

THANKSGIVING LEFTOVERS

Dec. 1, 2019

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: So what's your favorite part of Thanksgiving?

[Congregation shouts out answers]

Just all at one time, please!

[Congregation laughs]

How many of you want to vote for the food as your favorite part of Thanksgiving? Uh, there's about a dozen of us. Okay? **[Laughs]** How many of you want to vote for the parade as your favorite part of Thanksgiving? Last service we didn't get one; we were going "zippo." Not one hand for the parade. Alright; that's two services in a row. How many want to vote for football; last time, football got about six. We're about six, even though the service is larger. Six! Okay. How many of you want to vote for family and friends? Aw, you know that's the right answer, come on!

[Congregation laughs]

How many of you want to vote for being off work?

[Congregation cheers]

See, now we get to the true story! **[Laughs]** How many of you want to vote for leftovers?

[Congregation cheers]

If I only get one vote, that's what I'm going for! How many of you – when you get up the day after Thanksgiving – open that refrigerator, and it is filled with pure goodness, a tear doesn't run down your eye?

[Congregation laughs]

Right? I mean, it's just loaded with carbohydrates! We LOVE Thanksgiving, right? There's pies; there's goodness!

You know, for 40 days before Thanksgiving, this ministry focuses on gratitude. We've been doing that for 28 years. Over and over again, we dedicate 40 days to focus on the power of gratitude. So today, I want to talk about leftovers. Because today there is so much scientific research on the power of gratitude. When we began this process – we began dedicating 40 days – there wasn't a lot of research on gratitude. You know, Oprah had done her gratitude journal ... but there wasn't a lot of scientific research on the power of gratitude. And now, the scientific research is huge. That, when a soul spends time giving thanks, there are so many benefits! There are so many ramifications of this. Because our soul wants to give thanks.

And when we're not giving thanks, something's out of line. Something's wrong. Something's upside down. Because our soul is designed to give thanks to God. Over and over again, our soul wants to give thanks. And when we don't do that, we know that we are deeply involved in the drama of our life.

Have you ever been so locked into the drama of your life that you felt like there was nothing to give thanks for? That you were literally the only soul on the planet who had nothing to give thanks for? And sometimes, when we get in our own little world – we get in our own little drama – we actually believe that there is nothing to give thanks for. And then we're reminded to give thanks anyway. And something begins to change within us, because we acknowledge the goodness of God.

So the affirmation that we've been holding through this season is, "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*" Will you say that with me?

[With congregation]: "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*"

And so I know that there's a part of us that says, "*Well, Richard, that's nice; that was November. But this is now December, and we're moving on.*"

Well, what if we don't? What if we just take this one little moment to just focus on some of the scientific research that proves that gratitude makes a difference? And so I have 10 points that I want to share with you today of all scientific research that proves that gratitude matters.

The first one is: there was a study done for *Emotion* magazine in 2014 that showed that **gratitude actually opens the door in your relationships**. We know that gratitude is good manners. How many of you were taught to say "thank you" after everything when you were a kid? Over and over again? Right? Write the thank you note ... Thank you; thank you; thank you.

There's actually a study which found that thanking acquaintances – people that you kind of know, maybe people you work with or kind of know – actually creates a stronger ongoing relationship when you thank them. That, whether it's a stranger holding the door for you, or a quick note to a coworker to say thank you for a project they helped out with, gratitude over and over increases the quality of all relationships. And, in fact, what they found out: that people who had the strongest relationships (by their own judgment) – people who felt like their relationship was great – said that gratitude was a regular part of their relationship.

How many of you like to be thanked by your partner? How many of you would like a partner that would thank you?

[Congregation laughs]

Right? And so, over and over again, what we know is that, as we give thanks for our partner – as we give thanks for the people who are the closest to us – they actually respond to that. They actually like to hear how grateful we are for them. And it actually improves the quality of our relationship.

Two: Gratitude literally improves your physical health. Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains, as reported in a study in 2012. Not surprisingly, grateful people were also more likely to take advantage of health care; they exercised more; they attended regular check-ups on a regular basis; and it contributed to their longevity. So gratitude actually scientifically has been proven to increase your physical health.

Three: Gratitude improves your psychological health. Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions. Dr. Richard Emmons, leading gratitude researcher, has done multiple studies that show that gratitude actually releases toxic emotions. And I believe that number two and number three are related; because

as you release toxic emotions, do we usually feel better? Yes! Physically better! We feel better! That, as we release the toxic emotions...

How many of you have ever been in drama? Anybody?

[Congregation laughs]

Anybody ever been resentful? What they find is that, as you give thanks – even in the presence of what you're resentful for – if you can find something to be thankful for, even in the presence of resentment, it actually clears your body of negativity. Over and over again, if you want a solution for something that's going on with your health or psychologically... Over and over again, if you spend more time giving thanks, you actually cleanse your soul of the bitterness of the past, the resentments of the past, the pain of the past, the drama of the past.

Four: Gratitude enhances your sense of empathy and reduces aggression. Right? There was a study done at the University of Kentucky in 2012, and participants who were higher in gratitude actually showed that they were less likely to retaliate **[laughs]** ... I just love this idea that we're testing what's your likelihood of retaliation, you know?

