

# **Gratitude and Joy**

*By Bobby Schuller*

I want to encourage you to remember the Lord. In our lives, through good and bad, it's so good to remember the Lord, and to remember his character, and to remember that he loves you, that he's in covenant with you, that he's faithful to that covenant, and that you can trust him.

So much of living a joyful life is remembering the Lord, and particularly remembering him when things go good. I know for me I turn to the Lord when things go bad. Of course I do. They say there's no atheists in a foxhole, right? When things get rough and tough, we turn to the Lord and we ask for help, and we should, and that's good.

But what about when things are going really well. What about in the day-to-day things? I think it's so important to remember the Lord in everything we do. To be grateful people. A grateful heart is a magnet for miracles. A grateful heart just invites so much favor, breakthrough, vision, positivity, connections. A grateful heart is a magnet for miracles. There's something about grateful people that just draw health, wealth, joy, life, they just draw it to themselves, and that's why I want you to be a grateful person because gratitude will just open up the door in your life so much. And you are a grateful person, and I'm grateful for you.

When you're grateful, I believe you invite favor, not only with God, but with other people, God and man. When we're grateful, it changes the

way we view not only our circumstance, it changes the way we view our story. Many of us who have a great present kind of hate our past. We look back at our adversity and our challenges, or maybe we look at our family or some way that we were mistreated, or somebody that robbed us in our business, or sued us, or insulted us, or offended us. And the more we dwell on those things and feel embittered by those things, the more it affects our present.

But when we look back at our lives and from our bones we just say thank you, even in the midst of adversity, thank you that you carried me through. Thank you that you gave me everything I needed to be where I am today. Thank you for all the good, wonderful things in the midst of the suffering. When we begin to be grateful people, we reframe our story, not as a tragedy, but as a crucible that made it you, the fantastic person you are. You wouldn't be who you are without your adversity.

And so we, you know, God doesn't hurt people. If you're sick, God didn't make you sick. But we can thank God that no matter what the world or the devil or whatever throws at us, he remembers his covenant, he is good, he will get you through. So you can thank him today for the little things, and you can thank him today that he's got you this far because you've only seen just the beginning. Your future is so bright and you can thank God for that, too.

When we become grateful people, it's like heaven just opens up to our hearts and our lives and we create a whole new paradigm when we

see our story through the lens of gratitude versus the lens of being a victim, and many of you have been victims. When we see our past through the lens of gratitude instead of the lens of regret, or embitterment, but we say thank you God, you've got me this far and my future is bright, we just get a fresh vision for our future.

Let me say it this way: when you get a fresh vision for your past, you get a fresh vision for your future. The better you see your past, the better you see your future. And as we live today in this moment with gratitude, you just begin to just see clearer and to see everything that's possible. There's so much that's possible, but sometimes we're blind to it because of our grief or our pain or our sickness. Move from that place into gratitude.

I know there have been a lot of studies on happiness or joy or just a full life. I've cited a number of studies on this, but one of the things that's kind of baffled scientists is that it seems that people seem to have kind of fixed position of happiness. Most people do. And it's like this is kind of where your default is. And for most people, something really great circumstantially happens. Let's just say you win the lottery, and I hope you do. Remember to tithe. If you win the lottery, you're going to be elated for, and the number is usually about six months. And what typically happens, as Nietzsche said the human being is someone who can get used to anything. You eventually come back to that old point of happiness you were, and it's usually about six months prior.

The other happens, as well. Studies have shown that if something terrible happens to you, you go blind or you have some major health thing that's permanent, or you lose your business or something, you usually have about six months of despair, depression, anger, frustration, but usually after about six months or so, you go back to that original place of happiness. Isn't that bizarre?

And one of the things that scientists have asked is how do we move that needle? And they've only found one way to move that needle permanently, and I've cited this before, but this is from Robert Edmonds, I believe out of the University of Michigan professor, and this was also cited by Dr. Ben-Shahar out of Harvard. The one thing is regular practices of gratitude; people making lists or doing something in which they are saying or writing down how they're grateful. And they've actually shown that doing that moves your needle permanently in a happy direction.

