Bob L.: Do you sometimes find that life is overwhelming? Bob Russell says, "Look around."

Bob R.: Do you want to be a contented person?—you go to a third-world country, you call on people in the rehab center downtown, you work in the inner-city soup kitchen, you try to comfort parents who have lost a child, or you try to help somebody who is going through a divorce—and you say, "Man, I've got a lot to be thankful for."

Bob L.: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, November 2nd. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. What about you? Are you a grumbler or are you a thankful person? And which one does God want you to be? Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Monday edition. There is a passage in the Bible—actually, a verse in the Bible—that, for a while, you were saying a lot. In fact, I remember, just a few months ago, you were saying: "Give thanks in all things," / "Give thanks in all things." You were just kind of reminding everyone, here at FamilyLife, that, in the midst of whatever challenges we’re facing, we need to be people who give thanks.

Dennis: Practicing gratitude.

Bob L.: But it doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense, when you’re going through a difficult circumstance, to say, "Thank you, Lord, for this difficult circumstance that’s come into my life," when you really wish what God would do is—He would fix things and do things differently.

Dennis: Well, when you express thanks to God for a circumstance you don't like, you are demonstrating faith—faith and trust that God is in control and an acknowledgement that you're not! [Laughter] We mistakenly think we are in control; we aren't. It is God
who rules in the affairs of men and nations, and it is because He is in charge that we can give thanks in all things.

Bob L.: This is a month where giving thanks is kind of at the center of our agenda. The issue of gratitude is, at least, something that we ought to give some thought to. We're going to take a day off from work, later on this month—and eat some turkey, probably, and maybe watch a football game—and spend some time giving thanks for the good things / the blessings that we enjoy. And so we thought today we ought to nudge our listeners in that direction a little bit with a message about gratitude.

Dennis: Actually, I want to do more than nudge them—I want to exhort them. I want to challenge you to make, not just the day of Thanksgiving be a day of gratitude, but I want to challenge you to begin to practice the art and the grace of gratitude and thanksgiving from today forward for the rest of the month. If your family is like our family, it needs it.

Families just kind of are like an alarm clock—you wind them up, and they slowly wind down. In the case of our family, they wind down into whining; [Laughter] they wind down into complaining/griping. It's always easy to find something to complain about. But the Bible—again, as we've talked about here—really commands us to have a thankful spirit about us. What better place to learn that than in your family?

And this is why Barbara created her book, Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember. Last year, we talked about this subject of needing to train our children and needing to focus, as a married couple and as a family, upon the spiritual discipline of gratitude around the Thanksgiving season.

Bob L.: Yes, and one of the ways we do that is by looking back at how we have seen God's hand at work in the lives of others—rehearsing some of that, at the Thanksgiving holiday, reading through Barbara's book and reading, again, the story of the Pilgrims and their coming to America—and then looking at our own lives and saying: "What are our own spiritual milestones? How can we see God's hand having been at work in our marriage and our family?" And express thanks for that.

Dennis: And her book doesn't have a lot of words, but it has a very simple assignment for Thanksgiving Day that we are imploring families to practice this Thanksgiving. It's a very simple assignment of each family member doing just what you said, Bob—looking back over the year, listing how God has worked on your behalf, as individual family members / and then, one by one, sharing them around the table as you enjoy your Thanksgiving meal together. It will turn the Thanksgiving celebration, I think, into more
than a turkey, and football, and a bunch of noisy relatives. Instead, it will focus our hearts on God and on the things that we are most grateful for.

**Bob L.**: There is more about Barbara’s book on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com. You can order it from us by going online. Click the link that says, “GO DEEPER,” in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY if you’d like to get a copy.

Today, we want you to listen to Part I of a message that—actually, this was a CD that somebody gave Barbara that she really liked. You said, “If Barbara likes it, we have to play it on FamilyLife Today.”

**Dennis:** Barbara handed it to me, and I listened to a pastor by the name of Bob Russell. After I listened to him speak, he ministered to me profoundly around the subject of gratitude. I think you, as a listener, are going to enjoy a portion of that message today as Bob Russell exhorts us to have a spirit of gratitude.

[Recorded Message]

**Bob R.**: I think gratitude is one of the most important of all the Christian virtues. One of the reasons is that gratitude pleases God almost more than any other virtue. Hebrews, the 12th chapter, verse 28, in The Living Bible reads, “Since we have a Kingdom nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving Him with thankful hearts with holy fear and awe.”

