

Counting Your Blessings

Ephesians 5:18-20

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How are you doing? How are you doing *really*?

For many people there are at least five gospels: The Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John . . . and the Gospel according to Bing Crosby in the movie White Christmas. It's an American icon, an archetype of wholesome, American thought.

The world view and underlying philosophy of the movie shows up in a song in the middle of the movie, as Bing and the leading lady face the tragedies of a fallen world (in which Christmas may not always be white). They awaken confronted with these deep troubles, and Bing breaks out into song, accompanied by an unseen, full orchestra.

[Singing]

“When I’m worried and I can’t sleep, I count my blessings instead of sheep. And then I fall asleep counting my blessings.

“When my bankroll is getting small, I think of when I had none at all, and then I fall asleep counting my blessings.

“I think about a nursery and I picture curly heads, and one by one I count them as they slumber in their beds.

“If you’re worried and you can’t sleep, just count your blessings instead of sheep. And you’ll fall asleep counting your blessings.”

That’s good, old, American positive thinking . . . “Bing-ology” . . . believe the best of people, and things will work out for the best. Be positive, and with that positive attitude everything in the movie works out for the best, right down to a beautiful snow on Christmas Eve.

Well, it seems like *I’m* troubled and worried a lot . . . and I can’t sleep. But when I count my blessings instead of sheep, I *stress out!*

- I think about my bankroll and realize I could have none at all! And what would I do then?
- I think about the nursery and curly heads . . . and they’re gone! Two of my kids are in Jr. High this year. That wakes me up.
- I think about my wonderful bride. What if she gets breast cancer?

What if I lose everything?

Much statistical evidence would lead to the conclusion that the more blessings you count, the less you’ll be able to sleep. That is: depression, suicide, anxiety, and sleeplessness are very

prevalent among the rich. They count their blessings and realize they could lose them all. It's hard to fall asleep if you're guarding 100 pounds of gold bullion!

"If you're troubled and you can't sleep, count your blessings instead of sheep."

"Well, Bing, what if you're a shepherd? What if you're a shepherd guarding sheep, and the sheep *are* your blessing, and there's a lion prowling about like Satan?"

Much of the time that American, Bing-ology, positive thinking gets confused with Christianity. I love "Veggie Tales," but in America it's easy to reduce Christianity to happy, singing vegetables, and it's easy to see why Christians are often accused of living in denial . . . denial of this real world of pain. "Let's just praise the Lord! PTL, brother!"

When American Christians talk about "going back" to the values of our fathers, I doubt they mean slavery and Indian massacres. I think many mean Bing Crosby . . . wholesome, American, positive thinking . . . big in the 50's in America. But try applying it in other parts of the world.

I traveled in Romania in 1989 after the revolution. I met friends who had been interrogated, tortured, and imprisoned for their faith, and had lost loved ones. One friend held his young wife in his arms as she died, because he would not renounce his faith in Christ.

My friend Peter Dugulescu had to watch as the Communists took his wife and placed her on the hospital lawn to give birth to their child . . . because of their profession of faith.

Many, many times Peter left his home with his wife and children shaking and crying because of the threats of the secret police . . . not knowing if he would ever come home again. At one point they placed a radiation device in the ceiling and tried to irradiate him. They tried to kill him many times and had to use creative ways, because of pressure from the West . . . they had to make it look like an accident.

At one point he pulled up his sleeve and showed me the scars on his mangled arm. The secret police had tried to kill him by blackmailing a man driving a large, empty bus, who ran a stop sign and rammed into Peter's car. If he would have been in a Romanian car he would have died. But because some Christians had given him a Mercedes, he lived. But the accident was horrific.

Suppose you were there driving Peter to the state-run hospital, his body racked with pain, his family under constant stress and danger. What would you say to Peter?

"You know, Peter, you seem rather worried. Tonight in your prison cell, remember this: 'When I'm worried and I can't sleep, I count my blessings instead of sheep . . . I think about a nursery and I picture curly heads . . .'"

Curly hair ran in Peter's family. And he had no guarantees he'd ever see his kids again . . . let alone get paid a bankroll, or live.

Perhaps at best our American positive thinking is the ability to live in denial. Perhaps at worst it's a feeble effort to justify our own prosperity in a world where 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1.08 a day. Positive thinking: Is it Biblical?

- “Always think the best of people.” Jude 12-13 — “These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.”

Even Jesus looked at the Pharisees and said, “You brood of vipers . . . white-washed tombs!”

