our spiritual growth.

It's being thankful to God and then expressing thanks to Him. now, I want to keep our feet very grounded in reality here because I'm not preaching pie in the sky.

[12:27] Is it realistic to think that we can live in an attitude of gratitude to God when life is so full of suffering and pain and doubt and worry and hardship and on and on the list goes.

Is it, Jeff, is it realistic? Does the Bible really prescribe that? Well, folks, in this passage alone, we see that we are being commanded to be thankful.

It's not a suggestion. Christian. This is an attitude of the Christian life that we should be carrying with us as a matter of course. It should be an attitude that helps define who we are and how we live. Are you surprised to hear that? An attitude of gratitude toward the Lord. Now, I want to tell you that one of the strongest enemies of Christ-likeness, when I talk about spiritual growth that I had up here a moment ago on the screens, spiritual growth is about you and I as Christians becoming more like Jesus.

That's what growth is defined as. It's not me growing just simply in a knowledge of the Bible or religious stuff or how to act like a Christian, like come in here and know what to do.

[13:48] That's not what we're talking about. Spiritual growth is about becoming more like Jesus in the way that we live, the way that we speak, think, and do.

If I'm not becoming more like Jesus, I'm not growing as a Christian. Alright? I'm taking on more and more of the character of Jesus as it's expressed in my life toward others.

My outlook on life and how I live that life. Now, one of the strongest enemies of Christ-likeness is a lack of thankfulness. A lack of thankfulness battles against your spiritual growth, your conformity to Jesus and His character.

So, we need to follow the Lord's example of giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Now, here's something we also need to understand about being grateful to God.

Thankfulness is an attitude of your heart to God which needs to be refreshed and revitalized each day. this is not a one and done proposition.

[14:52] You don't start on Sunday saying thank you to God and the songs you sing and now you're good until next Sunday. It doesn't work like that, does it? No. It needs to be refreshed and revitalized each day of your life.

So, I want to take you to Colossians 2. Colossians 2 and this is where we get into the nitty gritty where the rubber meets the road as it were and we're going to look at verse 6.

Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, that is, as you have been saved, born again, as you have become a Christian by faith in Christ, so walk in Him.

You have been made a different creature. You've been given a different state of being. You are now in Christ, unioned with Him by faith. and so walk in Him.

That is, so now live out who God has made you to be in His Son. This is a radical spiritual transformation that can only come from Heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[16:00] This is why Christians talk this way about this kind of thing. This is how the Bible describes it. Now look at verse 7 with me, if you would. Since you are in Christ, walk in Him, that is, lead your life in Christ, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith in Him just as you were instructed and, how does the verse end?

You know, you just can't get away from this. It's like election. For those of us who struggle with election, hang in there, just keep reading the Bible because pretty soon you're going to see it on every page.

As God saves people by His grace through faith in Christ Jesus and it's a work that He alone does. It's the same way here. We are called to walk with Jesus in a thankful heart and we're to refresh that thankfulness every single day of our lives.

Let me catch up with myself here. There's the passage that I just offered you. Now here's the question that I want to ask. In light of now talking about what this walk looks like in thankfulness, what can we do to live more consistently in an overflow of gratitude that this verse tells us to do in our walk with Jesus?

Jeff, is it really possible to have an overflow of gratitude even in the most difficult times of life? Yes, it is.

[17:39] I call it the secret weapon of spiritual growth, but that's just something to draw people in. The Bible doesn't make a secret of it at all. It's very obvious to us.

To begin with, the answer that we have comes at the end of verse 6 as we see that we're to walk in or walk like Jesus. Do you see that?

So walk in Him. That's where this answer begins as we want to talk about overflowing with gratitude. We've got to be close to Jesus to do that.

Or we start losing perspective, especially when that hardship squeezes in on us. There's a verse in Scripture that I want you to see here, so I'm going to throw it up here.

We are to walk in Jesus and walk like Jesus because the Bible says the one who says he abides in Jesus ought himself to walk in the same manner as he walked.

[18:35] Do you see that? 1 John 2.6 A life overflowing with thankfulness is a life patterned after Jesus.

What a concept, folks. A life patterned after Jesus. And so now I'll give you just a second to take stock. Take stock of where you are and who you are and what's going on in your life and ask yourself how much of what I've just lived over the last six days was overflowing with thankfulness showing that I am walking in a life patterned after Christ.