You parents or grandparents know what it is if your child comes to you and says: "Boy, thanks! I really appreciate this." That's all you need to know—you're pleased. We please God by gratitude. Gratitude is also important because I think it's the key to personal happiness more than anything else. If I were to ask you tonight, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy are you right now?", if you answered with anything other than a 9 or a 10, you would probably go on to qualify your answer by saying, "Well, there are some circumstances in my life right now that are not ideal," because we think that happiness is in direct proportion to what happens to us. That's certainly a contributing factor, but I think 90 percent of whether we're contented in life has to do with our attitude a whole lot more than circumstances.

I could make you exuberantly happy tonight within 24 hours with exactly the circumstances that you're living in, right now; but it would be a brutal 24 hours. I'd have your lawyer call you and tell you that you were being sued, and it looked like you were going to lose every dime that you had. Then I'd have your doctor call you and tell you that he's looked at the latest test, and he thinks you have a terminal disease; and you've
Just got six months to live. Then I'd have a trusted friend call you and tell you that the three people who are closest to you in life had just been killed in an accident. Then I'd have the theologian that you trust the most submit an article saying that he can now prove the Bible was not true—he'd reversed his opinion, and He didn't believe in Christ.

Then, after 24 hours, I'd say to you: "None of this is true. You still have your wealth, you still have your loved ones, you still have your health, and you still have your church and your hope in Christ." After you took a deep breath and probably punched me out, you'd be exuberantly happy with exactly what you have right now. Happiness/contentment has to do with attitude a lot more than circumstances.

But another reason this is such a vital subject is that gratitude is essential for effective leadership in any field, whether you're a father, or a mother, or the President of the United States. Gratitude is essential for effective leadership.

Korah, one of Moses' critics, demonstrated you can always get a quick crowd by grumbling. But that kind of leadership is always temporary and ends in disaster. Effective, lasting leadership is always based on positive attitudes and grateful spirits. Now, with that in mind, I'd like for you to turn to Luke 17, where there is a familiar biblical example of gratitude. You know this story—let's read it through quickly:

"On His way to Jerusalem,"—down to verse 11 of Luke 17—“Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy”—a terminal disease—“met Him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us.’ And when He saw them, He said, ‘Go show yourself to the priests.’ As they went, they were cleansed.

“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him, and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked: ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return to give praise to God except this foreigner?’ And then He said to him: ‘Rise and go. Your faith has made you well.’”

Jesus asked: "Where are the other nine? Were they not grateful?" Wouldn't you love to conduct an interview with those nine guys and say: "Weren't you thankful that you were healed? Why didn't you go back and express gratitude?"
I'm sure that one of them would say: "Well, I'm going to show myself to the priest. That's what He told me to do; that is what I'm going to do,"—legalists are not very often happy people. Or another would say: "Well, I went immediately to show myself to my family. I mean, they are the ones who have been really suffering through this."

Another might say: "Well, I'm sure Jesus knows that I'm grateful, but I didn't know that I was expected to go back. I mean, He does that for a living; doesn't He?" Or can't you hear somebody saying: "I know I got better, but I think that it might just be a coincidence after all these years. I've been taking these herbs and spices that are supposed to cure leprosy, and I think maybe Jesus doesn't deserve the credit."

Another might say flippantly: "Well, I'm healed, but I'm not sure it's to my advantage. I mean, before, I could just sit around and beg. Now I've got to get a job." [Laughter] Or another might say: "Well, I'm healed, but I'm not pleased with the way I look. I mean, I've had leprosy for 15 years, and I look 15 years older than I did before I got sick. If He healed me, I think He could have made me look younger. He could have done more," and "I'm cured / I'm thankful; but, you know, I just don't feel right rejoicing and celebrating when there are so many other lepers out there. I mean, how can you be happy when there is so much suffering in the world?"

"I'm going to thank Him," another might say, "but I just haven't got around to it yet. I've been so busy since I was healed. There have been talk shows, and newspaper interviews, and later today all ten of us are going to pose for a 'Got Milk' billboard. We're so busy." And I'm sure one timid soul would explain: "Well, I know I ought to go back and thank Him; but this Jesus worries me a little bit. I heard that He demanded one guy sell everything that he had and give it to the poor. I think He's too demanding."