- “Everything works for the best.” Revelation 14:11 — “And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast”

Wouldn't that make a great Veggie Tales verse for the day? [Singing] “And so what we've learned applies to our lives today, and God has a lot to say in His Book.”

- “Be positive. Count your blessings.” But God said to him (the rich man who stored his goods in barns and counted his blessings), “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you've prepared, whose will they be? So it is with he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” *Not happy thoughts . . . no Pollyanna delusions and denials.*

So how do we explain I Thessalonians 5:16-18?

“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Ephesians 5:18-20?

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.”

“Always and for everything”? Talk about positive thinking! That line makes Bing Crosby look like a positive thinking wussy in comparison! “Always and for everything give thanks”? Even Bing Crosby would have to be plastered (drop-down drunk) to suggest giving thanks “always and for everything” to people like Peter Dugulescu. But that's exactly what the Apostle Paul says.

What's the difference between American positive thinking and Christianity?

What's the difference between Bing Crosby and the Apostle Paul?

It's one little phrase that turns everything upside down: “in Jesus.”

- “Always and for everything giving thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus.”
- “Rejoice in the Lord always” - *in the Lord* (Philippians 4:4).
- “In everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” We’re called *in Christ* (Romans 8:28).

Apart from Jesus
All our positive thinking
Is an evil exercise in denial

So what difference does being “in Jesus” make? Oftentimes it’s hard to tell by just watching people. In fact, your Christian and non-Christian friends probably answer the same when you ask, “How’s it going?” or “How ya doin’?” Sometimes Christians seems worse. In the 70’s they learned to ask, “How you doin’ *really*?” and then to give a long list of trials, tribulations, and complaints, and then get all therapeutic.

Sometimes prayer meetings just seem like organized grumbling sessions. So I’ve learned to not ask “How ya doin’?” at times, but to just start praying.

It’s hard to tell how people are doing anyway, by just asking, “How ya doin’?”

- Some people will always answer, “I’m hangin’ in there,” even if they just won the *lottery!*
- When my dad answers, “Everything’s great! Don’t worry about me!” that means he has pneumonia and could fall over dead any moment.
- When my wife answers, “I’m just *fine!*” that means duck and cover.

So in our secret lab under the church we developed a space-aged computer device that can be attached to the back of a person’s head and secretly monitors their blessings when you ask, “How ya doin’?”

This “Blessometer” Graph [Exhibit A] is a scientifically accurate sample reading of a person’s actual blessings over time. On the left is the exponential scale in ISBU’s (International Standard Blessing Units) and on the graph are readings plotted over time (“counting my blessings”).

Notice that there are peaks and valleys. A peak might be a new girlfriend, a great job, you’re feeling healthy, the Avalanche win the Stanley Cup. A valley might represent: your wife leaves you, you lose a job, you get cancer, the Avs lose to the Red Wings *7 to 0!*

The “fine” line is about halfway between the peaks and the valleys (when most answer “fine” to “How’s it goin’?”).

When the graph bottoms out in the valley, it exposes the foundation of people’s lives. I’m convinced God takes us to the valleys to do foundation work. God takes us to these valleys in

mercy to show us how much we truly need Him, because when we count our blessings in the valley and come up with “0” . . .

- We realize we are a wretch who needs the grace of God, or
- We jump off a cliff, or
- We lie to ourselves on the blessing count until one day we die never having tasted the goodness of God.

God shouts to people in the valley, “You need me! Come home!” Positive thinking is like ignoring the symptoms of heart disease.

Well, what happens when a person embraces the grace of Christ and receives His salvation? — They receive a foundation of eternal, immeasurable blessings. (That’s why this is an exponential scale.)

Now, you can see that if we had an enemy who wanted to diminish the cross of Christ, obscure the Gospel, and keep people from life, he would get people on [the left] side of the cross to always overestimate their blessings (count too high), and he’d get people on [the right] side of the cross to always underestimate their blessings (count too low). So then when people ask either of them, “How’s it goin’?” they’d answer just the same.

People on [the right] side of the cross might preach Christ, but with their frowns and grumbles they would deny Him constantly.

When you surrender to Christ, you receive a foundation of immeasurable blessings:

- You receive a new identity: Child of God, citizen of the eternal city, Bride of Christ.
- You are forgiven; there is no more condemnation. You receive Christ’s righteousness, and all your sin and guilt is washed away. You receive the life of Christ.
- You inherit an eternal salvation. “No eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” Yet Paul writes that the Spirit has revealed this to us: It’s Jesus, and with Jesus, God gives us all things.
- Ephesians 1:3 — “He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”
- I Corinthians 3 — “All things are yours and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.”

