



Unconventional Times to Practice Thankfulness Episode 194

Sean: Hello and welcome. This is Sean Edwards with Ray Edwards.

Ray: Thank you, Sean. You know, so many times I've been tempted to get rid of the jingle.

Sean: Yeah?

Ray: I don't know. Sometimes I feel kind of weird about it, but every time I bring it up people say "No, you can't get rid of the jingle."

Sean: No, no, no, we love Emerson Drive.

Ray: "I sing that jingle." I'm like really? I don't admit that I do, too, because that would make me seem kind of egotistical. It's a catchy tune.

Sean: It is catchy.

Ray: And I do love Emerson Drive. So today we're going to talk about how the attitude of gratitude makes you healthy, wealthy and wise. Clever?

Sean: Yes.

Ray: Lots of copywriter-ish things that I said there. It's, of course, the week of Thanksgiving and maybe you've heard giving thanks makes you feel happier and more fulfilled. There are at least seven scientifically-proven benefits to practicing the so-called attitude of gratitude and right now as we enter the Thanksgiving holiday season the media is filled with heartwarming stories of all we should be thankful for. Today I'm going to make the radical suggestion that you should be thankful for the bad stuff, the challenges, the tragedies, the pain.

I know. You're upset with me right now. How dare you! Some of you deep Calvinists are like, "Finally, he came around!" Don't jump to any conclusions. Just get off your jump-to-conclusions mat for a moment, there's more to come. So in today's show here's what we're going to discover.

Sean: Yes. We're going to discover the shocking truth about suicide rates during the holidays. I'm sure we've all heard rumors of those.

Ray: Aha.

Sean: The three dangers of counting your blessings.

Ray: Dangers?

Sean: Dangers. You're dangerous.

Ray: I'm in the danger zone. I'm dangerous.

Sean: The seven scientifically-proven benefits of gratitude.

Ray: Fun, fun.

Sean: The five unconventional times to practice thankfulness. How the attitude of gratitude makes you healthy, wealthy and wise. Why you can be thankful for the trials and not just through them. Nice wordplay there.

Ray: Thank you.

Sean: Plus, we'll share a tip for how to get your podcast ranked higher in iTunes quick and easy.

Spiritual Foundations

Ray: So since it's the week of Thanksgiving here in the U.S. we hear lots of Thanksgiving messages now, but I want to stay on this theme. I want to talk about the Book of James, the beloved Book of James in the Bible. If you're not into the Bible stuff you can skip this until later in the podcast and hear more Bible stuff.

The Book of James is hard to read because it seems to suggest things that are counter to some other things in the Bible, which is very unusual. No parts of the Bible contradict other parts of the Bible.

Sean: No.

Ray: There's never a moment where I go what?

Sean: What?

Ray: The Book of James is so troublesome to some. I don't know if you know this, but Martin Luther said this is not Scripture because it didn't fit with his theology.

Sean: Oh okay.

Ray: So that's how we do it, apparently. If it doesn't fit with our theology we just cut it out of the book, then we go all Thomas Jefferson. Oh, Google it, I'm not going to go into it right now.

So in the Book of James, by the way, there are lots of theories about who this James was, but the number one theory, the one that bubbles to the top that seems to be the one that everybody mostly accepts, the most accepted theory is that it's James, the half-brother of Jesus. So James writes:

"Count it all joy, my brothers." I presume he means sisters, too, but he said brothers. That's what it says. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be

given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

One can see why Martin Luther was not happy with this book. I know a lot of good Christians who just skip the Book of James, along with the Book of Revelation, Leviticus and several others, but that’s beside the point.

You need to be careful with this passage of Scripture. It’s been used in the past to malign, I believe, the character of God, teaching that God sends evil stuff our way so we can learn a lesson; that He is in control of everything that happens. I’m guilty of having a sign on the wall in my living room that says God is in Control, when I actually don’t believe that. Oh!

Sean: Oh-oh!

Ray: “Martha, come here and listen to this podcast, what he just said! He said God’s not in control. We need to stone him.” Don’t stone me just yet. This teaching that God is in control of everything that happens is usually dressed up under the cloak of the sovereignty of God. “You must not question the sovereignty of God, brother. That is the way of the wicked and woe unto him that does so.” I do believe in the sovereignty of God. I believe that God is sovereign, absolutely. Now, let’s see what that word means, just so we’re all in agreement.

