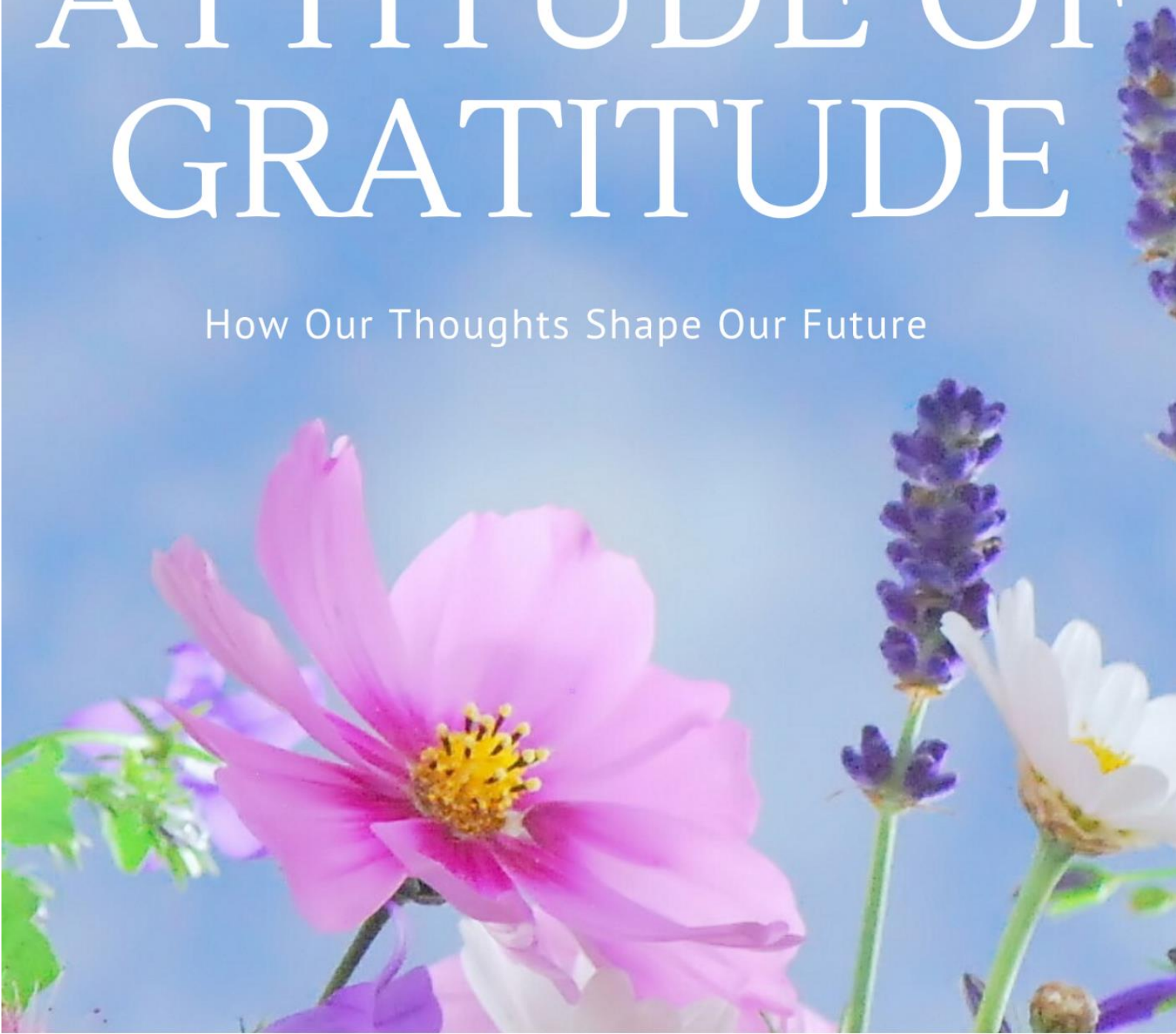


FINISHING STRONG SERIES

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

How Our Thoughts Shape Our Future



“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.” Colossians 3:16 NIV

It's the last month of the year and we can indeed testify that God has been with us through it all - both the ups and downs. Yes we may not yet be where we want to be, but have we stopped to thank God for how far He's brought us? Do we truly appreciate Him or are we more focused on being disappointed about what He hasn't done?

