

GROWTHguide

Starting November 23, 2014

"Thankful"



Day 1: Read Luke 17:11-19

Here were ten men in the most pitiful of all human misery. Not only were they afflicted with a terrible and loathsome disease; they were outcasts from society because of their disease. They had no one to relieve either their physical or emotional suffering. And then Jesus healed them. As these men went to show themselves to the priest and thus be restored to their families and friends, only one of them, realizing what had happened, turned back to give thanks to Jesus. Ten men were healed, but only one gave thanks. How prone we are to be like the other nine. We are anxious to receive but too careless to give thanks. We pray for God's intervention in our lives, then congratulate ourselves rather than God for the results. . . . Thanking Him for blessings we receive is very important to Him. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" Jesus was very much aware that only one returned to give Him thanks. And God is very much aware today when we fail to thank Him for the ordinary as well as the unusual blessings that come to us daily from His hand.

--Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*

- Many people give thanks for the food they are about to eat but don't give thanks for the farmers that supplied the food, the soil that grew the crops, and the sun and rain that sustained them. Pray and give thanks to God for the little things and the big things, recognizing every blessing He has bestowed.

Day 2: Read Ephesians 5:19-20

The next footsteps in the corridor, he knew, might be those of the guards taking him away to his execution. His only bed was the hard, cold stone floor of the dank, cramped prison cell. Not an hour passed when he was free from the constant irritation of the chains and the pain of the iron manacles cutting into his wrists and legs. Separated from friends, unjustly accused, brutally treated—if ever a person had a right to complain, it was this man, languishing almost forgotten in a harsh Roman prison. But instead of complaints, his lips rang with words of praise and thanksgiving! The man was the Apostle Paul—a man who had learned the meaning of true thanksgiving, even in the midst of great adversity. Earlier, when he had been imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" . . . Think of it: Always giving thanks for everything—no matter the circumstances! Thanksgiving for the Apostle Paul was not a once-a-year celebration, but a daily reality that changed his life and made him a joyful person in every situation. Thanksgiving—the giving of thanks—to God for all His blessings should be one of the most distinctive marks of the believer in Jesus Christ. We must not allow a spirit of ingratitude to harden our heart and chill our relationship with God and with others. Nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. And nothing will do more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness.

--Billy Graham, *How to Be Thankful in All Things*

- Do you struggle with bitterness, resentment or being dissatisfied? Begin to "restore contentment" and your joy today by being thankful. Choose not to let your mind linger on negative thoughts, and instead give thanks to God for everything! Pray and ask God to remind you to always be thankful and resist the temptation to be bitter.

Day 3: Read Psalm 106:1-2, Matthew 5:45, Ephesians 1:3 and Colossians 2:6-7

The primary purpose of giving thanks to God is to acknowledge His goodness and honor Him. . . . When we give thanks to the Lord we proclaim His mighty acts; we acknowledge His goodness. . . . He is most worthy of our praise and thanksgiving, especially if we are among His redeemed people, for He has blessed us not only in the temporal realm, but also with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. . . . The foundation of an attitude of thankfulness is a life lives in fellowship with Christ. As Colossians 2:6-7 suggests, thankfulness is the overflow of being rooted and built up in Christ. As we abide in Him, as we see His power at work in us

and through us, as we call upon Him for our needs and experience His provision, our response will be thanksgiving. Like any other trait of godly character, thankfulness is a result of the Holy Spirit's ministry in our hearts. He gives us a thankful spirit, but does this through our fellowship with Christ.

--Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*

- Pray and take the time today to give thanks to God for "His mighty acts" and "acknowledge His goodness." Thank Him for your earthly blessings and all your spiritual blessings. Give thanks to God for His gift of salvation and begin to live a life in fellowship with Him.

Day 4: Read Psalm 100:1-5

The spirit of thanksgiving runs against the temptation we face as human beings to assert our self-sufficiency. Few of us enjoy the feeling of indebtedness; a fact easily demonstrated by our oft-unsolicited readiness to return a favor once someone has expressed kindness to us. . . . Not only does this inability to express gratitude without our own autonomy stealing the show sometimes rob of us of the joy of affirming the contribution of others to our wellbeing, it also shrivels up our desire to worship God. An unexamined sense of self-sufficiency instills in us a subtle but false attitude of entitlement, thus making it difficult for us to accept the sense of vulnerability that is part of true gratitude. . . . But everything we know about ourselves and our world speaks loudly against this tendency to self-sufficiency. As human babies, we all begin our lives at the highest level of dependence, and none of us really outgrows all degrees of dependence. We depend on parents, teachers, peers, coaches, and others to open doors for us in life. Even in places where commitment to personal autonomy is likely to produce more martyrs than religious conviction, dependence on others is still a living reality whose attempted concealment is gradually unveiled by the onset of old age. From the inventions that give us comfort in this world to the young soldiers who give their lives in the battlefields to protect our livelihoods, an unobstructed view of our lives reveals the fact that we all owe debts that we can never repay. We will never begin to worship God until we recognize that we are bankrupt debtors, for an attitude of gratitude is an indispensable impetus to worship.