We have received immeasurable blessings, yet on top of this huge foundation of immeasurable blessings, I still live my day to day life with it’s peaks and valleys. I may get or lose my job, I may or may not get cancer, my kids may be constantly wonderful or a huge challenge, the Avs may lose to the Red Wings 7-0!

And because of my lack of faith and myopic vision and willingness to believe lies, my “fine” line stays halfway between my peaks and valleys, even though it’s immeasurably higher than where it would be without Christ.

So I come to work tired and cranky one morning, and Stephanie says, “How are you?” and I say, “Fine.” She says, “No, really, how *are* you?” and I say, “I’ve definitely felt better.” And she keeps going. “No, really, really, really, *really*, how are you?”

Well, if I’m honest I should say something like this:

“Actually, no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived how *good* I am today! The Spirit is making it known to me! You see, Stephanie, I’m absolutely *righteous*! Even God can’t get enough of me, and I own *all things*!

“How are you?”

Now, that’s always true, even if I lose my job or get cancer . . . even if the Avs lose to the Red Wings 7-0! So Paul writes, “Let there be no grumbling among you. Always give thanks.” Live always out of thanks.

“We love because He first loved us.” Every breath should be gratitude, for every breath is a gift purchased from Hell for you by the blood of Jesus the Son of God.

During the Vietnam conflict a young West Point graduate sacrificed his life saving a new recruit on the field of battle. Months later, back in the states, the parents of the slain hero had this soldier over for dinner. They wanted to hear about their own son’s love and bravery.

On the night of the dinner party this young soldier arrived drunk. He was loud and boisterous; he was ungrateful and obscene. As her husband closed the door and the young man left, this mother collapsed in tears and cried, “To think our son had to die for someone like *that*!”

We are someone like that. But it pleased God that Christ would bear our iniquities, and through His death we are and will be transformed in gratitude.

But the angels must wonder at times: “Lord God, your Son had to *die* for people like that? People so ungrateful; people who constantly grumble and complain; people so governed by the peaks and valleys of temporal existence; people so miserable in their own limited little worlds!?”

Well, what can God do to help people like us? — Take away our world. I’m convinced that in love He may often take us to the valley. For, you see, the valley exposes the foundation. When all this mortal blessing is stripped away, it shows us what is permanent. Like the author of Hebrews teaches, “Here we have no lasting city . . . but we have already come to Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem.”

The Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand wrote, “The Communists believe that happiness comes from material satisfaction, but alone in my cell, cold, hungry, and in rags, I danced for joy every night. . . . Sometimes I was so filled with joy I felt I’d burst if I didn’t give it expression.”

In the valley he danced on and in the New Jerusalem by faith.

Some people choose to live in the valley for the love of Christ . . . people like Mother Teresa, St. Francis of Assisi, Brother Lawrence . . . and they appear to be the happiest people in the world. Perhaps their vision of the foundation (the kingdom) is uncluttered. Perhaps “Blessed [happy] are the poor . . . the persecuted . . . the reviled” (just like Jesus said).

So Paul writes, “Give thanks *always*,” but it gets worse . . . “Always and for *everything* give thanks in the name of Jesus.” I think it’s the most challenging command in all Scripture.

“Thanks” (“eucharisteo”) is built on the same root (“char”) as joy and grace. “Joyful thanks for everything.”

Interpreters and theologians disagree over this verse, not because the language is obscure, but because the idea is so difficult. John Stott says, “Surely a husband isn’t to praise God for his wife’s adultery.” But as I read that, I think of Hosea in the Old Testament. He was commanded by God to marry an unfaithful prostitute, so that Hosea would know what it was like to be God of Israel.

Now, shouldn’t Hosea thank God for what God is doing in his life? And yet should he thank God for the evil in his wife’s heart? At this point we’re definitely pushing the envelope of what our finite minds can discern of eternity and God’s providence. We’re at the edge of amazing mysteries. But like Paul writes in I Thessalonians 5, we must at least give thanks in all circumstances. Maybe Paul also means give thanks *for* all our circumstances.

So once we’re in Christ, perhaps we don’t thank Him for evil. (Evil is a negation, like the darkness in a secret policeman’s heart.) But we do thank Him for the way in which evil crosses our path (like the fact that the secret policeman had a bus drive into the side of the car).

