

The Entitlement Cure

November 25, 2018

Songs:

- Blessed Be the Name
- This is Amazing Grace
- Can't Get No Satisfaction 10,000 Reasons

Introduction:

Just like the song says, it just seem like *I can't get no satisfaction.*

- **McDonald's gave me only one pack of barbecue sauce for my 10-pieces pack of chicken nuggets.**
- **There's a scratch on my phone. Now I want to buy a new one.**
- **One pillow is too low, but two pillows is too high. (even after buying a MY PILLOW on TV)**

- **I can't find anything good on TV. (even with over 60 channels to choose from)**
- **My electric toothbrush stops working 30 seconds into the job and now I have to use it like a manual one.**
- **There's not enough dressing on my salad. Now my salad tastes like salad.**
- **The Wi-Fi is free, but it's too slow.**

And that's just MY List. But there's more. I'm often dissatisfied with the people and relationships in my life.

- **I feel I deserve happiness, so I place demands on others to do things that will bring me happiness**
- **I feel sorry for myself when things don't work out exactly the way I want.**

- **I tend to look out for my needs and the needs & desires of my family more than anyone else.**
- **I generally think I am better than others and expect for others to see that and unquestionably respect me.**

If you are like me, sometimes it seems that all we think about is our first world problems and inconveniences. All of those inconveniences can become our first thought, our frequent thought, and our fixed thought. If we are honest, we let these little petty things get the best of us because we feel entitled to a comfortable, distraction free life.

Standing in sharp contrast to this fixation on personal irritations and, there's a major theme in

the Bible that appears over and over again, especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

Paul says to the church in Thessalonica, *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:16-18).*

He also says to the church at Ephesus, *"Make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:19-20).*

To the church at Colossae, he talks about this theme three different times in one brief passage:

And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and

admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:15-17)

If you haven't guessed by now, the theme is "gratitude" and it's the exact opposite of our sense of entitlement. Gratitude is one of the most often commanded yet neglected parts of the Christian life. Every year at this time, we stop and take time to be together with friends and family to celebrate Thanksgiving for all the blessings we have in life. And that's a good thing. But thanksgiving is supposed to be a lifestyle, not just a holiday.

So for us to become grateful at the core, we need to reorient our thinking. We can do this by undergoing training in this much needed area of the Christian life. This is what the Apostle Paul tells us to do in the book of 1 Timothy:

Train yourself in godliness. Exercise for the body is not useless, but godliness is useful in every respect, possessing, as it does, the promise of Life now and of the Life which is soon coming. 1 Timothy 4:8

So today we are going to start our morning together a little different than normal. We are going to start off with some training in godliness. We are going to exercise our “gratitude muscles” and to do so we are going to use that white piece of paper in your program. And by the way, we

will be referring back to this paper throughout this message, so keep it handy.

So pull it out that paper if you would, and get out a pen in your seat back. Let's take a couple of minutes right now to write down everything you are thankful for today. Write as many things as you can think of as we play some background music.

Today, I want to share with you a few ideas I have about gratitude. My hope is that in doing so, God will open your eyes to this neglected dimension of the Christian life and nudge you to consider all the various things you can be grateful for. By the end of this message, my prayer is that you'll have some wonderful words to look back on and talk to God and others about it.

Acknowledgement

Before we go any further, I want to give credit where credit is due. I want to thank John Ortberg, one of my favorite pastors and Christian authors, for his writings on this subject. Much of what I'm going to talk about flows from his writings on gratitude. He's one of the best Christian thinkers I know, especially in the contemplative areas of the Christian faith. Let's continue.

The Age of Entitlement

One of the greatest enemies to maintaining a sense of gratitude is known as the “entitlement mentality”. We live in a time that some have labeled, “The Age of Entitlement”. We live in a day and age when we feel entitled to (or owed) various benefits in life. For example:

- **Teens feel entitled to a car of their own when they turn 16.**
- **People entering the workforce feel entitled to start at the top.**
- **Consumers feel entitled to sue any time a product or service doesn't work the way they thought it should.**
- **Spouses feel entitled to a lifetime of bliss**
- **Many Americans feel entitled to owning and updating their home.**
- **Students feel entitled to loans and grants to get them through school.**

This isn't an all-inclusive list and maybe there's nothing on that list you can relate to.

But if you were honest, you and I would probably add one more item to this list.

I feel entitled to a “comfortable life”.

I don't want to experience lack in anything, whether it's in my relationships, in things, or circumstances!

Now can you could imagine if Jesus were standing here right now and looking at this list? What would he think after reading my "who's entitled to what" list? What would he say? I think He would probably say this:

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Luke 12:15

Why would he say this? Because He knows how we think and he knows where this entitlement mentality leads us to.

He knows that WE THINK the more we get, the more grateful we will be for what we have. But the truth is... it doesn't work that way. The truth is, the more we get, the more we want and the more we want, the more entitled we become. And the more entitled we become, the less grateful we are. This applies to relationships as well as things. As he said in the verse I just read, we must be on guard against all kinds of greed.

Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Catholic Benedictine monk says it this way,

**“We’re not grateful because we’re happy.
We’re happy because we’re grateful.”**

So if more possessions - and relationships - and good life circumstances don't make us more grateful and we are not grateful because we're happy, then what is the secret to gratefulness?

The Entitlement Cure

The secret to gratefulness and the cure for entitlement is to develop an entirely new worldview. This new worldview I'm talking about is:

A worldview built on an awareness of God's presence and God's goodness.

You see, more gratitude will not come from more acquisitions, or better life circumstances or better relationships - but from more awareness of God's presence and God's goodness.

A wonderful Christian writer named Robert Roberts once said there's a uniquely Christian framework for gratitude. Gratitude, he says, is a byproduct of a way of seeing things, of a certain

worldview, and it always involves three factors. These three factors each begin with the old Latin word “bene”, which means "good." Gratitude always involves three “benes”: a benefit, a benefactor and a beneficiary.

So the first factor in developing a worldview of gratitude is

We must perceive a benefit or gift.

In order for me to be grateful, I have to receive a gift. AND I must perceive the gift I’m given is a good thing for me to receive. I must find it favorable. The Bible has a lot to say about this idea of benefits.

Psalm 103 says,

Praise the Lord, O my soul! With all that is within me, praise his holy name! Praise the Lord, O my soul! Do not forget all his benefits! He is the one who forgives all your sins,...he crowns you with his loyal love and compassion, ...The Lord is compassionate and merciful; he is patient and demonstrates great loyal love... He does not deal with us as our sins deserve; he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve.

Psalm 103:1-10

Think about the benefits that these verses alone speak about concerning God. Think about all of those blessings we get from God that are spiritual in nature. This is a time for you to write some of those benefits on your paper because the verse we just read said “Don't forget his benefits.” Our lives are filled with benefits from God. We're blind to them most of the time. Gratitude requires

that we recognize them and know they're good. So take a minute to write down some of the spiritual benefits you have received from God.

For you and I to develop a lifestyle with gratitude, we must perceive a benefit. This means we mustn't take for granted the divine blessings, like forgiveness and mercy, which God provides. It's far too easy to focus on the material possessions, circumstances and relationship benefits and forget the benefits of being a Christian.

So the first factor in building a worldview of gratitude is to be aware of the benefits we receive as children of God.

The second factor of gratitude is that we must acknowledge a benefactor or gift giver.

The word “Benefactor” means "one who does good." To be grateful, you must believe not just that benefits are coming your way, but that they aren't merely random or by accident. They come from somebody. And you must believe this somebody or benefactor has good intentions towards you.

If I'm to be a grateful person, I must believe this about God: That God is inherently good and has good intentions towards me. The writers of the Bible were convinced they have a good and great benefactor in God.

The Apostle James says it like this:

"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights."

James 1:16 ,17

The way our benefactor expresses his goodness is by the fact that he's always giving to us. Every act of giving and every gift given has its source in God. He always does everything for His own glory and our good even though not everything that happens to us OR around us IS good.

We live in a world that's been stained by the effects of sin and evil and that sometimes makes us question God and his goodness. The problem is that we don't see our world from God's perspective and so we don't understand why things happen the way they do. But He sees everything from the beginning to the end and knows what he's trying to accomplish in the long run.

A child can't see goodness when he feels the sting of a flu shot. All he feels is the pain that the

doctor is inflicting...not the bigger picture or ultimate purpose behind the painful shot. In the same way, we must believe in the goodness of our benefactor even though we have a very limited perspective as to what He's doing. I will say more about this later.

So the second factor we must incorporate into our worldview of gratitude is to believe that God is a good benefactor and he has good intentions for us.

The third factor to building a worldview of gratitude is we must see ourselves as a beneficiary or gift receiver.

As I just said, there has to be a benefit, and a benefactor, and finally there must be a beneficiary: one who receives the gift. That's you and I. We are the beneficiaries. But in order for us

to be a beneficiary, we must believe one important truth:

Beneficiaries must believe they are receiving gifts they did not earn, merit, or deserve.

If I believe I am owed something, I will not be thankful for it because I will think I'm entitled to it. For example, if you just give me a car for no reason at all, I'll be overwhelmed with gratitude. I'll say, "Thank you! I can't believe how good you are to me." But if I pay the fair market value for the car, when you hand me the keys, I'll probably say, "Ok. This deal works for me," but I won't say, "Oh thank you for this incredible gift. I'm overwhelmed." Why won't express gratitude? Because you bought it. You feel it's something you earned because you paid for it. It is owed to you.

Unfortunately, we tend to believe our earthly blessings and gifts rightfully belong to us. We think we earned them. And the more we think we're entitled to, the less we will be grateful for.

