Spiritual Disciplines: Gratitude

Small things done consistently can have monumental results. Practice the discipline of gratitude daily and your life will be transformed. Simply pause to thank God for His good gifts. Meditate on His faithfulness to you in the past. List out all that you have to be grateful for in the present. As you practice this discipline of gratitude instead of complaining, grumbling, or forgetting God's goodness, you will experience His peace, be filled with His joy, and grow in faith and maturity.

Small things done consistently can have monumental results
- example: soft drink at lunch – a small pleasure to get us through the day
  o What if you gave it up for health reasons or to save $?
  o Small sacrifice – what would the long term effect be?
    ▪ avg: $1 a day (more if you eat out, less if you bring it from home)
    ▪ avg: 144 calories for a 12 oz can of Coke or DP
  o After 1 month: saved $30 and 4300 calories
  o After 1 year: saved $365 and 52,000 calories
    ▪ put that in perspective - $365 not chump change!
    ▪ 52,000 calories! To burn that off, you’d have to run for 4.3 days, bike for 5.7, or walk for 10 ½ days straight!!
- Now let’s assume
  o you begin making that sacrifice and saving that $30 a month
  o when you graduate – at 22 – and you keep making it until you retire – 65
  o $1/day, $30/month
  o invest that into an S&P500 mutual fund – historic rate of return = 9.6%
  o At 65 you’d have... $210,461!!!
    ▪ That’s real money! Buy a nice house! Not a bad trade!!

Small things done consistently can have monumental results

That’s the promise of our subject this morning: the spiritual discipline of gratitude
- small, simple compared to last week’s discipline
- but has had a monumental impact on my life over the last decade: secret of my joy, protector of my marriage, fuel of the fire of my passion for God...
- I’ve been truly excited to share this discipline with you – it can change your life

Review Spiritual Disciplines
- definition: Habits of body and mind that allow us to effectively cooperate with God's Spirit in the process of character transformation
- The Spiritual Disciplines
  - engagement: prayer • worship • service • giving
  - abstinence: rest • fasting • solitude

become a DISCIPLE through DISCIPLINE
- essential – can’t grow as a disciple of Christ without discipline
- BUT – disciplines don’t grow us – disciplines just make us available to the Holy Spirit!
What is Gratitude?
- English definition: “the state of being appreciative of blessings received”
- 2 Greek words in NT:
  o *eucharistia*
    - “an attitude of being thankful…
    - Col 2:6-7
      *Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.*
  o *charis*
    - “BOTH the gift of grace and our grateful response…
    - “let’s say grace”
  o basic idea: gratitude is a **choice to thank God** – crucial distinction:
    - we tend to think of it as a feeling contingent on the value of the gift…
      - steak dinner vs Raman noodles
    - but that’s not how biblical gratitude works…
      - a choice to thank God even if I don’t feel grateful
- Biblical OPPOSITES of Gratitude:
  o “Complain”
    - Numb 11:1
      *Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled…*
    - What were they complaining about? Numb 11:4-6
      ...*the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.”*
    - Background of Passage
    - Confused me because same English word in Ps 55
    - Psalm 55:1-3,17
      *Give heed to me and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the pressure of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me...Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice.*
    - Two different words in Hebrew
      - *anan* vs *siach*
    - define *anan*: Numbers 11 “to complain, express discontent, accuse”
    - define *siach*: Psalm 55 “to lament, mourn aloud, express sorrow”
    - both are human responses to difficult circumstances
    - but the responses are very different
    - *siach* response: dependent faith – Compatible with Gratitude
    - Ps 55:16-18
      *As for me, I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain (siach) and murmur, and He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me, for they are many who strive with me.*
    - *anan* response: ungrateful disbelief – Incompatible with Gratitude
    - What’s the point of distinguishing these?
      - not a “don’t worry, be happy” kind of life
  o “Grumble” – “to murmur against someone or something”
    - low, hushed, angry voice
    - all of us participated in it in High School around the cafeteria table...
“Forget” Turn to Ps 106
  - Not like English forgetting
  - read Ps106:6-8 then vv13-14 then vv19-21
- So in conclusion

Gratitude is a discipline – a habit – so, let’s ask...

When should we practice it?
- Read Phil 4:6-7
  Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
  - it’s easy to read and totally miss the discipline of gratitude...
  - gratitude should permeate our prayer-life
- Read Phil 4:8
  Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.
  - in this verse, Paul is talking about our free mental activity...
  - gratitude should permeate our thought-life
  - example of General Stonewall Jackson
    - he disciplined his mind to dispose it towards gratefulness so that not even the smallest...
- Turn to Deut 6 – read Deut 6:20-24
  o gratitude should permeate our family-life
  - parents, this may be the most important thing you hear this morning...
- Read Phil 2:14-15
  Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world...
  - gratitude should permeate our church-life

Gratitude should permeate...
  - Phil 4:6-7 ...our prayer-life
  - Phil 4:8 ...our thought-life
  - Deut 6:20-24 ...our family-life
  - Phil 2:14-15 ...our church-life

So the discipline of gratitude is all-consuming... should be practicing it all the time
  - I should constantly be choosing to thank God for His grace in my life
  - Why don’t I?!
    - Why am I more likely to complain than to give thanks?!
    - Why am I not grateful more often?
    - In other words...

