The Power of Gratitude Through Tough Times

We're continuing our series, OVERFLOW.

When we think about overflow, we usually think about abundance. Blessings. Having more than enough.

But overflow isn't just about what God pours into our lives. It's also about what flows out of our lives.

So question: When life gets hard, what overflows from you?

Because when everything's going great, it's pretty easy to be thankful, isn't it?

But when things aren't going our way? When we're disappointed, frustrated, worried, or just plain tired?

Well, sometimes what overflows isn't exactly gratitude! Grrrr-atitude…

Which reminds me of a story. A man goes to a monastery and takes a vow of silence. Every five years, he's allowed to say exactly two words to the elder.

After the first five years, the elder calls him in. The man says, "Food bad."

Five years later, he comes back looks at the elder and says, "Bed hard."

At the fifteen-year mark, he walks in, looks the elder in the eye, and says, "I quit."

The elder sighs and says, "Well, I'm not surprised. You've done nothing but complain since you got here!"

It's funny how easy it is to remember what went wrong. I can tell you pretty quickly what went wrong this week. If you asked me what I'm thankful for, there are weeks where I might have to stop and think a bit.

And sometimes what went wrong was a lot more serious than bad food or a hard bed.

Whether you've walked with Jesus for years or you're still trying to figure out what you believe about God, every one of us knows what it's like to face something we cannot control.

Some of us walked in today carrying something we've barely had words for. Maybe someone you trusted hurt you. Perhaps you've been praying for a situation to change, and you're tired of waking up to the same thing. Maybe you've received news that's been weighing on you ever since.

So here's the question: Can gratitude still overflow from a heart that's hurting?

Over the past weeks, we've been learning that gratitude isn't just about saying thank you. Pastor Mark reminded us that lasting gratitude is rooted in Christ and His grace. Pastor Theresa helped us recognize how comparison and entitlement can rob us of gratitude.

Our gratitude isn't rooted in perfect circumstances, but in God's unchanging goodness. Today we're going to explore: The Power of Gratitude Through Tough Times.

Have you ever noticed when life gets hard, it doesn't just affect what's happening around us. But it changes what's happening inside us."

We can become angry, discouraged, fearful, even bitter. And before we know it, those feelings begin spilling over into our relationships, our conversations, and the way we see the world.

But what if there's another way to walk through difficulty? Not by pretending everything is okay, but by discovering something that can sustain us even when things aren't okay.

Practicing gratitude during difficult times is not about ignoring pain or forcing positivity instead, it is a deliberate choice to not let pain have the final word. See we, you and me are in a battle. Yeah, yeah, we say it all the time. But, we really need to be sober-minded and not that all weird about it – we need to know there is a battle and we are in it. When the tough stuff come, it's human to feel afraid, to worry, or to go over what went wrong. But

we need to know the enemy can use those very real struggles to wear us down until we start wondering, “Does God really see me? Am I on my own?

And one of the ways God helps us stand in that battle is by teaching us to give thanks. Maybe the prayer is as simple as, “Lord, I’m afraid of what tomorrow might bring. Thank You that I can come to You right now.” When the enemy tries to convince us we’re alone, giving thanks helps us remember who’s with us. Are we seeing this? Gratitude can turn the tide … Church, shout it out, “There is power in gratitude!”

So where do we start when life is hard?

We can start by **“Telling God how much it hurts.”**

In Psalm 13, David asks, four times “How long, Lord?” And in so doing, he brings his sorrow to God, and by the end of the psalm, he’s talking about trusting in God’s love. Both belong in the same prayer.

How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

3 Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
4 and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

5 But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
6 I will sing the Lord’s praise,
for he has been good to me.

So what does it look like to give thanks when you still have a reason to ask, “How long, Lord?”

It's been said, *"The great spiritual call of the Beloved Children of God is to pull their brokenness away from the shadow of the curse and put it under the light of the blessing." – Henri Nouwen*

Gratitude does this. It helps us to realize our brokenness does not define us, no! God and His grace does.

God's grace empowers us. Our faith responds. Gratitude is an expression of that response.

Give Gratitude in Obedience to God

Most of us know the story of Daniel in the lions' den. But I want us to look at what Daniel did before he ever saw a lion.

A decree had been signed. For thirty days, anyone who prayed to any god or person except the king would be thrown into the lions' den. Daniel knew the decree had been signed. So what did he do?

"10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. (Daniel 6:10, NIV)"

I love those words, "just as he had done before." Daniel had been giving thanks long before there was a lions' den. And when the threat became real, he went back to the place where he'd been meeting with God all along.

