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## 28 DAYS OF DEVOTION

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### WEEK 2 (October 24 - 30) Grounded in Gratitude

#### DAY 8: Gratitude in All Seasons

*I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:12-13 NRSV)*

There are many Americans who know the words “I can do all things ...” not because they heard them read from a church pulpit, but because they have seen them written on the shoes of NBA All-Star Stephen Curry. Curry has been writing some variation of that Bible verse on his sneakers before each game since his college days, and he continues to use it for motivation and inspiration.

But as Curry found out the hard way after his Golden State Warriors blew a 3–1 series lead and lost the 2016 NBA title to Cleveland, the words of Philippians 4:13 do not ensure winning an NBA championship every season! What, then, of the promise that we can do ALL things through Christ? Paul’s own life and circumstances provide the key to understanding his message.

Paul truly knew hardship: he endured whippings, beatings, shipwrecks, and a stoning, as well as hunger and thirst; he wrote this letter from a prison cell. Yet, at the same time, he learned to be grateful for and to accept the abundant generosity of the church at Philippi as they had ministered to his needs. That is why he could say in the verses just prior to the ones above, “I have learned to be content with whatever I have” (v. 11 NRSV). The good news for us is this: Paul was not promising that believers can do anything and everything because of Jesus. Rather he was saying that because Jesus is sufficient for all our needs, we can be content in every circumstance in which we find ourselves. ~M. Thomas Norwood Jr.

#### **Reflection**

What does Christian contentment look like? How can we experience the joy of grateful living for God in all areas of our lives? Why do we find it hard to accept generosity from others?

#### **Challenge**

In your journal, chronicle your life’s journey toward finding contentment up to this point. What ups and downs have you experienced?

## **DAY 9: Choosing Gratitude**

*Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:15-18 CEB)*

A mother was busy navigating the complexities of a new school environment when all she had taught her children was tested. At the end of the school day, the oldest child began to explain the most recent incident of bullying, hurt feelings, and distress. The mother had taught the children to use their words, seek adult support, and defend themselves, but these lessons were lost in the heat of this moment as she declared, "Why didn't you simply put her in her place? You are twice her size and height."

These words were a direct command to end this once and for all. The youngest child replied, "Something hard must be going on in her life. Maybe we should pray for her." The words coming from the first-grader stung, and the mother immediately regretted what she had said.

The decision not to repay a wrong with a wrong is a way of living that results from our desire to express gratitude rather than fear. It is a lifestyle that includes an attitude of kindness and generosity even in the face of unfairness. It requires us to continually cultivate holy habits that foster a better world for us all.

It is impossible to live the Christian life without aligning our words and actions. Nothing will be solved repaying wrong actions with wrong actions. When we see and experience wrongs, we must choose a different path—one that is grounded in gratitude and reflects our Christian beliefs.

Imagine what type of community would exist if we truly cared about each other. How different would our world be if we reflected on the intentionality of scripture to remind us to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all situations? In a complex world where bullying, meanness, selfishness, and greed exist, we must choose to respond from a place of gratitude and actively pursue good for everyone. The pursuit of good is a high calling that requires us to behave in a Christlike manner that is often counter to the world's view.

*~Aimee A. Cole-Laramore*

### **Reflection**

How often do you encounter or experience wrongs in this world? Are you attentive to others? Where do you find joy?

### **Challenge**

In your journal, express gratitude for your current circumstances. Reflect on ways to pursue good for those around you.

## Day 10: Rejoice, Don't Worry, and Give Thanks!

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:4-6 NRSV)*

Paul, writing from prison to the Christians in Philippi, offered quite good advice, especially when considering his own personal circumstances.

I saw this advice exemplified in a woman named Betty who tended the breakfast bar in a hotel where I stayed five nights a month for several years. She had a giving spirit and a contagious joy. I never once saw her anxious or fearful. My greeting was fairly consistent whenever I saw her: "Good morning, Betty! How are you doing today?" With a big smile on her face, her answer was equally predictable, but I never got tired of hearing it: "Don, I am blessed and highly favored." Every day, she spoke into her own life the words of God spoken to Mary through the angel (see Luke 1:28-29).

One day, I shared with the hotel manager how inspired I was to be greeted by Betty in such a positive way each morning. The manager went on to tell me about some of the life struggles Betty was experiencing and what challenges she was conquering—addiction, abuse, homelessness, and illness. A modern-day Paul, Betty was writing a letter from her own personal prison through her words and actions for me and for others to read:

- Rejoice in the Lord always.
- Don't worry about anything.
- Give thanks in everything.

