

GRATITUDE NOW

Week #1 of the 5-Week Series, "Gratitude"

Oct. 21, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Hi! I'm Richard Rogers, and I want to welcome you to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center, to our Wednesday night service. We're going into a very special time within our ministry. This Wednesday is the first Wednesday of our "Circles of Gratitude": of our 40-day program of giving thanks. And, you know, this ministry's being doing this for years and years and years. And this is our time, every year, to stop all the busy-ness and just give thanks. So that's where we're going.

But before we do anything else, we've got a couple of announcements. First one: this Saturday night, we are doing our children's ministry Drive-By Halloween party. And this is going to be so great! It'll be a safe way your kids can go trick-or-treating. They're actually going to drive through the parking lot; there's going to be all kinds of things that you can do as you drive by. There may be a little candy there for the kids; again, come by our campus Saturday night and experience the power and the joy and the laughter of Halloween.

Also, we have four new classes starting very shortly. We have Rev. Lori's "This Is Not Your Grandmother's Bible Study." We've got a class coming up on grief. Richard – Rev. Richard – is doing one on "How to Get Out of Your Own Way." And then we also have Rev. Kim doing one on "Discerning Your Life Purpose." So we are really committed to supporting you in living your best life. And we believe that worship is a powerful part of this, but so is education. That as we allow the worship experience to inspire and uplift us, and then we learn the spiritual principles in our classes that really transform our lives.

So that's where we're going today. So let's take a deep breath, and let's move into our time of meditation.

MEDITATION:

And I want you to feel the presence of God that is within us and all around us. I want you to take a deep breath and feel God right where you are. That today our only job is to give thanks. We don't have to change it. We don't have to fix it. We don't have to solve it. We just have to say, "Thank you." And feel how much easier it is when your soul just says, "Thank you."

You know, so many of us were taught to be busy and be about life, and get after one thing or another. And for the next 40 days, your only job is to say, "Thank you, God!" Your only job is to give thanks! That, no matter what's going on in your life, today we just say, "Thank you, God! Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"

Thank you, God, for this moment. Thank you, God, for this breath. Thank you, God, for sunshine. Thank you, God, for the beauty that's all around us. Thank you, God, for the people who love us and care about us. Thank you, God, for every aspect of my life. Thank you, God!

And feel the deep calm that comes over you when your focus is giving thanks. Feel how still you become. Feel how quiet your mind and heart is, when you give thanks. That there's only one presence and one power: God the good. And in all of our busy-ness, your only job today is to say, "Thank you!" And acknowledge the presence and power of God that's at work at every level of your life.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

And I want you to even notice that part of you that is in resistance to giving thanks. I want you to feel that part of you that wants to tell life that it's just not right. That it should be different; that it should be like this or like that. And during this time of meditation, I want you just to breathe into that area of your life. Breathe into the part of you that is so resistant. And for the next few minutes, just breathe and give thanks.

Thank you! Thank you for exactly the way my life is. Thank you for my life. For this moment. For the possibilities. For all that could be. Thank you for the ups and for the downs. For the things that went exactly the way that I wanted them, and the things that just went completely off the rails. That I no longer stand in judgement of life. I just give thanks. I no longer tell life how it's supposed to be; I just give thanks. I just give thanks for everything. And I receive the full blessings of God. The full blessing of this moment. I receive all that God is.

In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, today I just say, "Thank you." From the depths of my soul, I say, "Thank you." To the power that created me, for the power that provides for me, for the power that is within me – the power that connects me to every living thing – I say, "Thank you." And I dedicate this day to living at the highest level of gratitude. And so it is. Amen.

SONG:

Todd Herzog: "There are Miracles" (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on the piano)

I'm feeling happy like a new sunrise
Don't always have to know the reasons why
'Cause it all comes down
To a question of your attitude

I read the papers just the same as you
But you don't see the world the way I do
If you did my friend
Maybe you'd be smiling too

There are two ways to look at life
Which one are you gonna choose?

'Cause everywhere there are miracles
If you only have the eyes to see them
Everywhere there are miracles
If you open up and start believing you'll see the light

Can't wait to see you it's no big surprise
That when I hold you feels like time just flies
I should know by now
Everything is relative

No use in analyzing symphonies
That's just like blaming love on gravity
You can learn some things
And some things you've just got to live

There are two ways to look at life
Show me what you've got to give

'Cause everywhere there are miracles
If you only have the eyes to see them

Everywhere there are miracles
If you open up and start believing you'll see the light

You'll feel the energy
You'll do what's right
You'll act for life

'Cause everywhere there are miracles
If you only have the eyes to see them
Everywhere there are miracles
If you open up and start believing

Everywhere there are miracles
If you only have the eyes to see them
Everywhere there are miracles
If you open up and start believing you'll see the light
You'll see the light

[Light applause]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Rogers: Fantastic! That was just great; thank you, gentlemen! Great! Just fabulous! Thank you, thank you!

