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30-Day
Thanksgiving
Devotional



Day 1 When Holidays Feel Hopeless, Give Thanks

By Jessica Van Roekel

As a kid at church camp, bathroom trips involved following a curving path through the woods. At night, I needed my flashlight. As long as I looked at the beam of light, I felt safe.

But looking beyond it made the shadows look scarier and deeper as the trees lurched in the wind. The holidays can do that for me too.

The sparkles of the shiny baubles catch my eye and I love it. But the shadows of regret, disappointment, and grief loom larger too.

I want to scurry through the holidays so those shadows can get pushed back to the edges of my life. It's hard to remember the what-could-have-beens.

It's tough to deal with the regret of broken relationships. It's painful to consider a holiday without a special loved one. And this year, hopelessness in the holidays seems like the biggest shadow of all.

Some have lost jobs, homes, and food security. Others have had to say goodbye sooner than they planned as death took a loved one.

Isolation and fear have created mental health crises for many people from the young to the old. The holidays look different this year, and many of us search for hope but struggle to find it. We know we should rejoice and give thanks.

But how do we do this when the shadows of our hearts creep closer and we can no longer ignore them?

We Give Thanks

Over and over in the Bible, we're told to give thanks. Giving thanks is an act of worship to the Lord. At times, it's also a sacrifice because those feelings of gratefulness are not always there.

But when we're feeling hopeless, God's Word provides us with a list of attributes of God to give thanks for. This list includes: his love endures forever, he is good, his mercy is new every morning, and more. When we sacrifice a thanks offering to the Lord, we benefit.

In our physical bodies, gratefulness helps us have less aches and can even create better sleep. Gratitude contributes to mental resilience because we focus on what we do have rather than on what we don't.

Giving thanks counters negative emotions such as envy, frustration, and regret. Our bodies and minds benefit when we give thanks even in the midst of hopelessness.

Our spiritual lives benefit too. Giving thanks trains us to take our focus off our disappointments. Holidays seem to showcase hidden hurts. Giving thanks for the one who never changes leads us to hope.

He is steadfast in his faithfulness to us. His love endures forever—through sorrow and grief. Regret and wishful thinking. Pandemics and times of health. Broken families and broken dreams. God is faithful, steady, and true. Giving thanks is an upside-down way to hope.

He sees us in our hopelessness too. He sees us worried about being alone for the holidays. He sees us wonder if our families will overcome their differences.

With each wonder, He draws near and whispers, "I am with you."

It's tempting to pull away from God when hopelessness fills our holidays. But he assures us that he is near the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). For this we can give him thanks.



Whatever you might be facing this holiday season, give thanks and open your heart to God. He wants to hear your voice crying out for help and your sacrifice of thanks.

Many of the Psalms teach us how to blend sorrow with hope. Spend time in Psalm 33, meditating and praying God's word over your hopelessness and then give him thanks and watch your hope grow this holiday season.

Day 2 3 Ways to Be Thankful through the Holidays

By Lynette Kittle

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Colossians 3:15

Especially during the holidays, it's easy for a heart of thankfulness to fade. And as with most things in life, it's easier said than done. So how do I go through the holiday season with a thankful heart?

Scripture offers three directives on how to orient my heart towards an attitude of gratefulness.

1. Be Thankful in Actions. Colossians 3:17 gives me clear direction stating "whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him," encouraging me to live out my faith through my actions and reactions.

This can be anything and everything I do from waking up in the morning and deciding to thank God for the day, to being a courteous and safe driver on the roadways. With each action and reaction, I can determine beforehand to have an attitude of gratitude towards God.

2. Be Thankful by Remembering. Psalm 77:11 encourages me to remember the deeds of the Lord, which can be as simple as thanking God for His comfort, presence, and peace in daily challenges, remembering that He never leaves me or forsakes me (Hebrews 13:5). Of thinking how I can cast all my anxiety on Him (1 Peter 5:7).

It can be as easy as picking up my Bible and reminiscing through the underlined and highlighted verses

and passages, remembering God's goodness, mercy, and love.

Likewise as Psalm 105:5 urges me to remember the wonders God has done, it's good to talk with family members and friends of the ways God has answered prayers and met needs.

Reminding myself of His faithfulness stirs my heart towards thankfulness.

3. Be Thankful in Everything. Giving thanks in everything can seem like a hard task to accomplish at times, especially in difficult circumstances. Even so, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 directs me to make this choice stating, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

One way our family lived this out was when my husband's job at a church ended rather abruptly. He was the only breadwinner at the time, and this hit us unexpectedly, so we felt tremendous disappointment with what had happened in the situation while combating the uncertainty associated with the loss of income.

Wanting to respond in a way that pleased God and set a godly example for our four young daughters, we looked to express it in a way they would understand and could also be involved in, which resulted in baking a "Thankfulness" cake.

Even though at the time being thankful felt like an opposite kind of reaction to have in such a serious circumstance, doing so made a life-long impression on all of us and surprisingly not only comforted us but also cheered our hearts concerning God's plans for our future.



Day 3 A Prayer for a Thankful Heart

By Debbie Przybylski

My cup overflows with your blessings. Psalm 23:5

It is not easy to give thanks in every circumstance. But when we choose to thank God in the midst of difficulty, it defeats the forces of darkness in the spiritual realm. When we thank God for every gift He has given us even when things are hard, the enemy loses the battle against us. He is stopped in his tracks when we come to God with a thankful heart.

Learn to be thankful for every blessing from God in your life. It is of great significance to Him if in the midst of great trials, we can be thankful. There is a way of looking at life from the standpoint of eternity. The reality of eternal life and eternal glory that far exceeds this life is a priceless treasure. Our afflictions are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

A Prayer for a Thankful Heart

Lord, teach me to offer you a heart of thanksgiving

and praise in all my daily experiences of life. I long to bring pleasure to Your heart daily. Break the power of the enemy in my life. Defeat Him through my sacrifice of praise. Change my outlook and attitude into one of joyful contentment with my present circumstances. I thank You for... [Name a difficult circumstance in your life presently and thank God for it].

Jesus, I want to be like You who obeyed the Father without complaint. You embraced the chains of humanity when You walked this earth. Convict me whenever I complain or compare myself with others. I know that Your truth dwells in a thankful heart.

“I will give thanks to the LORD because of His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens” (Psalm 7:17-18:1). In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Day 4 4 Ways to Cultivate a Thankful Attitude

By Lynette Kittle

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Are there times in your life when because of your circumstances, you don’t feel like there is any reason to give thanks?

If so, you’re not alone, especially in a culture of comparisons and one-upmanship. Many people measure their success by their wealth, jobs, popularity, and possessions.

Yet Scripture explains how it is God’s will for you to be thankful in all circumstances, which means learning to be grateful despite your situation (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

So if you’re having trouble finding reasons to give thanks but want to follow God’s will for you life, how

do you go about changing your outlook?

Below are four ways to cultivate a thankful attitude.

1. Present your concerns to God. Instead of focusing on where your present situation, Philippians 4:6 explains, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Instead of feeling stuck in your circumstances, turn to God and let go of the things weighing you down. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

2. Auto-correct your speech. Take time to listen to what you are saying. If you don’t like what you hear, revise your words. Ephesians 5:4 states, “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse jok-



ing, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Choose to speak words of life rather than trying to mesh in with society’s standard of speech. When negative, sarcastic, or critical words come to mind to say or write, replace them with words of gratefulness.

3. Let God be your means of contentment, not your surroundings. Although the Apostle Paul spent much time in prison, because of his relationship with God, he learned to be content in whatever his circumstance (Philippians 4:11).

Like Paul, look to find your contentment in the faithfulness of God rather than your standing in society. As stated in Hebrews 13:5, “Keep your lives free from

the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”

4. Live your life for God. Rather than focusing on you, decide to serve God in what you say and do. As Colossians 3:17 encourages, “And whatever you do, whether in words or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

As you seek to serve God, set your mind to seek Him as you go about your day. When you do, your outlook will be transformed. Although it will take time, effort, and consistency to redirect your attitude to be grateful in all situations, it will be worth it.

Day 5 What Are You Thankful For?

By Ryan Duncan

I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. Psalm 69:30

A while back, there was an episode of The Simpsons in which the family is celebrating Thanksgiving. When the time came to say grace, Bart Simpson bowed his head and said,

“Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing.”

The first time I saw this clip on TV I remember feeling a mix of emotions. On one hand, I was angry that such cynicism was being shown toward God and a day celebrating thankfulness. On the other hand, I couldn’t help but relate to Bart a little. I was at a time in my life when everything seemed out of control. I had no money, my life felt like it was stuck in neutral, and my future was looking pretty bleak. Why should I be thanking God for anything?

If you’ve ever been in my situation, I want to point you toward a passage of scripture that helped me put things in perspective:

“On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a

village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.” Luke 17:11-19

It’s easy to spend our lives worrying and obsessing over the problems of life. It’s also easy to overlook a blessing in times of need, or forget to be thankful when troubled times have been put to rest. Be sure you don’t become one of the nine lepers, who were so happy to be cured that they forgot who cured them. This Thanksgiving, I encourage you to spend time remembering what God has done in your life.

