



“Cultivating A Heart of Gratitude”
By Pastor Bill Alderson 01/02/2022

Philippians 2:14-16

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, **15** that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **16** holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

[CALL TO WORSHIP]

Titus 2:11-12

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

[CONNECT/INTRO]

Well, it's Sunday, January 2nd of the year 2022. Another one is in the books, folks.

With the Holidays over, I know we have two key factions represented here in the church, which one do you belong to –

- Those who have already put their Christmas decorations away
- Those who are going to take them down sometime in January

I confess, Bonnie and I are in the second camp – I think we just want to keep the season alive as long as possible!

With the start of a new year, it's natural to want to make changes in our life, to have a fresh start.

And that means it's time for the infamous **New Year's Resolutions!**

Maybe you're determined to lose weight, spend less, pray more, read the Bible every day, spend more time with family, etc...



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Whatever it may be, while great, there’s one important thing we all know about resolutions, and it’s this: resolutions will fail if it’s unrealistic or without the correct motivation.

So I want to share with you my resolution for 2022, and see if you might share in it with me. I feel like it’s both realistic and has the best motivations.

Here it is: **“Resolved to Cultivate a Heart of Gratitude”**

That’s it, just the one. But I feel like it’s the single most important thing I can focus on this year.

So what does that mean and how do we break it down?

During Advent, we celebrate more than just the birth of our savior, we celebrate the gift that his birth represents.

Week 1 - HOPE – Jody

Christmas Hope is the confidence that good things are still to come anchored in past events (Titus 2:11-14).

Week 2 - LOVE – Jody

Christmas Love is the realization that God loves sinners first rescuing us from our condemnation (John 3:16-17).

Week 3 - JOY – Jody

Christmas Joy should be our expectation for it is an intent of God (1 John 1:1-4).

Week 4 - PEACE – Mike

The great news of advent is that the Lord Jesus came and made a way for there to be peace between God and man and between man and man.

We celebrate the redeeming work of Jesus on the Cross, and the ramifications of what it means to receive Christ as our Savior. Indeed, accepting Jesus into your life should change your affections



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In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The apostle Paul said, “Christ lives in me” as he does in all who have been called in faith.

Well let me ask you this – what type of accommodations are you providing for Him?

Is your heart one of gratitude and reverence, reserving the most honored seat at the table for Jesus?

Or is your heart a dirty run-down tenement in the Bronx, with neglected upkeep and a revolving door of tenants for Him to share the space with?

I know there are some in-betweens here as well.

The question really is this – with what is Jesus sharing your affections?

To stick with the metaphor, Jesus is the absolute best tenant you could have. Why is that? Because he’s going to do the work to fix the place up, and it won’t cost you a dime, he’s already paid for it.

He does have an expectation though. In John 13, Jesus says this:

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

WOW. Not only is going to fix the place up, but he’s commanded us to do something that’s totally in our own self-interests – to Love and to be loved by one-another!



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And because we humans can be thick sometimes, Paul would thoughtfully provide us with a very detailed definition of Love – just in case we’re not grasping the concept. In 1 Corinthians 13, he says:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures **all** things. ⁸ Love never ends.

MAN, wouldn't it be great to love and be loved in this way?

- To be patient? When your child comes to you with a question?
- To be kind? When service is slow at a restaurant or a check-out?
- To not envy? When your co-worker gets that promotion at work?
- To not boast? When YOU get that promotion at work?
- To not be arrogant? When we're right, or at least think we're right?
- To not be rude? When you're tired and on the edge?
- To not insist on our own way? But to listen and hear those around us?
- To not be irritable? When you child drops a glass and breaks it?
- To not be resentful? When people do you wrong, and you're not quite sure why...
- To not rejoice at wrongdoing?
- To rejoice in the truth ALWAYS?
- To have a LOVE that Bears ALL THINGS, Believes ALL THINGS, Hopes ALL THINGS, Endures ALL THINGS?
- To have a love that never ends?

Brothers and Sisters, I'm here to tell you that we DO have access to this kind of love through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

The question is, what stands between you and Love?

Between you and Peace?

Between you and Joy?

If you're like me, I WANT to bask in the Joy that is Christ Jesus, every day, all the time!



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However, I often find myself of being focused on what I don't have rather than mediating on what I. Have. Already. received.

Discontent with our lives, and envy of the blessings of others, is the opposite of thanksgiving.

