

GRATEFUL FOR EVERYTHING

Week #1 of the 5-Week Series, "40 Days of Gratitude"

October 20, 2021

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Alright, so tonight we move into our "40 Days of Gratitude." You know, as a ministry, we've been practicing -- dedicating -- these 40 days before Thanksgiving for the last 30 years. For the last 30 years, we've been dedicating these 40 days to a time of gratitude to open ourselves up to the experience of living a more grateful life.

And, you know, some of us really have been, sometimes, challenged at really opening to the fullness of gratitude. Because I think it's difficult when you've been blessed with so much to really slow down and acknowledge how many blessings we have in each and every day that go unnoticed, unacknowledged. And so it gets easy for us, sometimes, to take life for granted. To expect it to show up a certain way. And to think it's always going to be like that. And it really prevents us from really embracing being fully grateful: being fully grateful for all of it.

So tonight our affirmation is really simple. It is, *"Thank you, God; thank you, God. Thank you, God."* Together: **[with congregation]** *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."* Right? And just bring it in to that simple way.

You know, when I was in YOU as a teenager -- YOU is our youth ministry. When I was in YOU, our sponsor said that, for three weeks, we were to practice this idea of just: no matter what shows up in your life in that moment, your only response is, *"Thank you, God."* And I thought it was stupid!

[Congregation laughs] Right?

Like, I was really clear that there were things that I was grateful for, and there were things that I was never going to be grateful for. Right? And I was okay kind of going, *"Thank you, God"* for things that, you know: for the green lights and for the all the other things that I wanted. You know: for a date. For gas in the car. You know, I can get my arms around the way life was supposed to be. I could be grateful for that. It was kind of a stretch, but I could be grateful for that.

But there were things in my life that I knew I could never be grateful for. They were wrong; they were bad; they were stupid. And there was no way I was going to be grateful. But I made this commitment, over and over again, to say, *"Thank you, God."* And so I just played with it for 21 days, right?

And for 21 days, I just started saying, *"Thank you, God."* And the most powerful things began to happen. I began to notice that my internal "judger" -- you know your internal "judger"? You know, like when somebody has their turn signal on and it's been on for the last 50 miles ... you know, just in case they want to make a left-hand turn? **[Congregation laughs]** Right? It's all those things that are just ...

Does everybody have at least one pet peeve that just drives you nuts? Right? And I began to notice that, the more I began to stay in the spirit of *"Thank you, God,"* my little "judger" got quiet.

Because there was a part of my ego that just knew that I could do a better job being in charge of the universe than God. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? That I could fix these people, right? If they would just listen to me, I could fix everybody, right? As a 16-year-old -- sometimes even later -- right? **[Laughs]** I noticed how much my "judger" wanted to judge.

And the most amazing thing that happened is that I couldn't be grateful and in judgement in the same moment. I could be one or the other, but I couldn't do both. Like, if I was going to judge the heck out of myself or someone else, I couldn't be grateful for them in the same moment **[laughs]** I wanted to tell them how bad they were. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? I just couldn't do it!

And so what began to happen is: the more I began to give thanks, the more my inner conversation got quiet. And it was so noticeable for that 16-year-old me that I ... I changed. I shifted. Right?

And I can't say that, through the course of my whole adult life, that I've been able to say in every moment and every situation, *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."* But that 21-day period changed me. It did!

And, as a ministry, we've been inviting you into this "40 Days of Gratitude" for 30 years. Because what begins to happen is: the more that you give thanks, the more you begin to notice all the good. The more you begin to notice all the blessings, and the more you begin to notice all the miracles and the moments and the peace and the love and the beauty that your "judger" doesn't allow you to see. Because the more you give thanks, the more you see the magic of God all around you.

So for the next 40 days, your moment-to-moment affirmation is: *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."* Together: **[with congregation]** *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."*

Because, as we come into this -- whatever experience it is -- right? We begin to see it with new eyes. We begin to see it differently. And, as our heart and our soul and our presence expands, we begin to notice, over and over again, how truly blessed we are. But if we don't -- if we just stay in our judgement, if we just keep our head down, if we just stay complaining and upset and angry and ticked off about everything -- we really miss about 95% of how great and holy and sacred life is.