From the dictionary, the place where we go to get the meaning of words, it says: supreme power, especially over a body politic; freedom from external control; autonomy. So God is free from external control. Nobody control Him, He’s autonomous. He is sovereign. If you think about it, if the king of a kingdom is the supreme ruler of the kingdom...let’s pretend that the United States was a kingdom. It almost was. If John Adams had had his way it would have been. He wanted to call President Washington His Royal Majesty, the President of the United States. He was, thankfully, overruled.

Sean: Yeah. Well, Washington’s troops even wanted to set him up.

Ray: His Highness.

Sean: And they referred to him as His Excellency.

Ray: Yes. So there’s some holdover from the previous culture. That’s a phenomenon that passes down through history. Just chew on that. Some of you that will be really meaningful for, others will be like I don’t know what you’re talking about.

So let’s presume that President Obama is actually His Royal Highness, King Obama of the Kingdom of the United States of America, but if he’s the king he is sovereign over the land. He answers to no one. Some would say that’s how it is right now. I’m not saying yes or no. This is the question I’m getting at, if I’ll stop joking around and get serious for a moment. Is he in control of everything that happens in the United States? Does he control every single thing that happens in the United States? No, he does not.

So it is with God who is sovereign over the Universe. He’s sovereign over the planet earth. He’s sovereign over the human race, but He does not control everything we do because we do stuff He doesn’t like. If He was in control, if He was actually controlling you

like a puppet -- you Calvinists don't give up on me yet, just keep listening -- you would not be able to do anything He doesn't want you to do.

Everybody would be well behaved, perfect in every way, but He gave us free will, the ability to make choices. He put two trees in the Garden of Eden, whatever that means to you. There was a choice to be made and He let us make the wrong choice. He knew He would. So He's sovereign. He is independent. He's not in anybody's control and He's not controlling us. He's letting us choose the way we behave.

What does this have to do with this passage from James? I've got to make sure this is not a two-hour podcast. This is only segment of the show, so let me move on.

There are at least seven things we can learn from this passage.

1. We are commanded to count it pure joy when we are in trial

It doesn't say, oh, brothers, maybe you should consider, possibly, counting it some joy when you face a trial, it says count it all joy. Actually, in some translates it says count it pure joy when you face various trials. Hum, how do we do that?

2. Trials test our faith, which makes it stronger

Now, this doesn't mean that God is testing our faith. It means, I believe, that He can use the situation if we will allow Him to strengthen our faith.

3. As faith becomes stronger, we are made perfect and complete

As faith becomes stronger, steadfast, that's where it's bringing about steadfastness and letting steadfastness have its effect, is what the verse says, we are made perfect and complete which, by the way, seems to imply we can become perfect and complete. Hello, anybody listening? If you were perfect and complete that means you could go a whole day without sinning, maybe a whole week, a whole month.

When I was growing up and going to church, Sean, I was taught that I couldn't go a minute without sinning.

Sean: Oh, yeah, I've heard that.

Ray: You're not capable of it, you filthy worm.

Sean: That's right.

Ray: That's wrong teaching, by the way.

Sean: Shhh...

Ray: So faith becomes stronger, we're made perfect and complete and it says lacking nothing. So we can reach a point where we lack nothing.

4. If we lack wisdom, we should ask for it

Now, I want to point something out, I put this on the website as one big paragraph. In your Bible it's in separate paragraphs and separate verses so people can split them apart and just quote one part of it without quoting the other part so they seem to be making a supportive case for their point, but it was all written as one piece. So what James actually wrote was: "You may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God."

So just pause for a moment and think with me through this. What is he saying? He's saying that you can be perfect and complete and you can lack nothing, but if you are lacking something you may be asking me, how do I not lack anything? You ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach.

5. God will grant wisdom without reproach

God will grant wisdom, which seems to be the key to everything. James says lacking nothing and then he says but if you lack wisdom, which seems to imply that wisdom is the key to lacking nothing. It's the key to everything. So number five, God will grant wisdom without reproach. What does reproach mean? Again, let's do something crazy. Let's go to the dictionary and see what it means. It means disapproval or disappointment.

