The Grace of Gratitude, Part 2

Guest: Bob Russell
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Bob L.: This may sound like a paradox, but you might be more grateful for what you have if you didn't have so much. Here is Bob Russell.

Bob R.: Why is it we're not more grateful people? 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.

Bob L.: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, November 3rd. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what to be thankful for until it's not there anymore? We'll talk more about gratitude today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Tuesday edition. We need to let our listeners know, right up front here today: “The fruitcakes are gone, ladies and gentlemen. Those of you who called in yesterday to order a copy of Barbara Rainey's book, Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember, hoping to get a free fruitcake along with—

Dennis: —from underneath the crawl space of our house.

Bob L.: — “they went like that [click of fingers], ladies and gentlemen. The fruitcakes are gone. The crawl space is once again clear.”

Dennis: Actually, I think we may have received an email or two from people who have fruitcake recipes. I want you to know—keep your fruitcake—keep your fruitcake recipes. [Laughter]

Bob L.: —to yourself. [Laughter]

Dennis: Please. Neither Bob nor I have any interest in your grandmother's fruitcake recipe. [Laughter]
Bob L.: And those of you in Corsicana, Texas, who have launched the protest against *FamilyLife Today* because of the Collins Street Bakery down there, we really—

Dennis: —we love you—

Bob L.: —we do love you—

Dennis: —we really do love you.

Bob L.: —and just—we hope that you prosper and that many people buy your fruitcake this year at Christmastime. Okay; did we cover that okay?

Dennis: I think we've got it covered.

Bob L.: We want to talk today about gratitude. We heard Part I of a message yesterday about learning to give thanks in all things—learning how to give thanks if somebody sends you a fruitcake—[Laughter]—that was not one of the things that actually we heard about. We heard Part I of a message from Bob Russell. It's a great message / a great reminder, here in a month, where we are thinking more about giving thanks, because we've got a holiday set aside that exhorts us to give thanks to the God who has provided for us.

Dennis: Barbara gave me a tape of Bob Russell's message on gratitude and said: "Here, you ought to listen to this. I think you'll like this." I'm not sure where Barbara got a copy of it—maybe one of our listeners sent it to us—but I listened to it as I was jogging. He ministered to me just around his own authenticity, as you are about to hear in a few moments, because he's real. He just shares his own struggles about maintaining an attitude of being thankful for what you have and for what God does through your ministry and through your life.

Bob L.: I think it would be good for our listeners to, before they listen to Bob, just to ask the question: "Do I have a grateful heart today? Is my spirit—am I thankful for what is going on in my life, or am I not all that thankful?"

Dennis: Or are you grumbling, griping—

Bob L.: Yes.

Dennis: —grumpy, as he talked about yesterday? What was the statement about the sad dog?

Bob L.: "You need to get rid of the sad dog, or he'll make everybody else around you sad"; right?
Dennis: That's exactly right because we, as sheep, have a need to be shepherded by God and His Word, I think it's no mistake that some of the shortest, most succinct passages in all the Bible are some in the New Testament, where it says, "Give thanks in all things." "Rejoice always." It's calling us to practice the grace of gratitude, regardless of our circumstances. We should do that, not merely on a day called "Thanksgiving." We're challenging folks, in their marriages and families, to practice it all month.

Bob L.: That's right. When you pass through the Red Sea, don't forget that God was the One who brought you through and start grumbling about onions on the other side, which is exactly what human nature leads you to want to do.

The message we're going to hear from Bob Russell today—he begins by talking about the issue of comparison and how comparison can lead us to become grumblers. Here is Bob Russell.

[Recorded Message]

Bob R.: Well, how can we be more grateful people? I'd like to suggest several spiritual exercises that will enable Christ to transform us.

Number one: Acknowledge that everything you have belongs to God—it's not yours. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD'S and everything in it, the world and all who live in it..." Actually, nothing we have belongs to us—it all belongs to God. God just loans it to us temporarily—we're going to leave it all behind.

Now, when we really, deep down, grasp that concept, it makes us appreciative of everything that God has given, big or small. A few years ago, I had a very sad funeral. A woman in her early 30s died of cancer, leaving behind two preteen daughters and a very grieving husband. I thought, you know, if I were that family, I'd be tempted to be bitter against God, taking this woman so young.

