

Express Gratitude Throughout the Day

Philippians 4:4-9

Scripture instructs us to express our gratitude to God in all circumstances. This is an instruction that often eludes us. We find ourselves wondering, *What does this mean? Why is this important?* Perhaps if we understood this instruction as an invitation to see our lives and circumstances through childlike eyes of wonder and trust, we might get a glimpse of the gifts gratitude offers us.

In the months that I helped provide end-of-life care for an elderly friend in her home, I experienced some of the gifts gratitude provides. I experienced how gratitude kept me present in each moment, how it opened my eyes to gifts of grace and goodness, how it opened my heart to receive those gifts. As a result, I experienced how gratitude allowed me to know God was with us in the midst of the whirlwind.

My strongest memory of the gift of gratitude from this time came from my elderly friend's determination to walk to the bathroom from her bedroom, and from the way she saw each step as a gift. Each step she took with her walker was an occasion to give thanks. "Thank you, thank you;" she'd say, one step at a time.

"Thank you. Thank you;" she'd say,
 offering her soft spoken hymn of praise to you
 with each step she took.
 Ninety-seven, clutching walker,
 while I held onto her,
 she walked in thankful wonder
 like a toddler taking first steps with glee.
 Each step a gift, counted.
 Walker steadied and grounded her body in motion
 while her thanksgiving steadied and grounded her spirit
 in the here and now flow of grace.

I lost count of how many of these short walks we took
 that last sweet year of her life,
 saying our thank-you's to you out loud

down the hall and back.

But they were many and enough to echo in my cells
and to raise up in me from time to time
this simple hymn of praise.

"Thank you. Thank *you*:'

I find myself whispering to you over and over throughout the day,
noticing how my eyes open to the outpouring
of grace and blessing in every moment,
how I feel myself carried on the current of your joy,
how I am able to use this walker of gratitude
to steady and ground my heart and mind, body and soul
in your glorious presence with us here and now.

Thank you. Thank you. *

GROUP DISCUSSION. Share an experience you have had with the power of expressing gratitude to God.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What thoughts and feelings do you have in response to the experience expressed in the above prayer "Gratitude"?

The text for this study shows us the relationship between gratitude and the experience of peace.
Read Philippians 4:4-9.

1. Using your own words, make a list of the instructions this text offers in verses 4-6.

2. What do you think it means to "rejoice in the Lord" (v. 4)?

3. What might it mean in practical terms to "rejoice in the Lord *always*"?

4. What does it mean to "let your gentleness be evident to all" (v.5)?

How might this be related to living in joy and gratitude?

5. This text suggests several antidotes to anxiety. What antidotes are suggested in verses 6-7?

6. What antidote is suggested in verse 8?

7. How might following these instructions in verses 8-9 help bring us God's peace?

8. How does the list in verse 8 compare and contrast your typical daily focus?

9. How might following the guidelines in verses 4-9 allow you to know God's presence in the midst of the whirlwind of life?

10. What are some practical ways you might shift your focus to rejoicing, petitioning, giving thanks and thinking about what is praiseworthy?

Thank God for the peace that comes as we express our needs and gratitude to God.

Now or Later

In a moment of quiet, write a list of things that are causing you anxiety and another list of what you are needing and wanting in relationship to these anxieties. Talk to God about these concerns, as you thank God for God's love and care.

Take a few minutes to write a gratitude list, thanking God for gifts big and small, ordinary and extra ordinary.

For a moment, breath in the peace, calm, hope and joy that can flow from the practice of noticing and expressing gratitude for God's good gifts and loving activity in your life and in this world. How might this practice change your experience in the midst of the busyness of life?

Daily prayer: Thank you, thank you, thank you for who you are, for your healing work in my life and for your unfailing love for us all.