When Daniel knelt, he didn't know how the story would end. Not even the threat of death could keep him from honoring his God and the time spent with Him. We know God shut the lions' mouths. But Daniel hadn't lived that part yet. He knew a decree had been signed, and he knew the God he was praying to.

That's gratitude as obedience. Sometimes our feelings take a while to catch up to what we believe. We can still get on our knees and say, "Lord, I'm scared. I don't know how this is going to turn out. But Thank You that I can come to You right now."

Whose are you when the thing you've been praying about is still unresolved? You're still His. And you can bring Him the part of you that's struggling to believe that today.

What God can do with our pain

When we're hurting, one of the first things we want to know is why. And sometimes we reach for an answer because we want to make sense of what happened.

Maybe you've been quietly wondering if the hard thing you're going through means God is punishing you or has turned away from you. Hear what Romans 8 says. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and nothing can separate us from His love. (Romans 8:1, 35–39)

You may have questions about what happened for a long time. You can start with what you know about the One who's with you now.

The pearl

Consider: How a pearl is formed. A pearl is grown over time, layer by layer. Sometimes gratitude grows that way, too. One small prayer at a time."

One day, the prayer may be, "Thank You, Lord, that my friend called." The next day, "Thank You that I had the courage to ask for help." And on a day when you can't think of much else, "Thank You for staying with me."

A prayer like that may feel small when you pray it. Over time, you may look back and realize those were the moments you noticed how God was caring for you.

Sometimes those small prayers are all we have when we're carrying a loss we cannot fully express.

When someone we love dies, we can find ourselves going back to the last conversation. There may be things we wish we'd said and questions we still carry.

But even on the days when we struggle to see what God is doing, we can remember what Jesus has already done.

Through His death and resurrection, He has made forgiveness and new life possible.

Colossians 1:13–14 reminds us that through Jesus, we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

“13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,” Colossians 1:13-14

Some of us are still waiting for a miracle. And while we wait, we can hold on to what Jesus has already done for us through His death and resurrection.

The story is told about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They’re standing in front of the king, and the furnace is right there. They say that the God they serve is able to rescue them. Then they say, “But even if he does not,” they still won’t bow.

“16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us[a] from Your Majesty’s hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16–18)

We know what happened next. They didn’t. And yet, they say “even if” before they ever stepped into the fire.

Maybe that’s where you are this morning. You’re asking God to do something only He can do, and you don’t know what happens next. As you listen to this song, would you bring that prayer with you. And if all you can say today is, “Jesus, thank You that I’m Yours,” that’s a prayer you can pray right where you are.

We are so blessed. Ulu and Lisa, felt led to share this song through ASL dance. Ulu is going through chemo and we’re praying with them for

healing. Today we get to worship Jesus and rejoice with them. Would you welcome Ulu and Lisa as they share …

Dance – “What a Miracle Feels Like”

Closing

For a moment, go back with me to Daniel at that open window.

The decree was still in effect when he knelt down to pray.

Church, that's what OVERFLOW looks like. Not a life without pain, but a life where God's grace can sustain us through the pain. And even when we feel empty, His presence gives us reason to hope.

First Thessalonians 5:18 says, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” So let's take a moment to do that together.

First, would you tell God one thing that's hard right now? You can be honest with Him.

Then thank Him for one thing you know about Him, right in the middle of what you're facing.

[Pause for quiet prayer.]

Jesus, You know what each person here is carrying. We ask you to heal Ulu. Give her strength through treatment, and hold her and Lisa close. For those who are tired of waiting, give them strength for today. For those who are hurting, give them someone safe to turn to and the courage to reach out. Thank You that we can come to You with our questions. Thank You for forgiving us, for holding us close, and for staying with us through what we don’t yet understand. Thank you for the powerful gift of gratitude. Teach us to give thanks, one honest prayer at a time. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Discussion Questions:

What did the Lord speak to you through this message? How will you apply it to your life?

Read Psalm 13. David asked, “How long, Lord?” four times and then declares, “But I trust in your unfailing love.” Reflect on that and discuss your thoughts.

Read Daniel 6:10. Daniel gave thanks “just as he had done before,” while the decree was in effect. What small habit of gratitude could you start now or continue that might help or has helped you when facing hard times?

Has fear or worry ever make you wonder, “Does God see me?” What is one thing you know about Him that you can hold on to? How might gratitude shape the way you pray?

Consider Daniel 3:16–18. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chose to trust God “even if” He didn’t rescue them. What might your “even if” prayer sound like?

Jesus made breakfast for Peter after Peter had denied Him. What does that moment reveal to us about how Jesus meets us when we’re hurting? What’s one simple way you could show that kind of care to someone this week?