How much of that life was patterned after Jesus? How much of it was a conscious effort to live like Jesus lived? Now please don't allow yourself to think impossible.

No. The Bible is commanding us to live like this and to walk like He walked. It's not impossible. It's just impossible without Jesus. But with the Lord Jesus we can consistently live a life like this.

Not perfectly like Jesus did. He already lived that perfect life for us. We come behind Him now and consistently look to Him and walk with Him even as we stumble along in life and trust Him.

[19:59] Now here's what this verse tells us. It tells us that our lack of overflowing gratitude stunts our spiritual growth because it is a sign of something wrong in our heart toward the Lord.

a lack of gratitude is the sign in your heart that something is wrong in your heart toward the Lord. Not just another person.

Not just toward life. You're not just misperceiving the situation or misperceiving life. There's something going on in your heart with the Lord that's not good.

That doesn't have a place there. So I'm going to ask you a question now. Is it possible for you and I to suffer, to feel sadness, to feel a sense of grief, to weep, and at the same time have a sense of overflowing joy and gratitude to God?

Really? Alright, that was quick. Well, let's bear that out and see if you're right. Yeah, I think so too.

[21:22] Alright, let me get to this then. What does ungratefulness or thanklessness foster in your life? A little more bad news before we get to the good.

What does it look and sound like when we're not living with grateful hearts in our walk with Jesus? Now, I want you to notice again that I am making the issue of ingratitude about your relationship with God.

Not with another person, not about the circumstance, because what I'm going through right now is pretty unique to us. There are fewer than 10,000 people in all of the U.S.

that have the disease Suzanne has. So what she's going through right now is rare for people with this disease. It's not rare, but for most, what about what you suffer through?

What about what's going on with you? What about things? we might have some commonalities in all of that because life is hard, remember? But at the same time, I'm not focusing your attention on the problem, the circumstance, or another person, or what you don't have and wish you did, or anything like that right now.

[22 : 36] I'm simply saying, what does ungratefulness or thanklessness foster in your life, and what does it look and sound like when we're not living with grateful hearts in our walk with the Lord?

Because that's the issue. What does that look like? And here's the answer. Thanklessness or ingratitude or ungratefulness, whichever word you want to use, produces that in our life, and much more.

There are spinoffs of all of those, right? Apathy. This is a I give up. I just give up. I just give in. I can't fight this.

I'm just going to have to learn to live with it. Anger. We get very angry about this stuff. Rebellion. Unbelief, unkindness, a lack of concern.

We can see this in relationships that we have. We express discontentment. We get moody and irritable. There's lack of commitment, lack of persevering.

[23 : 38] And it's just to name a few. All of these attitudes and actions work against your spiritual growth, your conformity to Jesus' character. So, I want to outline now, look at this, this is going to scream at you a bit.

When we made this slide and I was going through and reading them and I said, Suzanne, they're going to think I'm hollering at them with this bad boy. But six ways thankfulness helps us become more like Jesus.

Now, I'm very indebted to some teaching by Susan Lutz. I use her little booklet on thankfulness in my counseling ministry quite a bit.

I try to get people to the point where I can talk to them about this because it's such a powerful way to fight these different issues that we face as we experience hard things in life.

Thankfulness even when it hurts is the title of her booklet. So, she's come up with six items here and what I did was I took them and tweaked them and kind of filled in because the booklet's real small.

[24 : 38] So, I filled these in a little bit for me to be able to talk with you. It all relates to what we're seeing in Colossians 3 15-17 and I'll bring in some other verses where we see let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.

Alright, that's the first one. We need peace in the Lord and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you and be thankful.

And then finally in verse 17 whatever you do in word or deed, do in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks through him to God the Father. Alright, what is one of these first ways then?

Thankfulness keeps you in an attitude of worship and ceaseless prayer. Now, just think about these with me. Thankfulness keeps you in an attitude of worship and ceaseless prayer.

You have heard probably Paul's teaching, the Apostle Paul teaching in 1 Thessalonians 5.17 that we are to be in an attitude of ceaseless prayer before the Lord.

[25 : 40] Well, what does that mean? What does it mean to have this attitude of worship or gratitude or ceaseless prayer constantly before the Lord? It simply means that you are God conscious as you experience life.

