

Have you ever had a Hawaiian Sweet Roll (**picture**)? I'm not talking about the generic store bought kind. I'm talking about the real thing. We discovered them, probably within the last five years. At first, they were hard to find...now they're everywhere. Do you love them? We sure do.

Anyone here that's never had one? Well, today is your lucky day!

Would it make any difference to you if they weren't actually made in Hawaii? Well, it has to Robert Galinsky of Yonkers, New York (and no, I am not making this up). Mr. Galinsky has filed a lawsuit against King's Hawaiian Bakery because their rolls aren't actually made in Hawaii.

King's Hawaiian, a family-owned business founded by Robert Taira in Hilo, Hawaii and now based in Los Angeles, is the defendant in this class action lawsuit. Galinsky, after purchasing a pack of King's Hawaiian rolls from a local store, says that he's suing because the packaging on the Hawaiian Rolls which prominently displays "Hilo, Hawaii" is false advertising. He pointed out that the back label notes the popular bread is manufactured in Torrance, Calif (**picture**), but since the front packaging prominently features "Hilo, Hawaii," it leads consumers to falsely believe the bread is actually from there when it's really made in California.

Welcome to 2021! The next thing you know someone will be suing companies who make French fries because they aren't manufactured in France or Moon Pies aren't baked on the moon.

Pretty petty, huh? Can you believe that guy?!? I hate petty people! So raise your hand if you've recently, in the last month, complained about...missing a traffic light because the car in front of you was too slow (**picture**). The length of the line at a drive thru (**picture**). The toilet seat being up (**picture**). The weather (**picture**). The Kardashians, LeBron James, Miley Cyrus, Mark Zuckerberg (**pictures**). Complaining about people who complain (**picture**).

Let's be honest. We're a nation of grippers. Sadly, Christians are often as bad or worse. Because *while grumbling is natural, gratitude is supernatural*. We need God's help because gratitude goes against the grain of our hearts. Developing the muscle of thanksgiving takes time and effort.

If there is anything that will radically transform your life, your inner life, your walk with the Lord, your relationships with your family, your relationships here at church – every sphere of your life – it's gratitude!

Our theme (**picture**) this year is "*Gratitude is the attitude that sets the altitude for your life.*" (Let's say that together). We wrongly believe that thankfulness is dependent on our circumstances. It's a lie from Satan as old as the Garden. A grateful attitude has nothing to do with our life situation.

To launch and to ingrain this into our hearts, we're beginning an 8-week series: *ThankFULL* (**picture**). Gratitude, praise, thankfulness – has been the power source of the people of God throughout the ages. One reason we're so spiritually anemic is that we have so little of it.

In a world that is unraveling at the seams, gratitude is our life preserver. Please understand, I'm not sharing this as an expert. Too often I'm a glass half empty type. The joy of recognizing my Heavenly Father at work and by responding to Him, my little tastes of thanksgiving and its life-changing power leave me wanting much more and I want that for you too and for our church. As we launch this, let me share *Four Motivations* for this series.

First, I know *the glaring need* in my own life. That's not some humble brag; it's the truth. And I know that our church needs it too. Listen to our conversations. Watch our faces. We're not a grateful people.

Second, *there is little written or taught about giving thanks biblically*. At best, we focus on it at Thanksgiving for a day...maybe? This isn't Pollyanna (**picture**) stuff. Yet, we find in God's Word that praise and thankfulness are to be normative for the people of God, 24/7.

Third, *as we give God thanks, we delight in what we discover about Him*. Gratitude leads us to know our Heavenly Father more fully, which leads to trusting Him more, worshipping Him more, and loving Him more. It draws us closer to the One who loves us unconditionally!

Fourth, *it's foundational to spiritual growth*. As our faith and joy in God increase through thanksgiving, it cuts off the food supply to the sin of ingratitude. Gratitude is not an afterthought of the Christian life. It's not only for the super-spiritual. It's an essential, life-giving part of our faith. It's **The Transforming Power of Gratitude**. Ephesians 5:20, "*Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

1. Are you are grateful person? Or are you a gripper? Did you know that the NBA has a "no whining rule" (**picture**)? They've had it at least since 2010. But I don't think that it does them any more good than knowing that we shouldn't gripe is wrong and a sin, does us.

People are cranky. Turn on the TV, scan social media and you'll quickly encounter a chorus of voices arguing, criticizing and complaining. Cynicism and pessimism abound. It feels like they permeate life more than ever before.

Our world is ripe for receiving an alternative message. Through biblical thanksgiving, the Church has one to offer. This isn't fake façade stuff of wearing a grin. It springs from the heart. Biblical gratitude is gritty gratitude.

Let's take a test. **Are you a grateful person? Or a griper?** Circle them on the back of the insert or track them at home. They're all A & B questions.

