



Introduction

It all began quite spontaneously, unintentionally. One of those things God grows up in the most unexpected places.

A friend dared me to start counting one thousand things I loved. I took the dare, accepted the challenge, kept track of one thousand things, one thousand gifts—a thousand graces—on a quiet, unassuming blog. Before I knew it, thankfulness to God began to fully change me.

I found more daily wonder and surprising beauty than I ever expected. And in a few short years, this daily hunt for God's grace ushered me into a fuller life. A life of joy! Over the past several years, I've listed thousands of gifts ... and I continue. Thousands more have begun their own lists—in jail cells and by death beds, in third-world slums and by faith alone—and it's not overstatement to say that giving Him thanks has made me—and innumerable others—overcomers.

Through this intentional, daily practice of giving thanks, I found myself on a transformative journey that affected every aspect of my life—including all the broken places. God began to show me the graces, the love gifts, that were right before me, waiting to be noticed, waiting to be received. This

easily overlooked stuff, the small—and especially the hard—became for me a life-giving stream of joy in Him.

Even when I am sometimes impatient or unwilling, when I face conflict and heartache, I've begun to accept that even the impossible is a possible opportunity to thank God, to experience the goodness and grace of the Giver of all!

There is always only more grace.

And it's always more than I expect.

And you? You in the midst, you in the mire, are you too thinking about counting one thousand gifts, about making your life all about joy in Christ, about loving God and enjoying Him forever? There is so much joy in seeing how He uses our simple act of noticing the blessings He bestows all around us to transform our lives and the lives of those we touch.

So here is how I suggest you begin this journey by grace, begin your own gift list, count all the ways He loves you:



Pray. Start with a simple request, making it the refrain of your day: "God, open the eyes of my heart." This journey must be Spirit-led, every day.

Receive. Open your hand to the simple, daily gifts, writing down all the unique and ordinary things you notice, from the grand and obvious to the humble and hidden.

Praise. Praise Him for the unexpected and the unlikely, for the daily and the difficult, and the graces in disguise. The more you count, the more gifts you will see. Do not disdain the small. The moments add up, and we might come to believe it—the whole earth is full of His glory!

I found setting a goal of one thousand gifts—it kept me attending to all the ways He whispers, "I love you." The practice is intended to be a way of cultivating a habit, of learning to live praise, to make gratitude and joy your default, to move thanksgiving away from a holiday to a lifestyle—that all the days might be holy and set apart for real joy.

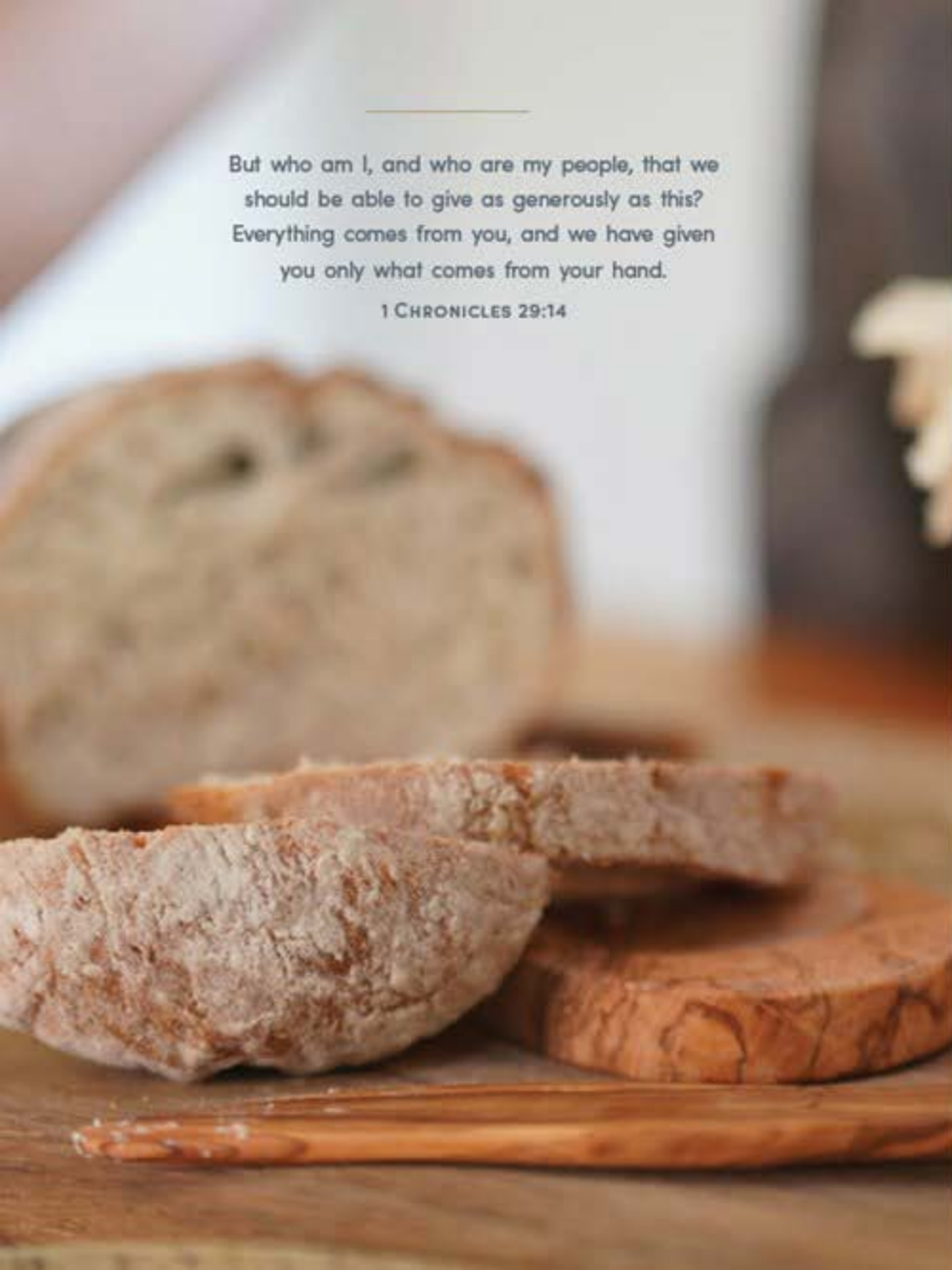
For each day of the month, I've included a short reflection. My humble prayer is that sharing these glimpses will companion and encourage you in your own prayerful discovery of a lifestyle of Christ-focus and communion. Of how extravagantly God loves you and how desperately you need Him every moment. Most of all, I hope these entries expand your view of the endless and matchless grace of an overflowing God.