So gratitude actually lowers your sense of retaliating against negative feedback, right? So the more grateful you are, the less likely you are to be involved in road rage.

[Congregation laughs]

Right? The more grateful you are, the less likely you are to have a knock-down, drag-out the day after Thanksgiving at a sale!

[Congregation laughs]

Thanksgiving actually makes us better people! We're more kind; we're more considerate; we're more empathetic.

And gratitude does all that! Studies show in 2011 that **gratitude actually helps people sleep better**. How many of you have an issue with sleeping? Anybody else, like me, that sometimes doesn't sleep? There was a study in 2011 in *Applied Psychology* that showed that, if you spend 15 minutes a day before you go to sleep – writing down the things for which you are grateful – you will sleep longer and you will have a higher quality of sleep. Because before you go to sleep, you focus on the things that you are the most grateful for.

Six: Gratitude improves your self-esteem. In 2014 there was a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* that found athletes who gave thanks for whatever was going on in their life actually competed at a higher level. And it actually made them better in every area of their life, but – as it applied to sports – it actually made them more effective in their sport.

Seven: Gratitude increases your mental strength. For years, researchers have shown that gratitude not only reduces stress, but it plays a major role in behavior. There was a study done by Dr. Emmons that also showed that ... They took a group of 411 students at University of Pennsylvania. And the 411 students did a variety of activities every week. And the week that they had to write a thank you note – and actually deliver it to the person they were grateful for – their happiness went up through the roof. It was through the roof! And the thing that was staggering about that is that level of happiness actually

lasted for up to 30 days. So if you write a thank you note to somebody in your life whose done something – and you deliver it to them, you give it to them – your happiness actually goes up for 30 days! That means that we only have to write 12 thank you notes a year...

[Congregation laughs]

Right? **[Laughs]** ... to have a higher level of happiness than we've ever had before! Right?

Nine: Gratitude also relieves stress and anxiety. Multiple studies show that it relieves stress and anxiety.

And ten: And this is my big take-away from this year. This is the one that I really have been practicing this year. **Gratitude helps us know our own greatness.**

What I want you to see in this one is that, through the activity of giving thanks, you actually begin to realize that you were created in the image and likeness of God.

You know, when we look at the Christmas story, what we see over and over again is: what the angels do, over and over again, is sing the praises of God. That's what they do; they just sing the praises of God. They sing, "*Hallelujah!*" They rejoice in all the good works of God.

And what I want you to see today is that, the more time you spend giving thanks, the more time you realize that you really were created in the image and likeness of God. The more time you spend giving thanks, the more you realize how blessed you are. And the more you realize how important you are in the infinite scheme of things.

And the thing that really changed this for me was last week's *Daily Word* on November 24. It was a Sunday. And the *Daily Word* was gratitude. I'm going to share it with you in case you missed it. It said:

"I embrace gratitude. I am filled with the awareness of greatness. It might be tempting to think that we need things or events to be grateful for before we can feel genuine gratitude. However, Unity minister Eric Butterworth suggests that it's possible to experience the feeling of gratitude without needing a special reason to be grateful. Just feel it, he advised. He added that we can simply allow ourselves to feel gratitude: that the flow of intelligence and love and peace and power come through us and manifest effectively. The practice of gratitude, Eric Butterworth explained, gets us into the fullness of "great-fullness" consciousness. As I generate gratitude, I will lift up my heart, quicken my heart, mind and body, and center myself in the flow of good that is present everywhere."

And then from Acts 2: 28:

"You have made known to me the ways of life, and I am full of gladness before Your presence."

So here's the deal. And this is why I think it's so important. I believe that there are two major states of mind that we live out of. One is victim consciousness. And right now in our world, there is a predominance of victim consciousness. We hear it over and over again. We hear people living from that place of feeling like a victim of circumstance, feeling victim to other people, feeling victim to their family, to their work, to their finances... There's an abundance of victim consciousness now in the world.

The way that we avoid living in victim consciousness is giving thanks. So we're either living in victim consciousness, or we're living in gratitude. But they don't dance well together. Does that make sense?

That you can't be grateful and be a victim in the same moment; it's just not possible! And, over and over again, what I want you to see – especially during this holiday season – is that it's kind of easy to slide down that road into victim consciousness. That we don't have this, or we wanted that or that we've got this story or this drama, or this person said this to me, or this is happening at work. And we begin to slide down that road into victim consciousness. And before we know it, we've just spent days or weeks or months or years living from victim consciousness.

But the reality is: the more you give thanks, the more you move out of victim consciousness. The more you realize how fully blessed you are – and the more that you can actually realize that you've been created in the image and likeness of God – that gratitude is actually the thing that acknowledges the activity of God. That our ego cannot spend time every time giving thanks and acknowledging God without it transforming us at our very depth.

And over and over again, what I want you to see is: As we go into Christmas, you would think that we wouldn't spend time in victim consciousness. But the reality is that, for some of us, holidays are a big old victim trap. Have you ever felt like a victim during Christmas? That you didn't have the family that you wanted, or the money you wanted? Or the presents you wanted, or the life you wanted? Or the hips that you wanted, or whatever it was?

