

Gratitude Carries Healing Powers for the Heart

Paul closed his first letter to the church in Thessalonica with a series of directives, including this verse:

“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

At the time Paul wrote this epistle, the church was experiencing intense persecution. Yet Paul admonished them to be thankful. He even elaborated on the “when” and “why”: we should be thankful “in everything.” The reason: because “this is the will of God.”

This verse is profound because it is so diametrically opposed to our natural inclinations. If left to the natural mind, the *time* to be thankful would be when great things happen to us, and the *reason* because great things take place. To the ordinary human mind gratitude is conditional. However, this ought not to be the case for Christ’s followers. Much like the attribute of love, thankfulness should be ingrained in our character.

Not only is gratitude God’s will for us, but it also provides the best defense against pessimism, which brings cynicism, distrust, and gloom. Thankfulness is like a light, able to drive out darkness and replace it with gladness, hopefulness, and confidence.

The Bible illustrates an example of the consequences of ingratitude in Exodus, when the Israelites found themselves in the wilderness after their miraculous delivery from Egypt.

Israel’s exodus marked the end of a 400-year period of severe oppression and slavery in Egypt. Certainly the family of Joseph was not perfect when it relocated to Egypt. Still, it

seems institutional slavery planted seeds of negativity in their descendants, which took root and bore fruit over 400 years. This is not surprising, especially since they were keenly aware of their status as God's chosen people.

Enslavement must have been all the more painful in light of God's promises to Abraham. Their covenant of hope didn't include slavery, and "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12).

God called on Moses to deliver his pessimistic brethren, who displayed both types of pessimism—dispositional and explanatory.

First, they had a negative outlook and were chronic complainers—so much so that this constant grumbling made them irrational.

They were also explanatory pessimists, explaining life's events in a negative fashion.

Pessimists in every sense of the word, they reached this outlook by choice. Although years of slavery and oppression may have planted and nurtured this disposition, they had the capacity to change. All they had to do was choose an attitude of gratitude.

Except for Joshua and Caleb, all the Israelites above the age of 20 who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness and never saw the Promised Land. The fire of God's wrath consumed some (Numbers 11:1; 16:35); others were swallowed by the earth for their rebellion (Numbers 16:28–34).

☒ Some were executed for disobedience by their brother's sword (Exodus 32:25–28) and others bitten by fiery serpents for speaking against Moses and God (Numbers 21:4–6). What the Bible doesn't reveal is whether many suffered from cardiovascular disease. No doubt many would have died long before they had aged enough to develop significant

atherosclerosis.

The point here is that had they chosen to be thankful in all things, their pessimistic outlook and tendency to rebel would have faded. This would have spared them from 40 years of aimless wandering. They could have avoided death from any of the causes I mentioned in the previous paragraph. Most importantly, they could have entered the Promised Land with happy hearts.

Learn the power of gratitude, and let thanksgiving preserve your heart.

The preceding is an excerpt from Dr. Kara Davis' book, *Spiritual Secrets to a Healthy Heart*. The book can be purchased at [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), or [eBay](#).