Do you more often (A) remember God's blessings in your life or (B) forget them?

When things don't go your way, do you typically respond (A) in gratitude or (B) grumbling?

Would you say that you tell God thanks (A) daily or (B) less than daily?

Would you describe yourself as more often (A) content or (B) discontent?

Do you (A) often tell others reasons you're grateful or (B) rarely talk about why you're grateful?

When you see things others have that you don't, do you (A) rest in what God has given you, or (B) struggle with jealousy?

Do you (A) more often find things that are right and praiseworthy or (B) what's wrong and needs to be complained about?

If you were to list reasons for gratitude, would it be (A) a long list and easy to come up with things to give thanks for or (B) a short list and hard to think of many things?

Do you (A) have a way of intentionally recording reasons for gratitude or (B) do you not have a way to intentionally record reasons for gratitude?

Would those close to you—family/friends—(A) say that you're a grateful person or (B) a griping person?

Tally up how many times that you circled (A). The goal isn't to condemn but to reveal how prone we are to thanksgiving or to complaining, knowing that all of us have room to grow.

In the classic, Dante's *Inferno*, Dante (**picture**) penetratingly placed in the center of his hell, not those guilty of vile sins but those who are ungrateful. He was right. Living in ingratitude is a hell that we have made ourselves.

But it's not new. Famed lawyer, Samuel Leibowitz (**picture**) rescued 78 condemned individuals from the electric chair. Not one ever thanked him.

Two of our children, Charity and Aaron, graduated from the University of Northwestern, St. Paul. It's a Christian college. Because we're in the ministry, Northwestern gave us a discount. Charity had already graduated. But when Aaron was a student, my giant sixth grade brain clicked that I should send them a thank you note. So, I wrote one to the President. Dr. Alan Cureton (**picture**), and thanked him for their generosity and that it helped us send our children to a Christian college which was so important to us.

By then, he'd been the president for several years. I'll never forget the letter that he sent back. He said that in his years as president, I was the first parent to ever write and thank him. He was thrilled. Personally, I was embarrassed because we'd sent Charity there, received the same discount and I'd never thanked him. We may not be gripers, but too rarely are we thankers.

2. Gratitude is a key to physical, mental and spiritual health. One New Year's Day, in the Tournament of Roses parade, a beautiful float suddenly sputtered and quit. It was out of gas. The whole parade was held up until someone could get a can of gas. The amusing thing was this float represented the Standard Oil Company. With its vast oil resources, its truck was out of gas. Gratitude is the power for living.

Believers continually seek to ascertain God's will. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 is clear. *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* If you wonder what God's will is for your life, here it is. Being a thankful person is a command. It's not optional. Being thankful must be an ongoing, continuous activity. *"Giving thanks always."* "Not occasionally, or mostly, but always.

In 2007, Dr. Robert Emmons (**picture**), began researching gratitude through a psychological lens. He found that expressing gratitude improves mental, physical and relational well-being. Being grateful also impacts the overall experience of happiness, and these effects tend to be long-lasting.

The Research Project on Gratitude and Thanksgiving, conducted by two psychologists, broke several hundred people into three groups and required each person to keep a daily diary. The first group simply recorded events throughout the day. The second was asked to journal negative experiences. The final group made a list each day of things for which they were grateful. It's not surprising that the gratitude group reported greater levels of alertness and energy, and experienced less depression and stress.

Some of gratitude's benefits are: Improved physical, emotional and social well-being. Greater optimism and happiness. Improved feelings of connection in times of loss or crises. Increased self-esteem. Heightened energy levels. Strengthened heart, immune system, and decreased blood pressure. Improved emotional and academic intelligence. Expanded capacity for forgiveness and decreased stress, anxiety, depression and even headaches.

To a very significant degree, your total well-being, as well as the health of your relationships, is determined by your grip on gratitude. Cultivating a thankful heart is a safeguard against becoming bitter, prickly and sour. A grateful child of God can't help but be a joyful, peaceful, radiant person. We must cultivate the grace and spiritual discipline of gratitude if we're going to persevere and not lose our footing in these difficult days. A key to a grateful heart is to continually look for evidence of God's hand at work in the midst of the difficulties and being simply overwhelmed with thankfulness to Him.

Gratitude is much more significant than most realize and its lightweight reputation would suggest. It makes all the difference in our spiritual health.

Try, for example, to sustain persevering faith without gratitude. Your faith will eventually forget the whole point of its faithfulness, hardening into ritualism that's hollow and ineffective.

Try being a person who exudes and exhibits Christian love without gratitude. Over time your love will crash hard on the sharp rocks of disappointments and disillusionment.

Try being a person who is generous, who gives sacrificially of yourself without the offering being accompanied by gratitude. Soon you'll find every ounce of joy drained dry by a martyr complex.