This series we're exploring how having an attitude of gratitude towards God shapes our future.

Stay connected and get ready to Finish Strong!



Day 1 Daily Mercies

'O give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the people. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonderful acts and devoutly praise them...Remember [with awe and gratitude] the wonderful things which He has done, His amazing deeds and the judgments uttered by His mouth [on His enemies, as in Egypt]' Psalms 105:1-2,5

Life has a very interesting way of keeping us focused only on what is right in front of us at a point in time. While it's okay to live in the moment, it's easy for us to forget the times God has been with us through issues in the past and how He brought us out of them. It's also tempting to get comfortable in the good things happening now, forgetting that it's God's grace that brought us to this point. This is why the psalmist reminds us of the need to consciously remind ourselves – and others – of what God has done in our lives.

'Through the Lord 's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.' Lamentations 3:22-23

Life is more than a series of yesterdays, todays and tomorrows. God has charted a specific, customized plan for everyone's life which He expects us to live by His grace. This is the only way we can live fully, abundantly and impactfully. As we begin to realize that it's God's daily mercies and faithfulness that preserves us, we become conscious of how much He does for us on a daily basis. Armed with this understanding, we should live with a heart of constant gratitude towards Him.

Reflect: Don't look too far back for what to thank God for. The fact that you are alive right now and have access to brand new mercies today is more than enough to praise Him.

Day 2

Firm Foundation

'Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, And the great King above all gods.' Psalms 95:1-3

The Lord is our firm foundation – we never have to worry if He's there or not or if anything is too large or complex for him to handle. He is the Alpha, Omega, Ancient of Days, I Am that I Am, the one true God. And He is our gracious and loving Father who cares deeply for us.

'See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me.' Isaiah 49:16

'What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?' Psalms 8:4

This great, mighty and awesome God has said to us that He not only knows us, He's inscribed us on the palms of His hands. Even when others forget us His thoughts are full of how to do good to us, in spite of our many deficiencies. Take some time to reflect on this and give Him praise.

Prayer: My Father in heaven I cannot thank you enough for your goodness and mercy towards me. In spite of how unworthy I am, you choose to love me and seek constantly to do what is good for me. You promised to lead me along the best pathway for my life. You've promised never to leave nor forsake me. You've promised to make my ways smooth and grant me good success if only I acknowledge you in everything. These are just a few of the many promises you've made to me. And so Father I come to you with a heart of gratitude, saying thank you. Thank you for loving me, thank you for keeping me, thank you for being there for me constantly, thank you for being my Rock and sure foundation. Thank you that you are always dependable and reliable. In Jesus Name.

Day 3 Sincerity

'Why don't you bring me the sacrifices I desire? Bring me your true and sincere thanks, and show your gratitude by keeping your promises to me, the Most High.' Psalms 50:14

Words are easy to speak, but God is more interested in what is going on in our hearts. He knows that if we're sincere in our hearts, our actions will reflect this sincerity. Many times we say thank you out of routine, habit or compulsion. But what God really wants from us is a heart that is genuinely thankful to Him. This type of heart acknowledges that while all may not be perfect at the moment, there's still a lot to be grateful for.

'Don't make rash promises, and don't be hasty in bringing matters before God. After all, God is in heaven, and you are here on earth. So let your words be few.' Ecclesiastes 5:2

When we want something from God we're often quick to make promises: "Lord if you do this for me I will do such and such..." and God is listening and watching us. When God does His part and the reality of what we promised hits us, sadly we often begin to renege on our promises. "But Lord, you should understand....".

From God's perspective, not keeping our promise is a sign of our ingratitude. If we were truly grateful, we wouldn't make excuses for not fulfilling our promise, we would find a way. Not because He needs anything from us – He is God all by Himself – but just for us to show that indeed we are truly thankful for what He's done.