You don't check out. You know, I'm with the Lord right now and I'm aware of the Lord and I'm seeking to honor the Lord and then for a little while I'll just kind of cruise and you know, I'm winging it.

I'm solo now. Christians can't live like that, right? What happens when you do? You get in trouble, don't you? You start losing perspective. You don't fly solo like that.

You can't do away with Jesus, right? He lives in you. But sometimes we act like He doesn't.

Thankfulness helps keep you heavenly minded so that you view every circumstance and relationship in your life as opportunities for you to make a choice.

You will choose to respond to God in faith or you will choose to move away from God to act on your own wisdom. And that's what thankfulness does.

[26 : 54] It puts you in a position where you're either going to be truly thankful, which means I'm going to adopt an attitude that honors the Lord and that's based in His wisdom. It's the only way that can happen.

Or I'm not. And I'm going to act on my own wisdom. And so you're going to be grumpy and angry and irritable and moody and all this kind of thing. God uses every single issue.

You'll hear me say this throughout these. God uses every issue and relationship of your life to refine your faith and to conform you to Jesus. God wastes nothing.

Nothing. He has His purposes for your good in every situation of life that you and I face. Our sin and our circumstances are not greater than the grace of God.

Now, here's something else. Thankfulness to God, especially in difficult situations, helps you remember that God is with you. How comforting.

[27 : 57] How comforting. You are not alone. Now, you will feel alone. You cannot let your feelings rule.

You are not alone. So, you're going to be challenged in your gratitude to stand on God's promises or to live by your feelings. If you live by your feelings, you're going to be on a roller coaster all your life.

All your life. And all the people around you are going to know that about you. And they're going to learn to relate to you like that. Right? I did this growing up with my dad.

My dad was bad to drink. Again, for those of you who don't know, my father got saved late in life and was a different man. Thank the Lord. But when I was growing up, he was bad to drink.

And we would always measure who my dad was going to be in any given moment to let us know how we would relate to him. Am I going to get angry dad?

[28 : 58] Moody dad? Short tempered dad? Violent dad? Or am I going to get the other dad? And listen, we were able to tell what dad we were going to get as we lived on the third floor.

We lived on the third floor of a complex, converted barracks, on a base in Germany, and stone steps.

We would listen to him come up the steps. We could tell by his footfalls what dad we were going to get. I promise you, you learn to do that. And if any of you have ever lived with somebody like this, you learn to listen and look for the signs, don't you?

And you know what you're going to get. People need to get Jesus from you. The Jesus who lives in you.

They need Jesus more than they need Jeff. Right? And so, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. And gratitude has a huge impact on helping me be consistent in my walk with Jesus and in my ministry to you, to my wife.

[30 : 18] And I don't want people to suffer because I've tried to make it about me. Folks, you're not alone. Listen to this statement. God listens to you, God knows you, and God is steadfastly loving you.

Don't let your feelings or the circumstance tell you differently. Thankfulness helps you remember that God designed this situation of life for you.

Now, can you get your mind around that? God designed. You hear people say, well, the Lord's allowing it. Listen, I'll go you better than that.

God designed. Say, Jeff, are you saying God designed the situation you guys are in right now?

Yeah, absolutely. I believe in a sovereign God. I don't believe this is beyond the sovereignty of the Lord, the design of the Lord.

I'm not saying that God created or caused this stone situation. My wife was born with this. Not at all. I don't believe God is the author of sin.

[31 : 23] A lot of that is just due to sin. We're in a fallen world, right? That's what sin does. But God designs these situations that He would teach us to look to Him. Let me give you the second one real quickly.

Thankfulness helps you see life through God's eyes. What am I talking about? Well, thankfulness moves your eyes off of you. It moves your eyes off your problems and on to Christ as He loves you through each situation of life.

So being thankful, here's what it does, being thankful resets your heart from being problem focused to being Christ focused. focused. Did you hear me say from being problem focused to being solution focused?

No, you did not. If you heard that, you didn't listen. I said it shifts you from being problem focused to being Christ focused. Now, do I want my situation to resolve with what I see my wife going through? Well, sure. Do I want to hear this week they're going to get her in? Yes, absolutely. There's nothing wrong with me praying like that, trusting God for that, asking God, begging God, you know, please Lord give us favor with these people and there's nothing wrong with that.