So this is the first Wednesday night as part of our "Circles of Gratitude": part of our 40 days of gratitude. And so, I want to start by asking you a question. And the question that I have for you tonight is: What is your favorite complaint? You know *[laughs]*, what is your favorite thing to complain about? Are you a complainer about the weather? You know, we had record heat this summer in Phoenix. Do you love to complain when it's 100 degrees, or it's 110 degrees? You know, if you do love to complain about the heat, you have picked the perfect place to live! Right? 'Cause you get an opportunity pretty much five months out of the year to complain about the heat. So, it's that your thing?

Or do you complain about the politicians? Or do you complain about other people's driving? Or people that don't use their turn signals? Or ... What do you complain about? Do you complain about your doctor? What do you complain about? Do you complain about your spouse? What do you complain about? Right? Because I want you to look at, really, your favorite complaint: the thing that you enjoy complaining about the most. The thing that just really just makes you so happy to complain about!

You know *[laughs]*, I'm going to tell a story on myself. And I was going to save it for later in the talk, and I'm just going to do it now. So, this week I was going through the news, and the deficit – the U.S. deficit – set a record number. It went up to over \$3 trillion. The highest deficit that we've ever had was \$1.4 trillion. So we more than doubled. So, as a nation, we set a record in the highest deficit we have ever had. And every part of me wanted to complain about that. Right? Every part of me wanted to complain and say, "*This isn't right.*" And then I remembered this talk and what I was doing this week. And that, this week, we were going into 40 days of gratitude. And part of my deal with this week is that I was going to spend all my time and energy consciously deciding to give thanks, and that I was going to suspend criticism.

And so, of course, the moment you make a commitment to do anything, the opposite of that thing begins to show up. And so, the thing that kind of ... 'Cause I'm a *[laughs]* ... I believe in paying as you go. I do! I believe it in my personal life; I believe it in my professional life. I believe it in the ministry. You know, I've gotten in trouble for this, but I believe that you shouldn't spend more than you're taking in.

And it's just the way – it's what I believe, right? You just pay as you go. And it doesn't mean you don't trust God; you can absolutely. But it's like, let's pay as you go.

So I had this opportunity to really practice: Do you want to complain about that? And the human part of me said ... Do you want to complain about that? And the human part of me screamed *[laughs]* "YES!!!! I want to complain about it! YES!!! Yes; I want to tell anybody who will listen to me this isn't right! And I want to complain about it. I want to ruh, ruh, ruh. I don't really need to blame anyone; I just want to complain about it." Right? So I want to complain about it.

And then I had to make a decision. Is there anything in this situation that you're grateful for? *[Laughs]* My first response was, "Absolutely no. There's nothing to be grateful for! There's nothing to be grateful for." And I'm like, "Richard, is that true?" It's like, "No; I'm sure there's something to be grateful for." Right? And I had ... It took me a little bit, but I found a couple of things in my own life, and in the life of our nation, that I am very grateful for. I am grateful that we're such a prosperous nation. I am grateful that we have the standard of living that we have in our nation. I am grateful for that.

So I really had to make a choice to move the focus of my attention off complaining and on to being grateful.

You know, there's a recent study that showed the 10 things that most people like to complain about. And I thought I'd share that with you so that – if you're not sure what yours is – maybe you'll hear one of these and really be aware. Because I think most of us complain from an unconscious place. I think when we're complaining – when we go into our tirades and our rants and our raving and all the things that we do when we're complaining – I don't think that we're really in our spiritual right mind. I don't think we're conscious. I think we're doing it from a really wounded place within us, where we feel victimized by circumstances, by this situation. And when we do that, I don't think we're bringing our best and highest self.

So I thought if I brought up these 10 things that studies have shown that most people – or the number one thing that people complain about – we could kind of see them, and really decide what we're going to do with them.

So the number one thing is bad customer service. Right? And probably all of us have complained, at one time or another. We've gone to a store or a situation, and we just didn't get the level of customer service, you know, or we just feel like there should have been better customer service. So that's the number one thing.

