Gratitude Blockers, Part 2

1. Warm up: As you look back over the past year, what's something you're thankful for?

2. In our Gospel lesson on Sunday, ten lepers pleaded with Jesus for healing. Leprosy is caused by flesh-eating bacteria. In Jesus' time, it was often fatal and thought to be highly contagious. Lepers were forced to live outside their village or city. Jesus told the ten lepers to go and show themselves to the priest. Back then only a priest could certify that a person was healed of leprosy and could reenter society. The lepers did as Jesus told them, and while on the way to the priest, they were healed. Then the story ends with a surprising twist. Read Luke 17:11-19 as printed on p. 3.

    a. If you were healed of a deadly disease, how do you think you'd feel? What would be going through your heart and head? Has anyone here experienced that?

    b. Only one of the ten lepers returned to thank Jesus. What might explain why the other nine didn't. What may have been going through their hearts and heads?

    c. From our Gospel story, Jeff drew "The 90/10 Rule." If you line up 100 random people, probably only about 10 of them are living with hearts full of gratitude. A recent study done by King's College reached a similar conclusion. In their study, the percentage of people living in a consistent, heartfelt state of gratitude was only 14%. Does that low percentage surprise you? Why or why not?

    d. It's important not to confuse occasional expressions of gratitude, which everyone does, with living in an ongoing grateful state of mind. Gratitude is not just what we say; it's a state of mind. So another way to look at "The 90/10 Rule" is as a measure of the percentage of our time spent in a grateful state of mind. The typical person is probably only in a grateful state of mind 10% of the time. But our goal should be 90% or as close as we can get. But getting there is a process of personal and spiritual growth. Most of us are probably somewhere above 10% and below 90%. How would you rate yourself? What percentage of your time would you say is spent in a grateful state of mind? Explain your answer.

3. The Bible repeatedly exhorts us to live with a grateful heart. For example, Ephesians 5:2 says, "Give thanks to God the Father **at all times and for everything** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Studies have shown that gratitude is hugely beneficial to our physical health, but even more beneficial to our spiritual wellbeing. Gratitude is the source from which many other spiritual virtues arise, *e.g.*, humility, patience, joy, gentleness, and kindness. It's imperative, therefore, that we be keenly aware of the factors that can block our gratitude. Two weeks ago, we explored Gratitude Blockers #1 and #2 (listed on p. 3). This past Sunday, we explored Blockers #3 and #4. **Gratitude Blocker #3 is called The Hyper-Busy Mental Fog.** The idea here is that our schedules often get so accelerated by all life's demands that all our mental and emotional bandwidth ends up being devoted to tasks, leaving no space for things like gratitude.

a. Who here among feels hyper-busy? Tell us how that feels? Also tell us why you're so hyper-busy, and why you can't (or won't) slow down.

b. There's a difference between being hyper-busy versus normal busy. Hyper-busy feels overwhelming, like you barely have room to breathe. Normal busy is more measured, or paced, allowing room for what psychologists call "mindfulness." Mindfulness means "a heightened awareness of, and appreciation for, what we're feeling, experiencing, and thinking in real time as it's happening. It means being emotionally present in the moment." Gratitude can be defined as "a deep feeling of appreciation and thankfulness." Because gratitude is a feeling, it cannot exist within us in any significant way without mindfulness. We can't appreciate the wonder of life and its goodness in real time as it's happening if our mental bandwidth is completely consumed with tasks and busyness. By way of example, and to make sure we get this concept, what would you say is the difference between eating a meal with mindful gratitude versus eating a meal in a fog? Describe the difference.

c. Now let's broaden our focus to include other examples. Have a few folks in your group give examples of a time in their life when they experienced something wonderful, or profoundly challenging, and were able to do so with great mindfulness and gratitude.

4. **Gratitude Blocker #4 is Survival Thinking.** The idea here is that we can get so preoccupied with all the incoming threats to our wellbeing and survival that we have no mental or emotional bandwidth left for positive thoughts like gratitude. Negative emotions like worry and fear kill gratitude.

    a. Life is dangerous. There's a lot of be afraid of. Tell us a about a threat you face, or a fear you have, that can easily take over your brain if you let it.

    b. Fear is our most powerful primal emotion and can easily take over our life. What are some practical strategies that can help us manage our brains when fear threatens to take over? What do you do to manage fear?

    c. Jeff shared Nancy Ortberg's story about a 14-year-old girl whose leg had to be amputated below the knee after a dirtbike accident. When Nancy spoke to the girl, the girl held her amputated leg up and exclaimed, "Look how much I have left!" That girl's attitude is a dramatic reminder of the power of a positive perspective to completely change our reality, freeing us from fear and negativity, and releasing us to joy and gratitude. Tell us about a great loss in your life, then tell us about how much you have left.

    d. Jack Wisneski's dad always used to say, "Life's not about what you have, but about how much you enjoy what you have." How can that bit of wisdom help us tame our fear of loss or lack?

e. Look again at the four Gratitude Blockers listed below on this page. Which one of them are you most likely to succumb to?

5. Awareness of our vulnerability is half the battle. But there are also some practical things we can do to tame our Gratitude Blockers and grow our sense of gratitude and joy. Take a look at the five practical suggestions listed on p. 4. Is there something on that list that you want to add to your personal pattern and practices?

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region
between Samaria and Galilee. [12]As he entered a village, ten lepers
approached him. Keeping their distance, [13]they called out, saying,
'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' [14]When he saw them, he said to
them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went,
they were made clean. [15]Then one of them, when he saw that he
was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. [16]He
prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a
Samaritan. [17]Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the
other nine, where are they? [18]Was none of them found to return and
give praise to God except this foreigner?' [19]Then he said to him, 'Get
up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

Four Great Gratitude Blockers

1. **Hedonistic Adaptation.** When we experience something that gives us pleasure over-and-over again as a constant in our life, become accustomed to it, and start taking it for granted instead of appreciating it.
2. **The Deficit Trap.** When we're looking forward to something we want but don't yet have, and become so preoccupied with what we want that we fail to appreciate what we already have. This way of thinking can be summarized in the statement, "I'll be happy when . . ."
3. **The Hyper-Busy Fog.** When our schedules get so accelerated by all life's demands that all our mental and emotional bandwidth ends up being devoted to tasks, leaving no space for feelings of appreciation and gratitude.
4. **Survival Thinking.** When we get so preoccupied with all the incoming threats to our wellbeing and survival that we have no mental or emotional bandwidth left for positive thoughts like appreciation and gratitude.

See next page for practical suggestions for growing our gratitude . . .

Five Practical Steps For Growing Our Gratitude

1. **Begin your Daily Prayer Time with Gratitude**, by naming a few things you're thankful for.

2. **Practice Sacred Pauses**. Pause for just a moment a couple times a day to ask, "What's wonderful about this moment I'm in right now?"
3. **Develop a Gratitude Mantra** – a word or phrase you repeat as you move through the day.
4. **Schedule a daily "Count-Your-Blessings Time**," taking a minute or two to recite, or journal, the blessings of that day or the prior day.
5. **Identify your greatest Gratitude Blocker.** Then catch yourself when your mind takes you down that path and consciously redirect your mind toward gratitude and positivity.