[32 : 40] But if that's all I do, if 24-7 all I'm thinking about is that, somebody needs to ask me, Jeff, where's Jesus in this? Who? Oh, right.

The Lord. That's exactly what your enemy wants. That's earthly mindedness without heavenly mindedness. So, no, I want to be Christ focused.

I want to keep remembering, Lord, you're in this. You're in this. You're seeing us through. You're not, listen, thankfulness helps you realize you are not defined by the issues of life, but by the Lord of life.

Okay? This is very important. That's why I called it the secret weapon of growth in Christ. Christ. So, when you feel threatened by life, overwhelmed by life, covered up by life, when you're struggling with perspective, when you're tempted to feel sorry for yourself, search for the one thing to remind you that God is with you.

And you shouldn't have to look far. Are you breathing? Did you get up today? Did the sun come up? God, these are all signs that God's still on the throne and He's letting you stick around.

[34 : 03] Now, I know that sounds a little bit trivial, but I'm telling you folks, you don't have to look far to be thankful. Is your heart still beaten? Do you still have breath for life to make a difference for Jesus?

Yeah, you do. what did Joseph tell his brothers who had sold him into slavery and brought so much suffering into Joseph's life for years after that?

And Joseph didn't do anything wrong. He said this to his brothers when they met him years and years later in Egypt. He said, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

I want to take you there real quickly and show you this because it's in Genesis and it's how it all ends. If you go to Genesis chapter 45, Genesis 45 and just look at verse 5 with me.

We're kind of jumping in, but I think you'll see the point. Well, let's do verse 4 so you'll get the context. Then Joseph said to his brothers, please come closer to me.

[35 : 21] And they came closer and he said, I am your brother Joseph whom you sold into Egypt. Now this is years later. Joseph has risen to be the number two power in the land of Egypt.

And now his brothers have come because there's a great famine in Israel and they've come to try to get food from Egypt. And he reveals himself to his brothers and he says, now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here.

What does he say? For God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

Notice verse 7. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.

Now therefore it was not you who sent me here but God and he has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

[36 : 26] Hurry, go up to my father and say to him, thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me and do not delay.

Then you go over to chapter 50 as Genesis ends and you see the verse I told you about in verse 20. He says to his brothers, as for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result to preserve many people alive.

Now you see the result. You see why he's saying that. God did this. You threw me down in that hole and then sold me into slavery and you thought you were getting rid of me and the whole time God was working behind the scenes to do this very thing.

Now Joseph could have said, you know Lord, I'd have just gone. You just have to ask, I'd have gone. You didn't have to sell me into slavery and put me in prison and you know, I'm listening. He didn't do that. He did not do that, did he? He said to his own heart, the Lord gets to choose the way he does this. Do you think I would choose to go through what I'm going through the way I am right now?

[37 : 38] No. Would you? No. No. No. That's not the issue. It's looking to the Lord and realize God is good and he is doing a good thing through this whether I see it or not.

that's not the point that I see it. I know it. Because the word tells me this about God and his character and he tells me that he is working good in this.

I may die and not see the good that he worked in this. But I don't need that to have a joyful heart and know that God is being faithful. And that's where you'll be tempted is God being faithful to you. So God was working in Joseph's life even through his pain, through his suffering, so that many, many people were blessed by what God did through Joseph and his wisdom. Now, look up here on the screen.

You need to allow your heart to be thankful so that you can remember that you are not defined by your failures, your sins, your weaknesses, or even your enemies.

[38 : 46] God will always have the strongest and last word about your life. Always. Number three, thankfulness helps you overcome Satan's schemes against your heart trusting Jesus.

We already know that Satan is a predator. He's a spiritual predator. He preys on people, on their souls. He's a liar, he's a schemer, he's a murderer, and he seeks to deceive you from having a simple and pure and sincere relationship with the Lord.

You feel sorry for yourself? Because you doubt God. And Satan tempts you in that. You feel sorry for yourself because you doubt God.

You rehearse the worst case options and you dig yourself into a hole of fear and of worry because you doubt God.

This is a God issue. It's not divorced from the Lord. Thankfulness helps you step back, it helps you take a spiritual breath and identify Satan's attempts to make it about you, to sour your heart toward the Lord.

