

Leading a Life of Gratitude

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Robert Emmons, a leading scientific expert on gratitude, sees gratitude as:

- An affirmation of goodness
- The sources of this goodness are outside of ourselves

Emmon sees gratitude

- 'as a relationship-strengthening emotion, because it requires us to see how we've been supported and affirmed by other people.'

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Biblical Foundations of Gratitude

What do these verses teach us about gratitude?

- **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** –

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

- **Colossians 3:15-17** –

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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- **Romans 1:21**

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

- **1 Corinthians 11:23-24**

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

- **Psalms 100:4-5**

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations

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Thanksgiving & worship in scripture is generally a **response** to God's character, provision, and deliverance.

Exodus 34:6-8

The LORD passed before Moses and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

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WHAT IS THE PRACTICE OF GRATITUDE?

Brené Brown wrote this about the relationship between Joy and Gratitude:

if you are joyful, you should be grateful. But it wasn't that way at all!

*Instead, **practising gratitude invites joy into our lives.**"*

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Gratitude is a positive emotion that involves being thankful and appreciative and is associated with several mental and physical health benefits.

Some of the practices:

- Observe the Moment
- Take a second to focus on your experience and how you are feeling.
- Write it Down
- Savor the moment
- Make it a (daily) Habit
- Give Thanks - Gratitude is all about recognizing and appreciating those people, things, moments, skills, or gifts that bring joy, peace, or comfort into our lives.

Gratitude blocks toxic emotions, such as envy, resentment, regret, and depression, which can destroy our happiness — Prof Robert Emmons

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POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY's angle:

Some benefits of both gratitude journaling and expressing gratitude.

- . increased happiness and positive mood
- . more satisfaction with life
- . less materialistic
- . less likely to experience burnout
- . better physical health
- . better sleep
- . less fatigue
- . lower levels of cellular inflammation
- . greater resiliency
- . encourages the development of patience, humility, and wisdom
- . increases prosocial behaviours
- . strengthens relationships

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How does gratitude affect us mentally and physically?

Gratitude does four things:

1. Gratitude disconnects us from toxic, negative emotions and the ruminating that often accompanies them.
2. Expressing gratitude helps us even if we don't explicitly share it with someone. We're happier and more satisfied with life.
3. The positive effects of gratitude writing compound like interest. You will see the effects after several weeks and months.
4. A gratitude practice trains the brain to be more in tune with experiencing gratitude — a positive plus a positive, equal more positives.

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Challenges to Practicing Gratitude

Even though Scripture calls us to maintain a heart of gratitude, real-life struggles can make gratitude difficult.

Some Common Obstacles:

1. Entitlement Mentality
2. Comparison & Discontentment
3. Noisy World
4. Unforgiveness; others, self
5. Difficult Circumstances

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Trigger alert!

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1. Entitlement

When gratitude fails = Ingratitude!

- Excessive sense of self-importance
- Arrogance
- Vanity
- Unquenchable need for admiration and approval
- Sense of **entitlement**

(Emmons 2013)

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If **entitlement**, by definition, is a sense that we deserve certain privileges, we are totally missing the key point of Christian faith, the generous love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus.

Entitlement – not much space for God, by default sees self as god?
Person doesn't look to God or think they need God.

n.b. Healthy *ego* is part of our human nature, whereas *entitlement* is more of a pervasive attitude.

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Reflection:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas in your life, both in your thinking and your behaviour, where entitlement may have taken a foothold and bring it to light.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit's help to show you alternative thinking, a scripture verse, a word of knowledge, to bring peace to this.

Pause:

- Now, Pause and give space for gratitude; for God's grace which has been gifted to you through the enormous sacrifice of Jesus.

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2. COMPARISON & DISCONTENTMENT:

In *difficult times* our common response is to turn to negative thinking.
Some typical emotions include

- Resentment
- Sadness
- Despair
- Loss
- Grief
- Loneliness
- Frustration
- Anger
- Jealousy

This is normal! God created us with a vast array of emotions.
This is the human condition; we feel deeply and are vulnerable.
We may even turn our anger toward God.

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When continued negativity and anxious thoughts loop through our mind, “rumination,” we can

- Lose sight of God’s love and care for us
- Lose hope in God
- Allow resentment and entitlement to slip in

N.b. Where there is an underlying *mental health* condition.