Reflect: Have you made vows to God you've failed to keep after He's done His part? First of all, ask for forgiveness for being ungrateful. Then ask for grace not to make rash promises to Him again. And if possible, redeem your vow to Him. Remember talk is cheap and your actions towards God speak much louder than your words.

Day 4

Love

'Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.' 1 Chronicles 16:34

God is love and He pours out His love with such amazing liberality and generosity. His love isn't fickle or judgmental, it is totally independent of whether we respond in love or not and it endures forever. It would take a lifetime for us to fully comprehend just how much He loves us.

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.' John 3:16-17

'But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.' Romans 5:8

'We love Him because He first loved us.' I John 4:19

Not only did God show His love by sending His Son to die for us, Jesus paid the price for our sins while we were still sinners. This means even though He knew He would be rejected, despised and crucified, He still chose to die for us because He loves us.

God is not temperamental, His love is faithful and steady, and we can rest secure in the knowledge that even if no one else professes love to us, our Father in heaven loves us deeply.

Prayer: Thank you Father for your faithful love, thank you for the security we have in your love. Thank you for the comfort that your love is unconditional so it's not something we have to work for, because we certainly could never attain the goal of being worthy of your love. Yet you love us from generation to generation and all you ask is that we walk in the same love you give us. Precious Holy Spirit our helper, please help us walk in love and let our lives demonstrate God's love not just to those who love us back, but to all we come across in life. We cannot do this in our own strength so please help us as only you can. In Jesus Name.



Day 5

Rest

'Praise the Lord; praise God our savior! For each day he carries us in his arms.' Psalms 68:19

We have a guarantee that the Lord is available to help us on a daily basis in every area of our lives. Picture yourself starting a new day and the Lord carrying you in His arms throughout the day. Lifting us above challenges, navigating us through distractions, keeping us close to Him so we are connected to His thoughts. But His carrying us is based on our choice to stay in His arms.

'Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.'" Matthew 11:28-30

When we choose to go our own way, we're essentially saying to Him that we don't need Him and can carry ourselves. What that means is that we're robbing ourselves of the opportunity to have Jesus teach us how to find rest in a world that seems bent on keeping us overly busy, distracted and exhausted. When we do things God's way, He takes responsibility for the process and we're confident that it will yield the best possible outcome.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I'm grateful for the comfort I have in you knowing that you're willing and more than able to bear all my burdens. I surrender this day into your hands and consciously drop all my plans, dreams, hopes, fears at your feet. I confess that I cannot make myself better than you can make me and ask that you carry me in your arms to day Lord. I yield totally to you, have your way in my life, guide me into your rest precious Lord. In Jesus Name.



Day 6

Deliverance

'Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all.' Psalms 34:19

No one likes affliction in any shape or form. In fact, most prayer points are against encountering them. However, the Bible tells us that as believers we're not insulated from facing trials and challenges. In fact the verse above says that the afflictions of the righteous are many. Doesn't really sound like a reason for gratitude does it? But here's the good news: no matter the challenge, trial or difficulty, the Bible tells us that the Lord Himself rescues us from them All. And when the Bible says 'all' it means 'all'.

If we were to spend some time in the Psalms, we will see time and again how David praised God for delivering him from a wide array of dangerous and life-threatening challenges. Before we think this was a promise only David could access, let's look at a couple of illustrations.

Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke! Daniel 3:27

'who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us ' II Corinthians 1:10

In the first scripture above, Daniel's friends had been thrown into a blazing furnace for refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue. Rather than burn in the furnace, the Lord rescued them, to the extent that they didn't even smell of smoke! In the second one, Paul was talking about God's track record of deliverance from potentially fatal situations and his confidence of deliverance in the future.

Reflect: We take comfort in and are grateful for the fact that even though trials will surely come – no matter how large they may appear – our God has promised to deliver us from the ALL.