Nowhere in Scripture does anybody thank God for Satan. Yet like Martin Luther said, “Even the Devil is God’s devil.” The Devil must get permission from God to afflict Job . . . or to sift Peter. Luther taught that the greatest cosmic joke is that Satan is forced to see (even through us giving thanks) that all along he was used by God for God’s good purposes.

Another way of saying it is that we believe God is sovereign, that God *is* in control. He is all-powerful and all-good.

Do you remember when Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his own brothers? We can also say with Joseph, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”

And do you realize that as Paul writes these words he is most likely chained to one of the Praetorian Guard in Rome? And he says, “Give thanks always for everything. Rejoice always.”

In Philippians he writes, “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.” So the whole Praetorian Guard (a few thousand men, Caesar’s finest) knows his imprisonment is for Christ. He ends his letter to the Philippians by saying, “The household of Caesar greets you.”

Do you remember Jesus before Pilate? “You would have no power over me except what is given from above.” On the cross He begins to recite Psalm 22. It starts, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and it ends with thanksgiving: “Posterity will serve Him; future generations will be told about the Lord and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn saying that he has done it.”

All things pass through Christ as He “makes peace through the blood of His cross.” Every moment of your life, every breath, must and will pass through that cross. The cross is the template—the pattern—for the whole new creation.

Now think for a moment . . .

What was the greatest *evil* ever perpetrated on planet Earth?

The day we nailed the Son of God to the timber and propped Him up to watch Him die.

What was the greatest *good* ever perpetrated on planet Earth?

The day we nailed the Son of God to the timber and propped Him up to watch Him die.

At the cross God transforms evil into good with His gracious blood.

So Paul writes, “For this slight momentary affliction [beatings, imprisonments, etc.] is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen”

Meister Eckhart wrote, “His word is that our sorrow shall be turned into joy. Surely if I knew for certain that all my stones should be changed into gold, the more and the larger stones I had the better I should be pleased.”

James writes, “Count it all joy when you meet various trials.” Trials are blessings, valleys are peaks; and every valley shall be exalted through the cross.

“All things [valleys and peaks] do work for good with them that love God.” God redeems every valley and every peak through the cross of Christ. That word “eucharisteo” should sound familiar. It’s where we get our word “Eucharist.”

This table is the mystery in which we remember Christ redeems our entire life, and even past sins turn to gold as a picture of God’s grace. Even your past life is an immeasurable blessing (redeemed by God). And the circumstances and situations in which you find yourself are the most perfect blessing of God for you at this time.

In the words of C. S. Lewis, “There can be no accidents—no loose ends.” There is no “luck” or “bad luck,” but God besets you behind and before. “He always leads us in triumph.” Anyone in Christ is never a victim.

So give thanks always and for everything in the name of your Lord Jesus. When you do, you proclaim reality in a world of lies.

I talked to Jeannine Yoshida this week on the phone. She had just had surgery for breast cancer. I said, “How ya doin’?” And she just went off. “Oh, I feel so blessed! I’m so thankful! God is so good to me.” She’s a single mom with two small children and stage three cancer. And she *went off* thanking God.

Then she said, “Oh, Peter, do you think I’m in denial? I think some folks think I’m in denial.” I said, “Jeannine, I think your denial is called *faith*. You’re believing what’s real and denying the lie. Jeannine, the whole world is in denial . . . but not you. If only for a few hours: you see your foundation and walk in reality.”

Jeannine may appear drunk to the world, but she’s filled with the Spirit. And she’s giving the Father what He most desires: faith.

Everything’s going pretty great in my life, and I don’t thank God like Jeannine does. Sometimes we psych ourselves up to thank Him in crisis but not in comfort.

Thank Him for the suffering and thank Him for the health.

Know “how to be abased and how to abound.”

Thank Him always.

Thank Him for cheese dogs and plastic by-products . . .

Always and for everything give thanks.

When you do, you expose and disarm Satan’s lies:

Fear,

Shame,

Doubt,

Anxiety,

Discouragement

When you thank God in all things, you walk by faith. That faith opens the doors for what Mark calls the “mighty works of God.” I don’t understand this, but perhaps God looks and says, “He trusts me in all things. He sees the foundation. So it’s safe to raise the dead and turn his stones into bread.” But whether you live or die, you believe His grace and do all to the glory of God.

