

Welcome everyone, I am so grateful you are here! Last week we kicked off a new sermon series on gratitude, and we talked about the *power* of gratitude. We talked about the power of gratitude at a sociological level – how we train our kids to say thank you, and how when a gift is given to someone, the exchange is only completed when we express thankfulness.

We also looked at the power of gratitude at a scientific level, and we learned that research tells us that expressing gratitude changes us for the better, it alters brain activity in our prefrontal cortex. And regular expressions of gratitude can, not just for a few days or a few weeks, but for months and years out, have a powerful impact on lowering anxiety, lowering depression, lowering blood pressure, increasing self-esteem, increasing sleep, increasing decision making abilities, increasing the quality of your romantic relationship, increasing the quality of your friendships, increasing your productivity at work, helping you become more patient, more generous, and less materialistic. Those are things we all want. Gratitude is the path to get there.

But we also learned that the power of gratitude goes far beyond sociology and science, it's written all over the pages of Scripture. It's something that God himself calls us to. We learned that there are more than one hundred scriptures in the Bible that command us to give thanks to the Lord. *More than one hundred times* we are called to be grateful to God for who he is and all he has done.

Now there are a lot of us who say that we want to know what God's will for our lives is. We want to know what he wants us to do. Last week we opened 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and what did we read? "Give thanks in all circumstances, *for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" This is God's will for us: that we would be a grateful people!

We looked at the interaction Jesus had with 10 lepers, who all had a life-stealing disease which caused them to be removed from society and helpless until their illness caused their death. Jesus saw them, healed them, and nine of the ten got on their way and went about their business. Only one person came back to give thanks. We said we want to be like that one, we want to be aware, mindful, conscious of all that God has done for us, and constantly give him thanks and praise for it!

James 1:17 says, "All good gifts are from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." Every good thing we have in life we have because God has given it to us. And we want to be the sort of people who recognize that and are constantly saying, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

Last week we learned about the *power* of gratitude, we learned about how important it is. And I think we all want to be more grateful people. This week we are going to talk about the *enemies* of gratitude – we are going to look at the forces at work in the world that make gratitude an uphill journey, as well as the forces of our own hearts that make gratitude difficult.

We could talk about dozens of different enemies of gratitude, but I want to highlight what I believe to be four of the primary enemies of gratitude. My best guess is that even if you think you are a pretty grateful person, at least one of these will resonate with you as an enemy you need to be on guard against. And many of us, myself included, will find that all four of these enemies can occasionally pop up in our lives, and we need not only to be aware of them, but to counteract them with gratitude. Let's begin.

The first enemy of gratitude is *greed*. The message of greed is clear: I want more. If you are taking notes, write this down! Greed is always about accumulation. And this does pertain to money, but it pertains to so much more than money. There are some people who always want more: more money, more clothes, more vacations...but it's not always possessions. It could be more respect, more affirmation, more friends, more hair. Greed is your enemy. Greed says, "No matter what it is, I need more of it."

Let's look at an example of this in Scripture – Luke 12:16-21. Let's look at a teaching Jesus gave about greed.

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

In this story Jesus describes a rich man who had a wonderful property that kept producing an abundant harvest. He always had excess. He always had more than he needed. And instead of spending time thinking about how to use his excess wealth to honor God, instead of spending time figuring out how to use his excess food to help people and take care of his neighbors, he spent his time considering how to turn already excessive wealth into even greater wealth. What would cause a person to do that? Greed! Greed gives no consideration to how much you presently have, it's only focus is on more, more, more.

There's a great example from the life of John D. Rockefeller. This is a man who, at the peak of his wealth, owned over 1% of the entire US economy. He owned over 90% of all the oil and gas industry at the time. He makes Gates and Bezos look like paupers. Many estimate him to be the wealthiest man in the history of the world! He was worth over 400 billion dollars. One day he was asked: "How much money is enough money?" His answer: "Just a little bit more." It's not just an issue with him – it's endemic to the human condition. Think about Adam and Eve in the Garden. They had the world to themselves, they could eat from any tree on the planet except one. Thousands at their fingertips. But that wasn't enough. The very first sin came from greed...wanting a little bit more.

Greed says: I want more. What's the antidote to greed? Gratitude says: I am content with what God has given me. To be content means to be satisfied, to be at a place of peace and happiness. This is a lesson I so desperately wish we could all learn: Contentment is not based on how much

you have, it is based on how grateful you are for what you have. If we are grateful, then no matter how much we have, we will be content. Paul said in Philippians 4:11, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” In 1 Timothy 6:6 he said: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” What’s the pathway away from greed and toward contentment? Gratitude!

