

Forget Not Gratitude in the Gutter

Rob Rogers

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RECAP — Last week we started a brand new 3-week series on gratitude called *Forget Not*.

- the single most prominent theme throughout the entire Bible is the command — the invitation to a grateful life.
- if you want consistent, abiding joy, peace, fulfillment, satisfaction in life — the way you get there is not by pursuing those qualities as a goal in and of themselves
- the way to grow in these qualities is the grow in the disciplined practice of Gratitude

**Gratitude is the recognition of the substance
and source of every good thing.**

- **Gratitude is first a recognition of good in and of itself**
It's a recognition that there is good in the world, and there is good in my own life
- **And then it's the recognition the Source of that good**
Where it came from
- **James 1:17**
Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights
 - if we're going to be enabled, and empowered to trust what God wants to do in our future, we've got to remember the great things He's done in our past
 - we've got to look back at those moments where God moved miraculously in and through our life as evidence of His faithfulness
 - allow that knowledge to empower us to grow in the grace of a grateful life...

The Gratitude Journal

If you missed last week, we created a resource to help you: *The Gratitude Journal*. It's a 28-day guide to growing in the discipline and practice of Gratitude. You can download an electronic copy at:

www.Gracechapel.net/gratitude

When you open it up, there are four sections for each day... and each section gives you a prompt to get you started...

- **Section 1:** Today I'm grateful for... and you've got space to reflect and write
- **Section 2:** Has a Scripture reading for that day... Psalm 103
- **Section 3:** "One thing I'm believing God for..." So, we're looking back, recognizing God's goodness in the past and present, and bringing our hopes, our desires for the future, and laying those before Him... believing Him for big things!
- **Section 4:** "What went well today..." This is a reflection on that specific day, maybe right before bed, you look back and recognize God's presence, His work in that day

We want everyone that calls Grace Chapel home participating in this, growing in gratitude, because not only is it the most prominent theme and command in scripture, but in the busyness and chaos of everyday life, it's so easy to forget God's goodness.

- **Psalm 103:1-2**

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ² Bless the Lord, O my soul, and **forget not** all his benefits...

The Problem of the Soul

- **Psalm 42:1-11**

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" ⁴ These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation ⁶ and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. ⁸ By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹ I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" ¹⁰ As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" ¹¹ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

Out of this passage, we're going to talk about the...

**THE PROBLEM OF THE SOUL
THE POWER OF PREACHING
THE PROMISE OF PEACE**

One of the biggest objections to growing in gratitude is the problem of suffering, difficulty, hardship... feeling stuck in life...

- *If God really is good... if He really is with me and for me, why is life so hard!*
- *Why is there so much pain... why is there so much trouble in life?*
- *Why is there this sense of endless, meaningless toil?*
- *I'm working, and striving, and trying to keep up, but there just doesn't seem to be any progress.*

- **Psalm 42:1**

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

- We put that verse on coffee cups, or a Thomas Kincaid painting of a beautiful deer, peacefully drinking from a river of crystal water
 - A deer only pants if there is a drought, when there is no water
 - When there is a drought, animals wander around in search of something they can't find
 - If they can't find any water or food eventually they become malnourished and die.
- *The psalmist is saying,*
 - *"This is the condition of my soul. I'm spiritually destitute, I'm spiritually empty..."*
 - *"My soul thirsts for God... because I can't find Him anywhere."*
 - *"The condition of my soul, is dry, and dark... there's no life here..."*

- **Psalm 42:5**

Why are you **cast down**, O my soul? And *why* are you **disquieted** within me?

- **Cast down** — crushed, overwhelmed, that your heart is just slowly deteriorating and melting like wax...
 - **DEPRESSION**
- **Disquieted** — to be in great commotion
 - **ANXIETY**

This psalmist is saying, “I’m dying of spiritual thirst, I can’t find God, and my soul is downcast — depressed and weighed down with anxiety.

The psalmist gives us a number of issues he’s dealing with...

- He’s in **ISOLATION**... he’s isolated from the people he used to worship God with...
- He’s wrestling with **ACCUSATIONS**... ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”
 - In other words, “if God is so good then why are you suffering like this? If God loves you so much why doesn’t He rescue you?”
- He’s lost the thing he looked to for **VALIDATION**, verse 4, He used to lead the worship procession... he’s bitterly remembering how great it used to be... he had an important role to play, he was a somebody... he contributed to something greater than himself, he had value...
- He’s without **EXPLANATION**... Over and over and over again he’s asking the question we all ask when tragedy hits our lives... “Why? Why me? Why now?”

There are times we’re **downcast** and **disquieted** as a result of **1.** our own sin.

Other times we’re **downcast** because **2.** tragedy breaks into our lives seemingly for no reason at all. sudden loss of a loved one, financial loss, life-altering diagnosis, abuse that launches us into a chaotic storm of overwhelming grief, questions and doubts... *depression*...

