

APRIL 2022

Practice of the Month

# GRATITUDE



“It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich!”  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

# WHAT IS THE PRACTICE OF GRATITUDE?

The practice of gratitude is an intentional loving and thankful response toward God for his presence with us and within this world. While acknowledging the "blessings" of life can and should be used to move us into a posture of gratitude, true gratitude is found in the simple recognition and delight in God's inescapable presence with us. When our gratitude is rooted in his presence, we are able to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:18) because no circumstance impinges on God's ability or desire to be present with us.

## WHY PRACTICE IT?

As any practice of Jesus does, practicing gratitude transforms our heart to better resemble the heart of Jesus. It teaches us to be more aware of God's grace, mercy and gifts. It curbs our critical tendencies. It helps us notice what we have before noticing what we don't. It helps us value things instead of taking them for granted. It allows us to see God's goodness in the midst of difficult situations. And it opposes entitlement. By allowing the practice of gratitude to transform our heart to closer resemble the heart of Jesus, it'll inevitably transform our lives to better resemble the life of Jesus, because it's out of the overflow of our heart that we speak and respond to the world around us (Luke 6:43; Matthew 15:19).





# WHERE DO WE SEE JESUS PRACTICE IT?

As always, Jesus is the ultimate example of someone who practiced gratitude. In Mark 6, he was in a tough situation with a lot of hungry people on his hands, and all he had were five loaves of bread and two fish. He could have complained that his Father shouldn't have expected him to feed five thousand people with so little. But Jesus didn't write off the loaves and fish as nothing. He noticed what was given and "gave thanks" for it (Mark 6:41). And in these less-than-perfect circumstances, God supplied all that was needed.

Jesus' expressions of gratitude weren't just about his Father's blessings, but also about his Father's presence. In John 11, having raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus thanked his Father in heaven for hearing him (John 11:41). For being present. For listening. For responding. And this wasn't a one-time thing. He thanked God for always being present (John 11:42).

While these are simply two isolated instances of many in the gospels, they reveal the grateful heart that Jesus had, and his habit of expressing those thoughts to his Father in heaven. Gratitude for that which his Father had blessed him with, and even more importantly, gratitude for the simple fact that his Father was present, in every moment of his life.

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a white ceramic cup filled with dark coffee on a light-colored wooden surface. A white napkin with the handwritten phrase "enjoy the little things" in black ink is placed next to the cup. Green leaves and a branch are scattered around the cup and napkin.

# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When you feel at the bottom of the food chain and dead last in terms of priority, how do you move towards gratitude?
2. When have you found that in retrospect you could have been thankful for something that you were not grateful for at the time it was happening? How can this perspective inform your life right now?
3. How has a grateful person affected your own vision of what matters in life? How has someone who lives out of bitterness affected your life?
4. How are you addicted to criticism, analysis, and negativity? How might thankfulness be an antidote to a critical spirit? [This article](#) may be of help.
5. Do you rely on negativity to connect with others in conversation?

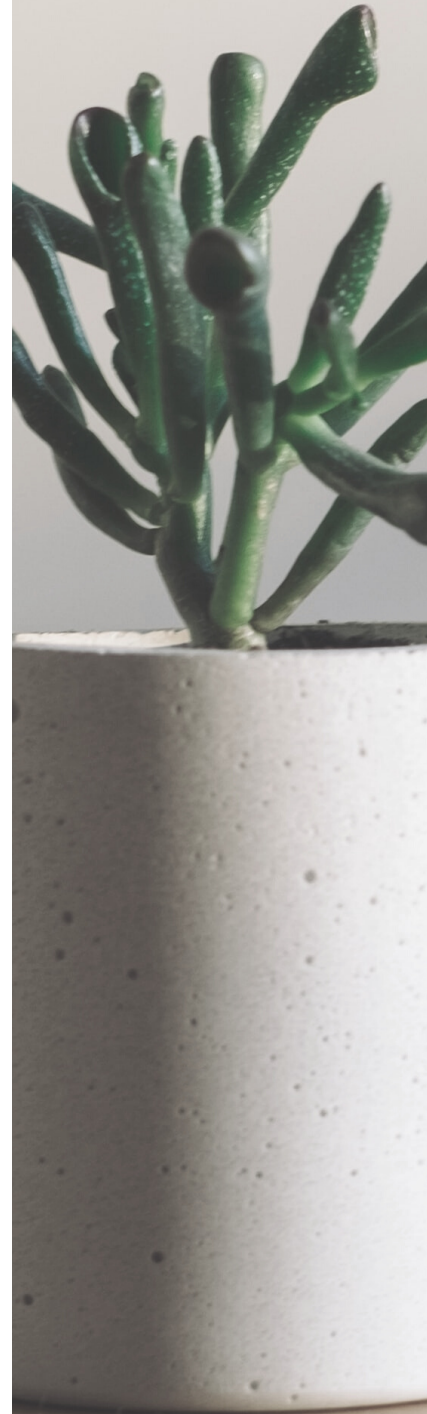


# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Keep a gratitude journal that records the “abundances” that God has given you. Next to each abundance write what it means to you to have a God who interacts and intervenes in your life. Notice what you have been given that you did not deserve. What do you want to say to God about these things?

2. End every day by saying thank you to God for at least one thing. Then tell God what that one thing has meant to you. Consider making this a practice you participate in with your community. Commit to texting a friend or your small group each day, telling them what you are grateful to God for.

3. Thank someone who has touched your life in the past year, the past month, the past week. Either tell them in person, write them a letter, or invite them to share a meal with you as a way to show your gratitude.



4. Get a current hardship firmly in mind. How do you feel about this hardship? Tell the truth to God. Where is there evidence of God's presence in this hardship? Is there anything you can be thankful for? If you cannot find God in your hardship, spend some time with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. What does he want to tell you?

5. What sorts of things tend to encourage you in thankfulness? Praise songs? Worship? Time spent with friends? Giving and receiving presents? Plan ways of incorporating the things that encourage thankfulness into your life on a regular basis.

6. Notice your tendency to make comparisons that result in feelings of dissatisfaction or entitlement. Practice abstaining from comparative statements about what you don't have. Instead give thanks for what you do have.



THANK YOU