So if you lack wisdom, let me just put this in real terms. You screwed up and you did something really bad. You got drunk and you drove the car through the front door of the house. You cheated on your spouse. You stole something from work. You looked at pornography. You watched a bad newscast on TV and it made you grumpy and made you think the world is evil and terrible and getting worse and worse all the time. It's going to hell in a hand basket, I wish the antichrist will come and burn it up.

Even if you screw up but you ask for wisdom, God will give it to you without disapproval or disappointment no matter what you've done. That's a hard teaching, as well, because we can all think of people who have done things and we think, really, even him? Even that person can be forgiven without reproach, without disapproval or disappointment?

6. We must ask in faith without doubt

Oh, but Ray, Mr. Grace Man, Mr. Hyper Grace, Greasy Grace Guy. I know what some of you say, it's all grace. So what's this stuff about not doubting and having faith or you don't get what you ask for. That doesn't sound like grace, does it? Well, unless you realize that it's grace that empowers you to have the faith without doubt. How do you get it? How do you do it?

I know right now this is causing a big disconnected for many of you because you're thinking, but I have doubts. Should I not? I won't tell God I have doubts. I'll just tell Him I believe totally. Here's a clue. He knows already that you have doubts, so what do you do? Well, the Bible teaches that each of us has been given a measure of faith. We've been given so much faith. We've got a little faith tank in our body or our brain somewhere and we've got so much. You exercise the faith that you have and how you have faith is you decide that you have faith. It's not a feeling.

Some say that faith is a feeling of certainty about something, I don't believe that. Faith is a choice to believe in something, even though you can't readily see it. I believe in atoms, I cannot see them. Think about that. I believe in molecules, I can't see those either. I

believe in gravity, I can't see that. I believe in electricity so much I pay somebody for it every month. I have yet to see it. I see its effects. Ah, there's a clue.

We can conclude that if we doubt or we sort of believe, I kind of believe it, but not really, you pray for the Lord to heal you, but you don't really think it's going to happen, then James says—

7. If we doubt, we're unstable and tossed about by the winds and the waves

That's not a judgment on you. It's not a criticism of you. It's a statement, an observation of what's going on with your heart. You're tossed about by the winds and the waves. You're in a storm and you're afraid. James had to be thinking about his brother sleeping through the storm. I don't think he was on the boat because when Jesus was alive in His earthy ministry His brothers didn't believe in Him, then when He rose from the dead they rethought their position. That's what resurrection will do for you.

I would leave you with this thought. Dan Sullivan, who is not in the Bible, says, "All those things that seem to oppose our goals are actually the raw material for achieving them." This is the same thing, I believe, as saying count it all joy when you face various trials. If you can really understand that all the things that seem to oppose you are actually the raw material for achieving your ends, your outcomes.

Dan is not saying have a positive attitude when bad things happen. Just have a positive attitude and say, yea! Things are great. United we stand! Don't be in denial, but understand that the things that seem to oppose you can actually become the raw material for achieving your goals. You can be thankful for trials and truly count it all joy. Not because God is teaching you a lesson, but because when approached with faith trials always lead to victory, wisdom, power and authority. They establish and ground and increase your faith.

God doesn't cause everything, but He can definitely use everything. This is why I say to you be thankful for the trials of life and not just through the trials of life.

Tip of the Week

Ray: Okay. I don't know how to transfer from something that heavy and weighty and theological, so I'm going to use ukulele music to make the transition to lighten things up.

Sean: Totally.

Ray: Maybe throw in some whistling.

Sean: I think that would help.

Ray: Okay. I can whistle.

Sean: Yep.

Ray: I'm not whistling right now, but I can whistle.

Sean: You can whistle and talk at the same time. That's amazing!

Ray: It's because I whistle through my ears.

Sean: You should go to the doctor. That doesn't seem...

Ray: But, then, I'll never make it on 'America's Got Talent'.

Sean: That's true.

Ray: Okay, here's the tip of the week. How do you get your podcast ranked higher in iTunes? Now, I used to think that it was by getting ratings and reviews in the iTunes Store. That's why if you go back and listen to previous episodes of the show you'll hear us time and time again say, if you want to help us out, give us a rating and review in iTunes, it really helps, people find out about the show. I don't know who started saying that, but every podcaster says it now.