I am grateful to God for sending such an angel into my life. I will never forget Betty's example of joy and gratitude.

People in twelve-step recovery often say that it's impossible to be in a place of fear and resentment if you are in a place of gratitude. Paul understood that. So did Mary. So did Betty. And, though I don't always get it right, in my grounded moments, so do I.

~Donald A. Smith

### **Reflection**

Where do you feel "imprisoned" in your life? When have you recently succumbed to worry and/or found it hard to rejoice? Who are the "angels" who, for you, model a worry-free life of joy and gratitude?

### **Challenge**

Write and mail a note of gratitude to at least one person who is a living example of Philippians 4:4-6.

## Day 11: Does Gratitude Really Matter?

*Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17-18 ESV)*

Too many bad breaks had happened for Joe: a job lost, a marriage ended, and mounting medical bills and car repairs had taken his last dollar. Finally, however, came a good break in the form of a job opportunity that offered a new beginning. But there was no money for gas to get him back and forth to work while he waited for the first paycheck. Reluctantly, Joe asked his pastor as they stood in the church's entryway, "Can you help?" After hearing the young man's story, the pastor agreed to meet at a local gas station where she paid for a tank of gas. His departing words were "When I get my first paycheck, I will be back to repay you." Would it matter whether he did? The gas was a gift, offered without strings.

As Luke describes in chapter 17, there were ten people stricken with a disease that had segregated them from family and community. As they cried out to Jesus for mercy, they wondered, "Could he help?" Jesus instructed them to go to the High Priest who had authority to decide if they were healthy enough to return to home and society. As they made their way there, each one was healed. Life was changed! One (and only one), however, returned to offer gratitude. One came back. For whatever reasons, nine did not.

Did it matter? After all, Jesus did not set forth any expectations. The healing was a gift of grace. Grace doesn't set rules for how the receiver is to respond to the gift.

Yet one senses there is a bigger question: did it matter to the one who came back? How did expressing gratitude offer perhaps a greater healing beyond the physical? Gratitude has great power in life. It moves us to complaining less and celebrating more. It enables us to see more clearly the good in all that is around us. With grateful hearts we focus less on the scarcity of what we do not have and more on the abundance of what we do. Saying thank you can transform an attitude of entitlement into a heart of feeling blessed. Offering thanks does matter ... to the one who says it.

*~Dustin L. Cooper*

### **Reflection**

How many times did you say thank you yesterday? in the past week? What happens in your heart when you express gratitude?

### **Challenge**

Make a point this week to say thank you, really focusing on the person as you express your gratitude. Pick someone who deserves your thanks and write or call them. Write about your experience in your journal.

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## Day 12: Count Your Blessings

*You can pass through his open gates with the password of praise.  
Come right into his presence with thanksgiving.  
Come bring your thank offering to him*

*and affectionately bless his beautiful name! (Psalm 100:4 TPT)*

I recently saw a plaque in the home decor section of a store with the phrase “Gratitude turns what we have into enough.” I took a picture with my phone so I could remember the exact wording because it struck me as identifying a deep need in our present culture, while at the same time issuing a subtle yet powerful call to action.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture where what we have is rarely enough. We want more—more money, more toys, more stuff, more recognition, and so on and so on! We are a people who often resist the word *enough* when it comes to our possessions. We want “more” because we think that getting “more” will bring us happiness and contentment. The truth is, what we truly desire from life will not come from what we have. Ultimately, happiness and contentment come from how we view what we have.

Your challenge for today will be to “count your blessings.” In the lyrics of the hymn “Count Your Blessings” are two phrases that are applicable to this exercise:

Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.\*

Through counting our blessings, we begin to see that God is generous with his people and that he delights in giving to us just what we need.

In my work in the ministry of stewardship and generosity, I have yet to meet an unhappy grateful person. There just seems to be a deep peace and abiding joy that only comes from a heart of gratitude. There is also a sense of contentment that accompanies a spirit of thanksgiving.

Gratitude indeed turns what we have into enough, but the best thing about gratitude and thanksgiving is described in Psalm 100:4: “You can pass through his open gates with the password of praise. Come right into his presence with thanksgiving” (TPT).

Gratitude and thanksgiving can lead us right into the presence of God, and God becomes our “enough”!