Have you ever wondered, “*Why do people who keep getting more and more, show less and less gratitude?*” There’s a reason:

It’s because the bigger our sense of entitlement, the smaller our sense of gratitude.

Therefore for us to be grateful, we must perceive and believe that we are receiving, and not earning, what we get from God. We owe God continual gratitude because everything in life is a gift from him.

When we put together the three important factors... benefit, benefactor and beneficiary and believe in what they mean and represent, then we can begin to reorient our lives around a new worldview that goes something like:

We are the beneficiaries of the benefits of a good God who has good intentions towards us.

And when we focus on this new worldview, that God is giving gifts to us that we did not earn, we are training ourselves in gratitude and building a worldview of gratefulness.

Gratitude in Hard Times

By now I'm sure some of you are thinking: this all sounds well and good Ladell, but what about all the not so good things that happen in life or the not so good people who make my life miserable?

How do those things fit into your nice little worldview? For some of you, life sucks right now and you don't see much of God's presence and goodness in any of it. You don't see anything to be grateful for.

If that's how you feel today, I am sorry. I understand that for some, it seems like much of life can be filled with people and events that aren't good. But our present life with God is more than our circumstances.

And just to be clear, our job is not to TRY to feel grateful as so many people do. Trying to be grateful by just putting on a happy face only works for a while, and because it's fake it will never last. True gratitude is the byproduct of an increased understanding of our spiritual reality. As we train ourselves to live by this spiritual reality, we focus our minds on the presence of

God around us, and to become more aware of his goodness.

A rabbi once said that we should pray a prayer of gratitude even in bad times because we are always in danger of being thankful only when good things come our way.

King David said the same thing in the book of Psalms 34,

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD. Psalm. 34:1,2 ESV

When we don't learn to bless the Lord at all times, our aptitude for gratitude gets worse and worse, and we become ungrateful people. Being

transformed by God means learning to see ways in which God is at work, even in bad situations. So let's take a minute to list those hard and difficult things in our lives that we are grateful for - or desire to be grateful for - in spite of the pain we feel. We are not listing these things because they are good, but because God was or will be able use them for good in OUR lives or the lives of those around us.

One of my greatest struggles in life was during the first three years of my employment in the counter packaging department at Hallmark Cards. I was a new manager, a mere 22 years old at the time and I had to work the graveyard shift with several older 20+ year employees. Some of the employees I managed hated my guts. They didn't like a young, green behind the ears manager messing

with their work routines. One of them hated me so much that he even threatened to do damage to my car.

During those three difficult years, my constant prayer was, “God, get me out of here!” But two years into my three year stint on third shift, I had built a relationship with a couple of guys and I was able to share my faith in Christ with them. One was a manager named Adrian and the other was a stock handler named Ray.

If I would have left third shift originally when I wanted to, I would have ever witnessed the miracle of salvation as both of these men’s turned their lives over to Christ. Yes, I would have gotten off of third shift alright (and my life would have been more “comfortable”), but the lives of these two men might not ever have been changed. God

used my “horrible” work situation to accomplish something I never dreamed could happen.

Someone once said, "Only God knows for sure what will turn out to produce good." A lot of times we go through something hard, painful, bad, and we wish we didn't have to go through it, like my 3 difficult years on third shift at Hallmark. Then we look back on it and say, "O God, I'm so grateful I didn't miss that." There are also times that it doesn't happen like that.

You see regardless of the good or bad happening around us... who GOD IS doesn't change. Our spiritual benefactor, the benefits and the beneficiary doesn't change. I can find gratitude because of Who God is, what he has done for me, and that he has such good intentions towards me.

So what I'm trying to say is this:

We're naturally grateful for our friends, for our houses and our cars, for money, for success when it comes our way, for our jobs if we have them. But not having those things doesn't prevent us from being grateful. Above all, as followers of Jesus, in plenty and in need, in palaces and in prison, we can still thank God for all of his "grace gifts" even though we can't see the ultimate purpose of what we are going through. We can trust that He knows what He is doing.

CONCLUSION

So as we wrap up our training on gratitude, I want to finish by saying that the reason we are going through this exercise today is because the good life, the abundant life Jesus talked about to his disciples, always involves gratitude. And gratitude doesn't come when you get more stuff, better circumstances or better relationships. That's the

insane folly of our day. Gratitude comes when we see this reality:

All benefits come from a wonderful benefactor, of which we are the grace-given beneficiaries.

And because we are grace-given beneficiary, we have 10,000 reasons for our heart to sing. So let's stand and sing together this anthem of gratitude to our good and great God.

CLOSING COMMENTS

At the Movies

Next week we begin a new series, At the Movies where we will see some timeless spiritual truths illustrated in 4 different Christmas movies. We'll have 250 movie invite bags ready for pick up

today on your way out. Grab one or two and invite a friend, neighbor, co-worker or family member.

We'll also have extra copies of the invites themselves.

Invites will also be on social media.

Have a great day and travel safely.