The truth is, according to my buddy Cliff, it actually comes down to two other key facts that most people don't realize or know about and that is the following:

- 1. Apparently, they count, 'they' being Apple, the gods at Apple, the recent number of new subscribers in iTunes using the Apple Podcast App.**

That's why we ask you to subscribe to our show in the Apple Podcast App because they use it, 'They' being they with a capital T, to calculate our ranking in the iTunes Store.

- 2. Recent new downloads in iTunes using the Apple Podcast App.**

Sean: I see a theme.

Ray: I think they want you to use their app.

Sean: I think so.

Ray: I would not be surprised if they're also tracking how much is actually being listened to.

Sean: Yeah, probably

Ray: I'm sure they have access to that data. In my opinion, the high star ratings and the favorable reviews probably somehow factor into this equation, but the key factors that we're pretty sure are part of the algorithm are recent new subscribers using the Apple Podcast App and recent new downloads using the Apple Podcast App. That's why I'm about to ask you, if you don't already, subscribe to this show in the Apple Podcast App, set it to automatically download each episode and then, even though I don't know if this is part of the official formula or not, listen to every episode. I'm just asking a small favor.

Sean: Just a small favor.

Ray: Now, you can model this behavior and ask your own listeners to do the same thing and I promise you, I've seen the results. We've been doing a little testing and experimenting without talking about it much, but since we started asking you to subscribe in the Apple

Podcast App our rankings have gone up. Ha, Glory be. How about that? That's how you get your podcast ranking to rise in the iTunes Store.

Feature Presentation

Ray: Woo, all right!

Sean: Boom shakalaka.

Ray: I've got a lot of ground to cover. The title of this week's feature segment is—

Sean: Five unconventional times to practice thankfulness and how the attitude of gratitude makes you healthy, wealthy and wise.

Ray: Okay. So this is the season for bloggers and podcasters to roll out their Thanksgiving posts to their Thanksgiving podcasts and talk about the attitude of gratitude. I believe that all has a place. We all have a lot to be thankful for. Of course, I also know that it's easy to be thankful when things are going right, when your team is undefeated, when you just won the Super Bowl, when you just made, what was it, the all-time passing record?

Sean: Yep.

Ray: Paton Manning, just saying. It's easy to be thankful when things are going great, when you live in a nice warm house, you're privileged to indulge in gluttony every year, you get to watch multimillion dollar entertainment spectacles piped into your home virtually for free. It is virtually for free when you think about how much it costs to put on NFL football broadcast. It's free, basically. When you're drinking a pumpkin spice latte from Starbucks while you're driving in your leased BMW taking on your cell phone while you're driving, it's easy to be thankful under those circumstances.

Now, it's easy to be thankful, especially if you're healthy and if you're in the top 10% of the world's wealthiest people, which you are. Before you argue with me let me assure you that if you live in the U.S., basically any modern country, but if you live in the U.S.A. or Canada you almost certainly are in the top 10% of the wealthiest people in the world. Check for yourself. Go to the Global Rich List website. There's a link in the show notes at RayEdwards.com/194. Is that the episode we're on?

Sean: Yes.

Ray: 194, there's a link. Go ahead, check it. Just in case you haven't checked yet or you're driving and you can't check right now I'll tell you. According to the Global Rich List website, if you make \$14,000 per year, \$14,000 per year in the U.S.A., you are in the top 9.52% of the riches people in the world by income. So quit your whining and get grateful because 90% of the world is in poorer conditions than you are, if you're making at least \$14,000 a year.

So why should you be grateful? Is there actually a concrete benefit to it other than it sounds nice on a post card, a greeting card or on a Twitter quote, one of those nice

picture quotes on Facebook? “The attitude of gratitude will increase your altitude.” I’m sorry, am I making fun of people who make those picture quotes?

Sean: Yes.

Ray: I make them, too, so I’m making fun of myself. Don’t worry about it.

Here are seven scientifically-proven benefits of gratitude, according to Amy Morin. She’s a psychotherapist and she wrote a book called *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don’t Do*. Now, I actually have not read that book, I skimmed it in an airport bookstore and it looks really good and I intend to read. I haven’t read the whole book yet, but it looks really good. In an article on the Forbes website, which we will link to in the show notes, she gives the following seven scientifically-proven benefits of gratitude.

1. Gratitude opens the door to more relationships

This is all based on studies and I’m not going to quote them all, you can read her article and get all the background on this.