And these things threaten to plunge us back into the darkness of sin.

John Calvin comments,

“Ingratitude is very frequently the reason why we are deprived of the light of the gospel, as well as of other divine favors.”

Walking in thankfulness for our salvation keeps us in the light of the Gospel, which reminds us always how grateful to God we should be.

This quote reminded me of a carton that is a favorite of mine, I've had it printed and hanging in my office for many years

[SHOW CAT CARTOON]

The first cat says, “Aren't you ever angry that you only have one eye?”
And the second cat says, “Are you ever happy you have two?”

That probably hits home for a lot of us.

And yet, still, I often find myself mentally complaining.

Why this Lord, why that!
Why me, Lord?!
Why NOT me Lord!?

Which brings me to our main point for today:

[MAIN POINT]

Grumbling and complaining robs us of fully experiencing the Joy, the Love, the Peace, and the Hope that is in Christ Jesus.



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If you're like me, you're in the mindset of thinking about the year that has passed, and mentally preparing for the year to come.

So let's take a moment to consider these two little words that keeps us from fully enjoying the fruit of our relationship with Jesus – Grumbling & Complaining

Our society has built **entire platforms** based on grumbling & complaining.

Heard of Twitter? Or TikTok?

Ever spent a few hours on YouTube or Facebook?

Ever watched CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News

Then you know what I mean – We live in a sea of constant, never-ending grumbling and complaining. In fact, we've raised them to an artform.

Grumbling is especially hurtful within the church.

Tim Challies, a Canadian Reformed theologian, pastor, and author, has defined two forms grumbling, which are **Casual Grumbling and Direct Grumbling**. I specifically want to talk about these views of grumbling that are popular in our today's culture, and then we'll talk about ways in which we can guard our hearts against them.

First let's look at Casual Grumbling

- This is a pseudo-serious way of expressing discontent about other people
- It's most often done under the guise of humor.
- It's often meant to evoke a laugh, but the humor masks the fact that we have uttered words that are destructive to Christian unity.
- We see this type of grumbling displayed on every sitcom, every new station, in YouTube videos, and across social media.
- We participate in it with our sarcastic remarks and – Quote – “Whitty Retorts”



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Then there is Direct Grumbling

- makes no pretenses at humor or being respectable – instead goes straight for the heart.
- Here we directly speak to one person about another person who is not present.
- Grumbling meets gossip as we openly complain about a person’s actions or attitudes.
- Rather than following biblical guidance and speaking directly to a person who has offended us, we speak to anyone or everyone else.
- This invariably erodes relationships and sows dissent
- Direct grumbling promotes **disunity**.

We’ve seen examples throughout the bible of God’s people grumbling and the response they receive. In fact, let’s look at two specific Cases.

- Immediately after God delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh, there were three incidents of the people grumbling against God.
 - They grumbled when they came upon bitter water
 - They grumbled when they didn’t have bread
 - They grumbled when they didn’t have water at all
- By the third incident, Moses had had more than enough!
- In Exodus 17:2, Moses told the people that their real problem was that they were testing the Lord with their short-lived gratitude for God’s good provision.
- However, when Moses turned to God, the focus of his complaint was on himself:
 - IN verse 4 he says, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” Rather than going to God as he had done in the past and praying that God would come to rescue and redeem His people, Moses appears to have stepped over the people and put his own needs front and center.
- After focusing on his needs in Exodus 17:4, Moses was directed by God to the rock at Horeb, where God promised, “I will stand before you” (v. 6).
- Moses still had a task to accomplish, a ministry to perform – *he hit the rock* – but he was most of all a recipient of that life-giving drink and a witness to that life-giving act.



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- Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that the “rock was Christ.” He did not provide physical and spiritual drink for the people in order to uphold Moses and his ministry; He gave it to ***sustain the people and their prophet***, whose physical thirst nothing compared to the spiritual thirst brought on by their self-focus and lack of reverence.
- That day, Moses stood with the people and looked to Christ.
- Together their eyes were drawn to God’s saving work and presence. And that day, their deepest needs were met and filled.
- May God grant to us the same posture as we pull our eyes off of ourselves and, together, seek Jesus finding in Him all of our hope, righteousness, and satisfaction.

The second case I want to look at is in John 6.