Whatever your situation may be, count your blessings and take a moment to thank God for them.

Further Reading: Psalm 95:1-6



Day 6

A Prayer to Share a True Heart of Thankfulness

By Maggie Meadows Cooper

When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Ecclesiastes 7:14

It's Thanksgiving season, and I have naturally been thinking of all I am thankful for. Family, friends, jobs, material blessings, etc. Those are all things I am absolutely thankful for, but it all just seems so predictable. Too routine. Too blah.

Saying I'm thankful for my family, etc. just doesn't seem like enough for some reason. It doesn't seem honest enough. It doesn't show the reality of my days. It doesn't show the depth of my depravity. It is all just too superficial. You may get what I'm saying. You may not. But hear my heart, here.

I have gotten to know a number of souls in the past few years who live day to day through situations and relationships I can't even begin to understand. Their hearts and minds carry burdens that I can't even fathom because, in all honesty, I have led a fairly charmed life.

There have been hiccups along the way, some unfortunate choices, and some regrets. However, through it all, I knew, without question, that I was loved and forgiven and accepted.

But some whom I speak of have never had the security I feel. They don't have "their people" who they can say with absolute certainty will always love them and stand by them as long as they are able. They don't know, without a doubt, that there is a God who loves them and will never leave them because no one in their life has modeled a love like that.

It's because of them that thankfulness takes on a new meaning this year. I can't just give a blanket statement anymore. I need to tell them and others exactly what I am thankful for and Who is responsible for every good thing in my life. Because I can't

guarantee them family or friends who will always be there. But I can guarantee them that there is a Savior who loves them and will never let them go. And we, as Believers, can help introduce them to Him....the One a true heart of thankfulness comes from.

Here are three things to consider when you share Jesus, not only this Thanksgiving season, but throughout the year:

1. Talk to the Lord and proclaim His name out loud.

When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the dead he said: "Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me." - John 11:41-42

Jesus didn't need to talk to the Lord out loud. He did it so those around Him would hear and recognize and acknowledge that this miracle came from God. If He had not, they might have given credit to his human flesh.

It is our turn to acknowledge, out loud, publicly, for all to hear, where all of our thankfulness is due. When we do that, when we claim the name of Jesus and share with others about all that He has done in our lives, it can't help but resonate with those who might not know Him yet.

2. Remember to thank Him in the good and the bad.

If we can share thankfulness in the good things, awesome. But if we want to make even more of an impression... share thankfulness for the hard things too.

"When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other." Ecclesiastes 7:14

I am thankful for the times the Lord has brought me to my knees in tears because they humbled me. I



am thankful for the health issues I've had from time to time because they show me my humanity. I am thankful for dealing with disobedience in my children because it makes me take a good hard look at myself when the Lord reveals my own sin nature.

When opportunities arise in everyday conversation, when you are sharing life with others, talk about the One who gives you life. Say His name out loud for others to hear. If others hear us talk about the Lord outside of church-away from the Christian setting where we are "supposed to"- it may mean more. If we show others that we think enough of Jesus to give Him credit for our good days and trust Him to guide our steps in the hard things too, it may plant seeds that will grow in time.

3. Keep it simple and speak gently.

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect," 1 Peter 3:15

The majority of the people you talk to are not Bible scholars. Many may have never even read one. You

don't need fancy answers and highfalutin talk to impress anyone. You just need to speak your heart, simply. Go ahead and have an idea of what you would tell someone about the Lord and all He has done in your life, so that the next time you have an opportunity, you don't back down because you feel unprepared. Don't believe the lies Satan may whisper in your ear, that you are not qualified enough to share about the Lord or that you are undeserving of that opportunity. You are a child of the King and He wants you to share! And finally, speak gently because you never know what someone has been through or what negative experiences they may have had with "church."

Dear Jesus,

Help me take time this Thanksgiving to be still, thoughtfully consider all you've done in my life, and praise you for the good things as well as the hard things. Give me courage, wisdom, opportunity, and the words to share you with someone who needs you as much as I do. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and never letting me go. You are the reason for the hope that I have.

In Your Mighty Name,
Amen

Day 7 A Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving *By Tim Brister*

Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, LORD, preserve both people and animals. Psalm 36:5-6

This prayer below is taken from a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions in a book called *The Valley of Vision* (highly recommended). It is almost always at my side in my personal devotion and study time. This prayer/meditation has been pressed on me in recent days...

Often I find the prayers of such a Puritan expressing my heart in a more suitable manner than I ever

could. Meditating on such little prayers often causes me to find more "meat" for thought than most sermons today. O for ten thousand tongues to sing of the ten thousand pleasures He brings!

O My God,
Thou fairest, greatest, first of all objects,
my heart admires, adores, loves thee,
for my little vessel is as full as it can be,
and I would pour out all that fullness before thee
in ceaseless flow.

When I think upon and converse with thee
ten thousand delightful thoughts spring up,
ten thousand sources of pleasure are unsealed,



ten thousand refreshing joys spread over my heart,
crowding into every moment of happiness.

I bless thee for the soul thou hast created,
for adorning it, sanctifying it,
though it is fixed in barren soil;
for the body thou has given me,
for preserving its strength and vigour,
for providing sense to enjoy delights,
for the ease and freedom of my limbs,
for hands, eyes, ears that do thy bidding;
for thy royal bounty providing my daily support,
for a full table and overflowing cup,

for appetite, taste, sweetness,
for social joys of relatives and friends,
for ability to serve others,
for a heart that feels sorrows and necessities,
for a mind to care for my fellow-men,
for opportunities of spreading happiness around,
for loved ones in the joys of heaven,
for my own expectation of seeing thee clearly.

I love thee above the powers of language to express,
for what thou art to thy creatures.
Increase my love, O my God, through time and eter-
nity.

Day 8

Living Your Thanksgiving

By Laura MacCorkle

Make a glad sound to the Lord, all the earth. Give worship to the Lord with joy; come before him with a song. Be certain that the Lord is God; it is he who has made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep to whom he gives food. Come into his doors with joy, and into his house with praise; give him honour, blessing his name. For the Lord is good, and his mercy is never-ending; his faith is unchanging through all generations. Psalm 100, *The Bible in Basic English*

When I was younger, Thanksgiving was pretty much just another holiday—a day when I got to eat a whole lot of good food and nibble on all the sugary stuff I wanted.

In fact, one year it only took me, my sister, two forks and about 30 minutes to finish off the rest of the pecan pie, while everyone else was either glued to the football game or snoring in a recliner. We had no regrets, and I'm pretty sure we'd do it again.

But besides being a holiday when I had permission to indulge, Thanksgiving was also a word my grandfather always incorporated at the end of his prayers: "And with thanksgiving, in Jesus' name, Amen." I always wondered why he used a word that made me

think of cornucopias and construction-paper turkeys; but he had the Th.D. in our family, and I did not. So I knew he must have had a good reason.

Years later, I think I now understand. In that one word, he was saying "Thank You for giving." You, being God. From my grandfather's example, I see that thanksgiving was more than a one-day family gathering. It was and is a way of living, a daily act of expressing gratitude to our Maker who first gave to us.

At this time of year, I sit and think about when I last thanked God for giving me anything—let alone his son, Jesus Christ. I'm ashamed to admit that I don't remember. But I know that I want to make such gratefulness as prominent as the giant turkey on the table and see thanksgiving become a way of life.

There's no better thanksgiving wisdom than that found in God's Word, specifically *The Old One-Hundredth* (Psalm 100). If you open your Bible and take a look at this passage, you'll see a notation under the heading: "A psalm. For giving thanks."

Following that, there are many directives listed that can help us live our Thanksgiving...



1. Make a glad sound to the Lord
2. Give worship to the Lord with joy
3. Come before him with a song
4. Be certain that the Lord is God
5. Come into his doors with joy, and into his house with praise
6. [Remember] for the Lord is good... his mercy is never-ending... his faith is unchanging

Reflect on Psalm 100 today, and ask the Lord how he

can help you really live out Thanksgiving each day of the year.

Your celebration with friends or loved ones is probably already planned by this point. But here is your Thanksgiving Day challenge: take time to “live your Thanksgiving” and call or visit someone who is alone or having a hard time (for whatever reason) on this holiday.

Further Reading: Psalm 107:1, Psalm 150, Eph. 2:8

Day 9 Thanksgiving for Richer or Poorer

By Shawn McEvoy

Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honored them. James 1:9

The rich eat ham,
The poor eat tuna.
Doesn't take as long to cook,
So we eat soona.
~Jay Henze

The words of that heretofore unknown poem were uttered by my lifelong best friend sometime around our senior year of high school. He conjured it out of thin air while I was spending the night at his house. It was the result of one of those “I’m so tired I’m laughing at anything” sessions you’d often experience with close friends around midnight.

It was also the result of Jay’s enduring awareness of the socio-economic differences between himself and many of his friends, like me, from the affluent north side of town. So whenever I think of ham, tuna, or Jay, I often think of richness and poorness as well.