In my life, as I've seen, you know one of the great things about being a pastor is that you can see all sorts of people from the very poorest to the very richest, all races and backgrounds, multiple nationalities, we're an international ministry, too, and you just see patterns form. And one of the things that you notice is how much people's mental perspective has a lot to do with the outcome of their life. And very often, especially the self made, a lot of the wealthy people that have succeeded or people have done really well in other areas of ministry

or things like that, you often find that they're just grateful people. And it's easy to say well that's post hawk. Obviously they're grateful. Things are going great for them. But one of the things I've noticed is with a lot of the successful people I've seen in life, they tend to have a sort of supernatural resilience that seems to be rooted in positivity and gratitude. That I've just seen for many of them, and not all of them, and this is conjecture, just my own observation, right? It's just an opinion. I see that when these people go through adversity, i.e. terrible sickness, or they lose everything: their whole business, they still have this posture of gratitude; to others, to God, and they're not Pollyanna but I just see how people that are like super human grateful tend to have just so much, the world would say, luck. Grateful people in every field, in every area of life, grateful people are a magnet for miracles; a magnet for success; a magnet for connections. There's something about a heart that is thankful to God and thankful to others that just invites blessing. It's one of the smartest, easiest things you can do to make your life better today. It is a no brainer.

As a pastor, I think the most important reason we should be grateful people, though, I think being grateful connects our heart to God. I still remember the first time I went to Yosemite and just looking around. I went there because one of my brother's closest friends, who was an atheist, said, 'I don't believe in God. That's stupid. Unless I go to Yosemite, then I think well maybe.' And there are these experiences:

Yosemite, maybe you've been out just for a beautiful walk, or you've been up in the mountains as its snowing, or to the ocean at sunset, and you just feel thankful to who? Well yes, if you believe in God. And actually C.S. Lewis, I think quoting Chesterton, said 'one of the hardest things in the life of an atheist is when you feel incredibly thankful but you have no one to thank.' You know C.S. Lewis was an atheist and converted to Christianity as a Oxford Don, very bright, of course.

But I think one of the reasons as Christians we ought to continue to thank God even for the little things, or to be thankful to God is that it like reinforces intimacy with the Holy Spirit. It acknowledges God's blessing and it just connects us to him. If you've ever enjoyed that sunset at the beach all by yourself on a warm evening and you just said thank you, God. After you said thank you God, I guarantee you felt more connected to God than you did before you said thank you.

And so as we say thank you to God, it connects us to him. And when we say thank you to people, it connects us to them, as well. So being a grateful person, and not just feeling it, saying it. Out loud. Thank you, God. Thank you, Russ. These things open up our body and connect us deeply with our friends, our colleagues, and most of all, our Lord, and it keeps us in a place of faith, hope, life, fresh vision, favor, so keep doing it, and you are doing it and that's good.

The passage I'm preaching today is Luke chapter 17, one of my favs. It's really good. And I'm going to read it again. Hannah already read it, but I have a deeper voice, so.

"Now on his way to Jerusalem," so he's almost to Jerusalem, "Jesus is traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee." So Samaria is where the Samaritans are. Galilee is where the Jews are. "As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy.." okay, this is the first important word. Everyone say leprosy. "Met him. They stood at a distance." Everybody say at a distance. Okay? "And called out in a loud voice – Jesus, master have pity on us. When he saw them, he said go show yourself to the priest. As they went.." everyone say as they went, "..they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice." Everyone say in a loud voice. Nothing wrong with praising God in a loud voice. "He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him and he was a.." and this is going to be the last time I ask you to do this, everybody in a loud voice tell me he was a Samaritan. Yes! "Jesus said were not all these ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Okay, so a couple of things, lepers. So in Judaism, in ancient Judaism, a leper is an outcast. And originally this was done because of health reasons. Everybody's traveling, living together, and one leper can ruin them all, right? So there's this idea that the way we handle lepers to keep everybody clean is we put them in leper colonies.

Now in those days, you ever wonder why there are so many lepers in the Bible. And a lot of that's because any kind of visible skin thing could be considered leprosy, including like eczema, and things like that. So a leper then, if you were a Jewish man, and you went to temple every Saturday, and you went with your family, and life was going well, and you had a business, and one day you got leprosy or eczema, or something like that, you'd be removed from your life and placed in a leper colony. And there you had to stay until one, you were either better, or two, a lot of people, the rest of your life. So say goodbye to your family, get used to the new norm in your leper colony.