Day 7

Hope

'I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.' Psalms 121:1-2

There are occasions in life where having looked around us and we see no hope of assistance. Every known possibility for help seems to have been shut down so we're left with no choice but to look up and ask, where will help come from? The psalmist was in a similar situation and he picked on a solution – help would come from the Lord. He must have said to himself, "Surely the one who made heaven and earth is more than capable to address this situation I'm facing?".

'Truly, [the hope of salvation from] the hill [where idols are worshiped] is a deception, A tumult and noisy multitude on the mountains; Truly in the Lord our God Is the salvation of Israel.' Jeremiah 3:23

'Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.' Psalms 20:7

The Bible tells us that we deceive ourselves when we look for help in anything outside of God. Trusting in people or material things is a recipe for disappointment. Material things aren't designed to last forever and people can be fickle – even when they have the best intentions, they also have challenges they're resolving. The only one deserving of our trust is our Lord.

'And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.'" Deuteronomy 31:8

Reflect: What have you been putting your hopes on? Your connections, finances, abilities? The only one who is guaranteed to have the ability to help you is the same one who promises never to leave or forsake you. Be thankful for this hope.

Day 8

Restoration

'For the Lord will restore the excellence of Jacob like the excellence of Israel, For the emptiers have emptied them out and ruined their vine branches.' Nahum 2:2

For a number of people, by the time it is December they feel as though there's nothing really to celebrate because of what they've been through during the course of the year. Having to deal with all sorts of issues, with the number of challenges seemingly outweighing the number of victories.

The Bible tells us that Israel went through an experience of not only being emptied, but also ruined. What a hopeless situation that must have been. But as always, the Lord doesn't leave us without help. He promised not just to return what was lost, but to restore to a level of excellence.

'So David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all.'" I Samuel 30:8

David and his men faced a similar situation when upon returning from battle they found that all their possessions and families had been taken by the Amalekites. After crying until they had no strength left, David's men turned against him. With nowhere to turn, David went to inquire of the Lord what to do.

Oftentimes we stop at the same point as David's men – tears and anger that things didn't go the way we planned. But David showed us the way forward: don't stop at the point of tears, ask God what to do.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I'm thankful that you don't leave me in the dark as to what to do when things don't go the way I thought or hoped. In spite of whatever I have lost you've told me that you Lord have the ability to recover all that was lost and restore my excellence. You did it before, you can surely do it again. I thank and praise you Lord for this comfort and assurance.

Day 9

Peace

'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.' Colossians 3:15

We have an assurance of peace that not only comes once in a while but can actually rule in our hearts. This means that regardless of what's happened in the past or is going on around us at the present, we can have peace.

'Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape...Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ' Acts 16:23, 25

Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, thrown in jail and while facing an uncertain outcome, the Bible tells us that they were praying and singing hymns to God. What they had experienced earlier in the day certainly didn't look like anything they should be singing to God about. In fact, we would even have understood if they were full of complaints of how they were unfairly treated for doing God's work. But rather they responded with prayer and hymns to God.

'Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.' Philippians 4:6-7

The peace God gives is incomprehensible because it transcends all external circumstances. This peace not only insulates us it also guards us, warding off worry, anxiety and fear from our minds and hearts. And it's available to us all.

Prayer: Lord, I lay all my needs down at your feet, I thank you for what you have done, what you're doing and what you're going to do. Lord I ask that you fill my heart and mind with your peace which passes all understanding and keep my heart focused on you. Thank you Lord for hearing and answering my prayer in Jesus name.



Day 10

Courage

'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'" Joshua 1:9

As we fast approach the end of the year most of us are already making plans for how we want the new year to go. But sometimes we place a ceiling on how far we believe we can go due to limitations we believe we have or issues we encountered during the year. Not realizing that by doing so we constrain what God can do in and with us.

When Moses died, Joshua was faced with the responsibility for taking Israel into the promised land. Even though Moses had appointed Joshua his successor following the Lord's instructions, Joshua was – understandably – nervous about this huge responsibility. But the Lord reminded Joshua that He (God) was the one in charge and would be with Joshua wherever he went.

