

How Gratitude Cures Discontent

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we are going to take a few minutes now and think about what we read earlier. So Jesse read to us from the Bible earlier, from a letter that was written by the Apostle Paul to a church in a place called Colossae.

Colossae is found now in modern-day Turkey. So a couple of weeks ago, I had a trip to Amsterdam.

I've never been to Amsterdam before. So I had a little work outing to Amsterdam, a meeting there for a day. And I got to spend a couple of nights in Amsterdam, walk around, see the sights, meet lots of people.

And I don't know, do you feel jealous that my work takes me to Amsterdam? I get to go and see such beautiful places and I get paid to do it.

So you might feel a little jealous of me. But, you know, I was at this board meeting in Amsterdam for church planters. And I was having such a great time.

[1 : 0 4] But at the same time, I felt a little jealous of some of the other people there. They all travel business class. They own vineyards. They have houses in New York and California.

And I found it really easy to wish that I had what they had. Coming back, standing in the EasyJet queue and boarding, I can tell you I was looking at the Easy Boarders with a sense of longing.

Because, you know, the world is set up to always wish you had more. The world is organized to kind of incentivize you so that you want to have what you don't have.

So the world is set up, in other words, to make us discontented. We look with envy at other people's lives, their jobs, their perks, their successes, their relationships, their income, their house, their car, their promotion, their boyfriend, whatever it might be.

We look at others with envy and it corrodes our joy and sows bitterness and anger into our hearts. It comes between us.

[2 : 1 3] And so we have rifts, fallouts, collisions of ego, resentments of what other people have. The Christian writer and author C.S. Lewis once wrote a book about a guy called Screwtape who was a senior demon mentoring a younger demon.

And how to lead people away from God. And one of the things that Screwtape said was this. He says, The goal is to create a whole race of people perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow's end.

Never honest, nor kind, nor happy. Okay. So, there's all this that's going on in the world around us. This spiritual battle that fuels our discontent.

And Jesus says, Well, in a world where you can feel so envious and discontented, let's learn to be thankful. Be thankful. Be thankful. The book of Colossians, or this letter that was written by the Apostle Paul, is really a letter that's saying to you, Be thankful.

Live with the attitude of gratitude. Why? Because Jesus says, I'm enough. I'm more than enough. If you have me, then I am the fullness of God who fills everything in every way.

[3 : 42] And so be grateful. In the passage that we have right here in Colossians 3, verses 12 to 17, it tells us to be thankful three times, just in a short space of a few verses.

In verse 15, Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, since as members of one body you are called to peace. Be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish each other with wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. So three times, when the Bible says something three times in a row, it's saying that's a kind of underlining or putting in bold, highlighting.

Get this. You really do need to be thankful. Be thankful. Be grateful. Be thankful. So part of what we want as a church, if you're trying to figure out what church is and if church is for you, then one of the things that we want for church is to be a community of celebration and thankfulness in a world of discontent and bitterness.

Instead of envy and insecurity and fearfulness and anxiety, we want to help one another live with joy and delight and thankfulness.

[5 : 12] So a couple of things that are key themes. We as a church family have been walking our way through this letter that Paul wrote to the Colossians. And a couple of key themes that we keep coming back to is this, that, you know, we move to God so that we can move towards others.

We love God more so that we can love others more. So I want to say it this way today. Superglue yourself to Jesus and then superglue yourself to one another.

I don't know if you've seen all the great climate change protests that have been going on recently, but people have been declaring climate emergencies.

And there's been lots of protests. And I do love a good protest. That's what my student life was for. And one of the really cool things that people have been doing is supergluing themselves to trains and roads so that the trains in London couldn't leave and the roads were blocked.

And I really, I think it's really sort of fascinating to see the passion that people have got to make a difference in the world. Greta Thunberg, the Swedish high school student who's gone global and viral, inspiring so many of these climate activists, and meeting with governments and parliaments, helping schoolchildren to go on strike to save the environment.

[6 : 43] Getting the grown-ups to take notice of the mess that they're making of things. And she's an example of somebody who lives with passion and wants to be part of something bigger and better than themselves.

And I think Jesus is calling us to live for something bigger and better than ourselves. And that's pretty hard occasionally.

Because the prevailing wisdom for life is that life's an individual journey, that life in the end is all about me. There's a guy called David Brooks, a journalist and writer, who wrote an article for the New York Times recently on five lies that our culture tells us.

So this is one of the lies that he picked up on. Life is an individual journey. This is the lie that books like Dr. Seuss' On the Places You'll Go tell.

The lie is this, in adulthood, each person goes on a personal trip, racks up a bunch of experiences, and whoever has the most experiences wins. This lie encourages people to believe freedom is the absence of restraint.