2. Gratitude improves physical health, which is awesome. I like the sound of that.

3. Gratitude improves psychological health

4. Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression

5. Grateful people sleep better

Apparently, I need to work on my gratitude. I have not been sleeping well lately.

6. Gratitude improves self-esteem

7. Gratitude increases mental strength

Those are her seven points. Now, her point is that we all have the ability and the opportunity to cultivate gratitude. So she recommends that you take a few moments on everything you have rather than complain about all the things you think you deserve. That’s good advice. I have some counter advice. Later, I’m going to give you the three dangers of counting your blessings. I think there are three pitfalls to that. I’ll give you those in just a moment, but first I want to cover the next bullet point I promised you, which was how the attitude of gratitude makes you healthy, wealthy and wise. That healthy, wealthy and wise part, I’m really fond of that piece of writing.

Sean: It’s good.

Ray: It’s really good, isn’t it?

Sean: It flows well.

Ray: It’s like worthy of one of the founding fathers even.

Sean: Absolutely.

Ray: In a post on our friend Michal Hyatt's blog called *The Gratitude Advantage: 4 Way Giving Thanks Improves Your Life*, Michel cites research. I love it when people have research instead of just platitudes. He cites research by Robert A. Emmons and Anjali Mishra, that there are several scientifically-supported ways gratitude helps us flourish and Michael found four of them especially compelling. Here were his points that he pulled out of this research.

- Gratitude reduces our stress

He says on his blog that, "Thankful redirects our attention from our difficulties to the benefits we enjoy."

- Gratitude inoculates us from negative emotions

This is powerful because negative emotions can run your life. They can run your behavior and they can ruin your relationships, your income and your business. Negative emotions, if you think you're just cynical and realistic and that's just how the world is and you're just that crabby, curmudgeonly person and that's how you should be, that's not really wise behavior, according to science.

Sean: It's science.

Ray: Michael says—

- Gratitude sustains our relationships

Michael has an interesting way of proving this. He says let me just ask, "Do you like hanging out with people that gripe and complain?" I think that's about all that needs to be said about that.

- Gratitude improves our health

Again, with the health. Grateful people, Michael says, spend less time with their doctors and they live longer than others. Doctors are great, they're helpful, they're necessary, they're a gift from God, but most of us would rather not be spending all of our time with them, I think we can agree.

So if gratitude has all these benefits, why is it that during Thanksgiving and Christmas, the time of year when we're most grateful, suicide rates increase dramatically? Why does that happen? Well, here's the shocking truth about suicide rates during the holidays.

Normally, this is the part of the post or the podcast where the blogger or the podcaster will tell you suicide rates rise dramatically during the holidays. We have to exercise great discipline, be thankful and not dwell on the negative because we'll kill ourselves in the holidays if we don't. People slip into depression, they slip into the bathtub and they cut their wrists.

I'm not making light of suicide. It's tragic, it's horrible. I wrote a post about this when Robin Williams committed suicide, you can look that up on my blog. You know how I feel about it, it's terrible. So I'm not making light of it and I'm not making light of you if you've had suicidal thoughts or feelings. It's not funny, but I will tell you that the problem with this assumption that suicides go up during the holidays is that it is completely wrong. It is 100% incorrect. It is a myth.

Suicides do not go up during the holidays. They are, in fact, at the lowest point of the year during the holidays. Don't just take my word for it. The Health Central website says, "There is a well known reduction in the suicide rate on major public holidays, including nonreligious. Many studies in different Western countries have found the drop is even more pronounced during the Christmas to New Year's stretch." I have a link in the show notes at RayEdwards.com/194 if you want to read the whole article.

It's not just them, there's tons of research on this available. I have so much research that I'm only going to quote two of them, the other one is the Wall Street Journal. They looked into this a few years ago and their conclusion is that suicide rates dip in the winter and peak in the spring.

Sean: That's counterintuitive.

Ray: That is very counterintuitive. They back it up with solid research. They say, "Studies from around the world suggest that the key factor is climate rather than the calendar. In the U.S. from 1999 to 2004, the six highest months in terms of suicides per day were March through August, not in that order, with a peak in July, according to analysis of numbers provided by the CDC." The good CDC, they're the people that are going to prevent the zombie apocalypse.

Sean: Yes.

