

GRUMBLING OR GRATITUDE?

By Bob Young

Introduction

The practice of Thanksgiving, “accion de gracias.”

Not, “are we thankful?” but “how do we express our gratitude?”

People love to complain.

A. Complaining seems to motivate us.

There is a story of a young man who was told by his doctor that he had only six months to live. In shock, the young man asked if there was anything that could be done. After all, he was still a young man and had many things left to do in life.

The doctor thought about his question for a bit, and then finally gave him a solution.

The doctor told the young man to go out and find the ugliest, most cantankerous woman in the county and marry her. He told the young man to insure that he found a woman who would incessantly nag him, and complain about everything he said or did.

Then go out and buy the most beat-up old pickup truck he could find, preferably one that wouldn't run all of the time.

Then he needed to buy a run down old apartment right in the middle of a poor section of town. Somewhat skeptical the young man looked at the doctor and asked, "Doc, are you sure that this will help me to live longer?"

"Not at all," replied the doctor, "but it sure will make six months seem like a lifetime!"

B. A study found that complainers live longer.

Apparently complaining gives them a purpose to go on living. (Israel's grumbling?)

Wouldn't it be wise to seek out a more positive purpose?

I. Our thinking: Grumbling and gratitude are learned behaviors.

A. Our upbringing influences us.

>>We have all seen a parent nudging a child and saying, "What do you say?" and hearing the child respond with a timid, "Thank you".

>>Maybe some believers need to be nudged with, "What do you say to the nice God?"

B. Expressing gratitude should be expected.

*Saying "thanks" is polite behavior.

**Good manners are rare these days. (Remembering when politeness was more common.)

**We expect people to be thankful. So does God.

*The Bible commands gratitude from us.

**Like ordering us to love enemies.

**Not a command, but call to express faith. Genuine gratitude is spontaneous, not forced.

**Spontaneity comes more easily to a disciplined heart

**Thank him even when you don't feel like it.

C. Thanksgiving should be part of life—once a year before a big turkey is hardly gratitude.

II. Our attitudes: cultivate the habit of gratitude.

A. Look for hidden blessings.

>>Paul tells the Colossians to be "watchful and thankful." 4:2

>>We complain about the gifts we have being different from the gifts we would choose.

*We complain about our looks, our brains, our popularity.

*Not every gift is to our benefit.

**Beauty can lead to vanity.

**Intelligence to pride.

**Strength to belligerence.

B. Turn your attention from your problems to God's priorities.

- >> Gratitude makes us step back and look at big picture.
 - *Jesus gave thanks for a meal, hours before death.
 - *He saw the bigger picture, John 13:3
 - *Your problems may be molding you into a better person.
- >> We discover God's will for us in a special way, 1 Th 5:18
 - *One way to discover his will: sexual purity.
 - *Another way: habit of gratitude

C. Thank God in the midst of adversity.

- >> We can have gratitude in everything.
 - *Everything that happens is wonderful?
 - **No, much is result of sin and selfishness.
 - **Everything is either good, or can be made good.
 - *Note that we are thankful "in" everything, not "for" it.
- >> Some in this church are going through difficult times.
 - *We are learning to depend on their heavenly Father.
 - *We thank him for the help and encouragement we get from others in this church.

D. Discipline your gratitude.

- >> Try a voluntary fast from something you take for granted.
 - *Familiarity breeds contempt; absence makes the heart grow fonder.
 - *Fast from food for a day, and your table will be more meaningful.
 - *Give up your car for one day and think how much more you'll appreciate your car.
- >> Keep a record of God's faithfulness to you.
 - *"Count your blessings" as the song says.
 - *List them in a journal.

III. Our actions: Expressing gratitude shows our love.

A. Gratitude shows we don't take our gifts for granted.

- *We also don't take the Giver for granted.
- *Humans and God both appreciate that.

B. Express your gratitude to God.

- *In prayer. Therese of Lisieux once said, "prayer is a cry of grateful love" launching out to God.
- *In public, Psalm 35:18
 - **We remind ourselves of the faithfulness of God.
 - **We encourage others who are cynical or wavering.

C. Express your gratitude to people.

- *Make a habit of expressing it to others.
 - **Some in church have a habit of sending little cards)
 - **Two even send animated internet cards)
- *Give opportunities in your family.
 - **When is the last time you thanked your spouse?
 - **Meaningfully, not just for dinner.
- *When is last time you thanked the garbage man?
 - **I appreciate the hard work they do.
 - **Been meaning to give them a gift for 3 years...

D. Expressing gratitude influences others.

In the book, **Living Life on Purpose**, Greg Anderson shares the story of one man's journey to joy:

The man's his wife had left him and he was completely depressed. He had lost faith in himself, in other people, in God – he found no joy in living.

One rainy morning this man went to a small neighborhood restaurant for breakfast. Although several people were at the diner, no one was speaking to anyone else. Our miserable friend hunched over the counter, stirring his coffee with a spoon.

In one of the small booths along the window was a young mother with a little girl. They had just been served their food when the little girl broke the sad silence by almost shouting, "Momma, why don't we say our prayers here?"

The waitress who had just served their breakfast turned around and said, "Sure, honey, we pray here. Will you say the prayer for us?"

And she turned and looked at the rest of the people in the restaurant and said, "Bow your heads."

Surprisingly, one by one, the heads went down. The little girl then bowed her head, folded her hands, and said, "God is great, God is good, and we thank him for our food. Amen."

That prayer changed the entire atmosphere. People began to talk with one another.

The waitress said, "We should do that every morning."

"All of a sudden," said our friend, "my whole frame of mind started to improve.

From that little girl's example, I started to thank God for all that I do have and stop majoring in all that I do not have. I started to choose happiness."

CONCLUSION

A. Put Christ back in Thanksgiving. It was an act of worship for Pilgrims.

B. Gratitude doesn't always give immediate payback.

When people expend themselves, they want results.

When they lay down life, they want someone else's life raised up.

If they empty themselves, they want someone to be filled.

They want sufferings to bear fruit.

If this doesn't happen, they're tempted to give up.

The refusal of the gift quickly becomes a reason not to offer it.

Instead of leaning into resistance with love, they'll back off and say, "Well, we tried."

However, the motive for offering love is not that it be successful.

Christians want response, but they are not bound to it.

They sacrifice for others because they are the recipients of sacrifice.

They are the current generation in a long line of broken bodies and shed blood.

This gift Christians have received, they freely give.

They join a living history in enacting the dream of God—people sustained and transformed by mutual sacrificial love.

C. Make gratitude an important part of your life.

>> With God.

>> With others.