Recently, thanks to a fantastic tour around the Missionary Learning Center, I was thinking about missions and outreach. It struck me as interesting that whenever a mission of mercy or evangelism is commissioned, it tends to be to an area where there is a high concentration of poverty, whether it’s to

India, Mexico, or inner-city Philadelphia. Well, yes, as it should be.

After all, Christ commanded us, if we loved Him, to tend to His lambs (John 21:15-17). James 2:15-16 admonishes us not to ignore those in need of food or clothing. Paul and the Apostles started churches among those who were poor (Acts 9:36; 10:4). Poverty was crippling in the time of Christ and so it continues to be now. The very fact that Jay had a roof over his head and the fish he despised came in a can rather than him having to catch it made him one of the wealthiest persons on the planet. So the holidays are certainly a time to think about- nay, physically assist- those less fortunate than ourselves (2 Corinthians 9:9).

Then again, are we missing something?

Consider James 1:9- “Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honored them.” There are lots of ways to be poor, and Jesus told us they brought about blessing in the long run (Matthew 5:3-12). Those poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Those mourning loved ones will be comforted. Those who make peace rather than seeking their own profit will be called sons of God, Who chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith (James 2:5). 2 Corinthians 6:10 states: “Our hearts ache, but we



always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.”

And what about the rich?

The news there is not so good. Jesus said it’s very difficult for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of heaven. Those who love their life too much find it hard to lose it. James reminds us it’s the rich who “oppress us and drag us into court, blaspheming the fair name by which we’ve been called (James 2:6-7).” The word “miserable” has at its root the word “miser.” The love of money isn’t just the source of evil, but can also contribute to depression and dissatisfaction.

So... doesn’t that mean that the rich have just as many spiritual needs, if not more, than the poor? Who will go to them? Who will train them in the joy of giving their money away and not living by comparison to others? What mission trips are planned?

I contend that untold legions of us are making such a trip this very month, back home to our families and friends, where a big ham might fill the center of the table, people will put on their fineries, and a lot of the talk will focus on the daily drudgeries of keeping our precious lives in working order to cover up the hole that’s getting bigger in the soul.

We might spend a few minutes at the table saying how we’re thankful we’re not like others, or that we

have our health, or that our family is with us- before we stuff ourselves, stare blankly at the Detroit Lions (of all things) to avoid looking at each other, or fall asleep. You probably know someone for whom Thanksgiving is an unwelcome chore, a painful experience of dodging rejection, annoyance, questions of future or romance, and Uncle Jim-Bob.

Or, if you’re truly rich, there will be genuine thanks, true giving, heartfelt prayers, and corporate worship. Regardless of income level.

Whatever the case in your gathering, let me encourage you to take the love of Christ with you and accept the difficult challenge of bringing it to the wealthy this Thanksgiving. Jesus said a camel fitting through a needle’s-eye was difficult, not impossible (thank goodness for most of us in the U.S.).

While you’re together, try to figure out a way your clan can come together to do something for the impoverished. Without that outpouring, the warm comfort of wealth can grow stale and dry. Meanwhile, the next time you think on the cloud of poverty and those who suffer at its chill, remember that, at least in the biblical view, it can carry a silver lining of comfort, inheritance, peace, and, I suppose, eating soona. And if those elements are present at your table, then you have a cornucopia indeed.

Further Reading: 1 Timothy 6:6-11, Matthew 5

Day 10 A Child’s Thanksgiving By Katherine Britton

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. 1 Chronicles 29:13

Sometimes it takes a children’s sermon to remind me what’s important. Thanksgiving should be a simple affair, but my adult brain had overcomplicated this heart attitude without much effort. The past few

months had been filled with many moments where I had said, “So far, so good” but doubted the future. The provision at hand was enough, to be sure. Yet I wondered if what looked like adequate provision today would diminish over time. I doubted God’s intention to replenish what I used up.

On Sunday, I listened to the children’s sermon with special attention when the kids talked about the Mayflower and the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiv-



ing. Each child quickly displayed their knowledge of Pilgrims and Indians- including Squanto- and incredible dynamic that played out that harvest season. Their teacher slowly enlarged their descriptions to include the previous winter's deaths, the desperately short food supply, the hope of a new planting season, and the summer's withering drought. By the time harvest rolled around, crops had been gathered in- not in abundance, but certainly sufficient compared to the previous year. The Pilgrims knew it, and reveled in the adequacy of their harvest. Edward Winslow, one of the only primary sources on the day, wrote this about it:

"Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the Company almost a week, at which time amongst other Recreations, we exercised our Arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five Deer, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on our Governor, and upon the Captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of

our plenty."

Almost four hundred years later, I stand convicted by Winslow's words. The man had stared death in the face, and had little idea what future lay in store for the Plymouth colonists. In spite of that, he had literally tasted God's provision and found himself satisfied. The meal was so filling, he wished that even if "it be not always so plentiful... we often wish you partakers in our plenty."

I wish I had Winslow's faith, to happily look at today's provision and consider each simple wonder. We are "so far from want" in those moments. We serve a faithful God who is more than enough for all of our needs. It's like the praise song says:

All of You
is more than enough for all of me
For every thirst and every need
You satisfy me with Your love
And all I have in You
Is more than enough

Happy Thanksgiving!

As you tally up the things that make you thankful, consider Edward Winslow's observations of God's faithfulness. Do you see the abundant life laid out before you?

Day 11

Abounding in Thanksgiving in a World of Grumbling

By Mike Pohlman

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. Colossians 2:6-7

My family and I just completed our first full week in our new home in Richmond, Virginia after leaving Los Angeles to begin my new job. And if I'm honest I cannot say I've been "abounding in thanksgiving" over the last several days. No. In fact, "abounding

in grumbling" may be the more accurate phrase to describe my disposition of late. I've grumbled about the weather, traffic, leaves, the movers and a myriad of other things petty and not-so-petty. None of this grumbling, however, has been constructive or justified. And, most importantly, it's been sinful.

To help combat this steady bombardment of grumbling I corralled our children the other night for a family time of thanksgiving. You've probably prac-



ticed this exercise many times as well: go from person-to-person and highlight things you're thankful for (it's tough to grumble when you pause to consider the many blessings in your life).

It took my nine-year-old Samuel some time to get warmed up, but eventually, he offered a short list of things he's thankful for, including our new church. Anna was next. What would our seven-year-old daughter express gratitude for? Her new neighbor friends across the street and the Bible. Good stuff. Finally, it was John's turn. He echoed his big brother on some things and agreed with Anna that the neighbors are great, and then with the zeal of most six-year-old boys who love sports, Johnny thanked God for his new basketball hoop out front (and proceeded to remind me of how he beat me in "21" over the weekend, 21 to 17). As Julia left to put our newborn down for the night, I shared with the kids several things I was thankful for. But it wasn't until the next day that I realized the inadequacy of my list.

While I voiced gratitude for God generally, I failed to highlight specific attributes of God that, when I consider them, cause me to "abound in thanksgiving." Driving to work the next morning I found myself asking, "What is it about God that I am most grateful for?"

The one attribute of God that flooded my heart and mind was His providence—the fact that He orchestrates everything in my life for His glory and my good. It's the promise of Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he

also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

In his helpful book, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*, Jerry Bridges applies Romans 8:28 to the sin of ingratitude. He counsels: "The meaning is that God causes all things to work together for good; for 'things'—that is, circumstances—do not work together for good themselves. Rather, God directs the outcome of those circumstances for our good." And what is the "good" God is working? Christlikeness. Indeed, all of our circumstances God uses as a means of our sanctification. I began to abound in thanksgiving as I visualized God as the great conductor over my circumstances, using them as an instrument for my growth in grace.

This Thanksgiving holiday I want me and my family to be "abounding in thanksgiving." And for this to happen I know being thankful for God in a merely general sense will not suffice. We need to meditate on some particular glories of our great God—not least of which is His sweet providence over our lives. For this I am most grateful.

Take a moment this Thanksgiving and ask yourself, "What specific attribute of God am I grateful for?" Perhaps you'll recall His love or mercy or grace or forgiveness or patience or wrath or providence. Challenge your mind to meditate on, and prayerfully consider, some particular glory of God as a means of abounding in thanksgiving

Further Reading: Psalm 63:3, Lamen. 3:22, Colossians 2:13-15, Ephesians 5:20, 1 Thess. 5:18

Day 12 Remembering Thanksgiving

By Ryan Duncan

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16

Thanksgiving has got to be one of the most underrated

holidays in America. Once Halloween has finished and the Jack-O-Lanterns are all put away, the Christmas frenzy takes over. Holiday specials start playing on TV, stores decorate their aisle with snowflakes and mistletoes, and people take the chance to hang Christmas lights while there's no snow. It's not all



that surprising really; the Christmas spirit can be pretty infectious, it's also a lot harder to profit off a holiday that emphasizes thankfulness.

I feel like this is how many people, even Christians, treat the idea of thankfulness in general. I don't know about you, but I'm much faster at coming up with a list of things I want for Christmas than a list of things I'm grateful for. It's also pretty easy for our prayers to become filled with phrases like "God, please give me...", "God, please help me...", or "God, I need...". We get so tied up in what God can do for us, how Christ can impact our lives, that we forget how to be thankful for what we have. Luckily, God is good at reminding us what's important.