So “give thanks always and for everything.” That is, always count your blessings instead of sheep (as a *discipline* . . . you may not always *feel* like it). Take time to count them, list them, and offer thanks in Jesus. It will remind you what’s true, delight your Father’s heart, and crush the head of the Serpent.

Count your blessings. You won’t be able to, but try. You won’t be able to because the cross renders all your Blessometer readings incalculably high, even if you’re being driven to the hospital in communist Romania after an attempt on your life.

I asked you what you’d say to Peter if you had to drive him to the hospital from the scene of the crash, as he feared for his life, his arm hanging mangled and his family wondering if they’d ever see him again. Well, Peter told me that at that moment he was spent and profoundly depressed. The driver turned around and said to him, “You must really have bad luck.” And Peter groaned, “Yeah.”

Just then Peter heard God speak. “Preacher man, what did you preach on just this morning?” He remembered it was I Thessalonians 5:18: “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” His illustration in the sermon had been a car accident!

Peter said that at that point he went to his “other residence.” (In Romania they were only allowed one residence, but he claimed to have two.) He went to the kingdom; he walked in the New Jerusalem by faith. He counted his blessings in Christ and gave thanks.

God used Peter to lead the revolution to topple the government. Last I heard, he sits in Parliament, in places of power, comfort, and security. But I believe (and I’m sure Peter believes) he is no more blessed now than he was the day they tried to kill him. For God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the author and finisher of your story—of your faith.

Well, like I said, I don’t sleep too well. But once upon a time I did. I told you a few weeks ago of my incredible experience years ago, pinned to the floor by God, at a conference in Canada. In that experience God showed me He was speaking to me all my life. I believe He also showed me something else: He was the author of my life—the author and finisher of my faith—and He was love.

For about an hour I thanked Him uncontrollably for all my blessings. I thanked Him for U2 songs and Sunday School teachers and my parents and on and on, because I saw He was *in* them always working for good. When I came home, for about two months, every night when my head hit the pillow I fell right to sleep.

Then it wore off.

But I don’t think I was more spiritual then (necessarily), for I was being such a bonehead God had to miraculously take me to the valley, pin me to the floor, and count my blessings *for* me by sight! I think He’s most honored when I choose to count my blessings willingly by faith.

So when you're troubled and you can't sleep, count your blessings by faith in Christ Jesus your Lord. Always and for everything give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

-Revelation 5:13-14

While we were having communion, Dave leaned over to me and said, "Peter, as I was watching people come forward for communion, I suddenly realized I was looking at Jesus! Jesus was in all those people coming forward." He said, "I watched this for a while, and then I looked up at the cross, and I had a vision. I saw all of those people hanging on the cross." He said, "But it wasn't *them* on the cross, and yet in a way it was."

We have been crucified with Christ. What Dave saw I think is an incredible and amazing truth. That is, that Christ's death was your death. He took your sorrows, your shame, and your iniquity. He wouldn't have been there except for you. And you now comprise His Body.

Yes, He took your Hell—your penalty—and has borne your shame, and He bears your sorrows, and He was sacrificed once and for all; yet I believe God holds your sorrows and tears for an eternity. That's how much He loves you!

Because you're the one who walked through the divorce, you're the one who was in the car accident, you're the one who felt that shame for a little while . . . you taste just a little bit how much and how uniquely He loves you.

And all of us comprised together in eternity will praise Him forever for His incredible love for us, because we, unlike the rest of creation, have tasted the depths of His love and grace. That's why you're here. You have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory for *ever*. He's telling you the words of your song with your life here, but He wants you to start singing *now*.

So always and for everything give thanks in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you came to this [communion] table, trusting Jesus to save you, it means He forgives all your sins, takes your shame and guilt, knows all your sufferings and fears, and walks through them with you. You belong to Him. You're His.