*~Joel Mikel*

### **Reflection**

What is your gut reaction to the question, “Do I have enough?” Does that reaction change when you count your blessings?

### **Challenge**

In your journal, create a “table of blessings and thanksgiving” by listing every blessing in your life: your relational blessings, your material blessings, and your spiritual blessings. As you list them, write beside each one the words “Thank you, God!”

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\*Johnson Oatman, “Count Your Blessings,” 1897.  
[https://hymnary.org/text/when\\_upon\\_lifes\\_billows\\_you\\_are\\_tempest](https://hymnary.org/text/when_upon_lifes_billows_you_are_tempest).

## Day 13: Sensible Stewardship

*Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7 CEB)*

William and Wanda were two of the most frugal people I've ever known. Decades into retirement, they fed their family and many others in our small town from the huge garden that William tended along the gravel driveway between the road and their house. William loved to collect aluminum cans to sell to the local recycling center and cash register receipts from a local grocer who would donate 1 percent back to their church. Wanda drove a twenty-year-old Buick and believed rinsing and reusing plastic storage bags and aluminum foil was sensible stewardship. They lived a simple life where nothing was wasted.

More importantly, William and Wanda loved Jesus, and they loved serving others. They volunteered countless hours in the church and in the community and believed that one of the best ways they could love God was by loving other people. They constantly spoke of God's grace and of their gratitude for Jesus.

I will never forget the day Wanda stood up to speak in one of our campaign meetings. She said, "You know how thankful we are for Jesus, and we love this church and the impact we are making in this community. We are going to give \$1,000 ... a month ... for this campaign." I nearly fell out of my chair. If she had said \$1,000 total, I would have been surprised, but \$36,000? What in the world were they thinking? Maybe Wanda and William were thinking about 2 Corinthians 9. They understood that God's grace in their lives provided them an opportunity to be generous. In turn their generosity would stir others to give with thanksgiving to God. And maybe that would lead more people to understand God's grace and the joy of being generous.

~Richard L. Rogers

### **Reflection**

Have you ever done something truly sacrificial? Have you ever chosen to be extravagantly generous? What motivated you to do it? How did that decision shape who you are today? How has someone else's extravagant generosity impacted your life?

### **Challenge**

In your journal, make a list of five practical ways you can create less waste and practice "sensible stewardship" like William and Wanda. Implement at least one of these in your daily or weekly routine.

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## Day 14: The Divine Nudge

*We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (2 Corinthians 8:1-2 NRSV)*

Although he had a job that provided a predictable income, Devon felt like he was always struggling to make ends meet. He felt imprisoned by expenses that siphoned off what would be his discretionary income. Now he was faced not only with that persistent sense of shortage but also with his church's annual campaign and its catchy theme about generosity. Certainly, he wanted to commit and participate with others in the congregation to help the church afford its ministries. Yet, he felt embarrassed and angry at himself for not being able to give anything.

His sadness and guilt were intensified when the pastor spoke the passage above from 2 Corinthians on the first Sunday of the annual campaign. Despite the pastor's analysis, those women in Macedonia must not have been as impoverished as they pretended to be, and certainly not as limited as he was. He remembered reading long ago the words of Anne Frank: "You can always—always—give something, even if it's a simple act of kindness!"\* But they're not looking for kindness right now, he thought, as he reflected on her words.

As Devon was walking his dog that evening, it dawned on him that he was focused on himself, not on God or the provisions that God persistently makes for him. That's how God expresses his love for me, he realized. The words from his pastor last Sunday included ones commonly attributed to the fourteenth-century Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart: "And suddenly you know: it's time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings." And so began Devon's entry into prayer realizing that God was nudging him toward something new.

~Sanford D. Coon

### **Reflection**

When have you felt trapped by scarcity? Has abundance ever felt out of reach for you? How might grateful recognition of God's persistent provisions be transformative toward generosity?

### **Challenge**

In prayerful mindfulness, identify three things right now for which you are grateful to God. Pause three more times through the course of today to practice this discipline. Continue it tomorrow and beyond and throughout any interval in which you feel limited by scarcity.

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\*Anne Frank, "Give!" in *Anne Frank's Tales from the Secret Annex: A Collection of Her Short Stories, Fables, and Lesser-Known Writings*, ed. Gerrold van der Stroom and Susan Massotty, rev. ed. (New York: Bantam, 2003), 121.