I used an illustration in the sermon of the funeral that they said helped them; and maybe, I hope, it will help you. I said:

Let's imagine that you have a very wealthy friend who says to you: "Would you come and live on my estate for a while, free of charge? I've got to go overseas. I don't know how long I'm going to be gone on business—four months / four years—I don't know how long, but I need somebody to stay at my house, free. I mean, you can drive my Jaguar, you can ride my horses and all-terrain vehicle, you can enjoy my entertainment center, and you can swim in my pool—have friends over / have a party. I just need somebody to stay there."
Well, you would jump at the chance. You'd go in—you would have a great time, and you live like a king—but about six months later, he emails you and says, “I'm coming home next week.” Would you meet him at the airport with a clenched fist—say, “How dare you come back early?” No, you'd be grateful for every minute you lived there for free: “This is his.”

Now, everything in this world, including your body, belongs to God. He's just letting you use it temporarily. Now, if He comes back early or He doesn't give you quite as much as somebody else, rather than being bitter, we ought to be grateful because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The great thing is—He says: “Now, when I do come back for you, I'll take you to heaven. That's going to be even better than this.’ That's why 1 Timothy 6 [verses 7-8] says, “Godliness with contentment is great gain. We brought nothing into the world; we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, let's be content with that.”

There is something else we can do to increase gratitude—and that is visit with and minister to those who have less. One of the reasons we're not thankful is that we compare ourselves with those we think have it better, but one of the ways we increase our appreciation is to be around people who have it tougher. Now, we do need exposure to people who have excelled to lift our vision and challenge us; but we also need exposure to people who have struggled to deepen our appreciation and humble us.

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 has gone through or going through a divorce—and you say, "Man, I've got a lot to be thankful for."

A couple of summers ago, Judy and I were in a little town in Tennessee. A little Christian church around the corner—I said, "Judy, let's just go to that Christian church in the morning." We walked to church. It seated about 200 people. I said, "Let's sit in the back so nobody will know us." We were early—sat in the third pew from the back. About 30 people came—they sat in the back two pews. We're sitting in the front pew. [Laughter] The preacher got up to preach—a young preacher, 27/28 years old. He had a great sermon. We walked out, and he met me at the door. He said: "Bob Russell, I thought that was you. You scared me to death."

As I sat there and listened to him preach, I thought: "God, this could be me preaching here. This young man is a better preacher than I was when I was 27/28 years old. I didn't get locked into a place like that—I am so blessed." You want to compare yourself to somebody?—you find somebody in lesser circumstances, and you'll be grateful.
Another way we can increase gratitude is to avoid grumbling and complaining like the plague. We've been studying Moses on Saturday morning. The children of Israel just griped and complained about no water and nothing to eat, and too much manna, and their leaders, and "We want to go back to Egypt." The Bible says the Lord became exceedingly angry because of their grumbling, and He struck them with a severe plague. First Corinthians 10:7-10 says we ought to learn from their example: "Don't be idolaters..." "Don't commit adultery..." and "Don't grumble, as some of them did..." Now, adultery, idol worship, and grumbling are linked together as horrendous sins.

Philippians 2:14 ought to be a theme verse for all of us—it says, "Do everything without complaining or arguing." Can you believe that? Let's all read that together: "Do everything without complaining or arguing."

Did you ever disobey that command? Some of you here tonight are specialists at complaining:

- Oh, there is too much rain. At least, it's warming up; but you know what that means; don't you?—humid days of summer.
- My husband's not romantic.
- My wife has no passion.
- My kids won't apply themselves.
- My parents are always interfering.
- My Sunday school class isn't meeting my need.

On and on it goes—and "The music is too loud," "The music is too slow," "The music is too something." You gripe about every little thing, or you gripe about the same thing over and over again. It's such a habit you don't even know you're doing it. Your constant griping is an offense to God, a poor testimony to the lost, and a detriment to your personality. You never hear anybody say: "Let's go over to Joe's house. I just love to hear him gripe." [Laughter]

I challenge you tonight—let Jesus Christ transform you from within: “…if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature…” [2 Corinthians 5:17] We ought to be new in our spirit of contentment. And if you think you've got a problem, ask a family member or a friend—say: "I think I gripe too much. Would you help me? Every time you hear me complain, clear your throat, nudge me, or call me 'Whiner, whiner, 49er.' Do something to help me.”
A fourth thing we can do is express thanks frequently to God for His generosity. First Thessalonians 5:18: “Give thanks in all circumstances;”—all circumstances—“for this is God's will for you in Jesus Christ.”