Now on top of this, there was a bad theology that essentially believed that if you were sick it was because God was cursing you. And part of Jesus' healing sinners and stuff like that was to prove God doesn't, I think, God doesn't make you sick because Jesus didn't make anyone sick. So there they are, outcasts, right? And the only way you can leave that leper colony is if you go to the temple and show yourself to the priest, and then the priest looks you over and he says no, you still you got a thing here, you need to go back. Or he'll say, nope, you're fine, you can go back to your life. Okay?

The second thing we need to understand, and if you've been listening to me at all you probably know a lot about Samaritans. We always think Samaritans are great and everything because of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Samaritans are outcasts also. Samaritans are

mud bloods. They're half breeds. They are outsiders. And they are half Jew, half Assyrian. So what happened is the earliest empire was the Acadian Assyrian Empire, and depending on how you measure it, it could be almost fifteen hundred year long empire. Amazing. Longest running and also, and there's a lot of big competitors for this, the most violent, brutal empire that's ever existed. Torture, everything. We're not going to go into that but it's bad. And everybody hated the Assyrians. They hated them so much that when the Babylonians and Persians conquered the capital of Assyria Nineveh, they burned everything to the ground and left nothing standing, and killed every Assyrian so that nothing would be left. They wanted to wipe them out from history, that's how evil the Assyrians were.

The Assyrians are the ones who got as far as halfway down Israel in the, I believe it was the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and they took all of the people in the Northern kingdom, from the tribes of Ephraim and the half tribe of Manassas, and dragged them back to Assyria, and then whoever was left they sent Assyrians into that northern part of Israel to breed them out, as the king says on "Brave heart." I don't know if you remember that. Breed them out.

And after the Assyrian Empire falls, you have this group of people in the northern part of Israel who are trying to reclaim their religious home. They are trying to reclaim a memory or an identity. And what you get is this bizarre half breed group of individuals called the Samaritans.

They have a Torah very similar to the Jewish Torah, but it's different. It's a Samaritan Torah. And here's what's really important. In the same way the Jews have the holy mountain, the temple mountain Jerusalem, where they claimed Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac, and it's where the covenant is established, they say it wasn't that mountain, it was our mountain, Mount Gerizim, and they built a temple there. So they have their own mountain, and they have their own Torah, and it creates this nasty hostility where Samaritans will be jabbed by the Jews for being half breeds; that you're half Assyrian, those devils. That's all you are. You're heretics. You have a false bible. You have a false temple.

And so over the centuries this incredible bitterness, especially from the Jews towards the Samaritans existed. Samaritans were hated. That's why the parable of the Good Samaritan is so powerful.

So in this story a Samaritan somehow gets muddled in with a group of Jewish lepers. They're all outcasts. I assume they're all friends. Something about tragedy tends to bind us together, in spite of religion and race and all these things. And there they are and they see Jesus. And they say from a distance, they shouted at him, Jesus save us! Why did they shout at a distance? Because lepers couldn't be, in some passages, within 50 paces of another clean person. So everywhere they went, they had to say I am a leper! I am a leper! And literally, people run away going get away, get away! With their kids and stuff. So just imagine total just like isolation, rejection, no sense of belonging. The worst thing

about the leprosy was not the sickness it was the fact that you were homeless. You didn't belong.

So here they are, they all cry out to the Lord and they say heal us. And what is his response? He says go show yourself to the temple priest. Okay. Go show yourself to the priest. That means you show yourself to the priest when you're healthy, but they're all still sick. And the Bible tells us that they start to walk, even as they're sick. And it says as they went. Everyone say as they went they were cleansed. So when they got there, they were able to show themselves to the priest and he said yes, you're good. Now here's the catch: the Samaritan somehow gets bundled up in this mix of Jews. Jesus, a very Jewish, Jewish rabbi talking to Jewish people and a Samaritan just happens to be in the crowd. And he's kind of in the mix. And there's ten of them. And he says go show yourself.

So where is his temple? His temple and his priests are not in Jerusalem. His temple and his priests are up north in Gerizim. And so he's like: I think he thinks I'm Jewish. I'll just go with this and see what happens. He totally Hans Solo's his way to Jerusalem. In this group he's just kind of hiding out and he's like he said go to the temple so.. imagine what it's going to be like. I mean Samaritans aren't even allowed to go into the temple, so he's going to go into the temple, and he a Samaritan is going to show himself to a Jewish priest, who's going to be like why are

you even here? You're not even Jewish. You don't need.. right? So he's going to have this bizarre experience and he does it.