- To set the scene, we have just experienced two astonishing miracles performed by Jesus:
 - the feeding of the five thousand,
 - walking on water to reach the disciples boat set out at sea
- The next day, the crowd sees that Jesus and his disciples have gone, so they get into their boats and head over to Capernaum, too.
- When the people manage to track down Jesus, he tells them that they're looking for him *not because of the miracles*, but because they ate their fill of the bread and fish from the day before.
- He urges them not to look for food that will rot and spoil, but to search for spiritual food, which will never go bad.
- So the people want to know how they can do God's work.
Jesus tells them they just have to believe in Him, the one God sent – sounds easy enough.
- But people have very short memories and want to know how Jesus will prove to them that he's really the one that God sent.



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- They explain that God gave the Jewish people bread from heaven when they were wandering in the wilderness. How is Jesus going to prove *His* credentials?
- Jesus tells them that it's true – God does indeed give bread from heaven that makes everything in the world seem alive.
- The people decide that, yes, certainly they'd like to have some of this special life-giving bread.
- So Jesus tells them that *He* is this special bread of life. Anyone who believes in Him will never be hungry again.
- Well, Jesus' words sent the religious authorities over the edge. They start complaining about Jesus. How dare he say that he is a special life-giving bread from heaven?

John 6:41-59

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”



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⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

- If there is single take-away from what we just read regarding Jesus as the “Bread of Life” it is this – there is no halfway, wishy-washy commitment to Christ.
- Because Jesus is indeed the bread of life, we must rely completely and fully on Him and nothing else for eternal life – *in the same way that we rely on food to nourish and sustain our physical bodies.*
- We must realize and confess that we have no power to believe in ourselves – but instead rely on the electing grace of God for redemption.
- We MUST embrace Jesus alone as the way of salvation.
- And listen, this teaching is **by no means** popular in today’s society.
- What we see today, both outside the Church as well as in certain factions within the Church, is a desire to be saved through a lukewarm commitment to Jesus as our Savior, but NOT as the Lord of all creation.
- Therefore, these people find it challenging to contemplate the idea that there could be ONLY ONE WAY to reach salvation. After all, they are good people, right? And able to make the good decisions on their own understanding...
- We see here later in John that Jesus’ were no more popular with the people he was speaking to over 2,000 year ago.



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- Later, In John 6:60, we read, “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” This didn’t mean that they were having trouble *understanding* what Jesus was saying, what they meant was that this message was *too hard for them to accept* – which then caused grumbling and discord.
- We should note that the reference to these grumbling disciples did not include the small band of intimate followers who were with Jesus for most of His earthly ministry.
- No, these were people who had professed some allegiance to Jesus, but who it seems did not have true saving faith.
- We know this to be true because the true disciples are set apart later in verse 67 when Jesus says to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”
- The lack of faith shown by the casual followers, though, did not cause Jesus to soften his message to make it easier to believe.
- Instead, he pushed harder into them by stating that if they found his words offense, there were things to come that make them even MORE offended.
- In verse 6:61-62 He says, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? This reference was, of course, to His ascension to heaven after His resurrection – and inclusive of the crucifixion, which was the path through which His return to heaven would ultimately travel.
- So, if the people could not bear the thought of being fully dependent on Jesus, then they certainly could not grasp the concept of salvation through a crucified Messiah.
- The Unregenerate will find God’s truth hard to believe – **and not** because God’s word doesn’t make sense to them – but because it so greatly offends their self image.
- Therefore, we HAVE to be steadfast. We CANNOT give in to the temptation to water down the gospel in response to these people, to make it more acceptable or “friendly”.
- To do so ultimately hides the truth from people who desperately need to hear it.



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- Instead, we MUST preach the gospel of Christ Crucified – faithfully trusting the Lord to give faith to His elect.
- After all, THIS is the Good News not only of Advent, but of each and every day of our lives!
- **This is the Good News that should lead our hearts to rejoice!**

[KEY POINTS]

So I have two key points we’re going to wrap up on when it comes to guarding our hearts against the grumbling & complaining that seek to cause disunity and to rob our lives of true hope, joy and peace.

To do that, we’re going to look at Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

By way of background, Paul wrote this letter in unusual circumstances. He wasn’t in some quiet place dictating his to a scribe.

No, Paul was in prison, where the prospect was either execution or release.

And yet he was a cheerful prisoner.

He had no worries for himself, if he was to be put to death, then he would be with Christ.

Instead, Paul calls upon his readers to remain steadfast in their faith and to imitate the humility of Christ, who “emptied himself” and “became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (2:7-8).

