



10-DAY THANKSGIVING DEVOTIONAL

CULTIVATE  
*Gratitude*

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# CULTIVATE Gratitude

With the busyness of the holidays, it can be hard to remember the importance of being grateful for all the blessings in our lives. Here are ten devotionals to cultivate gratitude no matter what is going on in our lives.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## When It's Difficult to Give Thanks

PSALM 73

“All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.” PSALM 73:13–14

Psalms 73 is one of those gritty and honest psalms. Asaph is frustrated. He is upset with God because as he looks around it seems that the righteous (Asaph) are suffering while his wicked neighbors are living large. It feels to Asaph as if the covenant blessings and curses are given backwards. Psalm 73:13–14 are the climax of Asaph’s vent.

As Asaph scans the horizon, he believes that the wicked are “always at ease.” From his perspective God doesn’t oppose the proud—he lets them have everything they want. And Asaph, and those who are trying to be faithful to the covenant are scraping by.

But look at how the Psalm ends:

“But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.” PSALM 73:28

How does Asaph end by giving thanks and taking refuge in the Lord? It is because Asaph, “went into the sanctuary of God” it was here that everything clicked (v17). He “discerned their end.” He began to realize that *this* life is all the wicked have. Asaph began to see things from God’s perspective and acknowledges that his ungrateful attitude was “brutish and ignorant” (v23).

We can learn from Asaph in Psalm 73 that there are three main reasons for giving thanks even when we don’t feel like it. First, we give thanks because God is good and always good. That is how Asaph started (v1) and it is ultimately where he ends. God is good even when Asaph cannot see God’s good hand.

Secondly, we can give thanks because we are upheld by God. That is how Asaph kept from stumbling. I love the “nevertheless” in verse 23. Even though he was “ignorant and brutish” God’s “nevertheless” held Asaph up. This is what kept him from buckling. God’s “nevertheless” goes deeper than any sin that we could ever commit. It’s deeper than our foolishness and all of our rebellion. We are upheld by God.

Lastly, we give thanks even when we don’t feel like it because the Lord is our portion forever. Asaph’s argument is that all of the other “stuff” of this world is the portion of the wicked. That is *all* they get. But not us. The Lord Himself is our portion. If this is true, then we must always be giving thanks. He is the greatest gift ever.

It is because of Jesus that the Lord will always do us good. It is because of the Lord Jesus that we are upheld by his right hand. It is because of Jesus that the Lord is our portion forever.

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# Finding Thanks in the Lord's Supper

LUKE 22:14–23

Depending on your religious tradition the observance of the Lord's Supper is called different things. Some traditions will call this the breaking of bread, others will call it Communion, and still others might call this the Lord's Supper. Another name for the taking of bread and wine is observing the Eucharist.

While the word *eucharist* does not appear in most English Bibles, it actually appears numerous times. Eucharist comes from the Greek word *eucharisteo*. It means simply "to give thanks". It is to appreciate the benefits and blessings that we have received. It is this precise word which Jesus uses in Luke 22 when he "gives thanks" over both the cup and the bread at the Last Supper.

When Jesus was thanking God for the bread and the wine, he was thanking the Father for His provision. But He was also thankful for what the provisions symbolized. The unleavened bread would symbolize the Lord being the sustenance and portion for His people. The wine would symbolize the blood shed by the Passover lamb—which would protect and cover the sinful Israelites as the death angel passed over.

But these elements pointed to something even greater. They would point to the provision of Jesus' body and blood which would He said was given "for you". It's not a stretch to believe that even Jesus is giving thanks for the gospel. I say that because in the gospel of Luke he tells His disciples that He "earnestly desired" to eat this Passover meal with them. He joyously and willingly gave His life for them (and for us).

Gathering at the Lord's table is a great way to remind ourselves of the gospel. Today, even if we are not able to physically take the elements on this day, we can be thankful for God's provision of the body and blood on our behalf.

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# Thanksgiving in His Presence

PSALM 100

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You've really blown it this time. You did that one thing that all the training material said to never do. And this isn't the first time you've done it. You have a meeting with your boss scheduled for the morning. What words do you use to describe your feelings about this meeting?