A few months ago, I was leaving for work in the morning when I was greeted by my apartment's cleaning lady.

"Good morning," she said, "How you doin'?" I thought about the question for a second and, trying to sound funny, said, "Well, it's a Wednesday."

"Now, now," she said, "It's a good day. Do you know why? Because you're walking, and you're breathing." You can't really argue with that, can you?

So, this Thanksgiving, amidst the mayhem of football games and turkey dinners, I encourage you to take a moment to pray and simply thank Christ for the things in your life. Whether it's for home, family, or a hot meal, remember to give thanks, for God is good.

During this fall season, remember to give thanks for your blessings.

Further Reading: Psalm 69:30

Day 13 Being Thankful in "All" Things By Debbie McDaniel

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:18

I must be honest, sometimes it's the "all" in that verse that gets me. Most of us can be thankful, for lots of things, at lots of times, but in "all" circumstances? That can be tough.

What about when you find yourself suffering illness, or defeat, or you're walking through huge loss... what about when a loved one leaves this world too soon and you still can't see past your tears... or when you've been praying for your prodigal loved one to come home and it seems like the prayers are unanswered... what about when you're discouraged, disillusioned, and struggling with disbelief... or when you're overwhelmed, overextended, and just fighting being over-stressed... what about when the needs mount high and the way doesn't look clear... or when people are cruel, life seems unfair, and the enemy's breathing down your back... what about when the storms come, and the car breaks down, or the air conditioner stops working on a holiday weekend

(true story)...

Yes, these are the "all" things that can be hard to find gratitude in, whether it's huge losses or just life irritations. But God's word never changes to fit our circumstances. His Truth rises above our circumstance, so that we can too. He doesn't say give thanks "for it", but "in it all," for He knows He's building more deeply into our lives and character than He could ever build without the hard times.

We're gaining strength. We're gaining perseverance. We're being reminded that true joy is never based on how we feel or our outside situations. We're understanding that God's ways are bigger, His thoughts are higher, and we can be assured that He holds us in His hands.

And He is with us.

Always.

No matter what you might be facing, the good news



is this, you woke up. He's given us today. And if we're still here, living and breathing, may our every breath bring honor to Him.

Be assured my friend, you never fight the battles alone. Stay strong. Choose joy. Choose to be grateful in it "all." For He is building greatness. He's working things out for good. He hears our prayers, He sees all, and knows all. He has purpose for our pain, and brings hope for our tomorrows...

Grace to you this day.

Recognize today that the most difficult challenge you're facing right now, may actually be a greater blessing, as God is working in and through your life in powerful ways. No matter how hard, choose to give Him thanks, in "all" things.

Further Reading: Psalm 118:24, Ephesians 5:20, Psalm 100:1-5

Day 14

How to Have a Thankful Heart through Difficult Times

By Veronica Neffinger

For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:15-16

Colorful, feather-shaped pieces of construction paper sit on the kitchen table, along with cut-outs of turkey-shaped bodies and body parts--beak, feet, etc. My mother brings over the magic markers and we are ready to begin making our yearly Thanksgiving turkeys.

This was a tradition my mother started when I was very young, and we participated every year that I remember until I left for college. We would assemble our turkeys and then write one thing we were thankful for on each feather.

Looking back, I remember it being so simple, especially in the early years: family, friends, pets, God, food, a warm house. In high school things became a bit more theological, but yet they still flowed fairly easily off my pen: salvation, God's mercy, spiritual mentors.

Holiday traditions like these are fun. They build memories and focus on the blessings of life; but

sometimes, especially as adults, it is harder to easily list what we are thankful for. Either it seems too cliché, or we can find it difficult to be sincere about our thankfulness when perhaps times are very hard.

My Thanksgivings after high school have been much less carefree. Adult thoughts of school, jobs, finances, and traveling can weigh heavy on us even as we attempt to drum up feelings of thankfulness on its namesake holiday.

Crosswalk contributor Debra Fileta shares her story of recognizing that Thanksgiving is about more than merely listing your blessings. "What if being thankful meant surrendering our struggles, too?" she asks.

"I am proclaiming right now that in times of suffering, a heart of gratitude means more than just saying 'thank you,'" Fileta says. It means believing that God is who he says he is. Believing that he is good, that he is love, and that he is for me. Believing that he never changes, that he never fails, and that he is working all things for what is good."

God understands that thankfulness is not always (or usually) a gut-reaction for us. Even Jesus struggled to thankfully accept God's Plan of salvation while He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, preparing to go through the agony of the cross.



“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him,” Luke 22:42-42 records.

This passage tells us two things:

First, there is value in going through the motions even if the feelings aren’t there. Choosing to thank God even if you don’t feel like it and are actually more stressed than thankful can be an important first step in having your heart opened to true gratitude.

Secondly, the passage says angels ministered to Christ and helped strengthen Him for what he was about to undergo. We have someone even better than God’s entire host of angels to aid us--Jesus Himself.

Though life may bring us trials, we are not alone. And though offering up thanksgiving in the midst of

those trials may be a sacrifice, it is a rewarding one.

“When I look at those pieces of my life that look overwhelmingly difficult or disappointing and can thank God for whatever good He plans to bring out of them, I am offering a sacrifice of praise,” says Crosswalk.com contributor April Motl. “When I can entrust what looks like something that is broken beyond repair to my heavenly Father’s goodness and love, I am offering a sacrifice of praise.”

This world and the life we live in it is often a thankfulness-stealer. But in Christ, we know that we can “Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16) because the trials and hard times are not a test, but another reason to trust God who is working all for our good and has already given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

What prevents you from being thankful this Thanksgiving? How can you seek to have thankfulness through the trials?

Day 15

Why Being Thankful Is a Powerful Way to Live Free

By Debbie McDaniel

The Lord is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him. Psalm 28:7

We have so much to be grateful for in this life, every single day. But reality is that sometimes constant life demands, battles, and worries give more room to defeat than to a heart of thanks. Or we forget, in the midst of busyness and pressures, just to pause and give thanks for all that God has done and continues to do in our lives.

Sometimes it really is a sacrifice to offer praise and thanks. We may not feel like it. We’re struggling. We’re weary. Or maybe, we feel like He let us down. We think God seems distant, like he’s far away, or doesn’t really care about what’s troubling us. Painful life blows and losses might have recently sent us

spiraling.

But here’s what can make a lasting difference. We have a choice, every day, to give him thanks. And with a heart of thanksgiving, we realize that no matter what we face, God doesn’t just work to change our situations and help us through our problems. He does more. He changes our hearts. His power, through hearts of gratitude and focused minds on Him, releases the grip our struggles have over us. We’re strengthened by His peace, refueled by His joy.

No matter what our current situation, or the struggles we may be facing, here’s what choosing to be thankful does:

It gets our eyes off ourselves, and helps us to focus back on God.



It reminds us we're not in control, but that we serve a Mighty God who is. It keeps us in a place of humility and dependency on Him, as we recognize how much we need Him.

It helps us to recognize we have so much to be thankful for, even all the little things, which often we may forget to thank Him for. It takes our attention off our problems and helps us instead to reflect on the goodness of His many blessings.

It reminds us that God is the Giver of all good gifts. We were never intended to be fully self-sufficient in this life. A grateful heart reminds us that ultimately God is our Provider, that all blessings and gifts are graciously given to us by His hand.

A heart of gratitude leaves no room for complaining. For it is impossible to be truly thankful and filled with negativity and ungratefulness at the same time. It makes the enemy flee. The forces of darkness can't stand to be around hearts that give thanks and honor to God. Our praise and thanksgiving will make

them flee.

It opens the door for continued blessings. It invites His presence. God loves to give good gifts to His children. He delights in our thankfulness and pours out His Spirit and favor over those who give honor and gratitude to Him.

Maybe you're in a hard place right now. Maybe you feel like God has left you on your own, to fend for yourself, or the battle seems too hard. Maybe there's never enough money left at the end of the month and you can't figure out how to make things work. No matter what, in it all, be assured that God is with you and He cares. Choose a heart of gratefulness today. Make a list of all that God has blessed and filled your life with, that it's been easy to take for granted at times. Trust He knows what concerns you and is at work even now, to bring you through this uncertain season. Thank Him for providing all you need.

Further Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Psalms 136, Psalms 103:1-5

Day 16

Why I Give Thanks to God

By Keneesha Saunders-Liddie

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. 1 Chronicles 16:34

There are times that, because of God's extraordinary goodness, I overflow with thanks. One such time, I was about 13 years old when I got off at the wrong stop while traveling to see my aunt. It was supposed to be a simple and very short trip across the ocean, from one island to the next. But I got off at the wrong port.

At the time I didn't realize that the island had two ports, and I picked the wrong one. It was around 3 in the afternoon, and everyone who disembarked with me was picked up. I didn't think anything about it until I realized that it was about 6 pm. At the time, the little flip phone I had was unable to make calls, and I wasn't receiving calls either.