The second thing is telemarketers. You know, the people who call us. You know, and now they don't even have people that call us. Now it's just computers. Now, I'm not complaining! But now it's just computers that are calling us, right?

And three. Number three was people who cut in line. Apparently, we don't like that so much! It just – we feel victimized. Like, if somebody cuts in line on the way to a movie or something, we feel a little victimized by that!

Then number four is weather.

Five is politicians. *[Laughs]* Right now – and political ads. And right now, it is a constant stream of politicians and political ads.

Six is packages or letters that don't show up right on time. Show up on time. Like, we order something, because most of our life right now is ordered. So ordered it, and it doesn't come, it doesn't come, it doesn't.

Number seven is traffic.

Number eight is trouble connecting to the Wifi. And this is such a Gen X thing, right? I mean, *[laughs]* I don't know ... maybe I have! But I'm not sure I've ever complained about connecting to the Wifi, or the Wifi was too slow. Maybe it's me, but I'm not sure I've ever done that.

Nine is litter, and people who litter. That's on my list.

Ten is waiting in the doctor's office. Any of you have a hard time *[laughs]* waiting for, like, 20, 30, 40, 50, an hour, at a doctor's?

So those are the top 10. Now, there's another study. The other study says – gives us 12 reasons to stop complaining. And the whole idea of these 12 reasons to stop complaining is from a mental health place. And the mental health professionals have come up with these 12 reasons not to complain as a way of really making us happier. So the 12 reasons to stop complaining.

Number one is: Stop complaining, because it doesn't solve a problem. How many of us know that complaining *[laughs]* doesn't solve a problem? I know this one! I know it, and it all together doesn't always prevent me from complaining. Sometimes I just want to feel like a victim. And every time I complain, I feel it. But that's one of them.

Two: Complaining creates more complaints. And isn't that true? That, as we move into kind of that complaint mindset, we begin to attract other people who complain. And what I've noticed about this is: I kind of enjoy my own complaints. I don't know if you're like that. But when I'm complaining – when I'm going off on how unfair something is or how wrong it is or how bad it is – I'm kind of having such a good time. Like, I'm complaining, and I'm ... You know, it's just fun! Right? But I notice that, the more we complain, the more it tends to create a consciousness – a mindset – of complaints. And the sad thing is: It actually draws more complainers into my life. And what I notice is: I don't enjoy other people when they're complaining! Like, somehow I think it's cute when I'm complaining; somehow I think it's witty or smart or I'm saying really intelligent things when I'm complaining. But when other people are complaining, I don't find it enjoyable at all! I don't find it witty. I don't find it humorous. I don't enjoy it. I just don't enjoy it!

And I remember the day when I looked at myself and said, *"Oh! If you don't enjoy them complaining, how many people in your life do you think enjoy you complaining?"* *[Laughs]* And it really stopped me! It stopped me right in my tracks! Right? 'Cause the idea is: I think it's funny or I think it's cute or I think it's fun. It's just not! Right? So it creates more complaints.

Three: Complaining isn't attractive.

Complaining is infectious.

Complaining kills innovation. Right? That, when we complain about it, we don't take responsibility for fixing it. And part of moving our life forward is that we're responsible for moving it forward. And when we complain about something, we're acting as a victim, and not taking responsibility for moving our life forward. So I want you to begin to notice what you're complaining about. And what would happen today if you made a commitment to move that situation forward ... even in a small way? What would happen if you decided today that that situation was so important to you that you're worth complaining about it ... but, instead of complaining about it, you were going to do one thing to move that situation forward?

Number six: Complaining makes us passive. I do not like that. Right? Complaining just makes us passive. When we regularly complain, we act as if there's nothing we can do about a situation.

Seven: Complaining creates a victim mindset.

Complaining leads to just continuous bad days.

Nine: Complaining makes a situation worse than it really is, or at least, makes it feel like it's worse than it really is.

Ten: Complaining *[laughs]* makes us less grateful. And that's why I'm bringing this up!

And number eleven: Complaining is immature.

And twelve: Complaining means avoiding taking responsibility for the moment.

So here's what I want us to look at today. Right? So we're launching into this 40 days of gratitude. And part of being grateful ... Now, we've been focusing on this, what: for 20 years? We've been focusing on this idea of gratitude over and over again. Why? Because it works! It makes a difference in our life!

Sometimes we get so focused on the negative – we so see the problem; we so see what's wrong – that we begin to think what's wrong is the majority of the things going on in our life. And I honestly believe – I honestly believe – that 97% of everyone's life is absolutely wonderful and great. And, for most of us, there's probably about 3% that we're working on.