Why is gratitude so hard?
- God is always to me, so why am I not always thankful? Why am I not always practicing gratitude? Why do I find it so hard to be continually grateful?
- because I am, by nature, ungrateful
  - parents, did you have to teach your children to be ungrateful?...
  - ungratefulness is a habit that few outgrow...
- because I often don’t feel grateful
  - again, we fall into the trap of believing that gratitude is based on feelings
    - I’m not going to feel grateful if you give me Raman noodles
  - unfortunately, life often gives us Raman noodles!
    - life is full of disappointments, disillusionment, pain, suffering
  - so, if we only give thanks when we feel grateful, we’re not going to be giving thanks very often.
- because gratitude requires sacrifice
  - when I’m hurt, disappointed – complaining feels good!
    - bandage on a wound
    - we like pity parties when we’re the guest of honor!!
  - gratitude requires us to sacrifice our right to complain and feel sorry for ourselves – that’s hard!
- because I live in a culture of complaint
  - complaining is as American as apple pie
  - reality TV shows...

The discipline of gratitude is incredibly difficult. It goes against the grain of our nature and our society. It requires sacrifice and effort.

So, the logical question, why should we bother?! Why put forth the effort it takes to practice gratitude?

Why should we practice gratitude?
- Answer by comparing the results of either practicing gratitude or not
- option 1 – practice gratitude
- option 2 – practice complaining, grumbling, forgetting
- Result #1
  - Read to you from profound theology book I found in our children’s library...
    - Counting Blessings by Debbie Boone
    - “Here’s the deal. Think about things that make you sad, you'll be sad. Think about things in your life that make you happy, you’ll be happy.”
  - cultivates happiness vs cultivates sadness
- Result #2 – gratitude grows our faith
  - Read Psalm 63:6-11
    - When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches, for You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me. But those who seek my life to destroy it, will go into the depths of the earth. They will be delivered over to the power of the sword; they will be a prey for foxes. But the king will rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him will glory...
  - Compare to ingratitude of Exodus 16:1-3
    - ...on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”
  - ingratitude empowers lies
    - complaining clouds our minds – we lose all perspective
- Result #3 – gratitude motivates obedience
  - In the book of Deuteronomy, we see a common phrase...
    - “You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the Lord redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.”
  - God knew that gratitude motivates obedience…same for us today
  - Unfortunately, the Israelites often chose ingratitude
  - Read Psalm 106:19-21 again
They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a molten image. Thus they exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt
- **ingratitude excuses sin**
- **common example today: adultery**
  - gratitude is the protector of a good marriage
- **Result #4 – brings God’s help**
  - Phil 4 again – “with thankfulness” – He gives you His peace
  - What about ingratitude – how does God respond?
  - read Numb 11:1-3
    * Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.*
  - Numbers 16 – 14,700 die by plague
  - **ingratitude brings God’s judgment** - infuriates God

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<th>Practice Gratitude</th>
<th>Complain &amp; Forget</th>
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<td>1. <strong>Cultivates happiness</strong></td>
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<td>3. <strong>Motivates obedience</strong></td>
<td>3. <strong>Excuses sin</strong> Psalm 106:19-21</td>
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<td>4. <strong>Brings God’s help</strong> Phil 4:6-7</td>
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**How do we practice the spiritual discipline of gratitude?**

- **Keep a gratitude journal**
  - may just be part of your prayer or personal journal
  - helpful to me personally
  - when I’m frustrated, depressed...
    - review what I have to be thankful for
    - or start a new page – list all I’m grateful for about my kids, wife, job, house...
    - like declaring nuclear war on my ungrateful heart!
  - This is a great day to start...
    - But 2012 has been a rotten year for me!
    - Are you breathing?
    - Are you saved?
      - if yes – all sins from 2012 forgiven
      - if no – you can have the greatest thank you statement possible if you’ll just accept 2 facts...GOSPEL
    - You’re off to a great start!

- **Make an encouragement box**
  - keep encouraging letters or cards – review on dark days
  - or email mailbox
- **Create a gratitude scrapbook**
  - buy or make
  - title each page
  - attach pictures, cards, quotes, verses
  - REALLY SHINES if you do it as a family
- **Find a gratitude mentor**
  - flip side: limit the influence of persistent grumblers

Choose one of these ideas to practice this week

**The Discipline of Gratitude is SMALL – but if consistently practiced, it will have MONUMENTAL impact on your life – I promise!**