So for the next 40 days, your only response to life is: *"Thank you, God!"* Together: **[with congregation]** *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."*

So if you're having cold cereal for breakfast: *"Thank you, God!"* Right? If the person in front of you is driving five miles an hour *[congregation laughs]*, and the speed limit is 45 miles an hour, and you'd like to be going 65 miles an hour, the appropriate response is: *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

And what begins to happen is that you no longer see that you're the smartest thing in the universe. **[Congregation laughs]** Like, you really begin to notice all the ways: all the magic, all the blessings, all the miracles in your life. Because what gratitude does is: it changes the way we see life. It really changes the way we experience life. And whatever you're willing to give thanks for, I guarantee it will grow and expand as a blessing in your life.

You know, there was a Unity minister one time who taught this idea that, whatever I wanted to change or grow or expand in my life, that -- if I would give thanks for it -- it would transform right in front of my eyes. And I did not believe that! And the place where I started the first was: I had -- just after I graduated from college -- I had an efficiency apartment. Do you want an efficiency apartment is? It's an apartment that is so small that you can cook, sleep and take a shower all at the same time, right? **[Congregation laughs]** Like, it is so small that, with my wing span, I could almost touch two walls at a time, right? It ... And literally, like, it was so ... Do you get how small it was? I mean, it was so small. Right?

And this minister said to me, *"Well, what you need to do is to go to every room in your apartment and give thanks for it."* I said, *"Okay; well, I'll go to the corner that is my bedroom."* **[Congregation laughs]** And I said, *"Thank you, God, for my fabulous apartment."* Right? And then I went to the corner that was my living room -- where the little sofa and the TV was -- and I said, *"Thank you, God, for my fabulous apartment."* Then I went to the little corner that was the kitchen, and I said, *"Thank you, God, for my fabulous apartment."* And then I went to the, kind of the, little corner that was the bathroom. And I said, *"Thank you, God, for my fabulous apartment."*

Now, did I believe any of that the first time I said it? No! It was a little dump that I hated! Right? Does that make sense? It was a little dump that I hated! But I went to every corner, and I just said, *"Thank you, God, for my fabulous apartment."* And there was a moment -- literally, there was a moment --

where I didn't hate it any more. Like, where I thought: *"This is kind of cute!"* **[Congregation laughs]** *"Like, I've done a lot! This is kind of cute! This is actually convenient! I can cook and watch TV and take a nap and take a shower all at the same time."* **[Congregation laughs]** Like, it changed for me! I changed! Right?

And within less than a month, a buddy of mine called and said, *"Richard, one of our roommates is moving out; do you want to move?"* And, at the time, I was living in southern California, which is where I grew up. And he had a condo on the top of Signal Hill.

Does anybody know where Signal Hill is in southern California? Signal Hill was just constant oil derricks. Like, in the 20s and 30s. And so, by the ... And it was: they found so much oil on this little pimple in the middle of Long Beach. Right? And it was a little, just a hill, that was just filled with oil. And about the 70s and the 80s -- when the oil started running out -- they started building these condos that had million-dollar views. That had a view from Laguna Beach all the way to Palos Verdes. And the sunsets were spectacular!

And they said, *"We've got this room; it's one of the bedrooms. It's: one wall is all glass, and you look at this million-dollar view."* And they said, *"Would you like it?"* And I said, *"What's the rent?"* And it turned out the rent was, like, half of what I was paying for this box that I was living in. **[Congregation laughs]** Right?

And it's like: okay; I get this! There is something that happens that -- the moment you begin to give thanks -- something is released. Something is changed. And not only does your perception change, but somehow the level of good that you're experiencing goes from whatever level it's at to a higher level of good. That -- through the activity of gratitude -- you actually turbo-charge your life. You actually lift your life into a higher level of goodness that you could never get to by complaining.