Now, can I scientifically prove that? No. I cannot. But I really believe it! That most of our life – most of our experience, most of our moments, most of our days, most of our interactions – are absolutely fine. They're good! They're fabulous! They're wonderful! And there's these 3% -- 3%! And the more that we focus on those 3% of the things that are in progress – that aren't working, that aren't quite right yet – we actually begin to believe that those are the majority of the things going on in our life.

And gratitude – what gratitude does – is it moves us into the moment. It moves us into being grateful for what is.

Eckhart Tolle said this: *“Realize deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the ‘now’ the primary focus of your life.”*

So here's the question that underlies all this: Are you grateful for the way you're life is right now? In this moment? Are you grateful for the way your life is right now? And I can hear you! I can hear so many of us say, *“No! I'm not grateful! I don't think the way my life is right now is right! This isn't good! This isn't the way it's supposed to be! I'm supposed to be better! I'm supposed to be here; I'm supposed to be there. I'm supposed to have more money, and I'm supposed to be healthier. My thighs are supposed to be thinner.”* And all kinds of things go off in our head about the way it's supposed to be.

And what would happen if – for the next 40 days – the only thing you get to say is, *“Thank you, God, for the way it is right now.”* What if that's it?

Eckhart Tolle said this: *“Realize deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the ‘now’ the primary focus of your life.”* And then he went on to say: *“Time isn't precious at all, because it's an illusion. What is perceived as precious is not time, but the present moment.”*

See, what I want you to see is that – when we are not grateful for what is – it actually takes us out of the experience and moves us into some mental construct that isn't really reality. That, the more we give thanks for what is – the more we give thanks for what is exactly the way it is in this moment, right now – the more we're actually transforming our life.

See, I think there's really two things that are going on all the time. There's our present experience, and then there's the infinite possibilities. And what happens when we begin to give thanks for the present moment – for what is – that thing actually becomes soft, or becomes more fluid. It actually makes room for the infinite to be infused in our present experience. But when we're in resistance to right now –

when we're in resistance to this present moment – it actually crystalizes the present moment and it actually makes it harder for those infinite blessings to show up. I mean, we've all heard that idea: What we resist tends to persist. And it's the idea that, whatever you're in resistance to – whatever you're complaining about; whatever you're not grateful for – tends to get crystalized in your life.

And I believe that every one of us wants to be more fully blessed. I believe that there's a human condition that wants to be more fully blessed in literally every area in our life. That most people want to be a little bit more prosperous, or feel a little bit more loved. Or be a little healthier. We have this desire for a greater life. And it doesn't help when we focus on what's not right. What really begins to change everything is when we begin to give thanks for what is: exactly the way it is.

You know, when I was in college, there was a Unity TV show in southern California. And Dale Batesole was the host, and he would bring in Unity ministers. And they would do a little 20-minute teaching. And it was on TV five days a week: Monday through Friday. I think it was Channel 13 in L.A. And I remember hearing Arthur Hammons, who was a long-time Unity minister in El Cajon, California. And he talked about the greatest way to transform your life is to give thanks for what is. And he said: As you give thanks for what is, it actually evolves right in front of your eyes.

At this time, I'd just gotten out of college. And I had my first little job that I wasn't really making any money at. And I lived not too far from the beach, which was great. But I lived in the smallest studio apartment that you could imagine. In fact, it was just one little square, right? And the bed got a square; the couch got a square. The kitchen got a square, and the bathroom got a square. And this was literally, I don't know ... maybe it was 12 feet across. I mean, it was a tiny, tiny, little apartment. Little studio apartment.

And I remember listening to him – watching him on TV – and the TV *[laughs]*. I could watch the TV from two locations. I could watch the TV from the couch or the bed, because it sat in the kitchen. Right? So the TV went in the kitchen. And I was watching him do this thing on gratitude is the way to transform. And I was so ready to transform that little apartment! I didn't really see it as wonderful. I didn't think ... I didn't really feel blessed by it. It was just a small, cramped little space. And I remember hearing that and thinking, *"What if that's true? What if gratitude really can transform?"* And he said, you know, give thanks for what is! Give thanks for exactly the way it is!