Then there are times in life where we have *no explanation for being downcast and disquieted*... sometimes you’re doing everything right... you’re practicing your spiritual disciplines, you’re in the Word, and you are alone with God, you’re working through your gratitude journal... and for whatever reason this tsunami of depression and anxiety just crushes you, and pushes you down, and won’t let up...

This is one area that the “capital C Church” needs to get much better talking about and proactively addressing — Mental health.

STATS ON MENTAL ILLNESS: ADA reported that

- 322 million people worldwide suffer from some type depressive disorder.
- 15.7 Million adults in the US suffer from depression.
- 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older suffer from an Anxiety disorder.
- Anxiety disorders affect 25.1% of Children in the US between the ages of 13-18

And on top of all of that, we’re heading into the holiday season...

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, (NAMI)

- “64% of people with mental illness report holidays make their conditions worse.”

**THE WORLD equates mental illness with weakness,
while the CHURCH equates it with unbelief.**

“Oh, you’re depressed... you’re struggling with anxiety? Well, have you prayed about it? Have you asked God to take it away? Have you read your Bible?”

- And we might be asking those questions as well-meaning Christians, but if you're in their shoes... what are you hearing? *"The reason why you're depressed or anxious is because you don't really trust God. If you did, this wouldn't be an issue. If you had enough faith He would solve this for you."*
 - *Which, not only heaps shame onto the individual, but brings into question at best, their intimacy with God, and at worst it brings into question for that individual the very existence of God.*
 - *What we often try to do to help, can be the very thing that causes the most amount of harm.*

I need you to hear me say this, Church...

*Mental Illness is an extremely complex issue and we need multifaceted solutions at times. Seeking counseling, community, be willing to ask for and receive help, getting enough rest and prioritizing the Sabbath, all of these are necessary practices if we're going to come out of that pit... and there are times when medication may be the best option... **I need you to hear me say this, Church**, if counseling or modern medicine helps you or is the best option you have... despite where the church has gotten this wrong in the past... **you are not any less of a Christian because of it, God doesn't look down on you with even an ounce disappointment, He loves you and He knows you love Him and you can breathe and rest in that eternal reality...** and if you're downcast and disquieted right now... you're in good company... Jeremiah, Moses, King David, Jonah, Elijah, the Apostle Paul, even Jesus was a man of sorrows... stressed to the point of sweating drops of blood...*

The Power of Preaching

Question — *How do I personally deal with being downcast and disquieted?*

Question — *What does the psalmist do in light of being downcast and disquieted?*

- **Psalm 42:5-6**

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation, and my God.

Question — *Who is he talking to? He repeats this same phrase three times in psalm 42 and in 43...*

Question — *Who's he talking to? Himself! There's no one else around! He's alone, he's downcast and disquieted and he's talking to Himself.... but he's not just **talking** to himself.*

ANSWER — *He's **preaching** to himself. When I'm talking about **the power of preaching**, this is what I mean...*

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his famous sermon on worry and anxiety, says,
 "When you go through one of these conditions, every morning you're going to get up, and your heart is going to be talking to you. You can either spend the day listening to your soul, or you can spend the day talking to your soul. It's up to you."¹
 ~ Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

In other words...

*...whether you are downcast and disquieted for obvious reasons or reasons that remain a mystery to you...
 ...either way, your soul is going to be talking to you...*

- you wake up and your soul is saying, *"Oh no! It's terrible! You're stuck in life, it's never going to get better! It's useless, you'll never find joy again...!"*

OR

- you grab yourself by the shirt and say, *"You listen to me, you weasely, whiney little soul, enough of your little pity-party...!"*

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Zondervan, Jan 24, 2012)

**Then what does he say?
“Put your hope in God!”
This is so important that we get this!**

A lot of times, the reason why we’re despondent, or inconsolable is because our hopes have been misplaced.

- better circumstances
- in that promotion
- in romance
- in the success of our children
- even in the correction of some injustice

But the psalmist isn’t just passively laying there, entertaining the despair of his soul. He’s got a choice to make and so do we.

**We can either passively listen to our own despair —
or we can make our despair listen to us.
The psalmist is grabbing his soul by the throat his soul and preaching to Himself!
And He’s showing us a way out.**

OBJECTION! That just sounds like positive self-talk — like some self-effort optimism — that doesn’t work.

RIGHT! There is an enormous difference between optimism and the hope of the Christian.

- **Psalm 42:5-6**
Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; **for I shall again praise him**, my salvation, and my God.

Hope in God, why?

Because even though I can’t see it, even though I don’t know when it’s coming... there is going to be a day when I will praise again... there is a day when I will rejoice in God, when all will be made right, and all of my sorrow, and all of my anxiety and inner turmoil will disappear... I will praise Him again.

What does that tell us about optimism and the Christian hope?