So greed is the first enemy of contentment – *entitlement* is the second. Entitlement says: I deserve more. As you are writing down “entitlement,” I want you to write a name next to it. It’s a name from the Old Testament of the Bible: Solomon. Solomon was the son of King David. Now, Solomon wasn’t the first son or the second son or even the third son of the David. But because of God’s plan, he was still chosen to reign over the nation of Israel. And though at first he was humble and deferential, and chose to pursue wisdom and honor God above all else, eventually, entitlement crept in.

He began his reign as king by taking seven years to build a temple for the Lord. *Seven years!* It was a massive, beautiful building. But then he thought, “Now that I have done all this, I deserve to take care of myself a little bit, too.” So he built a large palace for himself. It took him 7 years to build a dwelling place for the Lord, how many years did it take him to build his own dwelling place? *13 years.* I’m the king. I deserve this.

Then other kings started offering him their daughters in marriage for political alliance. He already had a wife, but he thought, “I’m the king. I deserve this.” How many wives did he add? 700. And that still wasn’t enough. He thought, “I deserve a few concubines, too. I’ll have 300 of those, please.”

He had great wealth that he inherited from his father, but he thought he deserved more. He thought he deserved more gold. So how much gold did he bring in each year? This is really important! 1 Kings 10:14: “The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents.” Did you see that? 666. That’s the number of evil. That’s the number of sin. That’s the number of the beast. He had been given too much. He had so much to be thankful for, but instead, he allowed entitlement to creep into his heart, which ultimately led him away from God.

And it wasn’t just his own heart that was impacted, he took so much from his people. He taxed them so heavily for his own extravagance and gain that he when he died, the nation was divided, torn apart, and ultimately hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives in civil war. And it all started with entitlement. Where in your life do you say, “I deserve this?” Wherever that is, that is where the enemy will point his sights and try to take you down!

The antidote to entitlement? Where entitlement says: I deserve more, gratitude says: I deserve nothing, but God has graciously given me everything I have. It’s human tendency to say things like, “I just want what I deserve. I want what I’ve worked for. I want what is coming to me, Nothing more, but certainly nothing less.” We have to be very careful with that sort of mentality. Because do you know what the Bible says we deserve? Romans 3:10 says, “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Isaiah 64:6 says, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Even our best attempts before God are insufficient. And Romans 3:23 says: “For the wages of sin is death.” So we are all on the same page: that is what we deserve. And yet, what has God given us? Romans 3:23 begins by telling us the wages

of sin is death, this is what we have earned, but it ends by saying: “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Entitlement is our enemy because it is a lie. Because of pride we want to believe that we have earned all we have and deserve even more, so we are never satisfied. But gratitude reminds us that the truth is that we deserve nothing. If someone took my worst moments and played them on this screen for everyone to see, you would all agree: Dan deserves nothing good. I’m guessing the same might be true for you. We deserve nothing, and we should be grateful that God has given us all we have.

So we’ve talked about greed and entitlement. The third enemy of gratitude is *comparison*. Comparison says: I want more than you. Human tendency is to measure ourselves by other people. I might be considered tall compared to your average gymnast, but short compared to your average basketball player. I might be strong compared to your average elementary school kid, but weak compared to your average weightlifter. We compare ourselves to others all the time. And sometimes comparison is no big deal – you have blond hair I have brown hair – it’s just a way we become aware of each person’s uniqueness. Other times it’s destructive, it brings either pride or insecurity, it turns other people into measuring rods, and it ruins our relationships. Comparison always leads to ruin.

There was a character in the Bible named Saul who let comparison steal his joy and gratitude. Saul was the first king of Israel. Saul was not born king, but he was chosen by God to be king and anointed King. He was taken from nothing, from total obscurity and given more power, more honor, more prestige, and more wealth than anyone in the entire country. And you think that would be enough! There was literally no one who outranked him in any regard.

But then he had a young man in his army who was brave, who was willing to risk his life for his God, for his king and for his country. And after a number of military victories Saul heard that there were some people in the streets who were saying, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (1 Samuel 18:7). And the moment Saul realized that someone else was having success – that someone else was being honored – what happened? He was so enraged that the bible tells us, the next day, Saul tried to kill David. Saul had so much, but he couldn’t be happy for what he had because he compared himself to others.