So it is in this context, that Paul writes in Philippians 2:14-16:

Philippians 2:14-16

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, **15** that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **16** holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.



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Knowing that the church in Philippi is encountering a time of trial that may soon turn to an outbreak of persecution, Paul is eager to ensure that the believers there endure it without sin.

Paul’s attitude of reverence and gratitude are evident in all his writings, but we especially see this spirit of joy pervading Paul’s thoughts in the letter to the Philippians.

In fact, later in verse 18, we see him express gratitude for the support that he had received from the Philippians, in particular the gifts they had sent which he had received from Epaphroditus.

I don’t know about you, but I want to be more like Paul, and less like the people we see on Twitter. I want to choose to live in gratitude rather than to sit in a prison of my own making.

So how do we go about that?

Well, let’s break these verses down and look at what Paul is saying here into two main points.

1. Children of God seek unity through relationship with Jesus

a. **Philippians 2:14-15a**

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, **15** that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...

i. **Do all things without grumbling or disputing**

- In John 6:43-44, when Jesus said, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”
- He is speaking of a unity born in truth, love, and mission, just as He and His Father are united in truth, love, and mission.
- So seek unity with your Brothers and Sisters in Christ
- Be thankful for the work and the people set before you
- Seek to understand the “Hard Sayings” that Jesus had laid on you



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- Condition your mind towards thankfulness
 - a. Psalm 51: 12
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

- ii. **Be blameless and innocent**
 - As we grow in maturity in Christ, we will find ourselves more sensitive to the presence of sin in our lives, and begin noticing the “minor” things we once overlooked.
 - This in turn should lead us to be more vigilant to do what is necessary to prevent bitterness and other (quote) “invisible sins” from welling up within us.
 - Don’t let your growing awareness of your own sinfulness discourage you.
 - Instead, arm yourself to fight your flesh more effectively with such knowledge.
 - a. Psalm 51:10
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

- iii. **Children of God**
 - To be adopted as Children of God is to be able to stand where Jesus always stood, looking at God and calling Him “Abba.”
 - Jesus, who always addressed God as “My Father,” teaches His people to say, “Our Father.”
 - Be thankful for a just and loving father, who has opened his Kingdom for us and calls us his beloved Children.
 - a. Proverbs 3:5-6
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
⁶In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.



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iv. Without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation

- There can be no adoption without also bringing of the family likeness and the generating a new impulse toward holiness and godliness.
- In this case, we are chosen to be holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4).
- These are the characteristics of the children of God, that we are set apart, different from the culture.

a. Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

v. Among whom you shine as lights in the world

- As Christians unite around the truth, love one another, and work together to make disciples, the world will know that Jesus is the full revelation of the Father.
- Be thankful for light of Jesus and let it shine through you.
- In a world full of sadness and sin, you can appear as a lighthouse.

a. Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.



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b.

2. Children of God trust in the Word and lay their hope in Christ.

a. Philippians 2:14-15b

holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

i. Holding fast to the word of life

- What does it mean to “Hold Fast”?
- Have you ever been on a Merry-Go-Round?
- You can’t hold on if you’re weak, or you don’t have the right equipment.

○ Ephesians 6:10-18

³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...

ii. So in the day of Christ

- There IS a future hope – a finish line to look forward to.
- Hebrews 12: 1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.



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- iii. I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.
 - Indeed, the prize is eternity with God. No labor could product such an excellent reward.
 - **Titus 3:4-7**
⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
 - If nothing else today, take joy in these words.
 - It's not our works, it's not our toil.
 - It's by the Goodness and Loving Kindness of our Savior.

So church, in closing today, let's treasure in our hearts these word from Paul – a man who once persecuted the Jews and later found himself sitting joyfully in prison writing this letter.

I invite you to join me in my commitment to growing in gratitude in 2022.

Resolved to Cultivate a Heart of Gratitude.

- Let us encourage one-another towards Hope
 - Because we have confidence that good things are still to come
- Let us encourage one-another towards Love
 - Because God loves sinners first, rescuing us from our condemnation
- Let us encourage one-another towards Joy
 - Because it is God's intent that we should find Joy though the Son.
- Let us encourage one-another towards Peace
 - Because Jesus came and made a way for there to be peace between God and man and between man and man.



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[PRAYER]

[COMMUNION]

[BENEDICTION]

Colossians 2:6-7

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.