“Optimism is a wish without warrant; Christian hope is a certainty, guaranteed by God himself. Optimism reflects ignorance as to whether good things will ever actually come. Christian hope expresses knowledge that every day of his life, and every moment beyond it, the believer can say with truth, on the basis of God’s own commitment, that the best is yet to come.”²
~ J.I. Packer

If you’re just optimistic, you have no guarantee that your optimism will ever pay off. There is no assurance, no confidence — it’s just wishful thinking.

The Promise of Peace

Question — *So, it’s one thing to tell yourself to place your hope in God, it’s one thing to preach it to yourself, but **how do you actively place your hope in God?***

- **Psalm 42:6**
...My soul is cast down within me; therefore **I remember you** from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

² J.I. Packer, *Never Beyond Hope: How God Touches and Uses Imperfect People* (Intervarsity Press, Feb 7, 2001) 15

*How do I put my hope in God?
How do I trust that the best is yet to come?
How do I not just have some phony wishful optimism, but have a confident assurance for future joy?*

You remember...

The psalmist is saying —

God, I look back to the land of the Jordan... *[we talked about this last week]* You guided us, provided for us, You split the Jordan and gave us the land... You were so faithful and so present, and so kind to us... **I remember!**

From Mt. Hermon, Israel's highest snow-capped mountain... to the hill of Mizar, meaning the low place, God You're there. **You're faithful.**

You've been good to Your people and You won't stop now.

**The Christian hope is based, not on some impulsive, delusional, whim —
but on God's proven and promised commitment to His people...**

But Church, we have something that the writer of Psalm 42 didn't have...

And what he was clinging to was a hope in God based on **various expressions of God's love** toward Him...

*But we have a hope that is rooted, not in various expressions of love, but on **the ULTIMATE expression of love** toward us.*

The psalmist had no assurance that God could identify with or understand his sadness or His suffering... but Hebrews tells us that...

- **Hebrews 4:15**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The writer of Hebrews is telling us

God doesn't just stand outside of the storms of our lives
He stepped into the most furious and fierce storm of all
He took on flesh

was tempted in every way as we are

was absolutely pure, spotless, innocent, righteous

suffered the most horrendous injustice

was filled with more sorrow than we could ever imagine

yet He never faltered, He never failed, He never quit, He never gave in...

The God of the universe was a

homeless, wandering, peasant

who was stripped naked

mocked, tortured, and crucified...

And He didn't just feel forsaken by God, like the psalmist...

Jesus Christ actually was forsaken by His heavenly Father on the cross.

Jesus Christ was forsaken so that you and I wouldn't ever have to be.

*In those seasons of our downcast and disquieted soul... we can look back and see specific instances of God's goodness — but the ONE we've got to beat into our heads continually — is the **Ultimate Expression of God's love toward us on the Cross.***

Martin Luther in His commentary on the book of Galatians writes this,

“The truth of the gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine... Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually.”³
~ Martin Luther

When it feels like God has abandoned you, preach the gospel to yourself, when you look back, look at Jesus! Look at what He endured to prove God’s love for you, to reveal to you your eternal significance and value — regardless of your place in this life.

The writer of Hebrews says — as Jesus is our high priest who entered into the storm of humanity...

- **Hebrews 4:16**
Let us then **with confidence** draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The Apostle Paul tells us...

- **Philippians 4:4-9**
⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the **peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In light of all that Jesus has done —

you come confidently to the throne of grace, you pray, you ask, you seek, you knock, you offer every one of those prayers and requests with a heart of gratitude, of thanksgiving, knowing that whatever God does with your requests... whether He answers them the way you want or not, you can look back on the Suffering Servant, and the sacrificial Lamb of God and know that God has already proven His love for you, and have the peace that surpasses understanding knowing that if He did that then — He won’t stop now.

YOU DON’T HAVE TO WALK THIS ROAD ALONE!

If you’re in the pit right now, if you’re wrestling through a season of anxiety or depression, we don’t want you going through it alone. This is what the church is for. So, if you’re there right now, keep practicing the discipline of gratitude, keep preaching to yourself, keep reminding yourself of Jesus love, put your hope in God... but you don’t have to walk that road alone. We have an enormous amount of resources and relationships to help you walk through those seasons. Because every now and then we need some friends to carry us to the feet of Jesus so that we can find the healing we need. Don’t go it alone.

Email today — care@gracechapel.net

Additional Works Cited:

<https://www.nami.org/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2014/Mental-health-and-the-holiday-blues>

<https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>

³ Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty* (ReadHowYouWant.com, 2006)

Discussion Questions

1. Has your perspective of the “deer panting for the water” changed?
2. As Christians, why do we feel like it is taboo to admit to being depressed or having anxiety?
3. Can we recognize that one of the main tactics of the enemy is to make us feel isolated?
4. Are you (we) guilty of “helping” a friend struggling with anxiety, by asking them if they have prayed about it, or asked God to take it away, or if they have read their Bible?
5. What is the difference between positive self-talk — and the hope of a Christian?
6. What assurance do we as Christians have today, that the psalmist did not have?

NOTES