I sat there until it was about 10 pm. I tried calling my aunt's house several times with a payphone until I ran out of quarters. A family drove into the lot and exchanged their vehicle for another one. When the mom spotted me sitting there, she stopped the car and asked me, "Do you know where the person that was supposed to pick you up lives?"

Despite my fear and the gnawing in my belly, I decided to accept the lift. They took me straight there.

That night before I went to sleep (after being scolded by every possible family member from near and far), I thanked God for his goodness.

Anything could have happened to me. But God. I was sitting by the side of a closed building while the sun descended. It was literally a dead end, just a parking



lot full of cars. And yet, God's love is enduring. It is particular. Do you understand what that means? It means that, he loves you. And his love never ends.

All your earthly relationships, the love of your mama or husband or fiancé will never, ever be able to compare to the enduring love of God.

This is why I give thanks. When I look back on his goodness over my life that night, I have to give my God thanks and praise. I could have easily become a statistic. I would have been another unsolved murder or just disappeared without a trace, but God.

Look at your life and honestly ask yourself, "Are you truly thankful for all that God has done, is doing and will continue to do for you?" If we are honest, we know that the answer is no. Every day is a gift, an opportunity that we have been given to thank God for

his goodness and his enduring love.

It pays to remember that there is none who is good and no one that seeks after God (Romans 3:10-11). This is why we shouldn't downplay or take for granted the goodness of God. He is a good God and he alone can carry the title of good. He is the definition of the word 'good' and he is our father. I'm thankful for all that he has done and will continue to do, are you? Then give him the glory that is due him.

Dear Jesus,

Right now, I want you to know just how thankful I am that you are my God. I am so grateful that you are so good to me and that the love you have for me is enduring. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 17 When Do You Thank God? By Anne Peterson

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

God tells us godliness with contentment is great gain, but being content is not always easy to do (1 Timothy 6:6). It's often difficult because we're looking around at others, wondering if what we have compares with what they have.

Paul said he learned how to be content in whatever state he found himself (Philippians 4:11). Paul didn't just talk about it, he showed us. There he was in prison, all shackled up, and what was he doing? Having a pity party? No, he was singing praises to God. Too often we choose to praise God after has answered our prayers. And while there's nothing wrong with thanking God for answered prayer, we miss out, if that's the only time we praise him with thanksgiving. God is good. It's impossible for God to be anything less than good. It's his character.

I often think of when Jesus visited Mary and Martha

after their brother, Lazarus died. Even though Jesus went there after Lazarus was already dead, he still had a plan.

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (John 11:41-42).

I always found it interesting that Jesus thanked God for hearing his prayer before Lazarus took one step. Years ago, I made a mental note of that. God is worthy of praise. We don't have to wait to see if God delivers on something we ask him before we thank him. And if God chooses to say, "No," that doesn't mean God is less worthy of our praise.

God's Word tells us it's impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). When we choose to be thankful and praise God at all times, we are exercising faith. We are praising God because we know God is capable of doing everything we ask and then



so much more. When we thank God, we are pleasing our heavenly Father.

God is worthy of praise. Just because he's God. It pleases God when we praise him ahead of time because we're saying, God, whether or not you choose to answer my prayers, I praise you for who you are. I thank you for all you've given me. And Lord, even when you choose to say "no" to my requests, I know you have your reasons. You know the beginning from the end. Your thoughts are much higher than my thoughts and your ways are higher too (Isaiah 55:8-9). And Lord, if you withhold something I'm asking you for, then maybe the thing is not good for me, or the timing is not right. I know it's not good because you've said you will not withhold any good thing from me (Psalm 84:11). God, I trust you.

We can choose to be thankful in all things. Simply because God is all wise and he allows what he does with his wisdom. And when things look like they will never work out, those impossible times are God's specialty. The things that are impossible with man are possible with God (Luke 18:27). I love it when God does what seems impossible, because there's no question at all who did it. And when we get dis-

couraged because of our circumstances, God promises that in all things he can work for the good, for us (Romans 8:28).

We can rejoice always because we know the Almighty God, the everlasting Father. We can pray continually, because he invites us to bring our cares to Him, because he cares for us (1Peter 5:7). And we can give thanks in all circumstances because it is God's will. We also know none of God's plans can be thwarted (Job 42:2). I'm pretty certain that when Paul sang to the Lord from behind bars, it was one of the most beautiful praises ever heard. And we can do the same.

Safely Through

"I don't know which way to go,"
I told the Lord, today.
He answered, "That's the problem,
You keep trying to find your way.
My thoughts are different than your thoughts,
My ways are higher, too.
So you just need to take my hand;
I'll see you safely through."

Day 18 A Prayer for Thanksgiving Day

By Debbie McDaniel

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness, come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God, it is he who made us, and we are his, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise, give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good; his love endures forever, his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:1-5

All across our nation, Thanksgiving is a day that we set aside in order to do one thing.

Be thankful.

And usually what goes along with it, is lots of food, family and friends, laughter and fun, times of giving to others in need, maybe some football, or traditions that you've recognized through long years.

And sometimes too, there is also loneliness. And struggle. Or deep loss. Feelings of hurt and painful circumstances that you're still trying to hurdle over.

Whatever you're facing this Thanksgiving Day, in the midst of all of it, may we remember again that God gives us the opportunity each and every day, to give worship and thanks to Him. Every morning He gives us breath, is His invitation to come joyfully into His Presence. He reminds us that He alone is God and



we belong to Him. He assures us that His plans in our lives are for good, that his love covers us securely, and His faithfulness extends from generation to generation.

No matter what, He's given us so many reasons to choose thankfulness and joy this day. Let's do what the Psalmist of this great chapter says:

Shout for joy.

Worship the Lord with gladness.

Come before Him with joyful songs.

Know that He is God.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to Him and praise His name.

Recognize His goodness, love, and faithfulness, through all the generations of our family.

Dear God,

Thank you for your goodness and for your blessings over our lives. Forgive us for when we don't thank you enough, for who you are, for all that you do, for all that you've given. We're so grateful to you for your amazing love and care, for your mercy and grace, for always working on our behalf, even behind the scenes when we're unaware. Thank you that you are always with us and will never leave us, even through loss and the most difficult of times. Thank you for your incredible sacrifice so that we might have freedom and life. Help us to set our eyes and our hearts on you afresh. Renew our spirits, fill us with your peace and joy, this Thanksgiving Day and every day.

We give you thanks and praise, for You alone are worthy!

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 19 The Lesson of Lasagna

By Katherine Peters Britton

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us." 1 Samuel 7:12

Life in the Peters household produced a frenetic Christmas just about every year, but that year eclipsed them all. I was eleven years old when two game-changers happened in quick succession. First, in early November, my youngest sister was born. My twin brothers hadn't yet turned two, so daily life included diaper changes for three kids in addition to the newborn routine. Just a month later, my dad was ferrying me home from a Christmas cookie exchange when a truck broadsided us. Multiple injuries kept Dad laid up for a couple of weeks, right in the midst of Christmas parties and preparation.

The body of Christ carried many burdens for my overwhelmed family during the crazy season that followed. Friends cleaned the house, washed laundry, babysat so my exhausted mother could nap, put lights on our Christmas tree, took us kids Christmas

shopping, and more. Even as a kid, I noticed how many people set aside their holiday bustle to lend a hand.

What I remember best, though, is the lasagna.

Church members consistently supplied us with hot meals when we would otherwise have eaten cold cereal, given the circumstances. I remember lots and lots of casseroles during the Christmas season, and- I must embarrassingly admit- my childish tastes invited me to turn up my nose at many of them. Especially the lasagna, which I barely tolerated in the best of times. During those two months, we choked down veggie lasagna that I thought tasted like printer paper, picked at lasagna surfeited with cottage cheese (I still despise cottage cheese), rejoiced over meat-lovers lasagna, and tried to get away with eating just the garlic bread someone brought as a side dish. Lord bless the folks that brought us that signature casserole, but after New Years I never wanted to see lasagna again. Ever.



Of course, the years have chugged along, I swapped out my last name, and I reticently reversed course on lasagna. The casserole has that sweetly sentimental quality of Grandma's cookies now, always reminding me of those crazy two months that began with a birth and closed with a year's end. It's my "edible Ebenezer," if you will. I know that might sound flippant, but I can't help but remember how God provided for my family during a rough patch when I smell that smell. To me, lasagna will always be synonymous with a church's love.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving, when food and memories intertwine so closely, look around for the Ebenezer stones in your own life. What past events can you point to and say, "Yes, the Lord helped us there." Tell your family and friends the stories of God's grace and provision, so they too will "forget none of his benefits" (Psalms 103:2). We serve a faithful God- let's remember to look back on those markers.

Day 20

How to Turn Pain into Gratitude

By Alisha Headley

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

My older brother passed away one week before my 30th birthday. He passed away from a rare form of cancer that he battled for a short six months before he was gone. He was young and had so much life ahead of him. He had married his high school sweetheart and had two healthy boys.

