

# **Gratitude in an Anxious World**

*By Bobby Schuller*

Well, today I almost want to say thank you because today I am beaming. I have spent the whole week writing this sermon on gratitude and have decided to put it into action this week as I'm writing to make sure I'm in the spirit of the theme. And because of that, I've arrived happier! I have had an easier week, I have seen the good things in my life, I have been less stressed, I've been more joy-filled, I've had better vision for the future for this church and for life, and I've recognized the value of gratitude. And I want to say thank you. Because I want to say that I am thankful for you, I'm thankful for everyone that's a part of this church, that's watching on television. I'm so thankful for every member, every volunteer. Thank you for the choir, and thank you all of you guys who do parking and the greet squad and the ushers and the cameramen, and everyone, and all the pastors and volunteers that make this place a wonderful place. And I can tell you that even now as I'm saying thank you, joy is bubbling up in my heart because when you thank people and when you speak your gratitude out loud, it builds and drums up joy inside of you.

Today, we're going to talk about putting into practice a life of gratitude. Not having an attitude of gratitude, but having a practice of gratitude. Actually doing stuff in which you're thanking people, and

feeling thankful in the life you live. I think there is no better way to be a joyful person than to be grateful. And if you think about it, you've never known a very grateful person who is not also a very happy person, right?

So gratitude and joy are almost synonymous. You want a happier life? Slow down and be grateful for the many joys and good things that are in your life, and you are. You are a grateful person. You are the type of person who is now opening your heart to the many gifts that God has already given you. Nietzsche said that the human being is someone who can get used to anything. I think that sometimes we've gotten used to the many wonderful things in our life. It's time to get unused to the good things in our life, to slow down, and to say God, thank you. Thank you for the tremendous gifts that you've given me. I'm so grateful for that.

You are moving from a mindset of scarcity to a mindset of sufficiency. And let's begin there. Many of us have this nagging feeling of scarcity. Not enough. How many of you, when you go to bed and you're setting your alarm clock, you do the sleep math? Okay. I'm getting up at 7:00, it's 11:36; I'm getting seven hours and 24 minutes of sleep. That's almost 8, it's not quite 8, but it's almost. Right? And this was a great thought that came from Lynn Twist. Our first thought when we wake up in the morning is I didn't get enough sleep. So the first thought that we begin the day with is I didn't get enough sleep, and that almost always

goes into a bigger statement: I don't have enough time. And this touches on an even bigger thing that I don't have enough money, I don't have enough time, I don't have enough power, I don't have enough recognition, I don't have enough good weather. I don't have enough.

And so it's almost like every day when we begin with I don't have enough sleep, we're already losing. We're already beginning our day from a mindset of insufficiency. Of always being behind, of never catching up to where we think we should be. And so what works into our day is a mindset of insufficiency, of lack, of having something, of having blessings but not quite enough. And I want to say to you but you have enough, you are enough, and that God is building in your mind right now, he is moving you from a place, a mindset of insufficiency to a place of sufficiency; a place of scarcity to a place of fullness, joy, and especially gratitude.

It's amazing how many people, even though they have so much in their lives, walk every day with a feeling of scarcity. I don't have enough of God. I don't have enough of my friends anymore. I don't have enough of this.

I will never forget. I was in Swaziland. Some of you were there with us a while ago, 2005, and we were there as a church to plant gardens in

Africa to help fight the hunger issue. We went into Swaziland to plant gardens, which was a way in which Swazi's could basically do little mini farms and we were planting this food.

And I remember when we were there, one of our first days there were three little boys who were orphans, and all three of them were really skinny, and they had the belly, you know, because they were starving. And we gave them our lunch and we spent the day with them. But I remember seeing that these boys, as horrible and hard as their lives looked, they were so joyful. They were happy. They were playing soccer with a rock. They were making toys out of stuff. These were kids that were very obviously joyful. And I remembered those kids in my mind for weeks and it was weeks later, I flew home and I was invited to a party with a friend of my grandparents. And I sat down with this man who I've known for years who's a billionaire with a "B" and is a wonderful man. He's brilliant, he's generous, he's done amazing things in the world, he's kind, he's warm, and I actually wanted to sit down with him and learn something from him.

So we're sitting at this couch, but it was the first time I had seen this man is sad. He had a sad spirit behind his eyes even though he had done so much good and was such a good person. And I was talking to him and he said, 'You know, Bobby, I never really made it in business.'