How many of you have ever tried to really change your life through complaining? **[Congregation laughs]** Right? How'd that work for you? Right? It doesn't really work so well, because complaining tends to actually degrade the level of good in your life! Right?

But the moment you begin to give thanks, you actually watch a miracle power at work that allows the good -- whatever level of good you have -- actually to accelerate simply because, as you begin to give thanks, you acknowledge the infinite blessings that an hour ago, or a week ago, or a month ago, you didn't see. You could not see it. You literally couldn't see the infinite Spirit -- the infinite possibilities.

Jesus said, *"The kingdom of heaven is all around you, but men see it not."* Right?

So the idea is that -- through the power of gratitude -- you actually take your life from whatever level it is now and you actually lift it to a higher level of good, simply by giving thanks. Because -- in the process of giving thanks -- you begin to see the infinite good that is all around you. That is fully present! But, until you give thanks, you miss it.

So here's what we're going to do for the next 40 days. You ready? I want you to pick one area in your life that you'd be willing to experience a miracle. One area in your life where you'd be willing to take the good from whatever level it's at right now, and take it through the roof. One area of your life! It could be in a relationship; it could be in your finances. It could be in any area of your life. And I want you to begin giving thanks for the possibility. Give thanks for "what is." Give thanks for the blessing. Give thanks for all the good that's coming to you.

And I want you to watch -- as you begin to give thanks -- if the infinite Spirit of God won't begin to show up, or you'll begin to see it, in ways that were dramatically different than the way you experienced before you started this process. And my belief is that all of us are -- at some level -- willing to experience a miracle. And this is the real deal! Like, this is a real deal where you learn that you can take your life

from where it is -- from wherever it is -- and, as you begin to give thanks for it, it opens to something far greater.

"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!" Together: **[with congregation]** *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"*

So does everybody have an area that you'd be willing to experience greater good than you've ever known before? Does everybody? Relationships, finances, health, healing in a relationship or love or work or wherever! You get to decide, right? Maybe you have a less than desirable little apartment that you would like to see moved, right?

And what I want you to see today is that the power of gratitude really does have the power to take lack and reveal abundance. It has the ability to take disease and disorder and show you health and wholeness. It has the ability to take heartbreak and disappointment and reveal possibilities. It could take your life from whatever level it's at and take it higher.

Albert Einstein said that there's only two ways for you to live your life. One is that nothing is a miracle. The other is though everything is a miracle.

And what I want you to see today: gratitude does that for us. It turbo-charges our life. It allows us to move beyond the limitations that we've known. Because gratitude actually moves us to a higher, more consistent expression of God.

In Jesus' two great miracles -- what I consider Jesus' two great miracles -- in the raising of Lazarus from the dead and in the feeding of the 5,000 ... In both of those examples -- in his two greatest miracles -- he gave thanks before he saw anything change. Does that make sense? So before anything changed, he began to give thanks.

Now, why is that important? How many of you grew up in a family that said grace? Anybody? Grew up in a family that said grace? Now, what's the whole premise of grace, right? That they put a plate of food in front of you, and you're supposed to give thanks for it. Right? And you actually know the food is in front of you! Does that make sense? It doesn't take a lot of faith to believe that the plate of food is in front of you. Like, when everybody closes their eyes -- I know! I've done this! -- you can steal a bite!

[Congregation laughs] Right?

So it doesn't take a lot of faith -- when the food is already in front of you -- to say, *"Thank you, God."* Like, that is not world-class ... And I'm not saying, *"Don't say grace!"* I think we should say grace, because grace is the acknowledgement that God is the source of everything we have. But it doesn't take a lot of faith when you know the meal is already on the table for you to say, *"Thank you."* Right? That's kind of a basic level that even like a three-year-old can grasp.

That's not what I'm talking about tonight. I'm talking about before you see the plate of food on the table, you say, *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."* Are you with me?