Ray: So let's keep funding them. Back to the serious stuff. "The seasonal variation is not extreme, the daily averages range from 76.3 suicides in December to 87.6 in July." So that's not a big swing. "Other northern hemisphere countries like Switzerland and Lithuania exhibit the same trend as the U.S. Suicide rates in England and Wales, on hotter days, according to a study that was done just recently. In Singapore near the equator, there was little season effect. In the southern hemisphere, suicide rates peak in December."

The climate's role is not totally understood because it doesn't make a lot of sense if you look at it, but some researchers have linked suicide's seasonality to the amount of sunshine. So what does the Wall Street Journal conclude? What do we conclude ourselves after we look at all this data?

One obvious possibility is because people are practicing gratitude more intentionally during the holidays, whether they want to or not. You may not be the kind of person who expresses naturally, but you're at the dinner table with a bunch of people and some jerk says, "Let's all say what we're thankful for."

Now you're like, oh great, it's going to be one of those dinners. I'm having dinner with the Flanders. You're forced to think about what you're grateful for and you're forced to hear other people talk about what they're grateful for, so in many ways you have the discipline of gratitude forced upon you during these months. I think that is what is

happening that makes people less likely to kill themselves during the holidays. It's at least part of it.

So that's a big point in favor of the attitude of gratitude. However, don't skip this next part because I want you to know the three surprising dangers of counting your blessings. I know what you're thinking, dear listener. Ray is all over the map! What is the point of today's episode? Where is it going? How's it going to end? Keep listening. Danger of counting your blessings—

1. Denial and gratitude are not the same thing

If you're swimming in the alligator tank all the gratitude in the world is not going to keep you from being some lizard's dinner. I'm so grateful that ahh! Denial is not the same thing as gratitude. By the way, the point is don't swim with alligators.

Sean: Okay, good.

Ray: Next danger—

2. Giving thanks only for the good stuff suppresses, refuses to deal with and, therefore, strengthens the power of unresolved pain and anger

It builds up. It will come out, usually at the worst possible moment. Can I get an amen?

Sean: Amen.

Ray: Did you mean that or is it just because I asked for it?

Sean: Both.

Ray: Okay. Next danger—

3. Your glib attitude and lack of empathy or sensitivity to other people's feelings can hurt them

Ray: I'll give you a couple of Proverbs to think about. Proverbs 18:14 says, "A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?" In other words, you can have a physical ailment and have a healthy spirit, but if your spirit gets crushed you may not be ill, but you can bear up under that.

The other Proverb I'd like to bring up is Proverbs 27:14. "Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice rising early in the morning will be counted as cursing." You know the person. You walk into the office all blurry eyed with your first cup of coffee still in your hand, you've kind of got a bad attitude about the day and that person walks up to you and says, "Hey, how ya' doing? How's the day? You doing good today? I'm doing great today. Isn't this a great day? What's the matter with you? Somebody's got a case of the Mondays!" Now, be real. You want to punch that guy, don't you?

Sean: Yep.

Ray: Less joking and more seriousness, if somebody is really hurting and you're not being sensitive to that and you've got a glib attitude about things that can hurt those other people. During this show when I'm joking around and making light of certain things, I think you've heard me do it before, you've heard me do it in this episode. I try to be sensitive to the fact that somebody might misinterpret what I just said and so I try to correct that and clean that up before it makes a mess. I'm not always successful, so I hope you'll forgive me and give me some grace on that, but I try really hard to be that way.

That's a danger of just counting your blessings and always having a positive attitude, being what we call Pollyannaish. It comes from a Broadway play that became a movie called 'Pollyanna', look it up on the interwebz.

So those are the three dangers of counting your blessings. If I was really being honest I would have called it counting only your blessings.

- Denial and gratitude are not the same thing
- Giving thanks only for the good stuff suppresses, refuses to deal with and thereby strengthens the power of unresolved power and anger
- Your glib attitude and lack of empathy can hurt other people

So what about the five unconventional times to practice thankfulness that I mentioned, it's the title of this episode. This is, I think, the other part of the equation that doesn't get talked about. So let's walk through these and we'll wrap things up. I believe you'll be left with a much better understanding about how you can adopt the attitude of gratitude, even when you've got bad things happening in your life, maybe especially when you have bad things happening in your life and it can be to your profit.