It's not about us but about the power of God at work in us. God's power and abilities are unlimited, however we can limit His movement in us by the amount of room we give Him to maneuver. Each time we face a situation and respond solely in our own capacity, we have limited God. Each time we step back from taking more territory because of what we lack, we limit God.

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us' Ephesians 3:20

'The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.' Psalms 138:8

God does not ask us to act foolishly or irresponsibly, but He does expect that we function with an understanding that He will not lead us where He cannot sustain us. He also expects that we will take the time to seek His mind concerning our plans and consciously trust and acknowledge that He's in charge. So we move forward with wisdom and divine direction.

Reflect: Courage isn't the absence of fear, it's moving forward in the knowledge that the God who calls us is without limits and has also promised to perfect what concerns us. So let's be grateful for this understanding.



Day 11

Liberty

'So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.' John 3:36

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and set us free from the bondage of sin. The devil in his craftiness tries to make sin look like it's really not a big deal, but the truth is that sin is slavery. Haven't you ever wondered why at some point in your life you kept doing something you knew you shouldn't do, but somehow you couldn't seem to help yourself? Perhaps you're going through something like that right now. We're not talking about making a mistake once in a while, but the consistent practice of something you know is wrong.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. James 4:7

Sin cannot be overcome by will power alone. For it to leave your life you must be subjected to a higher authority and that authority is God. The verse above gives us the strategy for overcoming sin. Oftentimes we try to do the second part – resist the devil – without first submitting to God. It won't work this way. But when we put ourselves in God's hands, truthfully admitting our shortcomings without making any excuses and honestly asking Him for help, He will step in and help us. But there's a caveat – we also have to want to give up what we're doing. We shouldn't hold on to the sin and expect God to wrestle it out of our heart.

Even if you're not ready to fully submit to God, be honest about that also. Let the Lord know you're having issues giving up a particular thing and ask for grace to release it totally to Him. We don't have to live in bondage, there's freedom available to us.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:13-15

Reflect: We have victory over sin by the power of Jesus. Hallelujah!!!



Day 12

Redemption

'being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' Romans 3:24

Christ has redeemed us by His grace. We didn't work for it and can never deserve it. He paid the price for our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the law so that He can give us grace to live a life full of abundance. By paying the price for our sins He gave us direct access to God's throne of grace so now we can approach the King of Kings by ourselves without having to go through a third party.

'having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.' Colossians 2:14

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16

'For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.' I Corinthians 3:9

Jesus wiped away everything written about us that was contrary to us. And not only that, He's given us access to His mercy which shields us from the punishment we deserve and access to His grace which gives us the help we do not deserve. We have access to His immeasurable power and He's also opened the door for us to join Him as fellow workers with Him in carrying out His kingdom agenda.

Reflect: Even if you think there's nothing to be grateful for, be grateful for this: you have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, delivered from the slavery of sin and oppression by the devil. You have unlimited direct access to Jesus and He's also ready to partner with you to help redeem others and expand the influence of His kingdom here on earth.



Day 13

Thanksgiving

'And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well." Luke 17:15-19

Jesus had just healed ten lepers and when only one of them came back to say thank you, he had to ask, "where are the nine?". We don't have any details about this man other than he was a Samaritan, but his act of gratitude got him recognition in the Bible. which means Jesus takes note when we come back to say, 'thank you'.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. Psalms 100:4

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits Psalms 103:2

The Bible gives us a key to accessing God's presence: thanksgiving and praise. As with any father, the Lord likes it when His children acknowledge Him for who He is and what He has done. And He does a lot for us every day that we could never do for ourselves. But the problem is that we forget very quickly. And because we forget, it's easy for us to focus on the things we think are missing in our lives, ignoring the many blessings we have.

Action Step: Get some writing material and write down every month of the year from January to December. Next to each month write down at least two things you're grateful to God for doing in that month. Then thank Him for everything. Let Him know that even if no one else thanks Him, you can always be counted on to return thanksgiving and praise to Him.

Thanks for completing the study. We'll love to hear from you, so please connect with us on:

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