[39 : 57] Making it about you sours your heart toward God because you make a poor God and you feel it. Isn't it insane that we try to play God and when things go south we just dig in like a tick and try to do it over we're laughing because it's true, right?

Isn't that true? And you just think Jeff. And what does the Lord do? Does the Lord say, yeah, you know what? I knew that was coming and I knew that's who you were so I'm done with you.

No. He gives us Jesus, his son, on a bloody cross to rescue us from ourselves and to help us know a life of joy and gratitude beyond all this, in spite of it.

So, you bring or you brought all kinds of doubts, you brought all kinds of habits and patterns of thinking into your new life with Jesus.

That stuff didn't just go all away, you brought all that in your new life with Jesus. Thankfulness is one of the most effective ways for you to put off the old habits, the old ways of thinking and living and to put on the new self who looks to Jesus to help you see his reality.

[41 : 22] His reality about who you are, what's happening. That helped Joseph a lot in his perspective on what was going on with him. They threw him into prison for what was it, years?

I think it was over two years. He was in prison. You know why he was in prison? Why was he in prison? Why did they put Joseph in prison? Because he refused to have intimate relations with another man's wife as he worked in his household.

The wife said, come lay with me, and he said no. And she tried to trick him and trick him and trick him to get him into bed with her, and he kept saying no until finally she got so bitter she accused him of doing it to her husband, and her husband threw him in prison, and the man was innocent. And yet God used him in prison, didn't he? And kept using him. And Joseph didn't complain. He stayed faithful to God.

And that's right, amen. thankfulness helps you keep your heart fixed on God's promises to you as his child.

[42 : 34] So you learn to interpret what's happening to you based on the truth of God's word, on what God says is right and honorable and good and pure and true.

And if you're taking notes, that's Philippians 4, 6-8. It culminates in verse 8. Think on these things. And it tells you what to think on.

In other words, it tells you how to have perspective. At the beginning of verse 6, it says, be anxious for nothing, but in all things. And then it ends with verse 8.

Fix your mind on what is honorable, pure, good, etc. God tells us how to have a perspective in hard things. The temptation then is for you to see God's word through the lens of your, now please hear

this, this is me combating the nonsense of psychology in our world today that has just done such a terrible disservice to us.

The temptation is for you to see God's word through the lens of your personal experience. So that we elevate personal experience to be things like we say, well your experience is what matters.

[43 : 42] We will actually hear people say it's not the truth that matters, it's what you experience that matters and what truth is to you. And I say that's not right.

It's what God says is true. That's where we stand. That's where we stand. Your personal experience can become more real to you than God's truth about your own life.

especially when it comes to your feelings. Listen, you need to let God's word have the last word. Let God's word have the last word.

In other words, we look at the problem and we allow the problem to umpire or rule our hearts rather than the peace of Jesus and how we interpret what is happening to us.

The problem. where we fix the eyes of our faith is going to determine what we trust in for that moment or situation. And if you're trusting in yourself and your own capabilities, then that's the limit of where your faith will go.

[44 : 50] That's the limit of where you'll look for help. Alright, so what does thankfulness do? Look, thankfulness helps us make meaning in the moment based on God's faithfulness.

God's faithfulness. If you turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, give you a little insight into what I'm saying here, and then we'll go to the last couple real quickly.

1 Corinthians 10, 13. Let me make this statement once again. Thankfulness helps us make meaning in the moment based on God's faithfulness.

So we're experiencing some temptation. We're experiencing some aspect of suffering in our lives.

What do we need? We need a perspective that bases us or grounds us in God's faithfulness.

Here's a verse that will help you do that. No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man. And what is right in the middle of this verse?

[45 : 55] God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the same temptation, with the very thing that is tempting to overwhelm you.

God will use that to provide the way of escape also so that you will be able to endure it. Your God is more powerful than what is tempting you, what is threatening you.

He will take the very thing threatening you and He will use it to help you move through it and see what? God is faithful. So the very thing that is tempting to wring you out, God will take that very thing and wring it out to use it so that you will be able to move through that situation looking to the faithfulness of God in your life.

The most important phrase in that verse is this, God is faithful. That's the center. Now hold on to that.

God is faithful. You're not facing anything in life that other people don't face. And it's common to being human. You listening to me now? It's common to being human.

[47 : 08] You're human. And so you're going to face weakness. You're human. And so you're going to experience things in life that are going to tempt you, that are going to slap you around.