Okay. Let me read from John 11: *"Jesus once more was deeply moved when he came to the tomb of the cave, and there was a stone laid across the entrance. And he said, 'Take away the stone.' And Martha, Lazarus' sister, 'But Lord!'"* **[Laughs]** *"By the time you got here, there'll be an odor: a bad odor. For he's been dead for four days."* Right?

So **[laughs]** ... Does it look kind ...? Like, this is one of the things where I think Jesus' faith was just amazing. Right? Because, does it look kind to say to Lazarus' sister, *"Move away from the stone?"* **[Laughs]** And she's going, *"No! It's gonna smell!"* Right? It's just gonna smell! It's like, *"No! Leave the stone! Thank you very much; we've had the service. It's over, right? We're done! Thank you; go home."* **[Congregation laughs]** Right?

And then Jesus says to her, "Did I not tell you that, if you believe, that you would see the glory of God?" She's, like, **[feigns her speaking meekly]** "Yeah ... You did say that." **[Congregation laughs]**

[Continues reading]: "So they took away the stone, and Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you, that Thou hearest me. And I know that you hearest me always, but I said this for the benefit of the people who are standing around me: that they may believe that You sent me.' And when he had said this, he said in a very loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' And the dead man walked out. His hands and his feet were still bound in the wrappings of linen, and there was still cloth around his face. And he walked out. And Jesus said, 'Take those off of him; take the grave clothes off of him and let him go.'"

See, I want you to see in your life how many times you're giving thanks, maybe, for just what is. Or maybe you're not even giving thanks for what is! Because some of us have a hard time giving thanks for some of the things in our lives.

But what I want you to see is: the moment that you begin to give thanks for the infinite potential of God, it actually releases the infinite potential of God in your life. And grace -- the grace of gratitude -- is the thing that turbo-charges your life.

You know, two of the greatest miracles that I've personally been responsible for ... No, not responsible for; sorry ... been witness to, right? And I'm thinking of two different individuals who come to my mind first.

And one was a woman who: a CT-scan that showed a mass taking up pretty much all of her abdomen. And she came to me a few days before she was going in for surgery; they were going to go in, and they were going to look at it, and they were going to remove this mass from her abdomen.

And she said, "Richard, I want you to pray with me that the mass will be gone." And, you know, there's a part of me that's going, "**[Gasp!]** Like, what if it doesn't work?" Right? And what happened is: I just said, "Okay; let's move into agreement that the mass will be gone."

And so, for about two days, we were in prayer that the mass would just dissolve. That it would go back into nothingness. And we were in prayer about that. And she went into the procedure that Thursday morning, and they did another CT-scan before they did the thing, just to look at it one more time. And It. Was. Gone.

Because you know the thing about miracles is: after a miracle, there's always a logical reason why it happened. Right? So what the doctor said at the time was, "Well, the first CT-scan must have been wrong." **[Congregation laughs]** But it wasn't so wrong that they weren't going to cut into her. Right?

So it was gone! Right? And I said, "Could you imagine giving thanks for your healing, even before it happened?"

The other one I want to share with you is a man who got himself into a lot of debt. And he said, "I've got a payment on Friday of \$2,000. And if I can't make that payment, I lose everything." And I said, "So how much you got?" And he goes, "I don't have any of it." And I said, "Okay; so we're going to pray and know -- and you're going to give thanks -- that everything you need by Thursday will appear." And this was a Friday. Then he goes, "Okay."

And so we prayed and he began to give thanks. "Thank you, God!" Right? And he just began to give thanks. And on Thursday night, in his mail, he got a judgement -- a payment -- for a lawsuit that he had done years ago. Completely forgot about it; didn't pay any attention to it. And guess how much the amount was that he received? **[Congregation: "Two thousand dollars!"]** Two thousand dollars!

So he called me on Thursday night and was beside himself, because he could -- on Friday morning when the payment was due -- he actually had the \$2,000. Took it there and paid. He wasn't paying it off, but it was the payment that he needed to make to keep everything else possible.