One of the many things I admired about him during his battle with cancer is he somehow found gratitude in the pain. And I'm not just talking about physical pain from the cancer eating away at his body. But also, the pain he was experiencing when he was at the point where he knew he was going to die. The pain of having to say goodbye to his loved ones as well as goodbye to all his future dreams and life he was building. But somehow, he was able to display in those six tortuous months of battling the cancer, that there is always something to be grateful for in any situation.

Gratitude

Just as today's Scripture mentions, we are encouraged to "be thankful in all circumstances." We all know life is far from perfect as we live in a fallen world. Some days are better than other days. And some seasons turn into very long suffering seasons

where there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

So, what does it look like to be grateful in our daily lives? Here are some ways to accomplish such gratitude:

1. Gratitude begins by acknowledging who God is and what He has done. This is not dependent on your outcome of your situation nor is it dependent on another person. It's solely dependent on God as your Maker, Redeemer, and Father of your life and all He has done.
2. A grateful person is humble and focused on God. It's so easy to focus on your situation vs on God since your situation is probably staring you in the face. When going through a circumstance that looks hopeless, remember to fix your focus back on God. Humbly come before him with your situation and focus on Him rather than the pain you are experiencing.
3. Do not take for granted the small and ordinary daily blessings. If you're sitting in traffic, be thankful you have a car. If your husband is working another late night, be grateful your husband is providing and leading your family. If you are not happy with your body, be grateful you are alive to see another day. If you dislike your current job, be grateful you are not unemployed. Just as my brother said-- there is



ALWAYS something to be grateful for in any situation – even the ordinary ones.

4. Be grateful you are going through a trial. Yes, you read that right. Scripture states “when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.” James 1:2 How many times did you go through a trial, but come out stronger on the other side? It might hurt while going through it but it produces character and faith. So, when your next trial comes, I encourage you to see it as an opportunity for growth.

5. Start your day by thanking God. I once heard someone say, ‘what if what you woke up today with what you thanked God for yesterday’. It not

only brings your heart before the Lord in a state of worship, but it changes your perspective for the day. Rather than thinking of what you are already missing when you wake up to fulfill you that day, you are starting your day in gratitude for the things you already do have.

Although I miss my brother terribly, I’ve been able to turn my pain of missing him into gratitude. I am grateful that I knew Him for the short years I had with him on this earth. Grateful for the years I did spend with him versus the years I am now spending without him. Grateful that he taught me the true meaning of gratitude. I encourage you in whatever situation you are facing, to take the steps to turn your pain into gratitude.

Day 21

Romans 8:28 Doesn’t Mean Giving Thanks with a Plastic Smile

By Alex Crain

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

Catastrophes like earthquakes, hurricanes, and even terrorist attacks remind us that, indeed, we live in a sin-cursed world. Not only do tragedies like these cause many to lose their lives, they often leave countless others in their wake, roiling in doubt and disbelief. The horrors of human suffering can stain our minds and souls and often obscure our vision of the God who is there. How are we supposed to respond?

Closer to home, we experience the curse of sin in personal ways through losses or disappointments that grieve the heart. We may wonder in all honesty at such times what verses like Romans 8:28 mean. Does Christ call His followers to simply put on a plastic smile and somehow grin and bear it?

Hardly.

Francis Schaeffer offers a helpful explanation for this dilemma in the first chapter of his classic book, *True Spirituality*. In fact, he says that a proper grasp of Romans 8:28 is crucial to understanding the world.

First of all, he takes care to point out that the Bible’s view of life in the world is clear-eyed and realistic: At the Fall of man, everything became abnormal. The whole world is not what God made it to be. Therefore, Scripture verses like Romans 8:28 cannot be calling us to think...

“... that in some magical way everything is really fine when it isn’t. Rather, we are to say ‘thank You Lord’ knowing that God will somehow bring good ultimately, though we may not know how all the pieces fit together.

It is not that Christians are to give thanks with a plastic smile, saying things are wonderful when they are hard. It is knowing that the hard things are really hard things, a result of the abnormality of the Fall, yet not revolting against God when the hard things come.



We do honor to God and the finished work of Christ as we throw the words 'all things' in Romans 8:28 like a circle around all things...

...we are contented before God... yet not complacent about the suffering of the world."

In other words, Christ neither calls us to be indifferent nor to put on a plastic smile. Rather, we are to face the facts of hard reality and then sink our roots more deeply in who He is.

What a privilege that we who are naturally God's enemies can even have a relationship of trusting Him—this faithful, sovereign, covenant keeping God who is incapable of failure. He makes and keeps great promises not only for His glory but for the ultimate good of those who are His.

In what situations are you tempted to be shaken from trusting God? Clearly, this is a sin-cursed world. Still, do you sometimes catch yourself expecting a rosy path? Why? What do we really deserve? (Read Romans 3:10).

Day 22 'I Thank God for You'

By Anna Kuta

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:3-6

We all know people who are a blessing to us. Whether it's a family member, your lifelong best friend, a coworker, the sweet lady who sits in the pew behind you every Sunday, or an old friend you can always pick right back up with no matter how many months it's been, each of us has people in our lives that we are so thankful for.

We get so caught up in day-to-day busyness sometimes that we forget to thank God for all the things He has blessed us with. Instead of focusing on the goodness the Lord has shown us, we complain about the minor thing that goes wrong. Instead of being grateful for the multitude of people who encourage us and make us smile, we get so hung up on the one person who did us wrong that it sours our whole outlook. I'll be the first to admit I'm guilty of this all too often – especially when it comes to tak-

ing for granted all the wonderful people who have impacted my life.

Here at the beginning of his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul presents a great example for us to follow when it comes to the people in our lives who are special to us. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you," Paul begins. He goes on to tell the recipients of his letter how he prays for them, and then gives an encouraging word about God's work in them. How often do we take the time to tell people how much they mean to us – especially fellow Christians with whom we share, as Paul says, "fellowship in the gospel"? I know I don't do that nearly as often as I should. As Paul models here, we should let the people we thank God for know that we do. And what better way to do that than by telling them today?

Right now, thank God for several people you know who are a blessing to you. Ask the Lord to bless them and encourage them – and then take a minute to let them know personally.

Further Reading: Romans 1:8, Psalm 13:6, Hebrews 13:15



Day 23

Why We Should Be Thankful for Unanswered Prayers

By Jennifer Heeren

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. 2 Peter 1:5-9

This Scripture passage speaks of making every effort to respond to God's promises and add to my faith moral excellence, and to that knowledge. Then add self-control mixed with patient endurance. And godliness. And brotherly affection. And love for all. The more I learn and grow in those ways, the more useful I will be on earth.

I've prayed for many things over the years. Favor on job interviews. A loving husband. Car repair bills to be lower than I expect. Benign biopsies. A baby. My list of desires can go on and on.

I've also prayed for friends, family, and acquaintances. Healing from accidents and diseases. Cancer to go into remission. Successful surgeries. Safe travels.

God always answers our prayers. But the answer isn't always a "yes." Sometimes it is "no" and sometimes it's "not now."

Wouldn't it be great if I could ask for something from God and He always answered quickly with a definite yes? It seems like that would be wonderful, but would it actually be a good thing?

Our whims aren't necessarily God's will.

I don't always pray for His will. I need to take all my whims and thoughts to God so that He can shape them into something more fitting to the way He originally designed me. God doesn't owe me anything, especially not my whims. However, He does promise me that He will provide the things I need—food, drink, clothing, etc.

We can't see the entire situation.

I can only see what is right in front of me. So, I need to rely on the judgment of an omniscient God if I truly desire what is best. I can keep a prayer journal so I can read about things that I desired in the past. Then I realize that God did indeed answer a lot of those requests. Sometimes with an "immediate yes." Often with a better "wait for this other thing."

A yes to everything we want is not how we were created.

If I did get a yes to every prayer, wouldn't that make me more of a god than God? He would be at my beck and call. I should always be coming to Him to ask if something is a good idea or not, not the other way around. God's ways are so much higher than mine. He is able through His mighty power to accomplish infinitely more than I can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Unanswered prayers lead us to stronger relationships with God.

God wants me to come to Him with everything, not just get what I want and then forget about Him. He deserves my attention even when I don't get what I want. God desires me to want Him, even more than what I'm asking for.

Unanswered prayers teach us to put our hope in God.



Psalm 62:5 says, “Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him.” My hope is in Him, not in my wants or even in my needs. He knows what I need before I even ask Him anyway. He is patient with me until I see my subtle real needs instead of my glaring wants.

Unanswered prayers serve the purpose of leading

me to the ultimate gift—peace of mind and heart (John 14:27). A peace that comes from trusting my Creator and Designer with EVERY aspect of my life. I’m not saying that this is easy to do. It’s a constant battle of my will vs. His best. But when I stop fighting, there is a peace and an absence of fear. Peace of mind and soul is much better than a temporary “yes.”

Day 24

A Prayer to Be More Grateful

By Victoria Riollano

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. Psalm 9:1

As a parent, there have been many moments I felt “used.” With each child bringing their list of wants for their birthday or everyday life, I wonder if they really appreciate me or just love what I do. If I make them happy enough, I am usually greeted with a “thank you” from my older children. My younger ones, however, tend to grab their occasional gifts with a burst of excitement and forget to say “thank you,” unless they are prompted. There is a sense of “I deserve this” written all over their faces in these moments.