1. When you are depressed

Why would I say this? Now, I have suffered off and on in my lifetime with depression. I'm not talking about I had a sad day. I just had a sad day, the camera don't lie. No, it's not that kind of depression. I'm talking about clinical, it's a sickness depression. It colors everything. I've been through periods of darkness, the dark night of the soul. So when you are depressed, first of all, seek professional help if you're in that place. Don't think you can just gut it out and do it on your own, that could be dangerous.

Beyond that, it's a great time to practice gratitude because practicing gratitude and being thankful for the good things that you do have while not denying the fact that you're in a depressed state, being thankful actually has physiological, biological, neurochemical effects on your brain. It's sort of like taking an antidepressant that your brain made.

Sean: It's science.

Ray: So if you're feeling depressed, force yourself to write down, I find writing it down makes a difference, five, six or seven things, as many things you can think of that you're grateful for, that you're thankful for. If you say I'm not grateful for anything, I know people who would say that, I've been one of them in the past, here's a good question to ask yourself. Well, if you were thankful for something what would it be?

I know you're not thankful, but if you were what might that be. It can be anything. I'm thankful that I have clothes and I don't have to walk around naked all the time. That would be inconvenient, although it would be interesting to observe other people's reactions. Ah, caught you smiling. Don't smile you're depressed. Whatever you do don't laugh.

You could be thankful for clothes. You could be thankful you have heat. Even if you live in a hovel, a shack, a terrible house in a terrible neighborhood you have a house. You're in the top 10% of the wealthiest people in the world. There are things you have to be thankful for. I'm thankful I have socks. I'm thankful I have soap. I'm thankful I have a toothbrush to brush my teeth. I'm thankful that I have eyes to see. I'm thankful that I could be listening to a podcast. There are always things to be thankful for and it will have an effect on your depression. I'm not denying the depression. I'm saying there's a way to lessen it.

2. When you are lonely

I know that doesn't sound like fun, but here's one way to think about it. There must be people you're thankful are not hanging around with you right now. You might be lonely, but surely there's somebody if they showed up you'd be like oh, my gosh, I'd rather be alone. Not that person. Okay, be honest, Sean. Does anybody come to mind just now? You don't have to say who it is, but did somebody come to mind?

Sean: Sure.

Ray: It's not me, is it?

Sean: Oh, no, of course not.

Ray: All right, just checking. I'm secure. So when you're lonely, be thankful for the people that you have known in your life that you love being around. Be thankful for the opportunity to have time to read, to pray, to meditate, to work out some of your inner conflicts. Be thankful that nobody is telling you what to do. You could come up with your own list. You could go back to the other list. Be thankful that you have socks. Be thankful that your feet don't stink today. If they do, be thankful you have a shower and you can take care of that problem. Here's one, be thankful you have an indoor toilet, especially in winter.

3. When you are ill

I know this is hard for a lot of people. There are illnesses that are really, really tough, I mean brutal. Cancer is brutal. When your body is being eaten alive by itself and normal functions that we all take for granted like the ability to digest food and dispose of it and that doesn't work anymore it's hard to be thankful. I understand. It's painful, it hurts. I've never been through that particular illness, but I've seen people that I love go through it and it's horrifying.

By the way, just on a side tangent is how it mystifies me that people can say, well, God gave you that cancer so you could learn something from it. Hang around somebody with cancer for awhile and then tell me God gave it to them and I will remind you that attributing the work of the enemy to God is called blasphemy.

So when you're ill that's a good time to practice thankfulness. Now, I can speak with some authority on this, I currently have an illness, it's called Parkinson's disease. It's not cancer, but it's not really a barrel of monkeys either. It's not a lot of fun. It's not the flu, it doesn't come and go. It's challenging sometimes, but you know what I'm thankful for? I don't dwell on the things that I can't do because I have Parkinson's disease. I dwell on the things I can do. I dwell on the things that I have gotten better at because of the situation.

Again, let me be clear. God didn't give it to me. He didn't send it my way. He didn't will it for me. It's not His will, but He is using it to increase my faith. I'm thankful for that. He's using it to increase my empathy and my sympathy for other people. I'm thankful for that. He's using it to make me bolder in ministering the Gospel to people who haven't heard it or perhaps people who haven't heard the actual Gospel. They've heard some twisted, perverted, controlling, manipulative form of the Gospel, which you can hear in many churches across the U.S.A.