[7 : 57] Be unattached. Stay in the move. Keep your options open. In reality, the people who live the best lives tie themselves down. They don't ask, what's the next cool thing I can do?

They ask, what's my responsibility here? They respond to some problem. They get called out of themselves by a deep love. By planting themselves in one neighborhood, one organization, one mission, they earn trust.

They have the freedom to make a lasting difference. It's the chains we choose that set us free. So instead of just living life in a kind of selfish, narcissistic way, he was saying, it's much more fulfilling to chain yourself, to tie yourself, or to superglue yourself, to something that really matters, and makes a difference in the world.

And so I'm starting off by saying to us, let's superglue ourselves to Jesus. Let's chain ourselves to Jesus, who gives joy and thankfulness to us in life, through the greatness of his love.

If you're going to choose any chains, choose these chains. Instead of living with corrosive envy, instead of living with a deep sense of discontent, chain yourself to Jesus, who gives joy, who makes life whole again.

[9 : 34] We want to be people who live in a world of radical commitment, to what is good. We want to live in a world of radical commitment, to one another.

And that starts, with radical commitment, to Jesus. So, Jesus.

Jesus offers you something that we don't find anywhere else. He's saying that the community that we long for, the life that we're looking for and searching for, is found in him.

Often people try and create better communities. I did a course, as I've told you before, at uni, called Utopian Thought in the Western World. We looked at green utopias, feminist utopias, Marxist utopias, capitalist utopias.

People try to create perfect societies, by reorganizing the structures of the world around them. And none of those utopian movements have ever worked, because they have sin at their center.

[10 : 48] And so what Jesus says, is build a different kind of community, with me at the center. In the book of Colossians, one of the great arguments that's been made, is that, a life of joy and love, is a life that flows out, of union, with Jesus.

Faith in Jesus. Knowing his life in your life. Knowing his presence, and his reality in your life. Because the more Jesus is present in your life, the more his love will fill you, and flow from you.

And so if we want community, if we want unity with each other, instead of building that around our egos, or our agendas, or our wisdom, we build it around Jesus, and his wisdom, and his love.

So chain yourself to Jesus. Before you glue yourself to a train, glue yourself to him. You know, I did used to go in student protests, and block the traffic, and sort of, try and disrupt as many things, as I possibly could.

And I was watching people, on their Instagram feeds, sort of commenting, on the climate protesters, in Edinburgh and London. And saying, oh, look at these stupid people, blocking the traffic.

[12 : 12] What do they ever hope to achieve? So, you know, you might look at somebody, super gluing themselves to the road, and think, they are mad. You know, what on earth are they thinking? What are they going to achieve? But they believe in something great, and greater than themselves.

And we have something, even greater to believe in. And that means that we glue ourselves to Jesus, in the kind of way that people look at us, and think, mad.

They are mad. Why do they choose to live, that kind of life? With such a passion, for Jesus, that they don't really care about, what anybody else thinks about them.

Because they are super glued to him. They're living for him, and with him. So, I really want to invite you, to think about your personal commitments, at that level. Where are you placing your hope, and faith, for yourself, and, for this world?

So, super glue yourself to each other, but, there's a complication there, which is the second thing I want to say. When you super glue yourself to Jesus, you super glue yourself to sinners.

[13 : 22] Okay? Because Jesus brings us into a community, when we super glue ourselves to him, and, annoyingly, that community is not perfect. It's full of sinners. sinners. There's a really great book, called, Life Together, by, a German, pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

He was an author, a pastor, he was martyred, by the Nazis, just before the end of the war. They took him out, and hung him, three weeks before the end of World War II. And, his book is about this challenge of, how do we create, a community around Jesus, when, that community is going to be full of sinners.

And, one of the things he says, is this, he says that, God hates visionary dreamers. God hates the person, who comes along with a dream, for this is the perfect kind of church, this is the perfect kind of community.

You can't come into a church community, and impose your ideal, on everyone else. We're not going to create, utopia here together now, because we're in a community, of sinners and sufferers.

We will sin against other people, and they will sin against us. Do you know what, every person, who's ever been in a church, has suffered because of that church. Because every church, is full of sinners.

[14 : 42] Even cornerstone, I'm sure, annoys you sometimes, or has caused you grief, in different ways, or people in the church. We're not here, claiming to be perfect, but we're organizing, our lives together, around Jesus, who is perfect.

And I can't make your life, better, or good, or perfect, or whole. And I'm not pretending, to do that. But I'm saying, that Jesus' love, is what begins, to make us whole.

And Jesus' love, and his power, and presence, is what begins, to allow us, to live well, with people, who are different, and difficult. And not to be corroded, by our differences, or by our envy, or by the ways, in which others, let us down.