--John M. Nijoroge, *The Indignity of Giving Thanks*

- Are you able to be truly grateful and "accept the sense of vulnerability" that comes with it? There are so many blessings God has bestowed on us, we will never be able to count them all! Take time to worship God today by giving thanks to Him for all His blessings, even the ones of which you're not aware.

Day 5: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Jeremiah 29:11

Below are excerpts from Corrie ten Boom's book, *The Hiding Place*. Shortly after Corrie and her sister Betsie arrived at Ravensbruck concentration camp, the sisters discovered that the large room in which they were to share with other women was infested with fleas. Corrie asked her sister, "Betsie, how can we live in such a place!" and her sister reminded her of the scripture they had read earlier that day from First Thessalonians.

"That's it, Corrie! That's His answer. 'Give thanks in all circumstances!' That's what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!" I stared at her; then around me at the dark, foul-aired room. "Such as?" I said. "Such as being assigned here together." I bit my lip. "Oh yes, Lord Jesus!" "Such as what you're holding in your hands." I looked down at the Bible. "Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here! Thank You for all these women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages." "Yes," said Betsie, "Thank You for the very crowding here. Since we're packed so close, that many more will hear!" She looked at me expectantly. "Corrie!" she prodded. "Oh, all right. Thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed suffocating crowds." "Thank You," Betsie went on serenely, "for the fleas and for--" The fleas! This was too much. "Betsie, there's no way even God can make me grateful for a flea." "Give thanks in all circumstances," she quoted. "It doesn't say, 'in pleasant circumstances.' Fleas are part of this place where God has put us." And so we stood between tiers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.

Betsie and Corrie began to hold worship services in their barrack and as time went on, and as no guards came, they became braver in sharing the gospel and wondered why the guards did not come.

One evening I got back to the barracks late from a wood-gathering foray outside the walls. A light snow lay on the ground and it was hard to find the sticks and twigs with which a small stove was kept going in each room. Betsie was waiting for me, as always, so that we could wait through the food line together. Her eyes were twinkling. "You're looking extraordinarily pleased with yourself," I told her. "You know, we've never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room," she said. "Well--I've found out." That afternoon, she said, there'd been confusion in her knitting group about

sock sizes and they'd asked the supervisor to come and settle it. "But she wouldn't. She wouldn't step through the door and neither would the guards. And you know why?" Betsie could not keep the triumph from her voice: "Because of the fleas! That's what she said, 'That place is crawling with fleas!'" My mind rushed back to our first hour in this place. I remembered Betsie's bowed head, remembered her thanks to God for creatures I could see no use for.

- Are you going through trials in your life? Are there "fleas" you have a hard time giving thanks to God for? Pray and give thanks to God, even in the midst of your difficult circumstances. Ask God to help you feel His love and remember to have hope!

Day 6: Read Psalm 22:3, 69:30 and 95:2

God's command to be thankful is not the threatening demand of a tyrant. Rather, it is the invitation of a lifetime—the opportunity to draw near to Him at any moment of the day. Do you sometimes long for a greater sense of God's nearness? When pressures intensify, when nighttime worries magnify in strength, when the days are simply piling up one after another, or when life simply feels dull and routine, do you crave the assurance of His presence? The Scripture says that God inhabits the praises of His people . . . God lives in the place of praise. If we want to be where He is, we need to go to His address. This is a recurring theme in the psalms: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!" (Psalm 100:4). . . Thanks-giving ushers us into the very presence of God! The tabernacle in the Old Testament was the place God set apart to meet with His people. In front of the entrance to the Holy of Holies—the sacred seat of God's manifest presence—stood the altar of incense, where every morning and every evening the priest would offer up the sweet scents, representing the prayers and thanksgiving of God's people who sought to draw near to Him. Those ancient rituals were types and symbols of a relationship that we as New Testament believers can enjoy with God anytime, anyplace. Through His sacrifice on the cross, Christ has granted us access to the Father who dwells in us by His Spirit. See what happens when you open your heart afresh to the Lord, moving beyond the normal, the canned, the almost obligatory phrases of praise and worship, where you truly begin to "magnify him with thanksgiving" . . . Yes, see if expressing gratitude to the Lord doesn't "magnify" Him in your eyes, increasing your depth perception of this One who knows your name, counts the hairs on your head, and manifests His love for you with one blessing after another. See if the practice of intentional gratitude doesn't transport you even nearer to Him—not just where your faith can believe it but where your heart can sense it. Thanksgiving puts us in God's living room. It paves the way to His presence.

—Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Gratitude is a Choice*

- Do you search for God and long for His presence and power to break into your world? You can enter into the presence of God today by magnifying Him with your praises of thanksgiving! As Nancy Leigh DeMoss stated, "see if the practice of intentional gratitude doesn't transport you even nearer to Him" where your "heart can sense it!" God is moving in your life, even when you can't see it, so give thanks to Him for everything!

Day 7

Today is your "Sabbath" and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God's voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life's demands do not squelch the whispers of God's language of love upon your heart.