In Psalm 9:1, David writes of sincere gratefulness. He states that he will thank the Lord with all His heart. Half-hearted thankfulness or a simple acknowledgment is not enough. Not only does the psalmist thank the Lord with his whole heart, but he also commits to telling all of God’s wonderful deeds. In other words, he just can’t keep withholding sharing how much God has done for him. His heart explodes with the opportunity to share the good news that God’s goodness. Even more so, David recognizes that to receive from the Lord is an honor.

If I’m honest, I’ve been guilty of not being as grateful as I should be. Instead of coming to the Lord humbly, with a heart of thanks, I have come with an attitude of entitlement. In my mind, of course, I deserved a blessing! I went to church, gave my tithes, prayed, and have been good to people. My pride followed blessings, when I should have had a humble heart, in

awe that God would grant me favor again.

Likewise, in many ways, I couldn’t wait to tell people of the “wonderful deeds” God had done. Unfortunately, my motivation for sharing God’s goodness was from a place of personal “horn-tooting,” versus a sincere honoring the Lord. In many ways, my thankfulness was only half-hearted as it was more about what I had accomplished and less about His goodness.

Although Psalm 9:1 should be a source of encouragement, for many, it is a wake-up call to ask ourselves, “Do we really appreciate our Father in heaven?” Would we be okay if He never did another thing for us? Is His presence and His promise of salvation enough? Could we say thank you endlessly, just for His love alone? Have we committed to sharing who He is and the good He’s done with a heart of humility?

These tough questions are convicting but reveal our true heart and perspective on who God is. For this reason, when we pray, we should not just bring our list of requests like a child on Christmas. Instead, we pray in awe of His goodness with humble thanksgiving.

My prayer today is that a heart of true gratitude will arise in our hearts. My prayer is that we would take each new day as a gift from the Lord and when He blesses us with more, we thank Him with our entire heart. May God grant us the opportunity to tell anyone who’s willing to listen how good He is!



Lord God,

I thank you for what you've done in my life. I thank You for each day, for Your work on the cross, and for helping me overcome the toughest battles of my life. Father, forgive me for the times I don't operate from an attitude of sincere gratitude. Teach me to do so

and to openly share your goodness with the world around me.

Help me to never grow weary of praising you for all that you've done.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 25 A Prayer of Gratitude for Life's Blessings

By Kristine Brown

Ever feel like you wake up each morning to more problems? Like they're waiting for you to open your eyes, so they can grab all your attention at the start of your day? Problems can consume us. Steal our energy. But in the process of handling the many issues that come our way, we may not realize the effect they have on our attitudes.

Focusing on life's issues can lead to frustration, discouragement, or even hopelessness. One way to ensure that problems don't overshadow the blessings in our lives is to give thanks. Dealing with one problem after another leaves me with a scarce gratitude list. But I can always find things to fill that list, even when my life seems filled with problems.

We're familiar with that old saying, "Count your blessings." It's something many of us learned at a young age. Yet, how often do we stop and proclaim the things we are thankful for? Especially in today's world, where complaining and arguing have become a way of life?

Paul gave the church at Thessalonica guidance to help them live abundant and fruitful lives through any circumstance they encountered. He encouraged them to "give thanks in all circumstances..." (1 Thessalonians 5:18, ESV) Yes, there would be trials and challenges, but Paul had learned the power of gratitude. He knew this valuable truth. In the worst times of life, we can still discover the peace and hope of Christ by counting our blessings.

It's easy to let thoughts about everything going

wrong drown out the many things going right. But it only takes a moment to find something we're thankful for, however small it may seem. A simple pause to thank God for that one thing in the midst of challenges can change our outlook from discouraged to hopeful. Let's begin with this prayer of gratitude for life's blessings.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the blessings in my life. I confess that I haven't stopped to give you thanks for the many ways you have blessed me. Instead, I've let problems take over my attention. Forgive me, Lord. You deserve all the gratitude I can give and so much more.

Each day seems to bring more problems, and the more I focus on them the more discouraged I become. Your Word teaches me the value of gratitude. In Psalm 50:23, you proclaim, "The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!" Help me remember this amazing promise and make gratitude a priority in my life.

Starting each day giving thanks to you for life's blessings will renew my attitude toward any problems that happen. Gratitude is a powerful weapon against discouragement and hopelessness. Strengthen me, Lord, to resist distractions and focus fully on your goodness. Thank you for the greatest gift of all, your son Jesus Christ.

In His name, Amen.



Day 26 A Thankful Tomorrow

By Ryan Duncan

How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.
Psalms 31:19

I've always really enjoyed Thanksgiving. Sure, the family can be pretty crazy at times, and I usually end up on dish duty after the meal, but Thanksgiving has always been a time for me to stop and realize how blessed I am. Friends, family, a warm meal, there are many simple things in this life that are easy to take for granted, so it's good to have a day that reminds us to be thankful for all God has given us. The problem is that's usually how long it lasts, a day. After the food has been eaten and prayers have been said, many people wake up the next morning and jump head first into the madness of Black Friday.

I can only remember shopping twice on Black Friday, and I regretted it both times. It's complete chaos, with people running, screaming, and sometimes even fighting each other over things they want to buy. I've never had any crazy experiences myself, but my brother-in-law remembers a particularly strange incident that happened while he was in college. One year, while he and my sister were still dating, he drove up to visit her on the Friday after Thanksgiving. He had left his house at 3am with hopes of avoiding the holiday rush and was making good time on the freeway when suddenly, out of nowhere, a

long line of traffic appeared in the distance.

At first he thought there had been an accident, but as he got closer he realized that the stalled traffic was due to cars making complete stops on the freeway so their passengers could get out, jump the guard rails, and climb a small hill to a nearby outlet mall. It's ironic, and a little sad, that a day which celebrates American greed happens after the holiday about being thankful. At times like these, it's important that as Christians realize we cannot live Christ-centered lives when we leapfrog between God and possessions.

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24).

So don't throw out your thankfulness with the evening leftovers, but hold onto it as the Advent season begins. Remember the blessings Christ has given us and use them to prepare yourself for Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of Christ, the greatest gift of all.

Don't let the crazy shopping season distract you from what's really important.

Further Reading: 1 Timothy 4:4



Day 27 A Prayer of Gratitude Even When Life Is Hard

By Tiffany Thibault

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. Psalm 107:8-9

There is no doubt about it. Life is hard. People and circumstances cause us stress. World events cause uncertainty. Each day seems to bring job losses, illness, bad news and disappointments. It can become a heavy burden to bear each of these challenges if it weren't for one simple fact: The Lord loves us with His unfailing love! That means it never stops, never diminishes in strength and is for us each and every day, and in each and every situation that we experience!

This Bible is so encouraging as it reminds us that his deeds toward us are wonderful! He satisfies the thirsty and he fills the hungry with good things. All we have to do is move towards him and seek him!

Are you thirsty for a fresh word from the Lord? Spend a spare moment today reading the Bible. There are thousands of words of encouragement there to satisfy your soul, calm your mind and give your heart hope and healing.

Are you hungry for wisdom and truth in your life? Seek for it in the pages of scripture. Everything we need is written down for us between the covers.

Are you stressed? Worried? Depressed? All alone? We can find help for all these things and so much more as we eagerly seek the scriptures for the answers that we desperately need!

The Lord wants to replace all your worry with peace beyond all understanding.

He wants to remove your fear and fill you with courage.

He wants to remove your loneliness by having a richer relationship with you.

Be thankful for the good things that the Lord is doing in and through you today. He is using you to point others to him. He is using you to be his hands of love as you serve others. He is wanting you to talk with him about your concerns, your pain, your uncertainty. He is waiting to listen to you and to guide you in every area of your life.

Be thankful for the hard things that the Lord is allowing in your life. He is with you. He loves you every single second you are traveling through this pain. He is going to use this situation somehow for His glory and for your good. In the meantime, trust him, and welcome his love. Look eagerly to see the ways he is providing for you through the struggles that you are going through.

We must remind ourselves over and over of how good the Lord truly is to us. He has allowed us another day to walk with him here on earth. Thank him for this day and pray that He would guide your thoughts, your steps and your words to honor him today!

Dear Lord,

Thank you for your unfailing love for me. It is always constant, and it always remains unchanging. It overwhelms me when I think of how much you truly love me.

Thank you for the wonderful deeds that you are doing for us. You created us and gave us an amazing world to live in. You have provided a way for us to eternal life through Jesus. You satisfy our thirst and you fill us with good things.

We trust our lives in your hands. We trust our every moment and our every circumstance to be provided for through your love and provision.

In overwhelming thanksgiving for you, I pray,

Amen.



Day 28 Why Your Kids Need to Hear You're Thankful

By Julie Sanders

Every child eventually makes the decision about where faith fits in their future. Childhood provides time to discover if their family's faith works.

