



GRATITUDE

Gratitude opens the heart. When we are grateful, even about some small thing, that response opens us up. Because, with gratitude, we recognize something worth loving and enjoying. This can lead to hope: I believe that something else might happen that provides love and joy. Gratitude helps us take the risk and open our lives to what wonders might come along.

Gratitude shifts the mind into a healthier perspective. Although some days are truly difficult, even horrific, and unjust we occasionally need gratitude to repair our soul and align ourselves to the Source, which is God. If we begin to identify what is going right, what helps us, and what is doing some good in the world, then our perception shifts away from the corrosion of hopelessness and despair.

Gratitude is not always easy, but it's simple to practice. All I have to do is ask myself this question, or one like it: What am I grateful for today, right now? At the end of the day, I can make a list of anything in the day that felt good or worked well or gave me cause to say “thank you.” These practices are simple enough for our children or students to do too. They don't require deep thinking or advanced theology.

Gratitude is greater than one person. Gratitude can set the tone or environment in a meeting, at an event, in a home, among many people. One person who expresses gratitude can change the way a conversation is going. If a meeting begins with a prayer of thanksgiving, a song of joy, or—if it's not a religious meeting—an acknowledgment of good work done and reasons to celebrate, then it's likely that the outcome of the gathering will be much healthier than if it had begun with a scolding lecture or a listing of all the group's problems.

Gratitude helps us build a history with hope, intention, and purpose. When we practice remembering the gifts we receive day to day and year to year, we build, with intention, a common history. I don't deny that I was in a serious auto accident that year, but I also remember the care I received while I was recovering. I remember details of that care, and I remember specific people. I don't try to erase the history of my depression, but in that history, I include the conversation that comforted me, the day beside the pond at the park that helped me breathe and hope a little more, the physician who found the medication that worked, and the holiday gathering I didn't have to skip because being around people would be so difficult.

Gratitude is possible not because everything goes perfectly but because God is present. The Spirit of God is within us – nearer to us than our own breath. It is a discipline to choose to stitch our days together with the thread of gratitude. But the decision to do so is guaranteed to stitch us closer to God. Attend to the truth that “bidden or unbidden, God is present.”

Gratitude is more than an attitude or a helpful strategy. It’s a way of seeing, a way of being, a way of remembering, a way of proceeding in the life of Christ.

May all of us practice gratitude a little more as the days and years go by. (Psalm 136:1-2, I Thessalonians 5:16-18, and Philippians 4:6).

Models of Gratitude

1. Begin this practice by pausing for a moment and slowly settling into a comfortable position. Gradually, allow your body to be still, connecting to the presence of God.

Feeling the rise and fall of your chest. And knowing that in this moment all is well. Never underestimate the power of gratitude. It can bring you joy and it can change the world.

If needed, gently become aware of your body sensing into your hands and feet. Maybe give them a wriggle or give yourself a stretch.

Now ask what am I grateful for today, right now? Begin a gratitude journal by keeping a record of the “abundance” God has given you. Next to each abundance write what it means to you to have a God who interacts and intervenes in your life. * Notice what you have been given that you did not deserve. What do you want to say to God about these things?

2. End every day by saying thank you to God for at least one thing. Then tell God what that one thing meant for you.
3. Write a letter of thanks to someone who has touched your life in the past year, the past month, or the past week.
4. Get a current hardship firmly in mind. How do you feel about this hardship? Tell the truth to God. * Where is their evidence of God’s presence in this hardship? Is there anything you can be thankful for? * If you cannot find God in your hardship, spend some time with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. What does he want to tell you?
5. What sorts of things tend to encourage you in thankfulness? Praise songs? Worship? Time spent with friends? Giving and receiving presents? * Plan ways of incorporating the things that encourage thankfulness into your life on a regular basis.
6. Hold a thank-you party. Invite the people you want to honor with a thank you.
7. Create a thank you scrapbook. Besides photos and pictures, write your prayers of thanksgiving.

8. Notice your tendency to make comparisons that result in feelings of dissatisfaction or entitlement. Practice abstaining from comparative statements about what you don't have. Instead, give thanks for what you do have.

GRATITUDE DEFINITION

Gratitude is a loving and thankful response toward God for his presence with us and within this world. Though "blessings" can move us into gratitude, it is not at the root of a thankful heart. Delight in God and his good will is a heartbeat of thankfulness. Psalm 136:1-2, I Thessalonians 5:16-18, and Philipians 4:6).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When you feel at the bottom of the food chain and dead last in terms of priority, how do you move toward gratitude?
2. When you have found that in retrospect you could have been thankful for something that you were not grateful for at the time it was happening?
How can this perspective inform your life now?
3. How has a grateful person affected your own vision of what matters in life?
How has someone who lives out of bitterness affected your life?
4. How does your disposition influence your attitude toward gratitude?
5. How are you addicted to criticism, analysis, and negativity?
How might thankfulness be an antidote to a critical spirit?

GRATITUDE PRAYER'S GOD-GIVEN FRUIT

- Keeping company with Jesus no matter what happens.
- Being aware of the abundance of gifts, benefits, mercies, and grace that have been poured into your life.
- Curbing critical tendencies by upstaging them with thanksgiving.
- Seeing what you have as quickly as you see what you don't have.
- Treasuring and valuing people by thanking them often and clearly for who they are to you or to someone else.
- Daily thanking the Lord for his presence in your life.
- Noticing your lack of gratitude and repenting of the idol that has your heart at that moment.
- Receiving everything you have as a gift rather than as an entitlement.