Apprehension? Fear? Dread? Worry? Shame?

What about "joy" or "thanksgiving"? Would you consider those words as you approach this meeting with your boss?

This is an apt picture of our feelings as we come into the presence of the Lord. We know that we have sin. We know how God feels about sin. And yet we're summoned to gather before Him. But somehow our experience as believers will often match that of the Psalmist in Psalm 100.

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!" PSALM 100:4

How is this possible? It is possible because of what we read in Psalm 100:5: "...his steadfast love endures forever". It is because of His love and faithfulness to us that we are able to enter into His presence with joy and thanksgiving. God's presence, for those washed in the blood of Christ, is a joyous occasion.

To circle back to our earlier analogy, the difference is that we do not stand before our "boss" with our own record and our own merit. The person and work of Jesus Christ is like an immovable door stop into the joyous presence of God.

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." HEBREWS 4:16

Today, be thankful that you have this access to God.









# Thankful for Where God Is Taking Us

REVELATION 21

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John Newton once shared this illustration about the foolishness of complaining:

Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, “My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!”

Newton’s point is that if we know the end of the story, and the end of that story is glorious then we are foolish to bemoan the bumps in the road which get us to our ultimate destination. One of the best things we can do to increase our thanksgiving is to develop a robust understanding of where God is taking us.

This does not mean that we flit away our times on rapture charts or try to discern the details of the end times by dissecting our newspapers. Jesus warned against such things. What is healthy is meditating upon where God is taking us. Read through Revelation 21:1–8 today and meditate upon the glory of what awaits those who are trusting in Christ.

The sea passing away means that there is no more chaos. The dwelling place of God with man means that there is now unfettered access between us and God. He will wipe away every tear, there will be no more death, or mourning, or pain. Imagine that. Nothing to make you sad or sorrowful. The old order, the fallen, broken, rebellious, heart-wrenching, and soul-sucking old order, has now passed away. Death has been put to death.

He is making everything new. He will give water to the thirsty. He is fulfilling our every longing. Those deep longings which he placed within us he aims to overflow with His goodness. I remember a few years back hearing a sermon from a pastor (and I think he was quoting Jonathan Edwards) where he said he imagined heaven being like God expanding our capacity for joy every day and then filling it up and doing this every “day” for all of eternity.

If you are in union with Christ. This is what awaits you. And Jesus stakes his very self on the trustworthiness of this reality. That is why he tells John, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” This reality is just as true as saying that the sky is blue. Jesus is accomplishing all of this on our behalf. It is ours.

Today, your carriage might be broken. But fix your eyes upon the glory which awaits you. And overflow with thanksgiving.







# Pretend Thanksgiving

JEREMIAH 8:11

They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious.

“Peace, peace,” they say, when there is no peace. JEREMIAH 8:11

There is a difference between hope and blind optimism. Blind optimism traffics in denial. Hope is the stuff of reality. In Jeremiah’s day, the false prophets preached a message of optimism filled with counterfeit thankfulness.

They took comfort in being in the promised land, worshipping at the temple, and being considered as God’s people. They believed that these gifts were unshakeable and unalterably theirs. Even when they went about each day denying the very God who gave them these gifts.

When Jeremiah challenged them through the word of the LORD, the prophets doubled down. They mocked Jeremiah’s message of judgment and his call to repentance. They believed that if they continued to give God lip service for all of these gifts, then He would be pleased and they could continue unabated in their rebellion.

There is a way in which we can use “thankfulness” and blind optimism as a shield for facing reality in our lives. There are times when we experience the consequence of our rebellion, but rather than calling it what it is we rename it a trial and put on the veneer of thankfulness for “God’s testing”. In reality, what is needed is repentance and not over-spiritualizing consequences.

We can fool ourselves into thinking that we are engaging in a God-honoring discipline, while at the same time we are actually circumventing the real change which God aims to bring into our lives. We should follow the path of Jeremiah and not the false prophets. When we look realistically at our life situation (whether from our own sin or even the consequence of others sins against us) we do well not to dress these wounds lightly. We do well to take all these wounds to Jesus and not try to cover them with false optimism.