And so, even in a community, of sinners, and broken people, Jesus says, there can be, joy, and thankfulness, and celebration. So, he calls us, to peace, doesn't he?

In verse, 15, let the peace of Christ, rule in your hearts, since as members, of one body, you were called, to peace. So, we want to live, peacefully together.

[15 : 56] The church, should smell good, it should smell, of peace. We may have, difficulties, in our relationships, but we don't have, the same depth, of division.

Because we are, being reconciled, to each other, as we are reconciled, to Christ. You know, our world, the world, that we live in, in western society now, feels like it's got, no place for the church.

Let's just stick the church, a way out, in the margin somewhere, where it won't bother anyone. But, at the same time, our world, is more fractured, than ever.

Populism, racism, hatred, violence, people feel, atomized, alone, and fearful. The world, is becoming, less human, less sympathetic.

Less kind. But, when we come to Jesus, having life in him, makes us more human, more sympathetic, more compassionate.

[16 : 56] It gives us, the freedom to be ourselves, and to allow others, to be themselves. It's a community, born in forgiveness, created for unity, not elitism, not cliques, not division.

We can be one, even though we're not the same. And that's good. We put on love. That's what we wear to church.

Because love, fastens together, all the different people, and parts of the church body. So, be thankful for community. Be thankful for one another, that his peace, governs your heart, and governs our relationships.

It's a community of peace, where peace dominates, so we can be thankful, not fearful. Peace comes from sharing wisdom. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and admonish one another, with all wisdom, through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God, with gratitude in your hearts, with thankful songs of praise.

Because we live wise lives, sharing wisdom, the wisdom of God, the wisdom of God's Word. We let God's Word, into our lives, in a really rich way, on a Sunday, in our small groups, in our social life, in our personal life, we feast on the Bible.

[18 : 27] That's what Christians do. They feast on the Bible. They feed on the Bible. Because it's a rich, insightful, nourishing book, book that penetrates our lives, penetrates our thoughts, exposes our problems, helps us to confront hard things together.

The Bible gives wisdom, and understanding, because it's true, it's God's inspired Word. In the Bible, we meet beauty, and glory, and love, because in the Bible, we meet God.

Wisdom helps us, to work out hard things together, when there aren't simple answers. How do I care for needy people? What do I do, with this wounded person?

How can I love them better? How do I build rich relationships? How do I forgive? This is the wisdom of the Bible. And wisdom reorganizes its life, around the name of Jesus.

We do everything, whether in word, or deed, in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through Him. So instead of relating to you, in a self-interested way, of what can I get from you, now I relate to you, in the name of Jesus.

[19 : 41] How can I serve you, and love you? How can I seek, not what's best for me, but what's good for you? Because that's what it means, to live in the name of Jesus.

That my corrosive self-centeredness, is replaced by selfless love. How? How? How does that change of heart occur?

Through Christ. Because as we see how much Jesus loved us on the cross, His selfless sacrifice, His costly, extravagant giving of Himself, then our selfish love is displaced, and replaced, by His costly, extravagant giving love.

Let's be then, a community of thankfulness. A community that lives with wisdom, with kindness, with joy. And a community that expresses its joy, clearly.

Okay? You know, we do have this problem, of Scottish Presbyterian Christians, not really knowing, how to show their joy, very well. Our joy tends to be deeply buried, beneath layers of misery.

[21 : 06] So, how do we do this? Well, there are lots of ways of showing joy in life, aren't there? I don't know how to smile very well, but, you know, I'm learning.

One of the things that he points out here is, sing, sing, sing these songs of wisdom, these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Jonathan Edwards, who was a great American intellectual and theologian, says this, the duty of singing praise to God, seems to be appointed holy, to excite, and express, religious affections.

No other reason can be assigned, why we should express ourselves to God, in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections.

God wants us to sing. Why? Because it moves our hearts. He gives us beautiful poems of wisdom, and the psalms, and so many other places, because these make us rejoice in all God's good work for him.

So, let's, through this week, practice being a community of joy. In the morning, get up and be a thankful human being. Remember again how rich you are, because you have Jesus Christ.

[22 : 27] If you have Christ, you have everything. In your relationships with each other, don't be grumbling, but be thankful for all that Jesus has given to you.

And that's going to flow from having Jesus right at the heart of your life. So, put your faith in him as your saviour. I'm going to just say a short prayer, then we're going to do the baptism, okay?

Lord Jesus Christ, we want to say thank you to you today for every good thing that we have in Jesus Christ. We pray that we would find a rich life in him, that we would not be grumbling, and discontented, and miserable, but that we would be joyful, and thankful, and hopeful, and that we would delight, first of all in Jesus, and then in one another.

In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. tips