The daily things of life inform their decisions, supplying proof and patterns they look for in answer to their wrestling. Most parents think too little or too late about the power of thankfulness to answer questions plaguing kids today.

Simply having faith in the same household isn't enough to pass on a pattern of following. Kids need proof the faith of their parents works. These six reasons help parents know why kids need to hear them verbalize thankfulness.

1. Gratitude Completes the Circle of Faith

If we believe God leads our family life, we receive God's care for our family life. His divine care pours out uniquely in as many ways as families are unique. Each customized journey of parenting creates a different stage for faith in God to play out.

As parents live out their beliefs, kids watch and listen to see if the scenes match the statement of faith.

Like oral storytelling practiced for generations, the narration of life together within a setting of gratitude completes the circle of faith. We believe God is our good and loving Maker, desiring a relationship with us.

Homes void of the sounds of thankfulness echo instead with disapproval towards the divine. By rejecting what God allows, discontent suggests He lacks goodness, understanding, and wisdom. Without expressed gratitude, God's character and intent toward us is suspect.

2. Thanks Expresses Individual Intention

When John said, "I have no greater joy than to hear

that my children are walking in the truth," (3 John 1:4) he spoke of spiritual children, but it's also the desire of every Christ-following parent's heart for their kids.

If we could believe for our children, we would. However, God wants each lost soul to reach independently for His grace. "So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God," (Romans 14:12). If redemption is individual, so is appreciation.

With kids sorting through a plethora of belief systems, hearing thankfulness from an individual parent helps with understanding. We each make a choice in what we believe about needs and challenges. Children need to hear what it sounds like for an individual to label life with their own words of thanks.

3. God Moves Our Hearts from Hard Things to Thanks

On our personal journey of giving thanks in all things, we sometimes stumble or get stuck in places of discontent or outright rejection. God calls us to an earthly experience of transformation, not perfection. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

When daily bread arrives on our family table, some of it will easily arouse an expression of thanks. Some of it will come with a bitter taste. Sometimes life is filled with fluffy mashed potatoes, and sometimes it's all spinach.

As an individual parent moves through their circumstances and a family of faith collectively moves through it, the goal is to move in God's direction.

Only God can transform our shock or anger, our grief and dismay into a willing attitude of thanks.



4. Our Household Chooses Peace

The world where our kids will make their homes won't put peace within easy reach. Instead, it will hide behind easier-to-access struggle, selfishness, confrontation, conflict and separation. If we're to reinforce our God-given hunger to live in a place of peacefulness, we need to engineer the environment of our home with words of thankfulness.

Rather than choosing to call out what we lack, what we hate, or what we reject, a thankful family chooses to receive God's gifts as "enough" and "good enough."

With regular responses of thanks on repeat in the background track of a child's world, an appetite for peace develops.

5. Children Learn the Language of Thankfulness

In a child's first three years, they make their greatest leaps in the acquisition of speech and language. Beginning in the cradle and continuing through every developmental season, children listen and learn from adults in their lives.

The words of a parent, and the intentions behind the parent's words, imprint on the mind of a child in the earliest days. Patterns form simply by watching non-verbal cues, hearing voice inflection, deciphering volume variance, recording repeated vocabulary, and making connections between words and actions.

While they listen to our language and learn the words to narrate their own life, how frequently will they hear thankfulness?

We know, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows," (James 1:17). The simple truths of God's goodness and our

gratitude deserve a frequent place in our conversations.

Rather than assuming we all "just know" these good gifts to be from above, kids need to hear our giving of thanks called out specifically and often. This builds a mental "word bank" of words and expressions, ideas and concepts our kids need to know and have ready to use as they move to new stages.

6. Our Voice Becomes Their Voice

A parent believes what the author of Proverbs wrote to his own child: "My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body," (Proverbs 4:20-22). We narrate life in the hearing of our child so they will take the scripts of truth to heart and use them to lead to life and health.

Each child and each generation must be imprinted with the language of thanks. Modern parenting influencer, writer, and publisher Peggy O'Mara said, "The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice."

Gratitude takes a child's heart on a journey of asking if God is good, knows them, and acts for their good. Using our voice to bestow on a child the inner voice of thanks provides reminders of faith at work.

May we never think too little of a little thanks. When kids hear parents speak genuine words of thankfulness from the heart, their own inner voice learns the language of faith-born gratitude.

Every generation needs to hear and memorize the words of a thankful heart.

Day 29

What I Learned from Keeping a Gratitude Journal

By Rachel Dawson

Several years ago, I read *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp and it has had a lasting impact on my life. It was wildly popular and became a *New York Times* Bestseller, which didn't surprise me one bit. It's a "dare to live fully right where you are" and, in our fast-paced society, a pretty countercultural idea. Throughout the book, Voskamp beautifully describes how she learned to notice and appreciate the many little gifts and blessings in her life and then record one thousand of them in her journal.

As I read through this book, I started a gratitude journal of my own. I've always been a journaler, so it wasn't an entirely new concept to me, but this new focus has been life-changing.

There are many things that are commonly listed when we talk about what we are thankful for-- family, friends, church or community, a roof over our heads, food on the table, etc. Those are wonderful things that of course we should be thankful for. Voskamp's goal of writing 1,000 gifts down challenged me to go deeper, though. My journal started with big things like family and friends, but as I kept going over time, I found that I started noticing more and more blessings (both big and small) in my life.

Knowing that I had a whole journal to fill helped me to see the little gifts all around me. It gave me a fresh lens to see my world through, and I found that my whole attitude shifted. Instead of stress or worry or anxiety driving my days, my focus was on gratitude and appreciation. I started to slow down more instead of always rushing so much, and in doing so, found so much more to be thankful for than ever before.

I noticed things like the pattern of the clouds in the sky, the way the steam from my morning mug of

coffee seemed to dance in the air, the sweet elderly couple holding hands across the table at a restaurant, the joy in a wobbly toddler's eyes when a dog walked by. I paid attention to the people around me better and found that I was more present and engaged when I spent time with them. I started keeping my eyes open more (literally and figuratively) and making mental notes of all the beauty I was seeing. I started giving myself more grace and loving myself better, because I was paying attention to what my heart and soul needed, too.

1,000 things seemed daunting at first. I didn't think I could name that many things without them becoming redundant or ridiculous. What I found, though, was that my list went well past 1,000 things. Usually, once I started writing one thing down, I would think of another and another and another. Some days, it seemed like it would be nearly impossible to think of a single thing to be thankful for, but those were always the days I needed to open my journal the most. Sometimes, just reading over past things I had written was just the prompting I needed to write down new things.

Not everything I listed was profound or poetic-- some were as simple as being grateful for another day, or for a text from a friend that came at a moment when I felt particularly stressed, or for my favorite song coming on the radio during my commute. Some days, I wrote twenty things down, and some days, just one or two.

I've learned a lot about gratitude from keeping this little journal, and it has impacted my life in more ways than I ever expected a journal could. I encourage you to try it for yourself, even if just for this month as we approach Thanksgiving. Many people even post one thing they're grateful for every day on Facebook, so that's an easy way to start.



Just try to slow down a little today. Keep your eyes open. Look around you, look up, look into the eyes of the people you pass, look at the grass growing or the flowers blooming or the autumn leaves falling. Take time to notice and appreciate the beauty of the

world around you, and take a few extra minutes to write it all down. You'll be surprised how gratitude can change your whole perspective on life and give you reason upon reason to praise the Creator of it all.

Day 30 Give Thanks Today *By Ryan Duncan*

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. 1
Chronicles 16:8

I have a system for writing devotionals. First I start with a funny or emotional story about some event in my past. Next, I'll usually drop in a Bible reference that loosely coincides with my experience. Finally, I'll finish off with how I learned more about God as a result. Simple, effective, and clean.

I'd like to try something a little different with today's devotional. Instead of telling a story, I'd simply like to give thanks. I don't thank God enough for the things He has given me; usually I'm too busy asking for more. So today, as awkward as it might be, I'd like to publicly thank Him for all He has done, starting with my family. Thank you, God, for my family.

Thank you for my job.
Thank you for providing for me in more ways than one.
Thank you that I have food in my pantry.
Thank you that I have clean water to drink.
Thank you for giving me a place to sleep at night.
Thank you that I have clothes to wear.
Thank you that I have friends who care about me.

Thank you that I have a Church where I can freely worship.
Thank you that I have a copy of your Word available to read.
Thank you that I am healthy.
Thank you for the ability to see, hear, taste, touch, and smell.
Thank you for the sun, the moon, and the stars.
Thank you for the birds in the air.
Thank you for the fish in the sea.
Thank you for the animals all across the globe.
Thank you for your Grace, which I do not deserve.
Thank you for sending your Son, who died for my sins.

I could go on, there is so much more I'd like to list. Instead, I'd like to pass this spirit of gratitude on to you. Today, remember to give thanks for the ways God has blessed you, and think about all the things He has done. Big and small, meaningful or bizarre, write them out or say them aloud. I think the list will grow longer than you would believe.

Write out your blessings on a sheet of paper. See for yourself what God has done in your life.

Further Reading: Psalm 45