Only one in ten was really grateful—grateful enough to go back. But isn't that about the percentage that you expect in life? How many of you are schoolteachers here? How many of your students come back to you, years later after they get a job and say, "I just want to thank you for all the knowledge that you imparted to me,"—one in ten?—probably not. Or parents—how many of your teenagers come to breakfast in the morning—those of you who are still old-fashioned enough to have breakfast—say: "Hey, Mom, my t-shirts were in the drawer / the socks were all folded up in there. I just want to thank you for doing the laundry again,"—one in ten?—you'd have a heart attack if it happened that often. [Laughter]

William Barclay said, "So often, once a man has got what he wants, he never comes back." Now, why is that? Why is it we're not more grateful people? Most of us are more like these nine than we are the Samaritan.
Well, one plausible explanation is we've had a privileged upbringing. Even though we live in the United States of America, the most affluent nation ever, even though we enjoy good enough health to be here, even though we are Christian and have the promise of life eternal, we're still not grateful because we have a privileged upbringing. Some of you here tonight were spoiled rotten, as children—your parents / your grandparents gave you just about everything you ever wanted.

And you were so protected / so pampered that you have unrealistic expectations about life. You think all of life is supposed to be free of any pain and disappointment. Anytime life is less than 100-percent perfect, you focus on the negative; and you miss the positive. You move into a beautiful new house, and all you can do is complain about that little crease in the carpet that's not exactly right. You go out to eat at a good restaurant, and all you do is complain that the waiter was a little slow.

Do you know what Jesus said? Jesus said, "In the world you are going to have trouble." In other words, life is never going to be 100-percent perfect; and if you have unrealistic expectations, you're never really going to be grateful for what God has given. Something similar to that—that contributes to ingratitude—is affluence. Generally speaking, the more we have, the less grateful we are. You would think it would be just the opposite; but the more we have, the more we grumble about what we don't have because your level of expectation goes up.

You know, if you're accustomed to cable TV, having 90-some channels, and then you have to go back to where you just have the three major networks—oh, you're very upset with that. Or if you've been to Hawaii for vacation, it's tough to be happy when you're going to Barron River. [Laughter] Or you've been to Ruth’s Chris Steak House; it's tough to be happy when you’re going to the hometown buffet.

Proverbs, the 30th chapter, verses 8 and 9, a wise king prayed: "Give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’” Affluence can take away your gratitude.

Negative companions contribute to ingratitude too. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with the wise, grows wise; but a companion of fools suffers harm." If your closest friends are upbeat, positive people about the church, you’re probably going to be upbeat and positive. If you associate with people who are negative complainers, pretty soon, you’re looking for the things that are wrong; and you’re not nearly as happy at church.
Remember that old movie, *Grumpy Old Men*?—Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon. The grumblers kind of feed off each other. Those who plan our short-term mission projects/trips get concerned if there are two complainers on the same trip because they say the complainers gravitate toward each other. They exaggerate the problems, and they contaminate others and sour the whole trip. First Corinthians 15:33 says, "Don't be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" Bad company corrupts.

I remember we had a leadership conference here / a leadership seminar. One of the leadership principles was, "A good leader gets rid of sad dogs that spread gloom,"—just one sad dog in an office, just one sad dog on a team, just one sad dog in a family—can just sour everything. No matter how fulfilling your job, or spacious your house, or personable your mate, or edifying your church—if you associate with people who are grumbling and complaining all the time—you will soon become a grumpy old man or a grumpy old woman. It's human nature.

But the one thing that probably destroys happiness and gratitude more than anything else is frequent comparisons / unfair comparisons. Remember Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard? There was a group of workers hired at the beginning of the day. They were perfectly content to work for a denarius—a normal day's wage—until, at the end of the day, they discovered there were people, who worked just an hour and they got the same amount of wage. Suddenly, they were very disgruntled about the inequity of it all.

If you compare your circumstances with other people who seem to have it better, you can be very discontented and a thankless person because, no matter how much you have, there is always somebody who seems to have it a little better. There is somebody whose kids are smarter or better athletes; there is somebody who goes to a church that's a little deeper; there is somebody's mate who is more romantic; there is somebody who works / has a better salary than you—and you can be really miserable.

[Studio]

**Bob L.**: That is Bob Russell talking about gratitude and about sad dogs. I was thinking about those two guys on the Muppet Show—you know, who sit in the balcony and just complain about everything in the show. Did you ever watch the Muppet Show?

**Dennis**: Yes, a couple of times.

**Bob L.**: They'd sit up there, and they'd go [mimicking their voices], "He wasn't very funny; was he?" "No; he wasn't." They'd just feed off of one another. [Laughter] And it's
true—if you hang around with folks who are grumpy grumblers, you kind of get soured on life; don't you?

