

PRACTICING GRATITUDE

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**BLESSING THAT FLOWS BOTH WAYS**

- ▶ From the first page of Scripture to the last, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 and everywhere in-between, we find a God who desires to impart blessing to His creation.
- ▶ God generously confers blessing and favor, not because of merit, but on the basis of His love and goodness. It is His nature to bless and confer favor!
- ▶ Therefore, when we confer favor and blessing on others, not on the basis of merit but on the basis of grace, we are reflecting the image and likeness of God.

## PSALM 103

*Bless the LORD, O my soul;*

*and all that is within me, bless His holy name!*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,*

*and forget not all His benefits.*

*Who forgives all your iniquities,  
who heals all your diseases,  
Who redeems your life from destruction,  
who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,  
Who satisfies your mouth with good things,  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

PSALM 103.3-2

*Bless the LORD, you His angels,  
who excel in strength, who do His word,  
heeding the voice of His word.*

*Bless the LORD, all you His hosts,  
you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.*

*Bless the LORD, all His works,  
in all places of His dominion.*

*Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

PSALM 103.20-22

*Blessing is meant to flow in both directions—  
from God to us, from us to God.*

## THE SPIRIT OF ENTITLEMENT

- ▶ The default mode of the human race is entitlement, the belief that I deserve good, better, more; that I am exempt from responsibility, or that I have been treated unfairly. Entitlement, like all manifestations of sin, is rooted in “the lie” perpetrated in the Garden of Eden:

*The serpent . . . asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden? . . . God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”*

- ▶ Another aspect (of this narcissistic personality disorder) is its sense of victimization: “it’s someone else’s fault that I am where I am, that life is like this for me.” Victimization is another outcome of “the lie”—  
*“Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?” The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God asked the woman, “What have you done?” “The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”*

GENESIS 3.11-13



## THE UGLY IN THE MIRROR

- ▶ Our sin-warped human nature has made us “ugly to the bone.”
  - We are driven by lust, always wanting more. (Who is satisfied with looking at just one post on social media?)
  - We are self-absorbed, perpetually focused on our feelings, opinions, appearance, plans, goals, next steps, accomplishments, hurts, injustices—the list goes on and on.
  - We are ignorant and obtuse, blind to the extent of God’s gracious goodness in our lives.

► The Bible is clear in describing our condition:

*. . . futile in their thinking. . . . darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

EPHESIANS 4.17-19

*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.*

ROMANS 1.21

## THE ABSENCE OF GRATITUDE

*Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5.16-18

- ▶ Few of us would characterize ourselves as ungrateful and yet the awareness and practice of gratitude in each day is often minimal.
- ▶ The fact of the matter is that our lives are permeated with the gracious goodness of God, and on every level of life, we are sustained and enabled by that which we rarely acknowledge.
- ▶ Ingratitude: blessings received, but unacknowledged.



*Entitlement grows deep within us. This is why, for the soul, ingratitude is not just a psychological problem or an impoverishment of our emotional experience. It's a sin. . . . the hallmark of a life opposed to God.*

*—John Ortberg, Soul Keeping*

## UNDERSTANDING GRATITUDE

- ▶ We are born blind and ignorant to the gracious goodness and faithfulness of God that permeates every aspect of our existence. Even as Christians, those who have been spiritually enlightened, we go through our days more conscious of ourselves than aware of the goodness of God that we are experiencing with every heartbeat.
- ▶ Gratitude cannot be assumed; it must be intentional and specific.
- ▶ Our human inclination is to take things for granted; therefore, real gratitude requires cultivated awareness and intentional expression.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.* (PSALM 103.2)



*From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,  
the name of the LORD is to be praised. (PSALM 113.3)*

*Seven times a day I praise You  
for Your righteous laws. (PSALM 119.164)*

- ▶ Gratitude is the life-blood of a God-conscious life.
- ▶ Gratitude is indispensable to faith, trust, humility, encouragement, hope, joy, contentment, and peace.
- ▶ When gratitude is minimal in presence and practice, we become critical, self-focused, self-pitying, arrogant— in short: ungodly.

## PRACTICING GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the practiced awareness  
of the gracious goodness of God  
that dominates my life.

- ▶ The Hebrew word for gratitude means “recognizing the good.”
- ▶ In the time of Jesus and the disciples, every devout Israelite practiced “The Eighteen Benedictions.” In the morning, at midday, and at night, they would pray eighteen times: “Blessed are You, O God . . .”

- ▶ This practice raised their consciousness of God's goodness in every aspect of their lives and made them mindful of their dependency on God's faithfulness.
- ▶ The absence of gratitude reduces us to the status of animals and those who are insensitive (Ephesians 4.17-19). Gratitude brings us into fellowship with and worship of God.
- ▶ Gratitude is deeply relational. The word "bless" means "happy." When we offer our gratitude to God, we honor Him, but we also bring delight to Him. Blessing is meant to flow both ways.