Be realistic. But be a gospel-person. Don’t dress them lightly, but also don’t try to dress them yourselves. Acknowledge reality and rest in the arms of Jesus.

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# Prideful Thanksgiving

LUKE 18:11

The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. LUKE 18:11

Not all thanksgiving is holy. In Luke 18 the Pharisee thanks God for all of his benefits—but also that he isn’t like the tax collector. He is engaging in prideful thanksgiving. And because of this Jesus tells us that he does not go home justified—instead that sinful tax collector who beats his chest and cries out for mercy goes home justified. But what’s so bad about his prayer?

Consider all that the Pharisee gets right. For one, he thanks God for his righteousness. He’s likely not lying about his righteous deeds. He probably doesn’t rob other people or commit adultery. He has deep morality and he is thankful for the work God has done in his life to bring that about. What is wrong with thanking God for His work in your life?

But if we inspect this further, there are at least two things that are a little “off” with the Pharisee’s prayer. First, even though he is thanking God his focus is clearly horizontal. And that is what pride always does—it looks at other people and looks at self. He looks at his own life with thankfulness and at the tax collector with disdain. Pride will compare our best qualities against the worst qualities of others. It doesn’t matter how much he tries to “thank God,” at its core, his prayer is prideful because it is mis-focused.

Secondly, his faith is off-centered. He clearly has a great measure of faith. And he’s not self-righteous in the way that we typically think. He’s depending upon God and upon God’s righteousness that is being created in his life. In one sense, he is trusting in God’s work for righteousness. But notice what he is trusting in for justification. He is trusting in the good that God has produces in his life as the measure of his right standing with God.

Imagine the Pharisee standing before God. God asks him, “Why should I let you into heaven?” What would the Pharisee respond? Well, God, you should let me into heaven because of the work that you have done in my life. Look at my righteousness. God, you have done such a work in me that I do not commit adultery. God, you have done such a work in me that I am not like the vile tax collectors. God, you have done such a work and here is all of the righteousness that you have created in me. Now compare that to these words from Mark Dever:

“A Christian, therefore, knows that if he were to die tonight and stand before God, and if God were to say, ‘Why should I let you into my presence?’ the Christian would say, ‘You shouldn’t let me in. I have sinned and owe you a debt that I cannot pay back.’ But he wouldn’t stop there. He would continue, ‘Yet, because of your great promises and mercy, I depend on the blood of Jesus Christ shed as a substitute for me, paying my moral debt, satisfying your holy and righteous requirements, and removing your wrath against sin’.

What is the difference? The Christian looks totally outside himself. Rather than looking at his/her life and stacking up his/her righteousness (whether believing it is God created or not) or his/her unrighteousness the believer banks totally and completely on the work of Christ. He/she looks totally outside of themselves for righteousness.

As you pursue thankfulness, be on the lookout for prideful thanksgiving.

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# Thanks for Resurrection Victory

1 CORINTHIANS 15:57

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:57

Disney recently released a new cartoon connected with the Marvel Universe. It's called, *What If...?* In each episode, they explore what would have happened if an alternate reality had taken place. Like, *What If Spider-Man Had Never Been Bitten?* In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul engages in his own "what if?" What if there had been no resurrection?

Paul then lists six things that would be true if the resurrection was not a reality:

- Our preaching is in vain
- Your faith is in vain
- We are misrepresenting God, false witnesses.
- We are still in our sin.
- We are all people to be most pitied.
- Those who have died have no hope.

In other words, every aspect of the Christian faith is a farce. And if Christianity is still a farce, then we have no Savior and we are still in our sins. But then Paul flips the script. Jesus Christ *has* been resurrected. Which means, then, that all of those things which wouldn't be true without the resurrection are now true *because of* the resurrection.

It is through Christ that we have this victory. This is precisely what Paul means at the end of the chapter when he says "O death, where is your sting?" He notes that "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." But through the resurrection, Christ has overturned the curse. Though we may still physically die it is true that "death is swallowed up in victory".

Death doesn't have the last word over your life. Jesus does. And thanks be to God, he has given us the victory.

Today, be grateful for all of that which the resurrection of Christ has made true in your life.

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