I'll never forget asking Mary Frances Myers—I asked her to have a testimony at the mini-vacation [retreat] because she is such a buoyant, joyous personality. She had diabetes, and she had to have a foot amputated—confined to a wheelchair. Her husband Ken pushed her around. After 50-some years, husband died. She then became blind. Son, Burt, moved her to Colorado; yet she still had this buoyant personality. I said, "Would you give your testimony?" She got—was wheeled up front at the mini-vacation—she said: “I don't know why they asked me to have a testimony. My life has been so full of blessing, and I am in two great churches — Clifton Church and Southeast Church. I have two wonderful kids I just love, and I had a wonderful husband for 50 years. I've just got so much to be thankful for. I don't know why they asked me to have a testimony”; and she quit. [Laughter] Isn't that great? Give thanks in all circumstances.

I read that, if you own just one Bible, you are abundantly blessed. A third of the world doesn't have access to even one. If you can read your Bible, you're more blessed than over 2 billion people in the world that can't read. If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you're more blessed than 1 million people who won't survive this week. If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and $20 in your pocket, you're richer than 80 percent of the people in the world.

Praise God for His goodness by the way you worship, and by your obedience, and by your generosity. When you praise God for the blessings you have instead of griping all the time about what's wrong, He changes you from within. We used to sing a song—I get lifted up when I praise Him.

And then the last, and probably the most tangible way that we can express and increase our thanks, is simply to live a joyful life. First Timothy 6:17: “Command those who are rich in this present world”—that's us—“not to be arrogant or to put your hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put your hope in God who richly provides us with everything”—for what?—"for our enjoyment." After you've been blessed by God and been generous with it, you be joyful. If your personality is morose and melancholy, it's an insult to the generosity of God.

Last Christmas, we put together a little baby buggy for my granddaughter. Christmas morning, when I saw her wheeling that baby buggy all over the house, it was worth the two-and-a-half hours it took to put that thing together. I wanted to see her enjoy it. Did you ever think about God giving you blessings, and He wants to see you live a life of joy? That's an expression of gratitude.

Back three summers ago, when the PGA Golf Tournament came here, two weeks before the golf tournament at Valhalla, I met a guy at the airport. He said: "Bob, my
name is Ray Arza, I live just two doors down from Valhalla. Would you like to park in my yard for the golf tournament?" Well, of course, I would—I mean, people were parking a mile away and walking and riding shuttles. He said, "I'll send you a little ticket." So I got this card in the mail—number 6.

I drove up to his house, Thursday morning. Sure enough, 100 yards down from the main entrance of Valhalla—there was his house. I pulled in. He was parking cars—$20 apiece. I'm parking for free—number 6. I get out of the car, and he picks me up in a golf cart and drives me to the Shelbyville Road. I walk down 100 yards. I'm close to the VIP lot—go in and watch golf.

Now, let's say that, three hours later, I come out. Ray is sitting on the front porch; and he says, "Hey, Bob, how did it go?" I say: "Oh, Ray, it was terrible. I mean, it's so hot I can barely stand it," and "So many people—couldn't see anybody," and "Feet got sore. Get back here, and you don't have a golf cart to pick me up and take me back to the house? I wish you lived in the first house. There are some people who live closer," and "It's kind of impersonal—number 6—I thought maybe you could have my name on there." What's he thinking? He's thinking: "Well, why bother? I wish I hadn't given it to him."

But that's not what happened. I come back, three hours later. He said, "Bob, how'd it go?" "Hey, Ray, it went great. I mean, I got to see Tiger Woods. I saw a lot of golf. I can't believe you had a golf cart here to pick me up / number 6, free of charge—I can't thank you enough." What's he thinking? He's thinking, "I'm glad I did it." What am I thinking? I'm thinking, "The Ryder Cup is coming in a few years, and maybe we'll do it again." [Laughter]

Now, God has poured out all these blessings on you. If all you do is mumble and complain about that 5 percent or that 2 percent that's wrong, I wonder if He doesn't think, "Why bother?" But if we say, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," then we please God by serving Him with a thankful heart.

