

The Power of Gratitude

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Day One

Have you ever thought about how powerful gratitude is? It has truly just begun to dawn on me that when I choose gratitude, when I am consistently thankful, I am amazingly empowered!

What do I mean? First, let's define the difference between gratitude and thankfulness. In many ways they are the same, but gratitude is more powerful. Thankfulness is a response to an event—when something nice happens or someone does something for you—and you are thankful. You got a good review which led to a raise, and you are thankful. And of course, thankfulness is good.

Gratitude, on the other hand, is a culture you develop for yourself, and it has a positive effect on everyone in your circle of influence. Being grateful becomes a way of life, increasing over time. The frequency of thankfulness develops this attitude or culture of gratitude. So, focusing on being thankful in all circumstances leads you to an abiding attitude of gratitude. It becomes a way of life, an automatic reaction, a repetitive act that creates spiritual muscle memory.

Amazingly, God's Word set this principle for us long before psychology caught on.

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:20).

Paul wrote to the Colossians that they should *sing to God with gratitude in their hearts* (Colossians 3:16). Gratitude is a heart thing. Someone has said that gratitude is when memory is stored in the heart.

We have a ministry called The Hidden Word where we encourage you to memorize one verse per week. It is easy to do, and we help you. This month our theme is gratitude. You could join with us and develop this culture of gratitude for yourself—in your home, where you work. It is powerful; it can change the temperament and quality of your life, making an improved home life, a better workplace, a lovelier person in you, and all to the glory of God.

There is power in gratitude.

Day Two

I'm examining the power of gratitude—of being a consistently thankful and grateful person. What is the power of gratitude?

For one, gratitude empowers you to be content with who you are, where you are, and what you have. Someone has said gratitude turns what we have into enough. Think about that. When what you have is enough, you're no longer envious, dissatisfied, or obsessed by the desire to have more. As you develop

a heart of gratitude, always counting your blessings for what you have instead of dwelling on what's missing, it brings contentment into your life.

The Apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy *godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6). This simple statement carries a real punch—a divine principle many Christians should take seriously, and that is contentment. The more you develop a heart of gratitude, the more contented you will be. And in this way—joining a godly lifestyle with true contentment—we gain so very much.

I find this is an on-going commitment for me, one that can easily get sidetracked with wanting more. Whenever we think getting something material, or getting more of it, will meet our needs, then we are not content. To develop a heart of gratitude means we recognize this flaming arrow our enemy will constantly throw at us—the arrow of discontent—and we choose to be thankful for what we have instead. A heart of gratitude turns what we have into enough.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.” Godliness with contentment is great gain. It's rich, and gratitude is the key to a contented life. The great gain we experience from a heart of gratitude has nothing to do with material things. Rather it's all about the riches of a peaceful heart, a mind at rest, and the assurance of God's presence and his never-ending love.

I encourage you to be very intentional about developing a heart of gratitude, being thankful no matter what, and continually dwelling on all you have to be thankful for. It's a lot! And remember, the more you practice being thankful, the more you'll have to be thankful for.

Day Three

Each year I choose a word to pray into my life for that year. My one word for this year is acceptance, and the verse I chose is 1 Timothy 6:6—*godliness with contentment is great gain*. I'm directing our thoughts to the power of gratitude—the incredible benefits we have as Christ-followers when we continually develop a heart of gratitude.

And acceptance is one of the great gains we receive. As I said before, gratitude is more than just being thankful for an event. It is thankfulness on steroids—taking thankfulness to the next level. When gratitude becomes a way of life, or an automatic response, it gives you the power to accept what's coming your way.

Let's face it: resistance comes far more naturally to us than acceptance. When life isn't going the way you want it to, if you're like me, your first reaction is focused on how to change it. And that often creates tons of stress and strife. We often hear and say, “Well, it is what it is,” right? And in a sense, that is the motto of acceptance—it is what it is.

Of course, that doesn't mean we lay down and roll over when we need to do something, but life is full of so many situations we simply cannot control, cannot change, and must endure. We can do that with a heart of gratitude, accepting what we cannot change, or we can kick and complain and be miserable. Gratitude empowers you to accept what you cannot change and trust God's promise to you.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

When acceptance comes more easily for you, because of your heart of gratitude, it empowers you to take in what's happening without needing to change or fix it. It is what it is. Focusing on being grateful allows you to quietly accept the moment and respond to it in a Christ-honoring way.

There is great power in gratitude.

Day Four

The power of gratitude. As I have been putting my thoughts together for this devotional, I've been amazed and inspired to realize how absolutely critical it is for us who claim Christ as our Savior to have hearts of gratitude. It's even more important than I realized.

Someone has said thankfulness is the quickest path to joy. Joy is what we want and what we need because the joy of the Lord is our strength. Don't you know the enemy of your soul wants to steal your joy because that weakens and sidelines you. It can happen so fast—before you realize it. How does it happen? You forget to be grateful, and you start a pity party, or you complain to someone, or you gripe in your own soul.

Gratitude and a complaining spirit don't get along well. They cross each other out. When your heart is full of gratitude, that complaining spirit, that pity party just can't take hold. But when you forget to do God's clearly expressed will—to give thanks in all circumstances—then gratitude is canceled out by griping and complaining.

Gratitude has the power to give you joy no matter what. And that gratitude will cause you to fix your mind on all you have in Jesus. Jesus is the reason we can be and must be always grateful. This is how Peter put it:

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8).

Inexpressible and glorious joy! Joy that does not yield to difficult circumstances, unhappy endings, unanswered prayers. True, gratitude is the quickest path to joy, and inexpressible and glorious joy is found in Jesus Christ—and in him alone. Go there when you're tempted to be discouraged. As you express gratitude for Jesus, you will know this joy which can't be expressed. Gratitude is very powerful.

Day Five

The Bible clearly teaches us to give thanks in all situations, to develop a heart of gratitude because it makes a huge difference in your growth as a follower of Jesus Christ. The more you have a spirit, a controlling attitude of gratitude for all the blessings in your life, beginning with Jesus, the more power you will have to *do the good works* you were put here to do, as we read in Ephesians 2:10.

I have a suggestion I believe will put you on the path to becoming a more grateful person, a person whose first response to whatever happens in your day is to give thanks. I'm going to do this with you. I believe it would be a great help if we would keep a thankful journal—a book or a tablet of some kind—where we specifically name three things in that day we are thankful for.

This is not a new idea. Many studies have been done in the secular world showing the power of gratitude. Once again, the world has unknowingly come to accept principles that are grounded in God's truth. When you practice biblical principles, they work for your good even if you are not yet born again into God's family.

I have journaled in different ways through the years, but this is the first time I've committed to a daily, end-of-day thankful journal. And it so happens a dear friend just gave me a new journal—not a coincidence, if you ask me.

Will you join me? I mean, how much trouble can it be? It's really easy to do. Just jot down three things in each day that you are thankful for—or more. It could be a chocolate cake or a good report from your doctor or a call from a friend. Small or large, it shouldn't be hard to name three things each day for which you are thankful and write them in your thankful journal. If you decide to do this with me, let me

know, and please share your experience of how God is growing a heart of gratitude in you. It could be life-changing in many ways.