So here's the important thing is the Samaritan doesn't understand. The Samaritan doesn't know if he's maybe tricking Jesus. The Samaritan doesn't know if he's going to get well. The Samaritan knows he's not Jewish. He maybe is. He's probably never been to the temple. Does he know whether or not he's going to get healed? I don't think so. I think he thinks it's possible. He's a possibility thinker. He is someone who says I don't know if this is going to happen, but he said go do it, and I've got nothing better to do, and I'm just going to try this out and see what happens. And as he went, as he went, as he went he was healed. Do not put God in a box. God is not in a Samaritan box or a Jewish box or any other religious box. God is God. And when he tells us to do this or that, just do it. Don't put him in a box. It's an amazing story because of all the ten, who comes back to thank Jesus? The Samaritan. He's like oh my gosh, it worked! Yes! Sweet. That's pretty sweet.

So this Samaritan runs back to Jesus and Jesus goes, didn't everybody get healed? And he's like well yes, but you know, they had stuff to do. Well didn't you have stuff to do? Yes, but I'm a Samaritan. I didn't deserve to get healed. I'm a Samaritan. I didn't earn this. I'm a Samaritan. That wasn't my temple mount. I'm a Samaritan. I wasn't entitled.

What do we learn from the Samaritan? Do you think Jesus knew he was a Samaritan when he told him to go to the temple? I sure do. Absolutely. You can actually see ethnically how they look different. Of course, he could see. Everybody knew he was a Samaritan. I think he told him to go to challenge his faith about how he viewed God, and I think he really did it to show all of us that God can just do whatever God wants to do. You know we always have these plans and these outcomes and the way everything is supposed to go. And we do our best to pray God into line, you know? Get in line, God, this is how it's supposed to go. And I think the thing we learn, especially in our very plan oriented entitled society, Christianity teaches us that we don't get clarity, we don't get to be told what's going to happen, we get faith. We get to walk through the fog just holding God's hand, not knowing where we're going, but trusting it is good. What we learn from the Samaritan is that as we go, even though it may not make sense, even though it doesn't fit in our paradigm, as we go we're healed. As we go, we're cleansed, as we go, we get the victory.

So it teaches us essentially to abandon outcomes, to hold the future lightly, and to believe that if God can heal my neighbor, he can heal me. If God can rescue my neighbor who does everything right, even though I have my issues, if God will save my neighbor who's so perfect, but I'm not, that he will do it for me, too. That he will remember his covenant. That he's good. That he's faithful. That he's no respecter of

persons. That he loves me in spite of what I do. That God has a miracle in store for you. To not compare yourself to others, but to hold it loosely and just say I am thankful that a good God will get me to my eternal destiny. He's good and I can trust in him.

So who had the most joy of the ten? I mean I think they were all thrilled. If anything, the Jews had greater reason to have joy because they had all of this religious baggage that was associated with it as well, but clearly to me the evidence shows the Samaritan has the most joy; has the most gratitude. He's the only one who returned. In my opinion, there's nothing like entitlement, and very specific expectation that will totally ruin your joy and your gratitude. Instead, we walk by faith and we hold it loosely. And holding it loosely doesn't mean we go oh God's got nothing good in store. Holding it loosely means God's got so much good in store for me I couldn't possibly plan it or imagine it. And that last point is so important. Holding it loosely means I can't plan this because there's no way I can see how much good God has in store.

And part of walking by faith and being a possibility thinker is becoming a dreamer to actually start to see just a small percentage of the amazing thing things God has in store for you. And man, once you got the picture in your mind, you've got half the battle. You're halfway there.

So what do we do then? We hold it loosely and we live in every moment with gratitude. And this is how it works as a happy and whole student of Jesus. We remember all the good that God has done for us, we

stir up our faith with gratitude. That gives us faith and the faith gives us the breakthrough, and then the breakthrough gives us more faith. So it's like a circle. So we stir up our faith with gratitude. That's what we do.

I'll never forget Victoria Osteen, I heard her at the Staples Center. She said this analogy I've never forgotten it. She said life is a bit like chocolate milk. And I said okay that's interesting. She said, you put your milk in the glass and then you put in all the chocolate syrup and it all goes to the bottom. So you got to stir it up. You got to stir it up. And then sometimes you put it in the fridge and you come back an hour later and it's split again. You got the chocolate at the bottom, and the milk at the top, you got to stir it up.

