

THANKFULNESS

By

Terry Kostel

As several of you know, Gail and I spent a wonderful week in Jamaica in October - then we had to come back to reality. One of the questions on my mind when we got back was, “what can I write about for the *Evangelizer*?” Then I thought, that’s easy – I’ll write about being thankful.

Jamaica was a beautiful reminder of all that we have to be grateful for. The beauty of God’s creation could be seen everywhere. As people of God, we are a thankful people, for we realize how much we have been given.

Feeling and expressing appreciation is good for us. Like any wise father, God wants us to learn to be thankful for all the gifts He has given to us. It is in our best interest to be reminded that everything we have is a gift from Him. Without gratefulness, we become arrogant and self-centered. We begin to believe that we have achieved everything on our own. Thankfulness keeps our hearts in the right relationship to the Giver of all good gifts.

How often are we guilty of focusing on what we don't have, rather than reflecting on everything that God has blessed us with?

As human beings we are prone to greed. By giving thanks continually we are reminded of how much we *do* have. When we focus on blessings rather than wants, we are happier. When we start thanking God for the things we usually take for granted, our perspective changes; we realize that we could not even exist without the merciful blessings of God.

We should be thankful because God is worthy of our thankfulness. It is only right to credit Him for “every good and perfect gift.” When we are thankful, our focus moves away from selfish desires and the pain of current circumstances. Expressing thankfulness helps us remember that God is in control. Thankfulness, then, is not only appropriate; it is actually healthy and beneficial to us. It reminds us of the bigger picture, that we belong to God, and that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. Truly, we have an abundant life, and gratefulness is fitting.

Psalm 118:24 tells us, “This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Realizing God is the source of our good comes with many benefits. Not only do we become more grateful when we realize all the good in our lives, but we become less anxious about loss, better at caretaking, more generous in giving, and less friendly to pride.

Daily we have the opportunity to reflect on God’s abundant blessings and express our thankfulness to Him and to the people around us. Every day we should pray; not because we need something, but because we have a lot to thank God for.

Sometimes we are so busy that we don’t even recognize what God has given us. Psalm 105 gives us wonderful instructions for how to show thanks to the Lord – by telling other people

about His works, singing praises to His name, seeking His presence every day, and remembering the many good things He has done!

While preparing this article, I came across a plan to be thankful, a plan that can help each one of us to rediscover a spirit of gratitude. Each Scripture reading offers reminders from God's Word of His promises and of His faithfulness. Uplifting Scripture illustrates God's never-ending love, inexhaustible grace, and always-accessible presence in our lives.

Do you have time this week to take inventory of the treasures in your life? As you look backward and thank your Benefactor, has it occurred to you that you can look forward with the same gratitude and joyful anticipation? The One who made your past better is already planting gifts in your future.

This reading plan will help you think more deeply about whom to thank for all good things—your God.

The goal of the plan is to take you through seven days of thankfulness. It is designed to help you explore different aspects of thankfulness and help make you aware of the need for being more thankful every single day. As God's children, we have much to be thankful for. Think of it as a form of study. Following this plan may help bring to the forefront that being thankful is a never-ending task.

The next seven days can help you take a fresh look around with eyes that cut through the daily distortions and see the undeniable and extravagant goodness of God. It is our natural tendency to look to the future, but we should never forget the past. This plan is designed for you over a seven-day period to remember all that God has done in shaping you into the person you are today.

Thankfulness is a funny thing. It seems so easy on the surface. It's something we teach children to do, and yet, we still struggle with the concept of living a life of gratitude. And not just to each other. The one to whom we should be the most grateful is the one we struggle the most to be grateful to – God.

Guide for the plan to be Thankful:

- Pray, “God, connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word.” Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you.
- Read the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of intriguing words and phrases, and read them a second time.
- Reflect on what strikes you as you read. Think through what God is communicating to you at this point in your life.
- Respond to the passage. Speak to God directly about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

Day 1 - 1 Chronicles 16:34-35, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Say also: Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and rescue us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, and glory in your praise."

Day 2 - 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Day 3 - Psalm 30:12 - "So that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever."

Day 4 - Psalm 106:1 - "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for his steadfast love endures forever."

Day 5 - Col 1:3 - "In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Day 6 - Psalm 7:17 - "I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High."

Day 7 - Psalm 95:2 - "Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of Praise!"

After completing your Thanksgiving reading plan, you need to remember being thankful is not really an "if you feel like it" type of deal. It's a command.

If following this plan seems difficult, try a smaller challenge. Try to get through an entire day without uttering one word of complaint. Develop an attitude of thanksgiving in every situation. In fact, just become outrageously thankful—and watch as your intimacy with God increases and He pours out greater blessings than ever before.

Isn't it amazing to know that we belong to God, but also that the whole world belongs to God? He loves the world and everything he created, and He calls us to love those things too.

I believe that if we'll stay amazed at the things God is doing in our lives—even the little things—we'll never be without hope. I encourage you to realize what you have, be thankful, and decide to live amazed... jaw-dropping, wide-eyed, "Wow! That was God!" amazed.

Some Final Thoughts:

"God gave you a gift of 86,400 seconds today. Have you used one to say, 'Thank you?'"
(William Ward)

"Gratitude and attitude are not challenges; they are choices."
(Robert Braathe)