So *[laughs]* he used that analogy: If you want to transform your home, go to every room in your home and say, *"Thank you, God, for my beautiful home. Thank you, God, for my wonderful home."* *[Laughs]* And I'm like, *"I'm going to do that!"* So *[laughs]* I only one room, so it really wasn't much of a problem! But I sat on the sofa and I said, *"Thank you, God, for my beautiful apartment. Thank you, God, for my wonderful apartment. Thank you, God!"* Then I went in the kitchen and I said, *"Thank you, God, for my wonderful apartment. I love my kitchen. I love how my kitchen looks. Thank you, God, for my beautiful apartment."* And then I went and stood right on the bed. I remember standing on the bed. And the ceiling was so low – and the bed was right on the floor – that standing on the bed, I was still about rubbing my head against the ceiling. And I remember standing on the bed going, *"Thank you, God, for my beautiful bedroom. Thank you, God, for my beautiful apartment. Thank you, God; I love it!"* Then I went into the little bathroom, right? *"Thank you, God, for my bathroom."*

And, literally, within about a few short weeks, a friend of mine called and said, *"Richard, we are buying this condo. It's on the top of Signal Hill."* And if you know anything about southern California, Signal Hill has a view from Paradise Valley all the way to Laguna. And so I was moved – I had an opportunity to move. And it was radically different!

See, what I want you to see today is that the greatest way to transform any situation – the greatest way to transform any experience in your life – is to give thanks! And I want you to give thanks for exactly the way it is.

If you're feeling like your car's an old, beat-up jalopy – can you even say “jalopy” anymore? – is an old, beat-up jalopy, I want you to give thanks for it! And I want you to give thanks for the fact that it got you to the grocery store, or it got you to work, or it got you to home. And I want you to give thanks for it! And I want you to watch – as you give thanks for every area in your life – it actually is infused with the infinite goodness of God, and it actually transforms it. It takes your life up! Whether it's your relationships, whether it's your finances, whether it's the healing of your body ... I want you to begin to see today that – for the next 40 days – your only response to your life is, *“Thank you, God! Thank you, God!”*

And it's not just enough to say, *“Thank you, God!”* For the next 40 days, I want to add another kicker. I want you to add gratitude. And I want you to take away complaining.

You know, Will Bowen – a Unity minister who was, at the time, out of Kansas City – he developed this program called “the complaint-free world.” And he would hand out wristbands. And the idea was that you were supposed to go 30 days without complaining. And every time you complained, you were supposed to take the wristband off and put it on the other wrist, and to see if you could get to 30 days.

Well, I know that you are all spiritual masters. So I know that *[laughs]* going 30 days is not a long enough process for us. So we're actually going to do 40 days. We're going to see if we can go 40 days without complaining. And every time we want to complain – because I know that you're going to want to! There's going to be a family member that says something, or there's going to be a politician that does something. Or there's going to be a boss, or someone at work, that does this thing over here. And I know that you're going to want to complain! Right? You're just going to want to complain! For the next 40 days, you don't get to.

For the next 40 days, in that very situation – about that person, that situation – you actually have to find something to be grateful for right there. And I want you to see the power – as you change the focus from complaining to gratitude – how you feel better! Every day!

The more that we're willing to be grateful, the more we're transforming our inner life. The more time and energy we have complaining, the more we're focusing on the negative. We're focusing on what we don't want.

There is so much good! There is infinite good available to each and every one of us! And for the next 40 days: *“Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!”* And when you feel that human desire to complain – when you feel that human desire to be a victim; when you feel that human longing to tell somebody how wrong they are – instead, what I want you to do is to move into, *“Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!”*

Will you join with me in prayer?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now. And I want you to feel the power of choice. Today your soul gets to make a choice. Do you want to focus on the negative? Or do you want to focus on gratitude? Do you want to focus on being a victim? Or do you want to have the power to transform any situation in your life? Today, we get to make that decision. And over and over again, I invite you to choose gratitude. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! Let's say this softly together: *“Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!”* And so we dedicate this day to gratitude. We dedicate these next 40 days to gratitude. We dedicate the opportunity to see the infinite goodness of God all around us. And so it is. Amen.

COLLECTION

Alright, this is the time of giving of our gifts and offerings. And I know that, even if you're giving electronically, I want you to imagine just holding your gift in your hand. And we're going to do a very simple love offering blessing: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* Together: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* And so it is! Amen.

CLOSING

God bless you, friend! I see this can really be a transformative period in your life! That, for the next 40 days – all the way through up to Thanksgiving – for the next 40 days, you're going to pass on complaining. Even though you may want to – even though you may think it's a requirement! Even though you may think, *"They need to hear my complaint, because I am so right,"* you're going to pass on complaining and, instead, you're going to find one or two or three things in that situation to say, *"Thank you, God!"* about. God bless you, friend! Have a great week! And I look forward to meeting with you next week.

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