

“UNLEASHING A LIFE OF GRATITUDE”
by Rom A. Pegram (11/15/20)

Good morning! And welcome back to our ‘Thank You’ worship series, where we’re discovering together ‘the power of a grateful life.’ And today we move to ‘unleashing a life of gratitude’...

Don’t you just love that word? UNLEASHING. I love that word because, when you *unleash* something, you expect it to have power to make an immediate and profound impact. You don’t just unleash something and expect it to lay there and do nothing, do you? When you *unleash* something, you expect it to be a catalyst for change...

Folks, that’s the heart behind this series we’re in. It’s not about just being grateful during this holiday season; *it’s more about lifestyle!* It’s about unleashing a lifestyle of gratitude that will help you live your life at the highest level—with more joy, more happiness, and more contentment than ever before...

And not only will a lifestyle of gratitude impact *your life*; it will also impact *the lives of those around you*. Did you know that? The lives of your friends, your co-workers, and your family will all be impacted in a positive way—just by starting to *unleash* a lifestyle of gratefulness...

Now, it’s not that you and I never say thank you. We do say thank you. Someone does something nice for us and we almost automatically say, “Thank you!” Or I hope we do. You’re probably thankful on Thanksgiving Day too, or before meals, etc.

But, most of us—if we’re honest—don’t live lives of daily, moment-by-moment, thankfulness—where we’re constantly thankful for God’s blessings every moment of the day. Instead, we focus more—if we’re honest—*on what we don’t have!* We focus on what’s not right with our lives and, as a result, we’re living lives where we’re complaining more than we should, possibly bitter at how life’s going, and maybe a little discouraged, where we worry or feel sorry for ourselves. That’s a miserable way to live, isn’t it? *What God wants for your life is to move you from a life of occasional gratitude ... to a life of daily gratitude!* Ephesians 5:20 are Paul’s words to the church at Ephesus. Here it is...

“And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, let me ask: Does this verse say give thanks ‘for some things?’ Does it say to give thanks for ‘the BIG things in life?’ Does it say we should just give thanks for ‘the good things’ that come our way? NO! This verse clearly tells says we should be thankful for ... EVERYTHING!

Man, that seems like a tall order, doesn’t it? How in the world are we supposed to manage being thankful for EVERYTHING in life? Folks, one of the keys to unlocking a life of gratefulness is to learn to be thankful with the little things—the little blessings—of life, because they come along every day. If we can be thankful for the little things, we can then be thankful on a regular basis, which leads to *unleashing* a life of gratitude. But, when are some prime opportunities to do that? What I want to give you today is a

schedule for thankfulness; I want to give you FOUR TIMES IN LIFE TO SAY 'THANK YOU' that will unleash a lifestyle of gratitude. Here's the first TIME to say 'thank you'...

EVERY TIME A NEW DAY BEGINS. To unleash a life of gratitude, it starts with being grateful every time a new day begins...

It means thanking God every time the alarm clock goes off—as soon as you open your eyes, before your feet hit the floor!

Now, whether you're a morning person or not, for most of us 'thank you' isn't the first thing that comes to mind when the alarm goes off. Instead of waking up and saying, "Good morning, Lord!", most of the time we wake up and say, "Good Lord, it's morning!" Right? Mornings are tough. We struggle a little bit sometimes. Or maybe you're the type of person that as soon as the alarm clock goes off, your mind is already distracted ... by to-do lists, things you need to get accomplished that particular day...

Most of us, however, don't wake up saying, "Thank you, God, for this new day!" But if we want to unleash a life of gratitude, if we want to experience the joy and peace that comes with that lifestyle, we need to begin each day with a great big THANK YOU to the One responsible for the new day...

Psalms 92:2a tells us, "It is good to proclaim your unfailing love [*when?*] in the morning..." Folks, the psalmist tells us it's good to thank God in the morning ... because each new day is a new opportunity to experience God's love! But let's be honest, it's not always easy to do that, is it?

Now I know, as a pastor, I'm not alone in this. There are times when I wake up in the morning just dreading the day. I'm stressed about meetings, or things I have to do ... *that I don't like to do*. Or I look at my calendar and I have an appointment that day with ... someone who causes me stress. You know what I'm talking about. You have this day in front of you, and you're dreading various things you must do. So instead of being thankful for my blessings, I'm focusing on the negative—complaining all the way. And that tends to just ruin your day!

This is why I'm committed to do all in my power (with God's help) to start each day from now on with a simple 'thank you.' I want to unleash a lifestyle of gratitude ... every day. Lamentations 3:23 reminds us, "Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning." Folks, this is one thing we can do to make sure we're headed in the right direction—SAY 'THANK YOU' EVERY TIME A NEW DAY BEGINS. Then, I should say 'thank you'...

EVERY TIME I ENGAGE GOD'S WORD. Thank God every time you take the time/have the opportunity to get into his word...

One of the keys to unleashing a life of gratitude is to say 'thank you' every time you engage God's word—every time you read the Bible. *The Bible is the primary way God speaks to us—gives our lives direction...* And one of the keys to hearing God clearly when you get into his word is to ... *approach God's word with gratitude*. When you're

getting ready to read the Bible, about to open it up (or read it on your phone or tablet), *pause ... pray ... and thank God for his word!*

Thank God for speaking his truth into your life through the Bible. Thank him for what he's about to say to your heart through his word. Because here's the thing: if you come to God's word grudgingly and your heart's not open, if you view reading the Bible as an obligation—something you have to do, instead of an opportunity to experience God personally, then you're probably not going to get much out of it. You're not going to get much direction from God. So, here's the principle: *The more thankful you are when you engage God's word, the more meaningful (and powerful) it will be!*

Folks, God's word isn't meant to be read like some old, dusty history book. No! The Bible is alive, and it'll speak directly to our hearts, if we let it. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul describes this (3:16-17): "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work."