And I just thought in my own personal experience, man that is the truth. When it comes to walking by faith, when it comes to being a positive, hopeful person, we have to be the kind of people that stir that stuff up inside of us. And the way you stir up your faith is through gratitude. When you become a grateful person, you become a miracle magnet. The more grateful you are to people and to God, the more you're asking for great surprises to happen to you. I've seen it over and over. And when you remember the good that God has done for you, you stir up your faith.

Hannah's family are like spiritual giants in Tulsa. They're not pastors and they don't really have a ministry; I think they have a youth ministry. But they're business people and they sort of do everything.

They have like a blueberry farm, and they sell eye glasses, and it's a bunch of stuff, but the main thing and she has five brothers, so it's a humongous family. They're all married, and they all have tons of kids, and we all get together in this like.. we put Mormon families to shame, I mean it's a humungous. I mean it looks like just tons of people. And we all gather at their house to pray, and if we have something big to pray for, we do this every time, the first thing we do is we stir up our faith through gratitude and memory. And what that means is we go around telling stories of ways that God has done a miracle. So I talk about when God healed my ear, and when I saw our missionary leader get hit by a car and she was fine, and when we prayed for rain and it did, and you hear all these amazing stories of true miracles that we've all witnessed that it's easy to forget, and then we pray. We don't pray until we've stirred up our mind and our heart to remember we're praying to a God who answers prayer; who does miracles. We are praying to a God who loves to break the rules and dote on his children. We are praying to a God who totally believes in nepotism. I mean he's just like I love my kids. He being the king.

And we are remembering people. And those memories, all the memories and the gratitude that we have for what God has done for us, change our soul. And that's why we gather here. Worship on Sunday is celebrating a memory. When Jesus offers us the communion, you remember what he says? Do this is in remembrance of me. Don't forget.

Or eat the seder or the Jewish people eat the seder they do it in remembrance that God brought them out of slavery. God says remember my covenant. This robe that I'm wearing, I'm wearing a memory. This is like a part of our tradition. The songs that we sing are hymns. Our memories and these are the things that remind us of God's faithfulness, reminds us of our ancestors, reminds us of our story, and it reminds us that in a long enough timeline, its victory. It's good. God is doing great things in your life and in mine.

And when this happens, when we become grateful people, we invite good people into our lives, too, and this is my last point. And it's the most California thing I've ever said, and it's not original: your vibe attracts your tribe. All right? Your vibe attracts your tribe. You look around and you don't like your friends, look in the mirror. All right? I'm telling you that who you are, you're either a thermostat or a thermometer. Wherever you go, you're either going to change your environment or your environments going to change you. But no matter what, your vibe and your tribe are going to eventually be the same.

So if you're a positive grateful person, you're going to invite people into your life who are positive and grateful. Negative, cynics and all, they're going to move along. You're not going to push them out. They're not going to stand to be around you, so that's a good thing. When you have good vibes, you invite all this good stuff into your life, and it's so

important to remember that. And the way to have that kind of spirit of joy and to invite all this good stuff in your life is to be a grateful person.

Be grateful for the everyday things you have in your life because if you lost them, you'd really miss it. Be grateful to the people that do things even though they're supposed to do it. If your husband takes out the trash, and it's his job, thank him for it. If your kids do one of their chores and they're supposed to do it anyway, thank them for it. When your wife does all the stuff, thank her for it. With your employees or your colleagues, even if they're supposed to do it, thank them for it. Don't be entitled. Hold everything loosely. Look at every good thing that comes your way as though it was somebody doing you a favor and say thank you and just watch how they go the extra mile to help you, to love on you, to do good things for you.

So much good is going to come to your life. So much good. And God just wants you to see it. And the way we train our eyes to see it all the time, even when we're going through suffering is by just being grateful. And it really does, it changes our mind, changes how you feel when you wake up in the morning, and I just want you to know I promise you good things are coming. So as you walk by faith, you're going to walk to victory.

So Lord we just receive that from you. We open our hearts and our minds and we just say look, in the midst of all of this, we trust you. You'll get us to our destiny. You're so faithful. You love us. You've already

lavished so much. You've gotten us this far. Lord, we love you and we trust you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.