



Ten Habits That Make Your Life Better

Habit Four

A few weeks ago Mary Jo and I took our daughter down to southern California to go to college. On the way back we took the major highway running north and south through central California. It was not a pleasant trip. Nothing to see along the way and lots and lots of cars. Sometimes traffic would come to a standstill because one large truck tried to pass another large truck, blocking all the faster moving traffic. Once the truck got into the slower right hand lane, the left lane quickly cleared and off everyone went again. But as we all waited for the truck to move back into the left hand lane several cars flew in the right hand lane and then at the last second cut in front of someone who had been patiently waiting in line. It was not only rude, it was dangerous and revealed the sense of entitlement many have. Entitlement is the belief that I need to be treated like royalty; I am the most important person in this room, theater, or highway. I recently read where a man in his sixties reserved particular seats for a movie and when he found them a young man and his girlfriend were sitting in the older man's seats. When the older gentleman politely let the younger man know they were sitting in the wrong seats, the younger guy beat him up and when others in the theater intervened, he and his girlfriend took off. That is entitlement; the belief that everything should go my way and I deserve the best seat, table, customer service.

The opposite of entitlement is gratitude. Sometimes we don't realize we have been living with entitlement. Arguments in families often are a sign of it as are fights in churches or at the workplace. The problem with entitlement is that it is an easily justified attitude. You do deserve to be respected, to be appreciated, to be treated "fairly", to have no one take advantage of you. Fairness is the justifying rationale behind entitlement. Entitlement, if you don't get what you want when you want it can lead to anger, bitterness, anti-social behavior and even violence. Divorce is often the result of entitlement and when you hear about former friends who haven't spoken in years, it is almost always due to entitlement. Many psychological disorders could be brought under control if the sense of entitlement were removed and generally, drug and alcohol addictions are rooted in entitlement. The first murder recounted in the Bible was due to entitlement and even when Eve fell for Satan's crafty temptation, he used entitlement to pull her into his trap. We recently witnessed the looting that took place in Philadelphia and have seen it here in San Francisco and it is based on entitlement. If you see an argument taking place, almost always someone feels entitled to have his or her own way.

Many believe that it was entitlement that led Satan to rebel against God and almost always, that is why we do so also. There is however an antidote to entitlement, a miracle cure to many of the problems entitlement brings. It is an aphrodisiac that puts marriages back together, restores friendships, brings psychological health to the workplace, ends feuds, makes neighborhoods warm and friendly and cements the relationships in a church. It is the opposite of entitlement and the cure for many social ills. Gratitude. UCLA Health reports that gratitude works wonders on the soul. It reduces depression, lessens anxiety and negative thinking. Gratitude stunningly supports heart health. It improves sleep, especially if you practice gratitude before you drift off. Studies have discovered that gratitude lowers the risk of diabetes, strengthens the immune system and helps you prioritize and manage your time.

Perhaps you have seen this before, but it is worth noting what the Apostle Paul directs. **Also, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, into which also you were called in one body. And always be grateful ones.** (Colossians 3: 15) Use a magnifying glass on that last short sentence. And always be grateful ones. That means there isn't a situation or a relationship where you are not to be grateful. That doesn't mean that everything about what you are facing you are to be grateful. You get hit by a car and you wind up with

broken bones. You don't have to be grateful for the pain. But you can be grateful for the nurse helping you. You can be grateful for the other drivers who stopped to call 9-11. There is always a reason to be grateful if you are in fact a grateful one. God isn't placing one more restriction on you. He's not commanding this so you will just do what He says. It is in your best interest to be grateful whatever trial or difficulty you face. It's great for your health, builds the fruit of the Spirit into your personality and develops your life with Christ as you live just as He wants you to live.

Gratitude is attitude. It is how you approach life. Thanking is banking. It is putting into practice your gratitude and investing in yourself and your relationships. Let me give an example from the Bible. Ruth was a poor young widow who moved to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi who also was a widow. Naomi was a native to Israel but Ruth a foreigner. With no jobs and no savings to support themselves, they were dependent on farmers in the area to let them gather the grain and fruit the reapers left behind. This was the method all Israel embraced to provide for the poor in the land. **And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters.** (Ruth 2: 2-3a NIV) It turned out that the owner of the field where she worked, Boaz was a close relative of Ruth's deceased father-in-law. Boaz came out to observe the workers and when he spotted Ruth behind the harvesters picking up whatever grain they didn't take, he took an instant liking to her. Boaz ordered his workers to leave behind extra grain for Ruth, actually pulling it out and dropping it behind them. Remember, gratitude is attitude. Thanking is banking. Ruth had a grateful heart and we have no record of her complaining about her widowhood or poverty. Boaz took his "appreciation" for Ruth one step further. **So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."** (Ruth 2: 8-9 NIV)

When Ruth questioned why he was so kind to her, Boaz explained that he had heard about her. **Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband — how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.** (Ruth 2: 11 NIV) Do you notice Boaz's attitude? Gratitude. He was grateful for how Ruth cared for her mother-in-law and the courage she showed in moving to a foreign country to support her. Boaz wasn't the only grateful one there. Ruth immediately revealed her gratitude attitude. **"May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant — though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls."** (Ruth 2: 13 NIV) Neither Boaz nor Naomi kept their gratitude to themselves. They let it spill out of them in thanks. Boaz thanked Ruth for her kindness and Ruth thanked Boaz for his generosity. Gratitude is attitude, thanking is banking. When Ruth thanked Boaz, she was investing in her relationship with him. The same was true of Boaz. What he said to her invested in Ruth and it helped pull them together clearly. As it turned out, the investments paid off richly and the two got married.

What if you are the only one banking on thanking in your marriage? What if you are the only one at work banking on thanking or the only one in your family or the only one in your church banking on thanking. Don't be discouraged. Gratitude is an investment in you and the health of you. Every time you are banking on thanking, nothing may show in the way your relationships go but something is happening within you that is crucial to your growth as a child of God. Gratitude is the attitude of heaven and how it is expressed is by thanking others and being on the lookout for reasons to do so. How can you get started or make it a habit that upgrades your life. Each time you are with someone or talk with someone, express thanks for something. 2. Plan in advance to be grateful wherever you are. Hunt for reasons to give thanks. 3. Say out loud five reasons to be grateful as you start the day. 4. Have a complaint free day where every hint of entitlement is avoided. You deserve to be grateful. Make it a valued habit!