Oh, let the gift-hunt begin! God is waiting to reveal so much through your desire to know Him more deeply and completely—but His grace is only experienced directly. The most important thing is simply to begin.

May God bless your journey with the greatest gift of all—more and more of Himself!

ALL IS GRACE.

Ann



But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

1 CHRONICLES 29:14

1
devotion



Surprising Grace

And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings that one may offer to the LORD. If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thanksgiving sacrifice unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil. With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving he shall bring his offering with loaves of leavened bread.

LEVITICUS 7:11-13 ESV



The first time thanksgiving is mentioned in Scripture, the thanksgiving offering was part of the peace offering.

Could it be that no one receives the peace of God without giving thanks to God? Is thankfulness really but the deep, contented breath of peacefulness? Is this why God asks us to give thanks even when things look a failure? When there doesn't seem much to give thanks for?

There were to be ten offerings of bread in every thank offering of the Israelites. The first were like crackers. The second like wafers. These were

known for their thinness. This was the order of thanks. The thanks began for the thin things, the wafer things that almost weren't, and the way the people of God give thanks is first to give thanks for even the meager and unlikely.

Then it came, thanks for the leavened bread. Why would leaven, yeast—that which is seen in Scripture as impure, unwanted—why would leaven be included as part of the thanks offering?

Authentic thanks is always for all things, because our God is a God kneading all things into a bread that sustains. To bring the sacrifice of thanksgiving means thank God for everything because He is benevolent. A sacrifice of thanks lays down our perspective and raises hands in praise anyways—always. A sacrifice is, by definition, not an easy thing—but it is a sacred thing.

There is this: We give thanks to God not because of how we feel but because of who He is. We who are grateful for little are given much laughter ... and it's counting the ways He loves, this is what multiplies joy.

Let's keep our eyes on the number of His graces, for the life that counts blessings discovers its yielding more than it seems.

God, cause me to know it afresh today: the life that counts blessings discovers its yielding much more than it seems. And my life yields most when I yield most to You.



For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:15 ESV

Hezekiah assigned the priests and Levites to divisions—each of them according to their duties as priests or Levites—to offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, to minister, to give thanks and to sing praises at the gates of the LORD's dwelling.

2 CHRONICLES 31: 2

Everything God created is good, and to be received with thanks. Nothing is to be sneered at and thrown out. God's Word and our prayers make every item in creation holy.