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Pause & Reflect:

Notice any thoughts or feelings coming into your consciousness.

Avoid critical and judgemental thoughts towards yourself, bring curiosity to these thoughts and try to have a compassionate mindset.

Do you have any *body responses*? The following can be signs of anxiety;

- Shallow breathing
- Heart rate elevated
- Tension in jaw
- Chest tightness, heaviness
- Butterflies in your stomach
- Nausea

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Pause:

Let God meet you with His compassion, love, wisdom.

You are not alone. God is always available; you need only to call on Him.

Be grateful that God is always near.

Ask him for what you need.

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3. NOISY WORLD:

- Time poor, too busy
- Exhausted, can't be bothered
- Demands of life
- Work, family, caring for aging parents, study
- Lack of privacy, no quiet space, no alone time (parents with young children)
- Chronic worries, "rumination," stealing your peace internally.

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Pause and Reflect:

Q. What are some of the "noises" that hinder your ability to pause?

Q. Which of the above challenges do you relate to the most? Any others?

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4. Unforgiveness; of others, self

- Extending forgiveness, when you've been wronged or betrayed, can be very difficult.
- When forgiveness is warranted, you've been harmed!
- Forgiveness is a process.
- We can feel guilty if we struggle to forgive.
- Feel God doesn't hear our prayers.
- Struggling with forgiving ourself.

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Pause and Reflect:

Q. Where are you struggling with unforgiveness?

Ask God to meet you in this difficult space?

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5. DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES:

Difficult circumstance can have an impact on our mental, emotional and spiritual capacity, and can be an obstacle to being able to practice gratitude.

Accepting our humanness and limitations, we can approach God authentically and without shame.

Pause and Reflect:

Q. Are you facing difficult circumstances presently?

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Gratitude is a state of being, whereas thankfulness is often used as a momentary response.

“Gratitude turns what we have into enough”. Anonymous

“The more grateful I am, the more beauty I see.” – Mary Davis

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How Gratitude to God Drives Worship (Tavis)

Gratitude is the lens through which we appreciate God's goodness and from this state of being leads us to respond with thanksgiving in worship.

Gratitude fuels our joy in worship. It reminds us of God's character, provision and deliverance and keeps us in a humble state. It flows on to impact our relationships with others, for example we give to others out of gratefulness to God for what he has given us.

Discussion Questions: What are some other ways that our gratitude to God affects the way we worship?

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Practical Tips for Cultivating Gratitude towards God:

Gratitude to God can become a habit that we can develop.
10 minutes each day.
Set a reminder.

Daily Practices:

- Gratitude Journal – Write down 3 things you're thankful for each day.
- Thankfulness in Prayer – Start each prayer by thanking God.
- Express Gratitude to Others – Say "thank you" to people who bless you.

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- Journal your thoughts in a Gratitude Diary, make this a habit with your prayer life.
- Pray with a faithful friend.
- Ask God to help you with your resentment or your attitude of entitlement (there's likely to be a hurt underlying resentment).

Some gratitude prompts:

- Use a Bible verse or Song.
- Identify a person, or group, in your life who have supported you, cared for you, nurtured you, directed you in a Godly way. Even the smallest of kind gestures.
- Identify answered prayers.
- Give thanks when you learn someone was praying for you.
- Had a meal delivered when you were unwell, just had a baby, just because.

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- Encouraging words.
- Nature.
- Quietness.
- Time for a moment of peace.
- Visual reminders, phone alarm reminder, etc.
- Be accountable to someone which helps reinforce a good habit you're developing.
- Reframe a situation;
 - Reality affirmation statements: "Even though ... happened, what I know to be true is ..."
 - E.g. Even though I am worrying about this situation, what I know to be true is that I can reach out for help, or know this will pass, that God is with me despite this difficulty, ..."

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Discussion Questions:

- Which of these practices do you find most helpful?
- Which ones will you use?
- What do you think you could use of these suggestions to help cultivate gratitude?
- What other ideas can you think of?

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We hope you learned something new that will help you in your practice of leading a life of gratitude.

So, we hoped you've learned how you might work towards an **"Attitude of Gratitude!"**

Prayer.

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