Now keep in mind, this guy came from nothing. He had nothing, and I think at the time was worth four point something billion dollars. Four billion dollars is four thousand million dollars, okay? It's a lot of money. And he says, 'You know, Bobby,' and he was being honest, 'I never really made it in business. It's like I just never made it. But my sons, my sons will make it.' And it was only this brief sentence, but I remember looking at him. He looked afar off, sad, now an old man in the twilight of his life. We're sitting in a palace, in one of the most amazing houses I've ever seen, and he's got so many friends and people who love him, and all I saw was a wealthy man who had done so much for so many people, lived such an amazing life, that felt scarce. Insufficient. He didn't do enough. He didn't quite get where he wanted to be.

So how can you have those kids who have nothing and are dying, and yet they feel alive, joyful, and sufficient. And the answer is gratitude. Gratitude. Gratitude is a posture in the body in which I have a completely open heart to recognize the many wonderful gifts that are in my life. And it's a discipline to say that even though I'm ambitious, I'm hungry, I have dreams, I have goals, where I am now is where God has me and he has given me so much and I am so thankful. Thank you, God for what I have. And God is moving you, even now, from being in a place of scarcity and a mindset of scarcity, to being in a spirit of sufficiency where you can say with joy, "I am enough, I have enough, God has given

me everything I need, and I can enjoy today with joy,” and you will! God is springing up in you a well of gratitude and joy and life.

God is building and making you into the kind of person that people joke about because you're so optimistic. God is building into you and making you the kind of person that is the example when people talk about that guy or that girl that is so happy to be alive. The world needs people like that, by the way. The world needs people like you. People who are grateful and joyful, and not entitled or angry or blaming others, but are thankful for all the wonderful things God has given them.

There's a guy like this in my life, by the way. It's actually my wife's cousin, Davie Morris. Davie is the most awesome guy. Davie.. once my brother-in-law called him on the phone, and he answered the phone and he was like 'hey Nate,' and he was like 'hey Davie, how are you?' And he's like 'fine! I'm in a tree! I climbed a tree and I'm sitting on a branch now!' And this is like such a perfect story because this guy, Davie, is the most joyful, grateful, life-giving, life-loving person I've ever known. And I already know what most of you thought. When I told that story, there was a handful of you who went, oh you mean he's an idiot. He's dumb.

And this is the first problem I want to address that we have too often linked gratitude and positivity with being Pollyanna or not

intellectual. And can I say that this guy Davie, by the way, is brilliant. He got married and his wife said you need to make more money, and so he said well what's something that makes money. I know, computer engineering. He went to the library, taught himself how to be a computer engineer and programmer, and landed a really well paying job just like that. So he's very smart. And there is no link between realism and intellectualism, okay? I want to tell all of you that it is good to be positive. It is good to be hopeful. It is good to be filled with gratitude every day, and also very smart.

The scripture reading for today is 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, and my wife read today, and she was terrific, of course, but I'm going to read it again. And I want to read it slowly. Now when Paul's writing to this church, this is a persecuted church. They are a religious minority, they are slandered, they are beaten, they receive no justice, many of them are Romans, and Romans had certain rights, but those rights were being thrown away because they were Christian. And he said, "Make sure nobody pays back wrong for wrong." This is such a message our world needs today, by the way. "But always strive to do what is good for each and for everyone else. Rejoice always." Everybody say always. So when do you rejoice? Always. "Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

If there was ever a reason that people have to feel betrayed and angry and not pray and say God where are you, and do all of these things that many of us do today, it would be this church, and they didn't. In fact, Paul is actually speaking out of his own experience. He's the guy that, when he's beaten and thrown into prison, begins to sing and rejoice and live with joy in spite of the terrible circumstances he is facing. He is joyful, like you. He is thankful, like you. And he is hopeful, like you. And the world needs hopeful, positive, joy-filled people like you because trust me, we have plenty of critics and they're not helping anyone.

I also want to point out that this is what worship is. Worship is the regular rhythm that in spite of our circumstances and our grieving, we still decide to say to God thank you. Nearly every worship song we sing is saying thank you for something. For the cross, for life, for our friendships, for our family, for our church, for the many good things that God is giving us.

And you know what's amazing about gratitude? When I hear non-religious people say thank you, or like atheists, they say practice gratitude saying thank you; be thankful for the things that you've given. C.S. Lewis said this: he said there's never a worse time in the life of an atheist when they feel grateful but they don't know to whom they feel grateful. And see, when you feel grateful for life, for what you've been

given, there is this thing in you that knows that that emotion is right and good. And it points your heart towards God even if you don't believe in God. I think that's what I'm saying is that there's something about gratitude, about being grateful that reinforces faith, that diminishes doubt, that springs up a well of joy and life in us, and even for those who doubt in their faith and their walk, when they practice gratitude, the thing that is connected between them and God becomes stronger. When we say we're grateful, I always ask well who you grateful to? And if you really press people, they're going to say if they don't believe in God, the universe, or something. So living a life of gratitude is one of the best things you could do for your job, one of the best things you can do for your relationships, and one of the best things you can do to finish life and say wow, that was a good life, and you will.

