

Being grateful is not as simple as it seems. Let's spend some time this week brushing up on our thankfulness skills and knowledge.

## Day 1

### Consider the End

Many times, when I am in the midst of a project, I am not the most pleasant person to be around. I have a tendency to find doing projects stressful for a number of reasons, including being unskilled, unprepared, and generally in over my head. Most of the time I tend to think that my project is going poorly and will turn out to be a disaster, and most of the time, when it is finished, it isn't. I generally look back, and while I can see the faults and flaws, tend to be satisfied with the result. It isn't up to the standards of a professional, but it isn't terrible either, at least not as bad as I envisioned in the middle of the project when all hope seemed lost. I think life is like that often. I will not be surprised if, when I look back at my life in total, I can see that all of the things that were difficult and challenging were the points where God was really accomplishing something in my life, and that, rather than being a disaster, these were the points that really mattered in transforming my life into Christ-likeness. In order to be thankful at all times in our lives, it is necessary to develop a longer perspective. In the moment, these things might seem like a disaster, but in the end, these things are shaping our character. When I talk to my kids, and hear how their experiences with building careers and family are challenging, I remember the challenges in my own life. I then start to see that my maturity and experience were shaped by things I wasn't all that thankful for in the moment. Now, I just have to remember it when the next disaster occurs.

Verses: Romans 5:1-5, James 1:2-4, 12, 1 Peter 4:12-13

Prayer Topics: Strength, Endurance, Transformation

## Day 2

### Goal's Aren't Everything

I have a tendency to look at goals and forget about other things. I would not say that I am necessarily goal oriented, as some people are much better at achieving goals than I am. I am not the organized, list of things to do, accomplishments crossed off the list kind of guy, but I can focus on what needs to be done to the exclusion of other things. I have often found myself answering questions I really didn't listen to, or wondering if I returned the greeting of the person I just passed in the hallway, because I was thinking about things that needed to be done. Goals are important, and I admire those people who skillfully accomplish the things they have planned out on their lists. I also know that goals aren't all important. It doesn't do any good to achieve your goal of going to Disneyland next summer for family vacation if everyone hates each other and argues the whole time you are there. Relationships are important, and relationships don't always lend themselves to neat goal setting and checklists. People are not tasks to be accomplished, they are not objects on which our wills can be imposed. To live a life of gratitude, it is often necessary to stop trying to impose our will on the world long enough to understand the nature of relationship that God communicates to us through the world, which is a complicated way of saying stop and smell the roses, and understand they are gifts from God. The foundation of reality is a relationship, and that relationship exists in blessing and worship. To complete our part, we must notice the blessings so we can render the worship.

Verses: Philippians 3:13-14, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Prayer Topics: Big Picture, Wisdom, Will

## Day 3

### Destroy Entitlement

If we want to stay grateful for any length of time, we must learn to destroy any sense of entitlement in our lives. In our small group lesson last week, we looked at Hebrews 7, about Jesus and how he is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. This is a statement most modern people don't know what to do with, not only because they don't know who Melchizedek is, but because they don't really understand what a priest is. In our world, we are convinced that we can go to God in whatever way we see fit, and that God is just happy to hear from us, like a slightly estranged grandparent who is pleasantly surprised that we called. The reality is that, because of our sin and enmity with God, there is a burning wrath that has the heat of a thousand suns directed toward us. This wrath is not only extreme in degree, but justified in character. We deserve this wrath, and nothing but wrath. In light of this, every blessing that comes from God is an act of His grace, His mercy, and His love. We are not entitled to anything good, but deserve death. The question is not, "why do some things go wrong in my life? Why do I experience occasional suffering?" "Why do I experience disappointment and setbacks?" The question is, "why isn't my life complete and absolute hell?" If we live in light of this admittedly uncomfortable truth, our life becomes something to celebrate, to give glory to God for, and to be ever grateful for. The destruction of entitlement by coming to terms with a very difficult truth becomes the pathway to true gratitude and joy. So go ahead, destroy it. What could go wrong?

Verses: 1 John 2:16, James 4:6, Proverbs 29:23

Prayer Topics: Humility, Respect, Love

## Day 4

### Make it Personal

We live in a time where science has shown the health benefits, both mental and physical, of being thankful. We also live in a time when people don't like contemplating the existence of a personal God. So, what is a person to do? Be grateful to nobody! That is the correct answer for our time, and it is a weird one. The idea of impersonal gratitude is completely wrong. You can't be grateful to an inanimate force, for the simple reason that it didn't intend you any good, just as being angry with it is pointless because it didn't intend you any harm. It doesn't intend anything, because to have a will is to be a person. You can be happy about beneficial accidents, but you can't be grateful or thankful because the expression to impersonal forces is meaningless. The purpose of gratitude is relational, it completes the circuit of the goodness and glory of strength and weakness. It gives goodness to strength, as the power of strength is used to bless, and honors weakness by blessing it. The blessing of helpfulness goes down, and the blessing of gratitude goes up. We should always be thankful to persons, because their blessing to us is not the result of luck or chance, but a conscious decision to use their strength and power for our benefit, and to complete the covenant we are obliged to give thanks. Without this giving of thanks, the relationship is injured, and future blessing imperiled.

Verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Hebrews 12:28, Colossians 3:15-20, Psalm 107:1

Prayer Topics: Particular, Individual, Unity

## Day 5

### Details Matter

When we give thanks, it is important to not be vague but instead, to be as specific as possible. Why? Because vagueness is lazy and does not honor the intention of the gift. The blessing we received was not vague, so why should the thanks be? I am guilty of this many times. I often thank God for the day, or for the meal, or for the friend, etc., and by doing this I weaken the blessing of those gifts. I should be specific about the nature of those things and how they blessed me. This specificity connects me in a greater way to the giver of the gift, because I grow to understand the intention behind the gift. Thanking God for a restful day helps me to understand God's knowledge of and sympathy with my weakness as a human, and thanking Him for a challenging day connects me with His desire to see me grow and become glorified. Thanking God for a delicious meal helps me to understand His desire to bring me joy and delight, while thanking Him for a healthy meal connects me with His desire to bless my physical health and bring me strength. In all these things, whether to God or to a person, when we receive blessings from any source we should be specific with our gratitude, because it will make the blessing to both giver and receiver grow.

Verses: Philippians 4:6-7, Colossians 2:6-7, Colossians 4:2

Prayer Topics: Details, Depth, Clarity