

How Cultivating a Spirit of Gratitude Can Take Your Faith to the Next Level

It is almost Thanksgiving, my absolute favorite holiday, along with Christmas. This past year has shown me a lot about being grateful. I am grateful for my health, my family, God's provision, contentment, peace, hope and many other things. But I believe that having an attitude of gratitude is at the heart of finding that peace, joy, hope and a happy family and restored health and freedom in life. If we're not careful, we can start to focus on everything we don't have and forget exactly what we do have and what God has done for us. I'm learning that a grateful heart sees each day as a gift. Thankful people focus less on what they lack and more on the privileges they have.

Gratitude has a way of getting us through the hard stuff, difficult times and the chaotic times. To reflect on your blessings is to remember God's love, grace and mercy. To rehearse God's blessings is to discover His heart. To discover His heart is to discover not just good gifts but the good giver.

I love how the Message Bible translates 1 Thessalonians 5:18. It says this: "Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live." I'm learning that not every day will be perfect, but in everything I do, an attitude of gratitude, praise and worship can change everything. It can change my mindset from focusing on me and whatever is bothering me to focusing on the one true God who has promised to provide for *all* my needs according to His riches in glory.

Psalms 136 states 26 times that we should give thanks to the

Lord. We live in such an age of entitlement and “the world owes me” mentality that we lose sight of gratefulness. Next time we feel less than grateful, let’s remind ourselves of all we should be thankful for. The only thing we are entitled to do is give thanks to the Lord daily. Without His faithfulness, we would be lost forever!

Look at this Scripture again in the New International Version: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

Can I be honest? Sometimes it’s the “all” in that verse that gets me. Most of us can be thankful for lots of things at lots of times, but in “all” circumstances? That can be a challenge. What about when you find yourself suffering sickness (cancer) or defeat? What about when a loved one leaves this world too soon, and you still can’t see past your tears, or when you’ve been praying for your prodigal child to come home and it seems like the prayers will never be answered? What about when you’re discouraged, disillusioned and struggling with disbelief; or what about when you’re overwhelmed, overextended and just simply fighting being over-stressed? What about when the needs mount so high and your bank account is empty, or when life seems unfair, and the enemy seems to be camping out at your front door? Yep, even these situations fall under the “in all” circumstances, and honestly, it can be really hard to find gratitude in them.

Don’t you love how God’s Word never changes to fit our circumstances? His Truth rises above our circumstances so that we can too. He doesn’t say give thanks “in some of it” or “in the fun times”, but “in *all* things.”

Because He says in Romans 8:28 (MEV), “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God.” He can take all things and bring good out of them. But are we willing to be grateful before we see the good in them? In all things, we’re

gaining strength, we're gaining perseverance. In a culture that tells us that everything is based on how we feel, we're learning that true joy is never based on our feelings or our circumstances. God's ways are bigger, His thoughts are higher and we can be assured that He holds us in His hands. He is with us always.

But for all its benefits, gratitude doesn't often come naturally to us. Look at Luke 17:11-19, Jesus was met by 10 lepers, who all cried out to be healed and for Jesus to have pity on them. Jesus didn't hesitate, He told them to go show themselves to the priest and as they walked, they were cleansed. But look what happens next, "One of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned with a loud voice glorifying God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan" (Luke 17:15-16).

Jesus was amazed that only one man had thought to thank him. "Were not the ten cleansed?" He asked. "Where are the nine?" (Luke 17:17). He looked at the one leper who came back to thank Him and said, "Rise, go your way. Your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19b).

What did Jesus mean when he said "well"? To be made well means "to be in good standing and in good favor." I believe that not only was the leprosy stopped and cleansed from his body, but he was also completely restored and renewed. His skin grew back, fingers grew back, limbs grew back, whatever he had lost was renewed. Why? Because he came back with thanksgiving and gratitude. The other nine lepers were just cleansed. The leprosy stopped, but the one leper who came back with a grateful heart was made "well"; he was made whole.

Being thankful, for me, should be an automatic response to knowing I'm forgiven when I know I don't deserve it. Recognizing God's grace causes me to have a thankful attitude. No matter what you might be facing, the good news is this: You woke up this morning; He gave you today. And if we're still

here, living and breathing, then our every breath should bring praise and honor to Him. You never fight the battles alone. Stay strong. Choose joy. Choose to be grateful in it all.

It takes time to develop a habit of appreciation for all He has done. Why not start today? Today is as good a day as any and I encourage you to pray and tell God how thankful you are for His grace He has given you. Tell Him you accept His sacrifice for you and want Him to help you develop a rich and passionate appreciation for all He's done for you.

Then, watch how your thankfulness grows. One way to acknowledge the good that God's done in your life is to make a list of all He has done for you. Start a gratitude journal by listing all the things you have to be thankful for. Going over that list can improve your attitude of gratitude. Cultivating a spirit of thankfulness honors God and strengthens our faith. It also strengthens our relationships with other people. We can't be in a right relationship with God or with anyone without a spirit of thankfulness.

I love Thanksgiving!! It's a great time of year to remind us to be thankful, but there is something so powerful about living a daily life of gratitude. It is not always easy to give thanks, but it's what we must do in order to see God's will accomplished in our lives. This is how we move into higher realms of faith for ourselves, for our family, for our city, nation and world. Satan is defeated when we have a thankful heart because thankfulness during difficulty is a sacrifice pleasing to God.

Are you thankful? Thankfulness is the key that turns your situation around because it changes you, your outlook and your attitude. There is power in a thankful heart. So, what do you have to be thankful for today? Take time this Thanksgiving to share with others exactly what you're thankful for and praise God, for He is good! Spend time in prayer today with paper and pen listing all you are thankful for and watch how God

responds. Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

For more on having an attitude of gratitude, listen to pastor Karen share about this topic on her video blog, "The Breathing Room", Episode 22.