So when someone asks you, “How ya doin’?” maybe you’ll say, “Fine.” If they say, “No, really, how ya doin’?” you may say, “Well, this has been a pretty tough day,” and that may be honest. But if they really press you and you’ve been to this table, you ought to tell them:

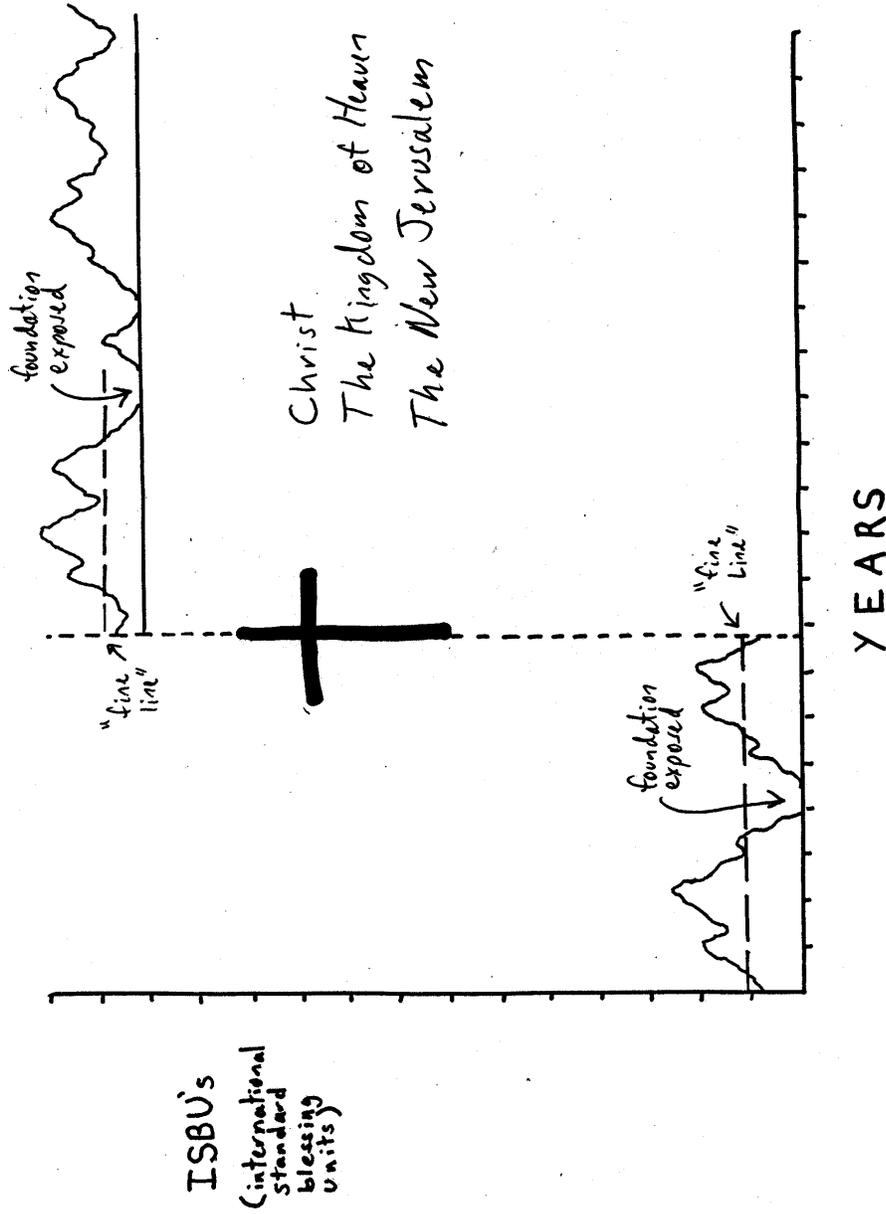
“Actually, no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived how good I am doing! I’m absolutely righteous! Even God can’t get enough of me! I own all things, including every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places!

“How are you?”

Amen.

Exhibit A

BLESSOMETER readings plotted over time ("counting my blessings")



Further Reading

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
-I Thessalonians 5:16-18

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.
-Ephesians 5:18-20

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast 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. Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. . . . Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
-Philippians 2:14-18, 4:4-7

The best way to show our gratitude to God and the people is to accept everything with joy.
-Mother Teresa

The greatest honor we can give Almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of his love.
-Julian of Norwich

When I came to Tro'as to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedo'nia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. . . . But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. . . . So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.
-II Corinthians 2:12-14; 4:7, 16-18

If God forsook his word, his truth, he would forsake his godhead and would not be God for he is his word, his truth. Now his word is that our sorrow shall be turned into joy. Surely, if I knew for certain that all my stones should be changed into gold, the more and the larger stones I had, the better I should be pleased.
-Meister Eckhart

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
-James 1:2-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.
-I Peter 1:3-9

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel. . . . For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

-Hebrews 12:12, 18, 22-24; 13:14-15

So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apol'los or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

-I Corinthians 3:21-23

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places

-Ephesians 1:3

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