Comparison turns people who are your friends into your enemies. And Saul is not the only one who does that. We do, too. We are happy with our car until we ride our neighbor’s new car and realize all the upgrades available. We are happy with our house until we walk into a friend’s new house and see the latest designs. We are happy with our salary until we find out that our co-worker makes more than us. This is really interesting: I am friends with several financial advisors. And they have told me that their clients might make a 12, 15, or even 17% rate of return on their investment, which they are over the top excited about...until they find out that someone else made 20%! They went from so happy, so excited, to frustrated and upset, and the only change: they compared themselves to someone else.

What’s the antidote to comparison? Gratitude! Where comparison says: I want more than you, gratitude says: I rejoice when great things happen to you. Being grateful is not just about being

thankful for what you have, it's being thankful for what others have, too. Whereas comparison always leads to jealousy and envy when others do well and allows you to only be happy when you have more than others, gratitude enables you to rejoice when others succeed, to be happy for them, sincerely delighted, because their well-being has nothing to do with yours. Listen to what God's word says in Galatians 6:4: "Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else." That's what God wants for us. Being grateful for what he has given us, without the need to compare.

So we've talked about three of enemies to gratitude: greed that says I always want more, entitlement that says I deserve what I have, and comparison which is always evaluating what I have compared to what others have. There is one more enemy I want to talk about: *foolishness*. This might seem like an unusual enemy to gratitude, one you haven't given as much consideration to before, but it's more relevant and helpful than you might think.

If you are taking notes, write this down: foolishness says I am unaware of all I have. A fool is someone who isn't mindful of the countless ways God has provided for them. We have another example of this in the Scriptures, and we are going to look at a man named Nabal. His name actually means "fool." So as soon as we are introduced to him, we discover what kind of man he is.

Now, Nabal was a man with a lot of possessions, and a large flock of 1,000 goats and 3,000 sheep. And back then, there wasn't a police force to help protect private property, so oftentimes robbers and thieves would steal people's animals. But David and his men, who were staying near Nabal, ended up protecting all of Nabal's possessions for him. They served him and looked after him and ensured that nothing he had was ever taken. Nabal's own workers said that they were like a wall around them to keep them safe from harm.

Then David and his men were in need. They got hungry, so they asked Nabal, "We've been providing safety and security for all your animals for all this time, would you mind sparing us a few loaves of bread? Just enough to keep us from starving?" But when they asked, do you know what Nabal said? "Who is this David?" (1 Samuel 25:10). He pretended he didn't even know him. He had 4,000 animals out in the wilderness, every one of them was healthy, not one of them taken by a robber or a wolf, not one...and he thought it just miraculously happened all by itself, giving no account for the work that others did to help him be so successful and profitable.

Nabal was going to meet a very unfortunate fate, until his wife went and advocated for him. His wife Abigail had to go to David and say this: "Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name – his name means Fool, and folly goes with him" (1 Samuel 25:25).

Nabal is just like you and me sometimes. We have all these blessings, and we think it's because of our hard work, our brilliant ideas, our studiousness, when in reality, there were other people who worked so hard to get us to where we are at – parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, coaches, employers, friends, mentors, and of course, God. Only a fool looks around and doesn't see blessings. Only a fool looks around and says, "I got where I got on my own."

What's the antidote to foolishness? Gratitude. Where foolishness says: "I am unaware of all I have," gratitude says: "I praise God for every blessing he has given me." This is what God's word calls us to. Psalm 103:2 says, "Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Ephesians 1:3 says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

We don't want to be the fool. We want to look around, be aware of all that God has blessed us with, be aware of all that has been done on our behalf by others, and say, "Thank you!" Every good thing we have comes from God. We want to recognize that and be grateful.

King David modeled this in a perfect way. Toward the end of his life, after giving almost his entire net worth to finance the building of the temple, he said this, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chronicles 19:14). David was wise. Yes, he gave a lot. And he was grateful to be able to give, knowing that everything he gave to God was first given to him by God. Why would he not joyfully give it back to him?

Last week we talked about the *power* of gratitude: it's appropriate socially, it's verifiable scientifically, it's taught in Scripture, and it's modeled in the life of Jesus. There is no denying its power. But there are enemies at work against gratitude in our lives. Greed, entitlement, comparison, foolishness are all lurking somewhere in our hearts, trying to rob us of contentment, rob us of gratitude, rob us of joy. But if we are mindful of those enemies, if we fortify our hearts against them, and if we specifically cultivate gratitude, we will become a grateful people.

As we prepare for our time of communion, let me share a truth with you from Scripture that should make us more grateful than words can express: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because of what Christ has done for us, let's be people who always, always, always say thank you!