[Congregation laughs]

[Rev. Rogers turn to Greta McLeod, interpreter for the hearing impaired, and asks]: Do that again! What's the sign for hips? **[She pats her hips]**

[Congregation laughs]

[He pats his thighs] Thighs... **[He pats his bottom]** Bottoms...

[Congregation laughs as Greta interprets his comments. Rev. Rogers walks across the stage and hugs her.]

Do we love Greta? We love Greta!

[Congregation hoots and applauds]

Boring!

[Greta signs "boring," which looks a bit like picking her nose.]

I love the sign for boring! **[Both he and Greta sign "Boring."]**

[Congregation laughs]

It's my favorite sign; it is!

[Congregation laughs]

[Mimics picking his nose]: I didn't know I spoke sign language!

[Congregation laughs]

Sorry; file that under "too much information," alright? Just... Moving on...

So here's my point. I'm going to get to my point, right? So here's my point. I want you to move all the way through this holiday season – all the way through to the beginning of the new year – moving out of victim consciousness and into greatness. Into gratitude. Because I want you to live as the fullness of God. I want you to live and give expression to all that God is. That we are here to give expression to the Christ. We are the sons and daughters of the Most High. It's very hard to know that you're the son or daughter of the Most High if you're living from a place of victimhood. It's very hard to know your power and your greatness as a child of God if you're believing that everything in life is overpowering you, and that you have nothing to show for it. That you're not blessed, and that life is hard and awful and ugly and terrible. It's hard to live in victim consciousness and take your next spiritual step forward.

Christmastime, I believe, is one of the most spiritual times of the year. Where love is supreme. Where we light up our house with lights and joy is overflowing. And yet, we can still live from this place of victimhood, and not live from the fullness of who we are. And so, for this year, I'm going to invite you to carry on the spirit of gratitude throughout the holiday season, and then over and over and over again, I want you to say, "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*" Together:

[With congregation]: "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*"

One more time:

[With congregation]: "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*"

One more time like we mean it:

[With congregation]: "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*"

Because I'm committed to you! Because it is no fun when we feel like a victim. You cannot have a great day feeling like everything has more power than you do. It's not fun! And this holiday season, we cannot have a spiritual experience from victimhood. It just doesn't work that way! If we want to know the glory of God... If we want to express the glory of God... If we want to be the most powerful spiritual version of ourselves... If we want to be like the angels, and sing the praises of God... then we have to come back to gratitude. In fact, this is where we live. It will heal you; it will transform your anxiety. In fact, there's also a research study which shows that Vietnam vets who experienced post-traumatic stress syndrome, and were taught a daily practice of gratitude: it actually alleviated the symptoms of their trauma. That gratitude can heal whatever your soul has been through.

And over and over and over again, I want you to come back to three simple little statements: "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*"

Together:

[With congregation]: "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*"

Now, are you ready for your homework? Now, do I want you to say, "*Thank you, God!*" over and over again? Yes! But I've got another homework assignment for you.

During this holiday season, I want you to have a ministry of caring. And what I mean by that is: I want you to find, pick, choose or let Spirit choose for you one person in your life that you're called to care for. Now, am I asking you to fix all of their problems? No! Whose job is it to fix their problems? God's. Right? It's God's job. But your job is to care. I want you to pick one person in your life – it could be a co-worker,

a friend, a neighbor – and I want you just to care. I want you to call them, or I want you to write them a note. I want you to make an invitation, invite them to dinner, invite them to church. And I want you just to care. Because what I know to be true is that caring doesn't change anything in their life, but it makes it so much easier to walk through whatever they're having to walk through if they know there's at least one person in their life who cares about them.

See, we can't really fix each other's problems. But we can care each other through our problems. And so, this holiday season, I want you to pick one special person that's going to be your ministry of care. And I want you to have a ministry of care. I want you to pick one person, and I want you to care for them. I want you to reach out to them. I want you to love them. I want you to care about them in such a way that they know that, during this holiday season, that they are not alone. Because sometimes we really believe we are alone.

And in developing this ministry of care, over and over and over again, we make a difference in one another's lives.

So you have two homework assignments. Do you know what they are? First one is, "*Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God!*" Second one is: I want you to pick one soul and, throughout this holiday season, I want you to care for them. I want you to be God's little instrument, whispering in their ear that they truly are cared for. Are you willing?

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul right here, right now. And I want you to feel the presence of God that is completely with you. And today we just allow our soul to rejoice and give thanks for all that God is. Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God! That it moves us out of our ego, out of our sense of separation, out of our stories and our drama. It allows us to download all the good that God is. Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God! And then from the fullness of our soul – from the fullness of our life – we find one other person to care about. To reach out to. To let them know that they are not alone. That someone is right there for them, walking with them through whatever life's calling them to go through. So, Spirit, throughout this holiday season, we want a deeper walk with you. We want to live in your grace and in your glory, and know the truth of all that you are. So thank you, God! Thank you, God! Thank you, God! And so it is. Amen.

Copyright 2019 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Rogers