



STORY

As a child, I always dreaded my parents telling me that it was time to write thank-you notes. So, I'd dutifully sit down and write, "Dear _____, thank you for the _____. I really love it! Thank you for remembering my birthday!" or something like that. But that act, while an act of thank you, was definitely not an act of gratitude. It was an act of duty and responsibility. It did not come from deep inside of me. In recent years, I have been learning more and more about what gratitude is all about. It is not a duty or a responsibility. Instead, it is a daily practice of *choosing* to be grateful... *choosing* to be aware of that for which I am grateful...*being intentional* in not only seeing gratitude but sharing it with others. It is a transforming practice as it literally rewires our brains to be looking for what is wrong or what is lacking (which we do automatically) and be aware of what is already there.

*Written by Edward Goode.

PRACTICES

Each day of the week, take time to do the 5 or the 15-minute practice.

Plan a time to do the Going Deeper practice sometime during the week.

- **5-minute Practice:** Each day this week, write down three things for which you are grateful. Nothing is off-limits. Something might seem trivial, like, "I'm grateful for spoons." But if you really are grateful for spoons, then you are grateful for spoons. It might be someone in your life: "I am grateful for my children." It might be something that happened that day: "I am grateful for being able to stop before getting in an accident." It might be something beautiful you saw. Remember, nothing is off-limits. Each day...write those down. Don't just think about them. Write them. Each day, look back at the days before. By the end of the week, you are looking back at seven days worth of gratitude.
- **15-minute Practice:** Set your timer for 15-minutes and take time each day to write down at least three things you are thankful for. After the first day, take time to read over your list from the day before and be grateful.
I am thankful for this person.
I am grateful for these things.
READ AND PRAY PSALM 100: 4-5 (The Message)
Enter the password: "THANK YOU!" Make yourselves at home, talking praise. Thank God. Worship God. For God is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.
Spend the rest of your time praising and thanking Jesus for all he is doing in your life.
- **Going Deeper:** Right where you are, take a deep breath, and close your eyes. In your mind, go through the space where you are. What immediately comes to you? Is it the physical space you are in? The objects? The people? The memories? Other? Take those things that come to you and bring them together with "gratitude." Which one seems to connect most strongly to gratitude? Why? What is it about it that makes you grateful? What emotions does this stir in you? Open your eyes and focus on what came to you. Is it something you can pick up? If so, pick it up, move it around, look at it from different angles, and feel its textures. If it isn't something you can hold, just imagine putting your hands around it and imagine those same things - moving it around, feeling it? What other senses can be engaged? Is there a smell? A taste? A sound? How is gratitude felt through all of these? How can you do this at some point every day this week?
- **With Young Children:**
If you are doing this with young children, you will need to guide them and do this together with them. Read this aloud and engage in it together.
Take a minute to get all your wiggles out.
Sit down in a comfy spot and open this gift of gratitude.

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 4:6, Psalm 100:4-5, Luke 9:10-17, Matthew 6:25-34

QUESTIONS for Journaling and Discussion

- When you think about gratitude, what do you think of first?
- What things make it hard to be thankful or grateful? Talk to Jesus about these things.
- It's easy to be grateful in good times, but often much harder to find things to be thankful for when life isn't going well. Where are you right now? Are you in a season where it's easy to be thankful for something, or is it a time when it's hard to be grateful?
- In God's economy, there is always abundance. Think about the big catch of fish when Jesus called Peter and the feeding of the 5000 etc. There is always more than enough! There are always leftovers! How do you need to experience the abundance of God right now?
- Take some time to thank Jesus for the ways he has provided for you in the last few months or in the previous year. You can look back through your calendar or your photos on your phone to help you remember. What do you notice?

EXPERIENCES

Choose one or several to try.

- **For All:** Create a gratitude jar or gift box to use each day. Have a stack of paper and pens nearby, write down something you are grateful for throughout the day, and put it in the jar or box. Read these out loud at the end of the week, like at a meal on Sunday night, and be thankful together.
- **For Families, Youth, and Entire Communities:** Create a gratitude stained-glass window by covering a window with colorful Post-it notes. You will need colorful Post-it notes and black Sharpie markers. Write down the things you are grateful for on the Post-it notes and stick them on the designated window or windows (clear window, not those already made in stained-glass). This can be done for one week or throughout the entire summer. If you are doing this at church, have an instruction sheet, so people know what to do. This can be done at home on a designated window or windows or in the youth room.
- **For Leading Young Children:**
If you are doing this with young children, you will need to guide them and do this together with them. Read this aloud and engage in it together:
 - Take a minute to get all your wiggles out.
 - Sit down in a comfy spot.
 - Open your hands and imagine something you love. What is it? Share that out loud.
 - Jesus is all about giving to us in BIG WAYS.
All Good things come from God (James 1:17). What good things has God given to you? Share that out loud.
 - When you receive a gift you love, how do you say “thank you”? Take a moment to quietly say “thank you!” to God in your own words. As a family or group, share your “thank you’s” to God as you move around the circle and close in prayer together. Do this as a daily practice this week out loud.
- **For All:** Honor someone you are grateful for in your life, your ministry, your neighborhood, your community. Celebrating them in some way. It can be simple or more elaborate. Create a video, a slide show, throw a party or picnic, create a card or cards to honor and tell this person that you are grateful for them.
- **Gratitude Journal:** Keep this practice of writing down what you are thankful for each day going throughout the summer. What do you notice? How are you changing as you remember the good things happening and all the gifts Jesus is providing you? How can you continue this practice and start to make it a daily habit?
- **Read:** *Grateful - The Subversive Act of Giving Thanks* by Diana Butler Bass
- **Listen:** Take time to listen to “What a Wonderful World” covered by Jon Batiste and be grateful. Create a Gratitude Playlist to listen to this summer.

PUSHBACK

What do I have to be grateful for? "I've lost my job...I can't afford enough food for my family ... I got that cancer diagnosis...the world is in chaos...my candidate lost." These (among many others) are what can sometimes arise when we share about being grateful. It's hard to ask, "How can I be grateful in the midst of all of this?"

Those are all real and honest. There's nothing wrong about feeling those things. And living in gratitude does not mean ignoring the realities that we face in life. It does not mean ignoring the injustice in the world or in our lives. It does not mean stuffing down emotions that are present. It is simply an "alongside" practice - how to be intentional about finding gratitude *in the midst*. It doesn't replace but instead walks alongside, so to speak.

PRAYER

Take a deep breath in for four seconds.

Hold that breath for four seconds.

Breathe out for four seconds.

Hold your breath for four seconds.

Do it again, four seconds...but this time breathe in gratitude in your life. What are you drawing in?

Four seconds...hold those things close to you.

Four seconds...breathe out gratitude into the world

Four seconds...hold with expectation for the next experience of gratitude to come

Do it again...