All is not lost. Why? God is faithful. And you camp there. You don't camp in the weakness. You camp in God's faithfulness.

See, I have a choice right now, don't I? As your pastor, I have a choice. I'm a husband. I can camp out in my weakness. And believe me, brothers and sisters, that has been a severe temptation.

If you've ever watched somebody you love suffer, there's no worse, I don't know of a worse feeling in the world than the helplessness of relieving someone you love from suffering. I don't.

If I camp out there, I'm dead. I'm just like you. I'm gone. I've got to camp out on God is faithful. God is faithful.

[48 : 09] And that's where I try to stay. thankfulness to God helps you see yourself through the eyes of the Lord.

That's number five. So God's truth cuts into the joint and marrow of who you really are. Gratitude to God helps you learn how to apply the wisdom of God to specific matters in your life.

And if you need some verses, that's Hebrews 4, 12, and 13, where the Word of God is described as a two-edged sword that cuts deep into the joint and marrow of who you are, your identity, your personhood.

God seeks and finds you out through the treasure and truth of His Word and exposes what's really there so that now you can deal with it. You can identify it. You don't stay deceived.

You don't stay ignorant. Now it's out in the open and you can apply the truth to that. And God uses difficult circumstances to reveal, to squeeze you and reveal that in your life.

[49 : 19] The Lord tells you to let the peace of God rule your heart and umpire your heart and be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in your heart and be thankful. In all you think, say, and do, do it in the name of Jesus, that is, according to His will, and be thankful.

So the peace of God, the Word of God, the will of God in Christ, all working in your heart, regardless of your circumstances, that's the motivator for being thankful.

God is working in my life. Thankfulness about God's work in your heart and provision for your life, those things help you affirm to your heart, Jesus is working His good in my life.

Folks, that's so important because the circumstance might not change, it might get worse. Right? What if you don't get instant relief? Can you still see the work of God in your life?

Yes, if you'll take a spiritual outlook on it. And that's what you need to do. No matter what the issue, Jesus is using it to make you more like Him.

[50 : 25] And knowing that that is true for you, how should you respond to the Lord, not the circumstance to the Lord. Look, finally, thankfulness is contagious.

It increases your influence for Christ and others. It helps define and shape your relationships as you live by faith in God's goodness to you. It's personal.

You complain less and comfort others more when you're thankful. You demand less and do more for others when you're thankful.

You are less selfish and you are more servant hearted toward others when you're thankful. Is that not true? Amen. Now, do you see why your enemy wants to keep you where you're not being thankful?

Because it makes a moody, irritable, selfish, prideful person out of you. If you don't, thankfulness helps diminish your struggles with things like fear, worry, anxiety, all the kinds of things that flood in on us when uncertainty is looming, when helplessness is monumental, when these different dark things are closing in and are so prominent, an attitude of gratitude will diminish those things in your life if not dispel them.

[51 : 55] this is very powerful. You're no longer threatened by the unknown. You're not threatened by difficult situations because you know you have a God who is supreme and sovereign over all of that.

What hope, y'all? That's such hope. Hope. Boy, and that's what we need. Thankfulness teaches your heart to respond to God and not to circumstances.

It's not that you don't work the problem, you just don't let the problem be God and define your life. By being thankful to God, you're learning to bring that attitude of gratitude into challenging situations.

Look, you are thankful because you know that God designs and uses the circumstances for your spiritual growth. You understand this, people cannot thwart God's purposes for you.

Do you hear that? People are not your enemies. They cannot thwart God's purposes for you. So listen, here's what this means.

[53 : 05] You do not have to be intimidated by or afraid of other people in hard circumstances. You don't have to manipulate, control, and abuse them. You can trust the Lord.

They're not sovereign. God is. Now, one of the reasons we respond in anger, why we're demanding, impatient, irritable, fearful, and easily hurt by others is we are responding to them instead of first responding to God.

Responding to God in our hearts before we respond to someone else is what we need to get accustomed to. God in our hearts before God in our hearts before we move to.

This is another way that I've said, I'm just saying it a different way, don't be problem focused, be Christ focused. It does again, it doesn't mean you don't work the problem. It just means you don't allow the problem to be God, to overwhelm!

