

*"But we who would be born again indeed,
must wake our souls unnumbered times a day."*

GEORGE MACDONALD

GRATITUDE

Desire	to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting to live with a grateful heart, cognizant of God's work in my life and my abundant resources
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 the heartbeat of thankfulness.
Scripture	<p>"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. <i>His love endures forever.</i> Give thanks to the God of gods. <i>His love endures forever.</i> Give thanks to the Lord of lords: <i>His love endures forever.</i>" (Psalm 136:1-2)</p> <p>"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)</p> <p>"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6)</p>
Practice Includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prayers and songs that focus on God's generosity • gratefully giving and sharing all you are and have as a sign of your thankfulness to God • expressing gratitude to others; the habit of saying "thank you," "I am so grateful," "you are so kind" and so forth • gratefully noticing God's presence and gifts throughout the day • practicing an <i>abundance</i> mentality; counting the blessings of life • keeping a gratitude journal of the myriad gifts God has brought you
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

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I HAVE A FRIEND WHO IS BENT ON teaching her grandchildren about gratitude. When one of them begins to complain or cry about some disappointment, she says, “Sweetheart, I know you don’t like what is happening, but you have the choice of making this a happy day or a sad day. What kind of day do you want to have? Do you remember all we have to be glad about in this day?” My friend is teaching her grandchildren that everything is gift. Everything from water to smiles, from bicycles to an education. Nothing is deserved. All is gift from God. And the only appropriate response to all life’s gifts is gratitude.

Thankfulness is a thread that can bind together all the patchwork squares of our lives. Difficult times, happy days, seasons of sickness, hours of bliss—all can be sewn together into something lovely with the thread of thankfulness. Jesus was especially good at doing this. Once he was in a tough situation with a lot of hungry people on his hands, and all he had were five loaves of bread and two fish. He could have complained that God shouldn’t expect him to feed five thousand people with so little. But Jesus didn’t write off the loaves and fish as nothing. He noticed what was given and “gave thanks” for it (Mark 6:41). And in these less-than-perfect circumstances, God supplied all that was needed. We, like Jesus, have choices about how to respond to what life dishes up. We each have the power to interpret the facts of our lives. We make the choices that turn us into bitter or grateful people. Carl Jung discovered (and popularized) this statement among the Latin writings of Erasmus: *vocatus atque non vocatus, deus aderit*. Gratitude is rooted in this reality that “bidden or unbidden, God is present.”

Thanksgiving 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.”

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 have you 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?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Begin a gratitude journal by keeping a record of the “abundances” 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, 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 there 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. Beside 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.

RESOURCES ON GRATITUDE

Choosing Gratitude: Your Journey to Joy by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Life Signs or *Here and Now* by Henri Nouwen

One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are by Ann Voskamp

Louie Schwartzberg, “Nature. Beauty. Gratitude.” TED, June 2011. www.ted.com/talks/louie_schwartzberg_nature_beauty_gratitude