

Being Thankful Increases the Quality and Length of Your Life

Recently I spent the weekend in Atlanta simply building relationships with our seven grandchildren. Special focus was on our 13-year-old grandson's baseball tournament with 75 mph pitching. Ever since he came here from South Africa he's excelled in the sport, and this time was no different. He hit three triples in one day, pitched a one-hitter and batted a phenomenal as they won the grand prize.

At the ballpark I had a fascinating conversation with a man who came to America when the Soviet Union collapsed. I asked his observation of Americans and, without hesitation, he said, "I don't think people here realize how good they have it."

How easy it is to take things for granted, not being grateful for the abundant blessings we all enjoy. Additionally, multitudes have never been taught the biblically informed perspective of how God uses situations to mature us as His people.

With the holiday season at hand, let's take some time to remember the importance of growing a grateful heart and cultivating an intentional and consistent attitude of gratitude. This has been a traumatic year. It would do us all good to position ourselves for more than a few days of family and festivities, but also for a renewed lifestyle of thankfulness.

Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart

Recently my wife saw an encouraging Facebook post of a young lady we've watched grow into a beautiful woman of God with a husband and family. Let her encourage you as well in

practicing a thankful heart.

“Do you remember the song ‘Give Thanks’ by Don Moen? It starts like this: ‘Give thanks with a grateful heart/ give thanks to the holy One/ give thanks because He’s given Jesus Christ, His Son!’ If you do know the song, it will likely be stuck in your head for the rest of the day.

“This song reminds me of Thanksgiving with my extended family. More often than not, someone would start singing, and everyone would join in for a beautiful family choir version of this song. With this season of Thanksgiving and traditions flipped on their head this year, I am reminded to be grateful in spite of 2020’s twists and turns.

“If I sat down to write out all the blessings in my life, I would run out of paper. How about you? The old hymn says, “Count your blessings; name them one by one.” Let’s be intentional about our gratitude as we enter the holiday season this year.

“If you need a daily reminder of your blessings, consider starting a gratitude jar by cutting out slips of paper, writing the date and something you’re grateful for and place it in the jar that is out in the open. On a regular basis, take out the slips of paper and remind yourself how blessed you are.

“If you were to write the first three today, what would they be? Focus on the positive. Focus on what you can control. Everything you do, do in the name of Jesus, and be grateful for the opportunities He gives us to shine bright in His name. Be blessed and be a blessing!” Rachel Ramirez wrote.

A Directive, Not an Elective

God tells us, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17).

“Give thanks always for all things” (Eph. 5:20a).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 He directs us, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

It is so important that we develop the habit of giving thanks “in” everything, not necessarily “for” everything (like habitual sin or criminal activity) even though it seems contrary to natural thinking.

Romans 1:21a outlines the downward spiral of a society departing from God: “Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him or give thanks to Him.”

As authentic New Testament Christians, we always want to glorify God and intentionally cultivate thankfulness in our lives. Remember Jesus had 10 lepers whom He healed, and yet only one came back to express gratitude. Ten were healed, but only one was made spiritually whole. God gives us a directive, not an elective, and it’s for His glory and our good.

Extraordinary Effects of Gratitude

Gratitude is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful in our life. It’s awareness, appreciation and acknowledgment of the positive aspects and blessings of life. How easy it is to not pay attention to them until they’re gone.

During this COVID-19 pandemic a poor old man got the virus and was near death but lived because of a badly needed ventilator. He survived miraculously and, before leaving the hospital, medical personnel gathered around him, and he began crying uncontrollably.

A nurse attempted to comfort him, “It’s OK. There’s no need to cry. Your ventilator was paid for!”

His answer made all the doctors and nurses tearful as he

explained, "I'm not crying because of the money, but during this time I realized I've been breathing God's air for 80 years and never had to pay a penny for it!"

God is a good God, and He calls us to cultivate an attitude of gratitude in a consistent way to glorify Him. The result: We'll have a longer and healthier life. Pause and ponder some of the incredible effects science proves are the result of a grateful heart:

- Decreases stress and depression.
- Lowers blood pressure and decreases inflammation.
- Better sleep.
- More resilience to perform challenging tasks.
- Stronger relationships with family, friends and colleagues.
- Less substance abuse and suicides.
- Fewer divorces and suicides.
- Enhanced sense of security and well-being.
- Better coping with loss after trauma.
- More attractive appearance for "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance" (Prov. 15:13a).

3 Things Thankfulness Does for Us

First, thankfulness weakens pride in our life and helps us cultivate humility. It demonstrates our dependency and trust in God.

Second, it protects us from the sin of complaining. The Bible tells us to "do all things without grumbling or disputing" (Phil. 2:14, ESV) and practicing thankfulness is God's antidote to negativity. Rather than falling prey to charging

God or doubting His care, we show we trust our heavenly Father is working “all things ... together for good” (Rom. 8:28b, MEV).

This reality sure helped me days ago when I cracked a tooth and the dentist said I needed a crown, costing big bucks.

Third, it deepens our love and worship of God. Gratefulness thaws a cold, hard heart like frozen meat near a fire. It enables us to carry out the command: “be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (Rom. 12:11b).

Get Happy in God

On a regular basis I quote to myself the words of George Mueller of Bristol orphanage fame. He supernaturally cared for 10,024 orphans, established 117 schools and provided Christian education for 120,000 children. I’ve been to the site of his ministry work in England and encourage everyone to read the inspiring book chronicling his life and work.

George was an evangelist and a happy man who lived until the age of 92 at a time when people were dying 40 to 50 years earlier. He practiced thankfulness and inspired scores to do likewise. His famous saying encouraging gratitude to God was simply: “I count it my first duty every day to get my soul happy in God!”

With the avalanche of anxiety-producing stories in the news daily, aren’t you glad we can pause in this season and express gratitude to God for our manifold blessings? Scripture says, “Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 144:15b), and what a powerful witness we provide a watching world as we walk in happy holiness!

Remember the Pilgrims’ example on that first Thanksgiving when they paused to give God thanks for enabling them to survive terrible adversities that claimed the lives of all but 52 of the original 102 settlers.

Recall our Founding Father, George Washington, a devout follower of Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the first nationwide Thanksgiving celebration marking Nov. 26, 1789 “as a day of public Thanksgiving in prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God.”

Here’s the deal: Let’s be intentional in practicing Thanksgiving as a lifestyle and not merely a once-a-year holiday. Let’s purpose to be a people who “give thanks with a grateful heart,” and may the song be stuck in our heads for the rest of the day, the year and the rest of our lives. {eo}