I'm thankful that He's given me that opportunity. I'm thankful that He's given me the courage to pray for people with illnesses just like mine, even though my at this point when I'm recording this is still present in my body. I don't believe it always will be. It's increased my faith. It's increased my sympathy, my empathy, rather not my sympathy. Empathy is you help somebody out of a hole. Sympathy is you climb down in the hole with them. There are so many things I'm thankful for and I'll be super thankful when it's over. When the disease is over not when my life is over. It's going to be over, I'm telling you. Right now, publically I'm saying it's going to be over. I'm not suffering from it, I'm recovering from it.

4. When you lose someone you love; when they die

Again, I know this is hard. I've lost people that I loved dearly. That meant, it felt at the time, they meant everything in the world to me and they died. That is tough and it doesn't go away. People say time heals all wounds. No, it doesn't. It may make them hurt less, but it still hurts.

So I get it, you're never the same after you've lost somebody you love. There's a hole in your life that will not be filled until you're with them again, but you can be thankful you had time with them on earth. You can be thankful for all of the rich memories you had with that person. You can be thankful for the influence they had in your life. You can be thankful you get to be the person who carries their memory to other people, who helps their legacy to live on.

You can be thankful for all those things. You can be thankful that death is not the end. You do this for yourself you don't do it for other people. Here's the worst thing to say to somebody who just lost someone, somebody died that they love. It's the worst thing to say to them, do not ever say this. Well, he's in a better place. That's a good way to get nose punched. We know they're in heaven. Well, we hope. Let's assume they are, but that doesn't make me feel better that I've lost them in this life until the next. It still hurts.

5. When tragedy strikes

This may be the hardest one of all because when tragedy strikes, like recently there was a tragic series of events that happened in Paris. Some time has passed since the

time we recorded this and the time this will actually air or be published and I am not in any way thankful that anyone was hurt. Hear me on that. That's horrible, it's inexcusable. It should be stopped. What I am thankful for when I see something like that happen is I'm thankful for the outpouring of love, help, honor, assistance and peacemaking that I see poured out from people all around the world. Not just Christians, people of all different faiths, people of all different cultures, backgrounds.

I know that we just witnessed the worst part of humanity's nature or perversion of humanity's nature, but I also know that it brought to light the overwhelming truth about humanity's nature. It's that we want to love. We want to make peace. We want to protect. We want to shield people from horrors like what we saw in Paris. We want to shield them from genocide. We want to shield them from disease.

I'm thankful that doctors work to end pandemics and epidemics, that they are working to eradicate diseases, just like the one that I have Parkinson's disease, just like they're working to eradicate Alzheimer's, just like they eradicated polio, mostly. If we hadn't kept in a laboratory... I don't know. I'm off on a tangent again.

I'm thankful when there's a natural disaster at the love I see poured out by people who want to help, for the people who rush in to a nuclear power plant that has just leaked radiation into the water supply, who throw their caution into the wind and go in to help people, I'm thankful to see that. I'm not thankful for the tragedy and neither should you be, but I'm thankful for what can come out of it, that it can bring out the best in us.

Those are five unconventional times to practice thankfulness. Now, Sean, since I've done all the talking would you like to recap?

Sean: Absolutely. So the five unconventional times to practice thankfulness are—

- When you are depressed,
- When are lonely,
- When you are ill,
- When you lose someone you love, and
- When tragedy strikes.

What to do Next

Ray: What I would love for you to do is share with us how has the attitude of gratitude during this Thanksgiving season helped you deepen your faith. How has it helped you deepen your relationship with God? How has it helped make you healthier, wealthier and wiser? You can leave a comment by going to RayEdwards.com/194.

Sean: And you can subscribe to iTunes if you'd like to help, give us a rating and a review. Make sure you put your real name and website in the text of the review itself and we will definitely mention you in the show. Remember, as we pointed out in the tip of the week, if you have not subscribed, please subscribe in the podcast app. We are also on Stitcher, so if you prefer Stitcher you can subscribe there. Any parting thoughts?

Ray: Yes, indeed. I have a parting thought that I think you'll find very helpful and that is just remember that all the gratitude in the world if you're swimming in a tank full of alligators will not keep you from being some lizard's dinner. So don't go swimming in a tank full of alligators, it's not going to end well.

Happy Thanksgiving, everybody, we'll see you next week. Until then, I pray that God continues to bless you in every conceivable way, even beyond what you've asked for or imagined.

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