So what I want you to see tonight is that it takes courage to give thanks before you see something. It does! Because there's a human part of us that says, *"Don't give thanks for it, because you're only going to be disappointed. It's going to be one more time where you're going to be disappointed."*

And what I want you to see is: as you begin to give thanks for everything in your life -- as you begin to give thanks for literally everything in your life -- everything in your life gets better. But I want you to pick one area, whether it's your finances, your health, your relationships, your work ... I want you to pick one area, and I want you to start just turbo-charging giving thanks for that area in your life. And I want you to see what happens over the next 40 days: if you don't feel more blessed -- if you don't begin to witness miracles happening in your life -- simply because we are giving thanks.

That, over and over again, what I want you to see is that, as we give thanks, we truly release the infinite goodness of God. In Matthew 14 -- about the feeding of 5,000 -- we read this: *"As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already late. Send the crowds away so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.'"*

Now, one of the jobs of the disciples was to keep Jesus safe. Like, I don't know about your holidays and your family, but I know in my house -- if dinner was an hour late at some of those holidays -- things got a little rocky. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? Now imagine you're going to multiply that by 5,000 people!

So 5,000 people's blood sugar drops all at the same time ... **[Congregation laughs]** And the disciples' job is to get Jesus out of that. And I can show Scripture after Scripture where the disciples took that job very seriously, and they would put him on a boat to get him away from the crowd, so that they could make sure that their guy was safe.

So Jesus is now preaching to 5,000 people. He's been doing it all day. People's blood sugar's dropping; they're starting to get a little cranky. And the disciples go, *"Send them home. I don't care where you send them; get them out of here, because we do not have enough to feed all these people."* Right? And they, in my mind, were a little somewhere between concerned and freaked out. **[Congregation laughs]** Right?

So let me read the rest of it: *"So Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go anywhere. You give them something to eat.'"* This was the thing they were the most afraid of! Right? And then their response was -- right? As their hair was on fire, their response is: *"But we only have five loaves of bread and two fish!"*

[Continues reading]: *"And Jesus said, 'Bring it to me.' And he directed the people to sit down on the grass, and he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and he began to break it." He just began to break it. "And when the first basket was full of food, a disciple ran it out into the crowd."*

Now I want you to see how much faith that took. Because those disciples knew they did not have enough food to feed everybody. There was a part of each one of them -- at least in my mind -- that didn't want to go out there. Right? They didn't want to go into that crowd knowing they didn't have enough. And the first disciple ran into the crowd with the food that he had, and he gave it away. When the next basket was full, the next disciple went out. And, over and over and over again.

And Scripture says, *"And he gave it to the disciples, and the disciples gave it to the people. And they all ate and were satisfied. And the disciples picked up 12 full baskets of broken pieces that were left over. And the number of those who attended were about 5,000, besides men and woman."* I mean, *"Besides women and children."*

And so what I want you to see ... And I know it's a sexist statement, and I'm sorry. But that's what it says. Right? I know it, so don't email me; I didn't write it! Right? **[Congregation laughs]** I'm not responsible for that culture 2,000 years ago; I'm not even responsible for that culture now. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? Right? Because it's only like a half-shade better than it was 2,000 years ago! Right?

But what I want you to see is the message! That, if you give thanks -- if you look to heaven and give thanks; if you look to the infinite possibilities; if you look to the Spirit of God and give thanks -- you will witness miracles in your life.

*"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!" Together: **[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!"*

Let's take that into prayer:

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now. That there is only one presence and one power. And, today, we are willing to see the infinite Spirit of God all around us. And that our only job tonight -- and for the next 40 days -- is to say, *"Thank you. Thank you for this day; thank you for the blessings; thank you for this moment; thank you for all that I have; thank you for the blessings that I've forgotten to say 'Thank you' for, or that I missed or that I didn't see. Thank you, God!"*

And I want you to watch the level of good in your life expand. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

Copyright 2021 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Rogers