**Dennis:** You do. That's why we're challenging folks, all this month in November, to make gratitude and thanksgiving your focus—and talk about this, as a family / practice it, as a family. Maybe you need to go over to—is it Philippians, Chapter 2, [verse 14] that says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing"?

**Bob L.:** Yes.

**Dennis:** That means there can't be any grumpy old—

**Bob L.:** —men.

**Dennis:** —men.

**Bob L.:** —or women.

**Dennis:** —or radio co-hosts.

**Bob L.:** Come on, I'm not grumpy! [Laughter] I could get that way if you provoke me. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** —sad dogs—you know, can't be any of that—but instead, we're going to focus on that which God has done for us and cultivate a grateful heart. Frankly, Bob, Barbara's book would make a great tool for your own family to go through on Thanksgiving Day.

And it would make a great gift to give a family member / a friend. Maybe there is somebody in your life that you just are grateful to God for, and you'd just like to give them something; but you know, if you give it to them at Christmas, it's just going to get lost with all the fruitcakes, which nobody eats, and they won't open it or look at it because they're too busy anyway. Thanksgiving is an uncluttered holiday that, I think, provides some opportunity to pluck some low fruit off of the tree.

**Bob L.:** My mom, when she was alive, she used to eat fruitcake—she did!

**Dennis:** I've always wanted to meet someone who eats fruitcake because, personally, I believe they make that stuff so it could survive a nuclear holocaust. [Laughter] We kept
one of these things alive for years in our crawl space. [Laughter] In fact, it was the key to our Y2K survival kit! [Laughter]

**Bob L.**: Just a whole package of fruitcakes there in case things go south with the computers, back 15 years ago; right?

**Dennis**: Yes.

**Bob L.**: The book that you're talking about from Barbara is her book called *Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember*. We do have it available, at this point, in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center.

**Dennis**: And I'll tell you—while supplies last, we'll give away a free fruitcake—

**Bob L.**: No we won't!

**Dennis**: —from underneath our house. [Laughter]

**Bob L.**: 1-800-FL-TODAY is the number to call if you'd like to get a copy of Barbara's book—no fruitcakes allowed. [Laughter] Or you can go, online, to FamilyLifeToday.com. This would be a great gift for someone in your family—a copy of Barbara's book. Pass it along to someone else—this is also a great gift to give to somebody who doesn't know Christ. Everybody celebrates Thanksgiving—what a great way to introduce them to the kind providence of God, which might spark in them a little gratitude in their own hearts.

**Dennis**: Now, think about it for a moment: "If you had someone who doesn't know the Lord, is a fruitcake going to get through to them?" [Laughter]

**Bob L.**: It's not going to happen. [Laughter]

**Dennis**: It's not going to happen! [Laughter]

**Bob L.**: You need to send them the book—1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY”; or again, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper left-hand corner of the screen that says, “GO DEEPER,” if you’d like to order from us online. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY.

By the way, Barbara has been working on a whole lot of other resources designed to help promote and encourage the idea of gratitude during your Thanksgiving. You can find all of it when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the button that says, “GO DEEPER.”
You know, I think everybody would agree gratitude is a good thing. It’s one of the things you want to be true about your own life and about your family. When a family is a thankful family, there’s more joy; there’s more peace; there’s more contentedness; there is more of the presence of the Spirit of God in a family where gratitude is a part of the fabric of the family.

Our goal, here at FamilyLife Today, with programs like this—with all that we do—we want to effectively develop godly families. We believe that’s the key to changing the world, one home at a time. And we know some of you share that conviction with us. Some of you are Legacy Partners, who give each month in support of this ministry. Thank you for your ongoing financial support. And some of you will occasionally make a donation to help defray the cost of producing and syndicating this radio program—keep it on the air in your community. And we’re grateful for your support as well.

If you can help with a donation today, we’d like to express our gratitude to you by sending you a copy of a book Barbara Rainey has written called Growing Together in Gratitude. These are devotional stories you can read to your kids—or they can read for themselves—all about being thankful. It’s our gift to you when you make a donation, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen that says, “I care,” to make an online donation. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation over the phone. Or you can mail your donation to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR, 72223.

Well, tomorrow, we’ll hear Part II of Bob Russell’s message on gratitude and how we can cultivate a heart of thanksgiving—and maybe a little more about fruitcake tomorrow. I hope you can be here with us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas.
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