I like Psalm 30, verses 11 and 12: "You turn my wailing into dancing. You remove my sackcloth and clothe me with joy. Then my heart may sing to you, O God, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever." Amen, amen.

[Studio]

**Bob L.:** Amen. That's Bob Russell with a great reminder of the fact that we need to be grateful men and women—that the Bible calls us to that and, frankly, our life gives us plenty of abundant reason to be grateful.

**Dennis:** You know, Bill Bright used to say, "We need to practice praise now because praise is the language of heaven." And he used to say, "I think we need to get busy on this side of heaven, practicing giving thanks in all things / praising God regardless of what's taking place, so that when we get to heaven we'll know what to do."
And that's why we're challenging couples and families to establish a new tradition at Thanksgiving and take the entire month of November to make it a month of gratitude. Make it your slogan for the month: “You can't make it too tough for us, as a family.”

Bob L.: “No grumbling allowed.”

Dennis: “No griping, grumbling, or disputing—no grumpy old radio hosts or co-hosts.” [Laughter]

But the idea is for you to practice gratitude. We’re making Barbara’s book, *Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember*, available to our listeners to aid you in the process of giving thanks. The reason this is going to be helpful is because Barbara’s book talks about what the Pilgrims went through to establish our nation. It talks about what happened as they left the port—and how they had to go back and get repairs to the ship, and then the trip over, and the pregnant women and the children living in the hold of a ship because of a storm.

Bob, the conditions they were living in were inhumane; but they gave thanks to God / they sang songs—they practiced thanksgiving. And, of course, we honor them and their faith at Thanksgiving by hosting a big meal and spending time, as a family—and, really, as we found out last Thanksgiving—a lot of families are interested in establishing some new traditions around Thanksgiving.

So this year, if you don't have Barbara's book, call and get a copy of it and establish this tradition of each person giving thanks. It will change the entire celebration atmosphere around your Thanksgiving meal.

Bob L.: The book is called *Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember*. We've got it in our FamilyLife Resource Center. In fact, as Bob was mentioning the Doxology —“Praise God from whom all blessings flow”— I was thinking about the CD that's in the back of Barbara's book. We've taken some great hymns of thanksgiving—and our engineer, Keith Lynch, who is also very musical, has put together some great arrangements of these hymns—so that you can have some Thanksgiving music to play around the holiday.

Dennis: Let's listen to just a piece of one right here.

[Let All Things Now Living plays]

Bob L.: That is the great hymn: “Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving to God the Creator triumphantly raise.” It’s a great hymn that reminds us of God's care and His provision.
**Dennis:** And Thanksgiving is a time when we need to celebrate some of the old hymns. I’m glad Barbara has included this CD in the book because, frankly, we need to be revisiting some of the great praise hymns of times past.

**Bob L.:** That’s right. And we do have copies of Barbara’s book in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. You can go online, at FamilyLifeToday.com and click the link in the upper left-hand corner of the screen that says, “GO DEEPER,” to find the book, *Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember.* We have the hard-back book, which has the music CD it. We also have the audio book, and that includes the music CD as well. So take your pick—either the hard-back or the audio book. Order either one from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY,” to order your copy of either book—1-800-358-6329. That is 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, our hope, as you tune in to listen to this program each day, is that, at the end of each program, you can walk away, saying: “I got today some practical biblical help for my marriage / for my family. There are some things we can do in our home that will strengthen us, as a family.” Our goal is to provide you with that kind of practical biblical help and hope every day on *FamilyLife Today.*

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If you can help with a donation today, we’d like to send you a copy of another book that Barbara Rainey has written—this is a book of Thanksgiving-themed devotions called *Growing Together in Gratitude.* You can read these to your family at the dinner table, or older kids can read them themselves. Again, it’s our gift to you when you support the ministry with a donation today. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen that says, “I care,” and make an online donation. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make your donation over the phone. Or you can mail a donation to *FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, Barbara Rainey is going to join us. We’re going to have her here to talk about what moms can do—and what dads can do, for that matter—to cultivate thanksgiving and gratitude in your home during the month of November. So I hope you can be 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’ll see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today.*

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