British pastor, John Henry Jowett (**picture**) wisely said, *"Every virtue divorced from thankfulness is maimed and limps along the spiritual road."*

Growing in gratitude doesn't just happen. It's a discipline. Complaining and ungratefulness come naturally. Best-selling author Rick Hanson (**picture**) explains that negative experiences are like "Velcro" and tend to stick in our minds, whereas positive experiences are like "Teflon" and more readily slip away. We must actively work to integrate positive experiences into our minds in order for the positive to "stick" and the beneficial effects to endure.

3. Gratitude anchors us in the present. Years ago I was in sales, selling commercial roofing. There was pressure to come up with new sales. It's tempting to rest on your laurels. My boss, Paul Desjardins, would ask the sales staff, "What did you sell today?" And he had a line that I'll never forget, *"Sales is like shaving. Do it every day or you're a bum."*

Too often we're like the little boy who came home from a birthday party. His mom met him at the door, and asked, "How was it?" He showed her all of his candy and trinkets and souvenirs. She said, "Wow! Did you say, 'thank you?'" "Well," he said, "I was going to, but when I was in line at the door and the girl ahead of me said, 'Thank you' to the woman, the woman told her, 'Oh, don't mention it.' So I didn't."

Eric Hoffer (**picture**), put it this way: *"The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings."*

God doesn't want us to live in the past or on leftovers. It's great when someone shares what God did in the past, or how they came to Christ years ago. But God is the great *"I am"* not the great *"I was."* Lamentations 3:22-23 says, *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

Gratitude anchors us in the now. Too many of us are either looking backward or forward. We talk about the good old days. It is tempting to look over our shoulder at the way we were. Ecclesiastes warns us: *"Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these? For it is not wise to ask such questions'"* (Ecclesiastes 7:10).

Or we long for the future. Our focus is continually forward on possibility. We talk about retirement or when the kids are gone. We talk about what it will be like when all of this is over. Where we will travel, what we will do, who we will see. It's helpful to hope for good things. But it's lifechanging to give thanks for what we have today. We delay our own happiness by waiting for a future event. Gratitude brings happiness into the present. Paul said to be thankful IN all circumstances. Not after. That's God's plan and will for us.

4. Children of the Heavenly Father have a longing to be grateful. One of the first things that we teach our children is to be grateful. When we realize how much God loves us and all that He's given us, gratitude is the natural response. Since God loved us so much that He gave His Son to die for us on the cross, what's the only possible response? Gratitude. Every time we hear the word *grace*, it reminds us that we who know the Savior must live every day in a way that reflects our gratitude to God. We who've been given so much; forgiveness, eternity in heaven, heaven in our hearts now – when we begin to comprehend all that our Father has given us, gratitude is the only fitting response. It's why Christian poet, George Herbert (**picture**) wrote:

*Thou that hast given so much to me,
Give one thing more, a grateful heart...
I cry, and cry again;
And in no quiet canst thou be,
Till I a thankful heart obtain*

*Of thee: Not thankful, when it pleaseth me;
As if thy blessings had spare days:
But such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise.*

One of my favorite movies is *Groundhog Day* (**picture**), starring Bill Murray as Phil Connors, a self-centered weatherman who ends up trapped in a time warp. He's stuck in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, for Groundhog Day, the same Groundhog Day over and over and over again. After satisfying his hedonistic pleasures, Phil begins to grow into a person committed to helping others. For example, from experience, he knows that at precisely 11:05 a.m., a boy will fall out of a tree onto the sidewalk. So Phil makes sure to be there at exactly the right moment to catch the boy, saving him from serious injury.

But, every single time, the boy runs away without even acknowledging Phil. In one scene, Phil laments, "That's right. Never thank you, not once. You never say thank you." Things like this happen all the time, not just in the movies. It shouldn't surprise us.

The Apostle Paul informs us that ingratitude is to be expected in "*the last days*," that period between the ascension of Christ and His return. People will act in terrible ways and will be, among other deplorable things, "*ungrateful*" (2 Tim. 3:2). That must not be those who are born-again.

In *Groundhog Day* (**picture**), Phil Connors is deprived of the recognition he should receive from the boy he saved. When we fail to thank God, God loses out on the recognition that He rightly deserves and we lose too. Gratitude wrongs the one who should have received thanks.

If you asked a troubled Christian, what they thought their trouble came from? They'd probably come up with a litany of issues. I doubt though that they'd ever consider that their own lack of gratitude was the root of much of their turmoil. They'd say that their spouse or children or their parents or their job is the cause of their problems. They might blame their circumstances.

Lack of gratitude rarely presents itself as the source of our problems. But it is. Gratitude though is the wonderful gift that just keeps on giving!

