

# LIFE with Jesus in Worship

## Gratitude

### INTRODUCTION

*“I would maintain that thanks is the highest form of thought and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.” G.K. Chesterton*

For some of us, saying thank you to God before a meal is a common ritual—so common, perhaps, that we don’t think about why we do it. But we learn this practice from Jesus; in the Gospels He often gives thanks before He eats or feeds someone else. He even gives thanks for the bread and wine that symbolize His body and blood at the last supper with His disciples.

If He took the time to turn His heart to God and thank Him for the simplest of meals, isn’t He teaching us to practice gratitude and thankfulness for every gift in our lives?

Paul says as much in his letters. “Give thanks in all circumstances,” he says, “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us.”<sup>1</sup> He says we are to be “giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father.”<sup>2</sup>

Why is the practice of gratitude so important?

Modern brain science provides some answers to this. When we express gratitude and appreciation, our brains release specific, marvelous chemicals. These chemicals make us feel good from the inside out because they are associated with feelings of hope, peace, and contentment—in short, happiness. These chemicals also enable bonding; expressing gratitude, adoration, or appreciation warms up our brains to being intimately connected with someone else. So by thanking God, we make ourselves able to be more aware of, encouraged, and comforted by His presence.

Another reason that gratitude is so important is because it aligns us with the beauty and goodness of reality, with God’s person and His world. God is generous and good. His creation, His word, His son, and every single good, pleasing, necessary, or helpful thing in our lives are His gifts to us. He is constantly pouring out these gifts. Every sunset we see, every flower or falling leaf that is beautiful to us, every friend who loves us, every meal, every good night’s sleep—every bit of it is a gift. If we remain ungrateful or anxious, we miss the joy of them all.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5:20

But if we open our eyes wide in wonder and thankfulness, our joy multiples and our intimacy with God grows exponentially. We can draw close to God *only* through adoration, appreciation, and gratitude. This is how we bond with Him.

So God exhorts us to give thanks always not because God is a narcissist who demands praise before He will let us close, but because He made our hearts and brains to be delighted by His beauty and goodness, and we tap into this joy and intimacy with Him only by the practice of gratitude. We “enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise!”<sup>3</sup>

## THE PRACTICE

We do not need to wait until we feel gratitude to express it. We can be alert to reasons for gratefulness and then intentionally communicate our thankfulness and adoration to God. This is what it means to practice gratitude.

We have three ever-brimming wells from which to draw our expressions of gratitude:

### Scripture

God’s word reveals God to us. We can make a practice of turning every truth we learn *about* God in His word into prayer and praise *to* God.

We can also return time again to specific worshipful passages to prompt our praises. Try Psalm 100, Nehemiah 9:5b-6; Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8b; and Psalm 96; and Revelation 5:9-12 to begin with, but in truth almost every passage of Scripture can be turned into expressions of gratitude and appreciation.

- Try to begin your times of prayer with several minutes of worship prompted by Scripture.

### Creation

We have all experienced that spark of joy inside of us when we are struck by something beautiful in creation—the snowy mountains, the spring flowers, the fall leaves. This is because there is a language, a song, that God has put into His creation that is meant to speak to our hearts, to awaken our gratitude to Him and love for Him: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 100:4

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 19:1-2

It takes twenty-five seconds of gratitude to change your brain chemistry.

- When you see something that gives you joy in creation, take twenty-five seconds to express your wonder, praise and thankfulness to God who made it: respond to His song to you by singing back to Him.
- Or take a minute or two each day to intentionally slow down to observe the beauty and glory of God's world. Turn your observations into twenty-five seconds of thanks to Him.

## Your Life

Michael Reeves states this about the Trinity: "The love and goodness of the triune God is the source of all love and goodness. . . in the triune God is the love behind all love, the life behind all life, the music behind all music, the beauty behind all beauty, and the joy behind all joy."

And Jesus said, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven," John 3:27.

So every good, helpful, or necessary thing in our lives is a gift we can turn into expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving.

- Try to take time each day to think through the previous twenty-four hours. Look for every good gift, every gracious thing, and thank God for each one.
- Some people like to keep a gratitude journal. Designate a specific notepad or journal for a list of things or memories that spark gratitude in you. Return to your list frequently to thank God for each one.
- Keep lists of the attributes of the people close to you that you are grateful for. (This will help you grow in love for them.)

## HELPFUL VERSES

"He took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples," Matthew 15:36.

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me," Luke 22:19.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it,” Psalm 118:24.

## INTERESTING QUOTES

“The Present is the point at which time touches eternity. . . the Present is all lit up with eternal rays,” C.S. Lewis.

“When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude,” G.K. Chesterton.

“I would maintain that thanks is the highest form of thought and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder,” G.K. Chesterton.

“Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace,” Frederick Buechner.

“When good is found and we embrace it with abandon, we embrace the Giver of it . . . Every second is an opportunity to praise. There is a choosing to be made. A choosing at each moment. This is the Praise Habit,” David Crowder.

## FURTHER READING

“One Thousand Gifts” by Anne Voskamp.

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. If you were to measure your average daily sense of gratitude, where would you put yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being overflowing gratitude).
2. Have you tried intentionally expression gratitude and adoration to God before? What was your experience like?
3. Do you have any practices already that help you identify sources of thankfulness in your life?
4. Have you known a deeply grateful person? What was it like to be around them?
5. What do you think might be challenging to you in this practice?
6. Someone in your group pray for you all as you head to try this practice.

After you have tried this practice:

1. Talk about your experiences with this practice.
2. What did you find helpful or good about engaging in intentional gratitude?
3. Was any part of this practice challenging?
4. How do you think you will engage with this practice going forward?