To overwhelm you, define you, drag you down so that all of your resources and everything that you are, are being poured into the problem. that's how you're supposed to serve Jesus.

[54 : 14] Okay? You with me? Thankfulness keeps your heart primed to Christ and His will for your life and relationships.

So, in any given situation, what does it look like for you to please Jesus in your response to someone? That's the question I want to end with. Listen, in any given situation, what does it look like for you to please Jesus in your response to someone, to the situation?

Have you first considered responding to God before you begin to open your mouth or act in the situation? That's another way of me asking you, where's Jesus in all this?

That's a sobering question, isn't it? Where does Jesus fit in all this for you? Does He squeeze in just a little bit back here? Or is Jesus front and center?

Here's something interesting. I'm going to close with an extended quote. When I was preparing this material this past summer, I had to do nine one-hour sessions on spiritual growth to teach in Poland.

[55 : 32] And as I was preparing all of this, it wasn't long before Dr. MacArthur, John MacArthur died. And he preached his final sermon just before we left for Poland.

And it was so interesting. I finished this lesson and there was one more after this one. Got it done. And I was reviewing all of this.

And I think it was Suzanne found this message from Dr. MacArthur and it turned out to be his last sermon. This was the last sermon John preached.

And I want to share it with you because when I read it, now remember I had just finished these lessons. This one in particular. And this is what John said.

The final thing. Quote, it's been since July that I've preached here on a Sunday. So he'd been out of the pulpit for some time. That wouldn't have been my choice but I think as Grace Church just sung sometimes our trials are blessings in disguise.

[56 : 55] And God has purposes that we would never have been able to fulfill if we weren't put into some kind of stress. Now I can tell you, I've had three heart surgeries and surgery on my lungs in those last few months I've been away.

And I'm still here so I'm thankful to the Lord for that. And I have so much to be thankful for. In fact, when people ask me how I feel, I say I'm thankful.

I'm just thankful I see the good and gracious and kind and providential hand of God in every vicissitude of my life. Every hard experience, every challenge, whatever that challenge may be, I see the good hand of divine providence operating in ways that would never have been possible were it not for the trials.

So I genuinely and truly am grateful and I can be grateful because I know the outcome of everything. The outcome of everything is to the glory of God and the benefit of his children, right? He said that. So I want to make sure that I allow my own heart to rejoice in the fact that God will perfect me and will bring glory to himself through my trials probably more than any other way.

[58 : 23] And one thing that I have found is that my thanksgiving has increased because it's in the trials when you're face to face with things that could easily overpower you and you have no particular control over them at all.

that you find your faith is tested and out of that testing has come an immense amount of gratitude to the Lord.

He has revealed himself in all these issues, all these trials in so many ways that I can't even begin to count. And I think when you're in a situation like this for a true believer thankfulness should be the first reaction.

because the Lord is doing his work on the one hand and on the second hand you're getting close to heaven and we rejoice in that reality. He had no idea what was about to happen or did he?

In Colossians 3 if you want to look at it for a moment Colossians 3 15 just a reminder let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and here's a very brief command be thankful be thankful now down in verse 17 it says whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks through him to God the Father.

[59 : 52] That's a New Testament counterpart to say Psalm 103 verse 2 which says bless the Lord oh my soul and forget none of his benefits. That was John's last sermon and I read that and thought brother this is where I learned it.

I learned this from him just sitting under his ministry and following his life and we're thankful to God for the goodness of his heart especially in the hard situations of life aren't we?

Let's pray together. Father. Well dear Father in heaven you are good and you are gracious and you are kind and I thank you for helping your people this morning to remain attentive and dialed in to

this very important topic of living in gratitude to you in our lives no matter what but especially in the times that are hard and the times that we're doubting and we're anxious and we're uncertain. life can close in on us so fast Father and you know too well because you took on human form becoming the Lord Jesus Christ and walked this earth and scripture tells us you were tempted in every way that we are and yet without sin and so we thank you that you've overcome what threatens us.

You are more powerful than what threatens us and now you have given us your promises to keep us. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ Father.

[61 : 29] We thank you for the tenderness of his heart and we thank you that with Jesus we are never alone. We never ever face these things alone. So help us to look to you in joyful gratitude knowing that you are doing a heavenly work in us and that the circumstance and situation can never ever change or overpower us in that reality.

Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for our time together. It's in his name we pray. Amen.