Gratitude empowers contentment. It guards against envy. Envy tempts us to compare ourselves with others. Comparison is the thief of joy. Envy makes us want what someone else has. Gratitude makes us realize God has given us far more than we deserve. Because there's enough for everyone, we can cheer rather than compare. A grateful heart has little room left for envy. Contentment is to rest in Christ, trusting that He is in control. Circumstances, good or bad, are an opportunity for Him to show Himself faithful. Once you go to God in gratitude, you can live in contentment.

Gratitude enables peace. Giving thanks, even as we bring our requests to God, shows us that we don't need one more thing in order to be thankful. We just need to recognize God's presence in our lives. God's peace transcends our understanding and guards our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:6-7).

I love what Lisa Apello (**picture**) says: "*When you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Count your blessings.*" God's grace can work in our lives to reveal that even some of our biggest struggles are actually gifts from Him, something He uses for our good and His glory. Gratitude transforms our perceptions and helps us see promise in each situation. It gives us His peace.

Gratitude energizes our faith. Keeping a record of God's past faithfulness boosts my faith when I'm facing my next difficulty. God's record of faithfulness is 100%. That's why He continually commanded Israel to remember His great deeds on their behalf. Usually we think of gratitude as something you express after you're given something. Yet, as I express my gratitude it increases my ability to trust the Lord and let Him lead me more and more. As I realize I have much to be grateful for and those blessings are from Him, it energizes my faith, and I'm able to trust in Him more.

Gratitude encourages joy. Brene Brown (**picture**) has done years of research on this connection between joy and gratitude. She quotes a minister who says "*It is not joy that makes us grateful, it is gratefulness that brings us joy.*" She says the important thing is not just an "attitude of gratitude" but practices of gratitude, like saying grace before we eat.

We need joy for our journey. Psalm 126 talks about the journey of the exiles going back to the Promised Land. Even before they arrived, they were filled with joy and gratitude. Joy isn't a destination, it's a journey. If you want more joy, build gratitude into your life in tangible ways. Talk about your blessings with others. Pause to name God's many blessings in your life.

Gratitude enhances our testimony. Complaining hurts our testimony and damages God's reputation. It communicates that our Heavenly Father is a delinquent parent and not taking care of us.

Yet, when we thank God openly and acknowledge what He's done for us, we proclaim a personal, caring God to the world around us. We show that contentment and peace come not from what we have, but Who we know.

Perhaps the most important thing we can say about gratitude is that it glorifies God. There is a cycle of blessings that starts when we give thanks. In 2 Corinthians 4:15, Paul talks about the power of the gospel to transform lives. God's grace reaches more and more people which causes more and more thanksgiving to overflow. And this wave of thanksgiving glorifies God.

A Christian is someone who's decided to accept God's gift of salvation and to live evermore not for his/her glory but for the glory of God. The best way we can bring glory to our Creator is to simply thank Him at all times, in all circumstances, for all of His blessings to all who will listen.

Conclusion: Two-time Academy Award-winning actor Denzel Washington (**picture**) is best known for his roles in *Glory*, *The Preacher's Wife*, and *Remember the Titans*. But this Hollywood A-lister sounded more like a pastor when he's spoken at recent events. You may not know this but Denzel Washington is a PK (preacher's kid). His father was a Pentecostal preacher from Mount Vernon, New York. More important than that is the fact that Denzel Washington is a growing Christian. He's been an active member of West Angeles Church of God in Christ for nearly 30 years.

Denzel says he reads his Bible every morning—and that he strives to consistently “get up and speak of what God has done for him.”

At a November 2015 church banquet he did exactly that. But then he urged his listeners to live in a constant attitude of gratitude for God's goodness. Here's what he said, “*Give thanks for blessings every day. Every day. Embrace gratitude. Encourage others. It is impossible to be grateful and hateful at the same time. I pray that you put your slippers way under your bed at night, so that when you wake in the morning you have to start on your knees to find them. And while you're down there, say 'thank you.'* A bad attitude is like a flat tire. Until you change it, you're not going anywhere.”

I love that last sentence, “*A bad attitude—an unthankful attitude—is like a flat tire. Until you change it you're not going anywhere.*”

Gratitude is so empowering! True gratitude comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. “*Grumbling is natural, gratitude is supernatural.*”

Thankfulness is an essential first step if we want to have the Kingdom life now and progress onward toward Christlikeness. We have so much to be thankful for no matter what. Our Heavenly Father has it ALL under control and the very worst for the Christian is temporary.

The closest a believer ever gets to Hell is this life. Tragically, the closest an unbeliever ever gets to Heaven is this life. My friend, Jesus died for you so that you could go Home to live with Him forever. Do you know Him? Is He your Lord and Savior? If not, my friend come to the Savior today!