Our world is too negative and I am sick of it. And I know it's ironic that I'm being negative about the negativity of the world but it is getting old. I think news and politics are training us to be negative.

And what happens, and this is something Shawn Anchor pointed out. What happens is many of us have this thing he jokingly calls medical school syndrome. So he talked about his brother-in-law, and this is a real thing. His brother-in-law, who was in medical school, and he called him and he said, 'Shawn, I've got leprosy.' He said, 'What do

you mean? I've got leprosy, I've got all the things, all the signs of leprosy, and this is terrible because just last week I got over menopause.' He's a man. Medical students always think they're sick because they're always studying all the symptoms that make you sick.

And many of us are struggling from that. All we're doing is reading and ingesting all this negative stuff and it's changing the way we view our lives, and the world, and you don't need that in your life. Look there's always going to be bad stuff. There's always going to be work that has to be done, so do your work, but enjoy your life. Can we just say, "Enjoy your life?" Okay? Yes. You don't have to wait until after November to enjoy your life. You can enjoy it today.

There was this thing on Twitter and this whole negativity thing is getting so over the top. There was this thing on Twitter, I took a picture of it, actually, and this one drove me nuts. I wanted to throw my phone across the room. And the meme was, and it was promoted by Twitter, "when did America break your heart?" And then what happened is lots of people started tweeting about how America has let them down. I'm thinking you entitled ninnies. I'm thinking, "You need to travel!" I'm wondering why we have to sit around and form a discipline about complaining and being negative about all the things that we don't like about our country. There's always going to be stuff you don't like about

the country but there are also so many great things about California, and America, and whatever country you're from. There are wonderful things about where you live. And we need to sit around and say when did America bless you? When did America help you? When did America open doors for you? And that's a good thing!

So we're all worried about this spirit of expectation and entitlement that is being woven into us, and you have rights, absolutely. You have things that you deserve but let's not live our lives from a spirit of entitlement. Let's be surprised by life. You know some of the most joyful things that you're going to experience in life are the big surprises that you get. I've actually never had a surprise party. I've always wanted one. But I've always been a part of them. It's so much work. And I'm usually the guy that messes it up, like I didn't get the info right. But there's something about like a big fun surprise that's so joyful. And many of us, it's like we're such planners, we want to make sure everything is in order to feel safe, but what we're really doing is saying I don't want any surprise in my life because bad surprises are just as bad as good surprises are good. And I say take them both. Let's live life, shall we? Let's be brave, let's be whole-hearted and vulnerable in the way that we live. So be surprised by life.

And I want to say this: just let go of your expectations. I know a lot of pastor's talk about having expectations. I actually think it's a bad thing. I think when you expect something then when you actually get it you think, "Okay, I got it." But when you don't expect something and you get it, you're thrilled! Or vice versa. If you expect something and you don't get it, you're all angry and upset. I can tell you that one thing you can expect is that God has good in store for you, but what you don't know, and I can tell you, it's bigger and better than you thought it would be. That's one thing I can tell you.

So let it go and be patient and enjoy your day today. Let go of expectations you have for people, let go of the expectations you have for your spouse and your friends. Just be surprised when good things happen and let it go. Okay?

So I have some ideas for you, okay? These are things that have worked for me. All right, you ready? First of all, we want to put gratitude into practice. It's more than having a mindset, it's actually doing stuff that makes us feel grateful. I had a friend in high school who was totally into rock and roll. And his room was slathered in posters of Led Zeppelin, Metallica. He always wanted to be in a band and he finally got an electric guitar and an amp and had it set up in his room and he got a pedal but he never played. And so he looked like he was in a band, he had a guitar,

he was into music, but he never actually rocked. And he had the mindset of rock but he never did it. He never did anything. And you can have the mindset of gratitude, and that's good, but let's start practicing it. Let's be grateful people. Let's start telling people that we're thankful for them. Let's start telling God.

So the first thing we want to do is we want to begin by walking with a slower posture. So we want to slow down because when you speed up, you don't experience stuff, good or bad, right? So in our desire not to experience the bad in life, we speed up so that we can get through stressful situations, and I'm saying slow down. Open your heart to the sufficiency of the Father's world in which you live right now. Become a tourist in your own town.

