

# Practicing Gratitude

## Day 1 of 5 • This day's reading

- Genesis 1:12
- Mark 6:37-44

### Devotional

Gratitude is a spiritual practice of seeing and celebrating the good in the world around you. This is easier said than done.

Modern life often forces you to focus on what is bad – what needs to be fixed immediately, what crisis must be prevented, what new thing you need now to make your life better.

Learning to notice the good takes practice. Thankfully, every time you flex your gratitude muscle you get stronger. You get positive feedback – it feels good to be grateful. And you connect with God who is the source of all goodness.

You don't need to look for big miraculous things to be grateful for. Jesus showed that gratitude can begin with very little. On a day when it seemed like he and his friends wouldn't have enough to eat, Jesus looked up to heaven and thanked God for the food they had (Mark 6:37-44). When Jesus did this, the little they had turned into an abundance.

Start your gratitude practice by simply noticing what is good in the world around you. This goes back to the very first chapter of the Bible, when God “sees” what is good in his creation (Genesis 1:12).

### **Practice:**

- What is good in the world around you right now? If the seat you’re sitting on is comfortable, thank God for that.
- During your day, make it a point to notice one thing that’s good. If a coworker smiles at you, this can be a prompt to gratitude.
- Before you go to bed tonight, think back on your day. What was good today that you can thank God for? Make a list.
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**Prayer:** God, thank you for the good you have put in my life today. Reveal yourself to me through your goodness. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

## Day 2 of 5 • This day's reading

- 1 Thessalonians 5:18
- Jonah 4:6

### Devotional

It's easy to notice the good around you when things are going well. It can be harder to practice gratitude when things go poorly.

And yet, that's exactly when you need to connect with God. When life is tough, you need God more than ever.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says that Christ's will for you is to give thanks "in all circumstances." How can you give thanks when things are hard? It may take venting your hurt or frustration to God before you can get to gratitude.

Jesus himself suffered. If you're suffering, start there with Jesus. Then ask God what you can be grateful for.

You may find many good things springing to mind. Even the thought that Jesus sees you and cares for you can be encouraging.

When the prophet Jonah was having a terrible day at work, he found gratitude by looking at God's provision through the physical environment. God made a bush for shade and "Jonah was very happy about the bush." (Jonah 4:6).

### **Practice:**

- Think about a current hardship you face. Tell God truthfully how you feel about it. Share every lament and complaint.
- Ask yourself: is there anything I can be grateful for in this circumstance?
- Notice anything in your natural environment that feels like a gift from God.
- Anytime you feel your shoulders sink today, ask Jesus to share in your suffering. Then ask: is there anything I can be grateful for? What has God done here that's good?
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**Prayer:** God, you know my heart. Thank you for hearing my suffering. Help me thank you in all circumstances.

## Day 3 of 5 - This Day's Reading

- Philippians 1:3-4
- Numbers 6:24-26

### Devotional

As soon as you started to talk, your parents probably taught you to say, “thank you.”

It's no surprise that parents teach children this basic rule.

Relationships grow stronger when you express gratitude. A heartfelt “thank you” makes other people feel appreciated. And it reminds you of your dependence upon other people.

Saying “thank you” isn't something you grow out of when you leave childhood.

The writer of the letter to the Philippians modeled practicing gratitude for other people. “I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you” (Philippians 1:3–4).

In the Old Testament, people express gratitude to one another by blessing them. One of the most famous biblical blessings reads, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you” (Numbers 6:24–26).

When you express your gratitude to someone else, it can be as if God is shining his face on both of you. A sincere “thank you” points out the good in another person and bring it to the surface.

### **Practice:**

- Say, “thank you” to three people today. It could be someone you know well, or someone you only meet in passing.
- Use specifics. Point out exactly what the other person did and the good that you see in them. For example, you could say: “Thank you for responding so quickly to my email. I notice you put a lot of care into your work. You really love the people around you through your work.”
- Make a note of how someone reacts to a genuine “thank you.” Did the person’s face change when they heard it? How did you feel after expressing your gratitude?
- At the end of your day today, reflect on your gratitude experiment.
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**Prayer:** God, thank you for the people in my life. Give them your blessing. Help me say “thank you” for the ways they bless me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## Day 4 of 5 • This day's reading

- Psalms 16:5-6
- Exodus 20:17

### Devotional

When you're trying to fan your flame of gratitude, comparison douses it like a bucket of ice water.

Comparison means looking at what someone else has and thinking about how much better or worse it is than what you have. It's so dangerous that the 10th commandment warns against it. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17).

Comparison sabotages two relationships at the same time: your relationship with God, and your relationship with other people. You can't fully love others when you're jealous of them or trying to outperform them. And you can't love God when you think maybe God has given you a bad deal.

When you feel the urge to compare your lot in life with someone else's, replace that thought with a prayer of gratitude. A good example comes from Psalm 16. "The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage." (Psalm 16:5–6).

The writer of the psalm acknowledges God as the source of his provision. He declares that what God has given him is good. This is an antidote to comparison.

### **Practice:**

- Think about the last time you compared yourself to someone else or compared what you have to what someone else has.
- Thank God for blessing that person.
- Thank God for your lot in life – exactly the way it is right now.
- Today when you notice yourself making a comparison, make a list of the good things that God has blessed you with in this area.
- Before you go to bed tonight, do a comparison inventory. Ask yourself: Am I jealous of anyone else? Do I need to say “thank you, God” for what I have?
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**Prayer:** God, thank you for setting boundaries around what is mine. I am grateful for the lot you've given me. Be my proof against envy and unhappiness. Amen.

## Day 5 of 5 • This day's reading

- Philippians 4:8-9

### Devotional

If you practice gratitude every day, what do you think the result will be?

The Bible promises that seeing the good in daily life leads to peace.

“If there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8–9).

Medical studies confirm the link between gratitude and mental health. When test subjects wrote down three good things (Seligman et al., 2005), kept a gratitude journal (Kerr, O'Donovan, & Pepping, 2014), or wrote letters of gratitude to other people (Toepfer et al., 2012) all demonstrated improvements in levels of anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction.

The Bible and the scientific material both attest to the effectiveness of simple gratitude practices. If you want to deepen

your level of peace and your relationship with God, gratitude is a great place to start.

### **Practice:**

- Reflect on the past week. Which practice of gratitude gave you the most peace? Was it noticing something good three times a day? Finding gratitude in something hard? Thanking another person? Replacing the urge to compare with gratitude for what you have right now?
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- Whichever discipline most helped you to experience gratitude, make that your practice today.
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- Make a plan for the future: How can you build a practice of gratitude into your daily life?
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**Prayer:** God, thank you for all that you've given me. Please give me a grateful heart and a deeper relationship with you. Grant me peace today. Amen.