So, the scriptures are the words of God breathed into humans who wrote what we know today as the Bible. Think about that for a moment, would you? The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written by 40 different authors, in three different languages, over the course of 2,000 years. Yet, it is a seamless story of God's love for us—all humanity. There is nothing close to it in all human history! The fact that the Bible exists is nothing short of a miracle!

It's the inspired word of God that we can trust, that will speak truth into our lives, that will guide us at every turn of life, if we let it. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ..." Thank God every time you engage his word; there's nothing else like it. The psalmist reminds us (Ps. 119:72), "Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver." There's the value of God's word. Then I thank God...

EVERY TIME I EXPERIENCE A BLESSING. Be thankful every time something good happens—every time you're blessed, because ... *every good thing in life comes from God!* James tells us (1:17a), "Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father...."

That means ... whatever is good and perfect is what? *A gift.* It's not an accident. It's not a coincidence. It's certainly not luck! It comes from God. Every good thing is a blessing. So, every moment of joy, every blessing you have—your job, your money, your health, every relationship with family, friends, co-workers, everything in life that makes you happy to be alive today ... is a gift from God. Make sure you say 'thank you!'

The key to unleashing a life of daily, moment-by-moment, gratitude comes by being thankful for every single blessing in our lives! Let's get practical for a moment, shall we? Every time you get paid, thank God for that blessing. Every time you walk into your

residence, thank God for the roof over your head. Every time you get a good grade on a paper at school, thank God for that blessing.

And sometimes the blessings come through other people. God uses others to bless us. Please don't forget that. *Who has God used to bless you this week?* Take a moment and thank them that they allowed God to use them—to be a blessing in your life, would you? *And they may be sitting right next to you...*

Psalm 103:2 says, "Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me"—including the good things that come through others. Don't forget to thank God ... every time you receive a blessing. Then, I need to thank God...

EVERY TIME GOD DOES OR DOESN'T ANSWER MY PRAYER. Now, this'll take a little explaining, but I'll do my best...

WHEN GOD ANSWERS PRAYER: You'd think the easy part would be thanking God when he answers our prayers, but the truth is ... many times after God answers our prayers, we forget about it...

We forget to thank God when he answers our prayers. Do you remember the 10 lepers? We talked about that story when we first started this series (Luke 17). In this story, Jesus heals all 10 lepers—cleanses them and ushers them back into society. But only one came back to say 'thank you.' And what did Jesus say? "Didn't I heal ten of you? Why has only one of you come back to say 'thank you?'"

We look at this story and say 'Oh, that's bad!' But don't we do the same thing? God answers our prayers, and we say, "Man, I lucked out!" No, you didn't! God answered your prayers ... and you forgot to say 'thank you!' It's not blind luck, folks. Psalm 118:21 states: "21 I thank you for answering my prayer and giving me victory!" Take time to thank God when he answers your prayers. It's one way we unleash a life of gratitude! Then, we need to say 'thanks'...

WHEN GOD DOESN'T ANSWER PRAYER: There are times when we ask God for something and God says, "No!" And, even though we're sure it would be best, God doesn't give us what we prayed for. Well, in those times, God still deserves our thanks, because he actually knows what's best for us ... and for everyone!

The Apostle Paul prayed in a letter he wrote to the church in Rome. This was the one church he wrote to that he didn't plant, but there were believers in Rome, and he wanted to go see them. It was the center of the empire, so it had great potential to grow the church. Rome is where he wanted to be. I'm sure he had visions of revival services in the Colosseum and so forth. He prayed in Romans 1:10, "One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you." This was Paul's biggest dream—to preach in Rome. 'Seems like a worthy prayer, doesn't it?

But God had another plan. He said to Paul, "Paul, I'm gonna send you to Rome, but not as a preacher. I'm going to send you as a prisoner. You're gonna go to Rome in chains, and you're gonna die there in prison." So, why in the world would God do this? Why would he not answer Paul's prayer the way he wanted it answered?

You see, Paul wanted to preach to thousands, which seems great. But, as a prisoner Paul was forced to sit in a cold, dark cell ... and in that cell is where he started writing letters. And he wrote to all the churches he'd planted. And, in writing, he began to lay out Christian theology—correct thinking about God, about God's plan in Jesus. And he ended up writing the majority of what we know as the New Testament. He wrote 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, 1 & 2 Thessalonians—the vast majority of the New Testament ... which we still have today...

Do you understand now why we also need to thank God for unanswered prayers? God's plan was much bigger for Paul ... and it was much better for the world! When God doesn't answer your prayers the way you think he should answer them, know that God probably has something much bigger and much better for you, too! Remember, you can trust God, he loves you, and he can see further than you can. God knows what's best for you, and he's busy blessing your life even when you can't see it...

So, *unleash a life of gratitude starting today*. Thank God at these times: when every day begins anew, every time you get to engage in his word (Bible), every time you experience a blessing, and when God answers and doesn't answer your prayers. Folks, there's nothing more powerful in this world—how it affects you and affects the lives of others around you—than a lifestyle of gratitude. Unleash it in your life today by thanking God at all these important times in your life. Here's *your schedule for thanksgiving*—not just for the holiday, but all year long...