I remember my wife and I, we went to Paris. Wow, Paris, right? Amazing. Beautiful art, incredible architecture, amazing food, and we came home and I was all bummed out because I had to come home to Southern California. And I remember, I lived in Old Town Orange at the time, and I was walking around like I walked from my house to Old Town to get a cup of coffee and two Japanese tourists stopped me and they asked if I could take their picture next to a drawing of this old arrow hand that was pointing. And I said, "Oh sure, I can do that." They said, "Your town is so amazing." I thanked them and then stopped and looked

at the hand. I've never seen that hand before. That is kind of cool. And I remember thinking, "They think Japan is boring and they like my town, and I think my town is boring, and I want to go to Japan." I thought I could pretend I was a tourist in my own town today, and I started doing that. I started to look at it, pretending I was on vacation, and it was amazing how I experienced my town with fresh eyes. I thought, "This town is awesome." And you can be a tourist in your own town. You can.

Be thankful for three things every day. This is something my wife and I do every night and it makes all the difference. They've actually proved that if you say aloud three things you were thankful for that day, for 21 days in a row, your brain chemistry changes to be a happier brain. Did you know that? And it can be something as dumb as like I'm so happy today it didn't rain. I am happy today that my car started. I'm happy today that I came home alive. Those work. Whatever you want. It will actually train your brain to look for the good things in your life rather than all the things you're upset about and complaining about.

Finally, and this is so important. Nothing will make you feel more joyful than telling somebody you're grateful for him or her. It's true. Pay attention to your body. Next time you go out of your way and say you know what, I'm so grateful for you because of X, Y and Z. Listen to the feeling, the emotion that you have in your own body. It's going to be akin

to joy. So if you want to feel joy, tell somebody that you're grateful for him or her. Write an email to somebody, one of your employees or colleagues or your boss saying I'm grateful for you. You're a terrific boss. You should write that to me, or whatever. You write to people.

When I was on mission trips, we used to pay closer attention to our words and the way that they affected our team. And one of our number one rules was don't state the obvious. So when we were in Thailand and it was like so smoggy you couldn't breathe, and it was a hundred degrees outside, and a hundred percent humidity, you weren't allowed to say it's hot. It's as if we know. We know it's hot. And this was such a good rule not to state the obvious unless the obvious was that you're grateful to be in Thailand, and then you could say it.

I had this rule when I used to lead young men in groups on these trips. Boys, especially when they become friends, love to bust each other's chops. And they would always tease each other and all this. And we had this rule and it was called seven up. So if one guy said something negative about another guy, it didn't matter what it was, all that guy had to do was look at him and say seven up. And seven up meant that that guy had to say seven things that he was thankful for about the guy who just insulted him. And let me tell you this was a fantastic discipline when it came to the moral of our team. And it was so fun to look at somebody

who really got you and be like oh that's good, seven up. Oh, it was great. And the reason is that it trains you to say what you're grateful for. So if you're grateful for people, tell them.

Now I want to ask you how many of you know how to text? I actually want you to raise your hand if you know how to text. Okay, put your hands down. If you don't know how to text, raise your hand. Okay, all right. That's all right. We might be able to learn. How many of you have a cell phone, raise your hand. Okay. With you, I mean. Still, okay that's pretty good. Choir, are we good? Okay. If you're watching at home, you can raise your hand, too. Pull out your cell phone right now; pull it out. Pull it out. Choir, you can pull your cell phones out but you have to put it away before Don sees before the anthem. Okay?

Now you got your cell phone? Now think who's somebody you're grateful for? Think of that person. And I want you to text them right now and tell them that you're thankful for them. Go ahead do it. Be vulnerable, come on. Don't be too cool for this. I'll have a seat. You take your time. So let's go. I don't have my phone or I would be also probably texting Don who wouldn't get it till he got home, because I'm thankful for the choir. You still doing it? That's good. Are you doing it? Or are you too cool? Some of you are too cool to do this, huh? All right. And some of you

don't know how to text so that's something, too. That's all right. It's never too late to learn.

Okay how many of you did it, raise your hand? It's cool if you didn't do it, don't worry. So about ten percent of you did it. Really, raise your hand. Some of you are still doing it. Raise your hand if you're doing it or did it? Okay, that's pretty good. That's about half. That's pretty good. Most of the choir did it, see? I'm always preaching to the choir anyway.

Think about how you felt when you sent a thankful text to a person. And I want to reiterate that when you're thankful and when you put words into practice of gratitude, it reiterates and forms a posture of joy and openness to the goodness of the Father's world, and he has given you so much and more is coming. And so whatever it is that you're missing, and whatever it is that you're lacking, believe in your heart that you can be at peace even now because God has good things in store for you. Your best days are ahead of you. God loves you more than you love yourself. He has good things coming for you, so be at peace. Worrying won't get you there faster. Have patience and be grateful for the many wonderful gifts that God has given you, in Jesus' name, amen. All right.