1 TIMOTHY 4:4 MSG

Gifts & Gratuities

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Choosing Grace

His secret purpose framed from the very beginning [is] to bring us to our full glory.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:7 NEB

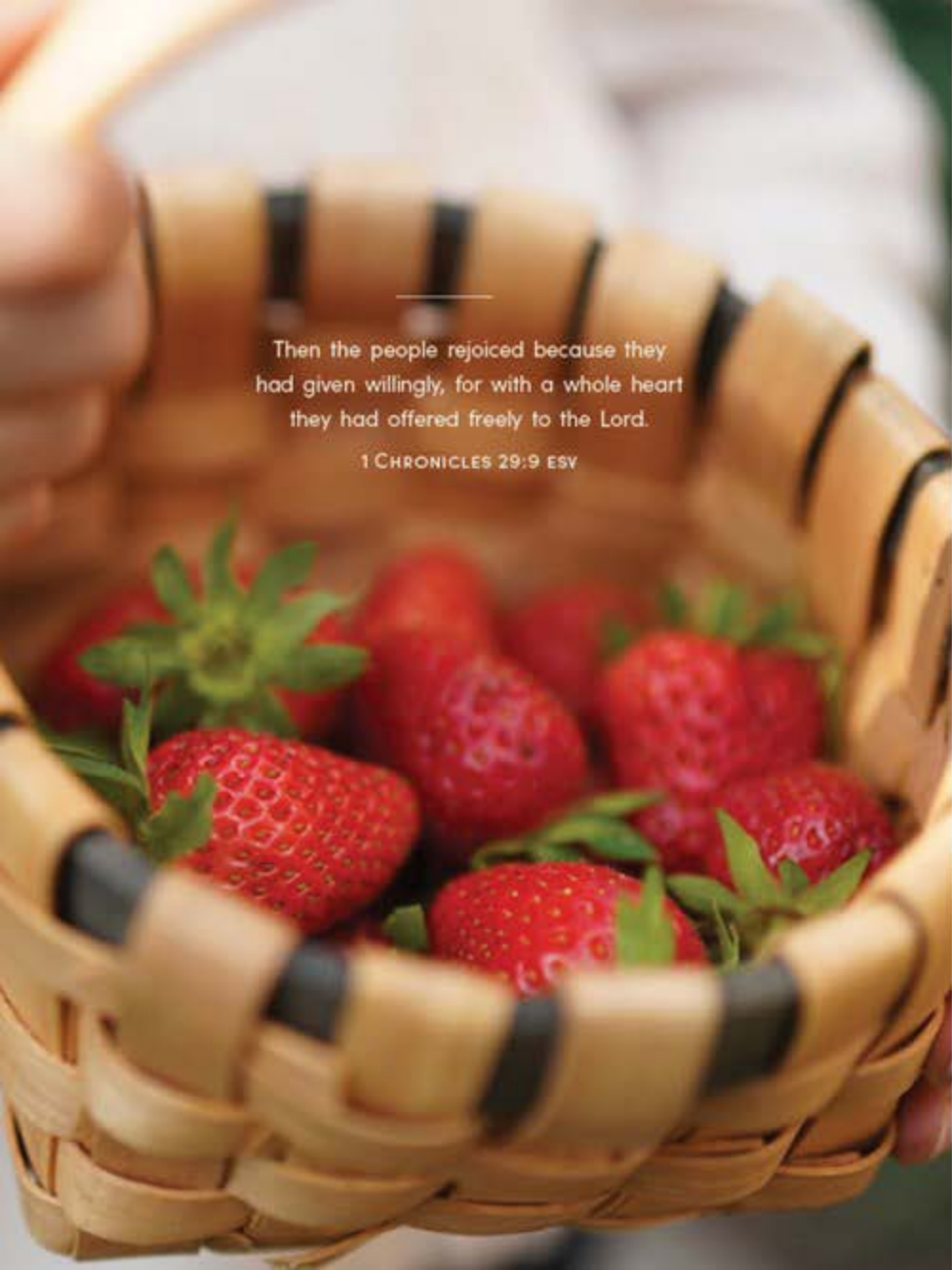


Everywhere I look, I see a world pocked with scarcity. I hunger for filling in a world that is starved.

But from that Garden beginning, God has had a different purpose for us. I open a Bible, and His plans come back to me. His love letter forever silences any doubts. He means to rename us—to return us to our true names, our truest selves.

He means to heal our souls.

From the very beginning, that Eden beginning, that has always been and continues to be His secret purpose—our return to our full glory. Us! So unworthy. And yet since we took a bite out of the fruit and tore into



Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord.

1 CHRONICLES 29:9 ESV

our own souls, God's had this wild secretive plan. He means to fill us with glory again. With glory and grace.

Grace, it means "favor," from the Latin gratia. It connotes a free readiness. A free and ready favor. That's grace. It is one thing to choose to take the grace offered at the cross. But to choose to live as one filling with His grace? Choosing to fill with all that He freely gives and fully live—with glory and grace and God?

I know it but I don't want to: it is a choice.
Living with losses, I may choose to still say yes.
Choose to say yes to what He freely gives.

God of all gifts, thank You. Thank You! For the grace to choose to see. I choose to say yes today to all You give. Do the work in me—I want to more fully live.



I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4

All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:15

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

EPHESIANS 2:8

Gifts & Gratitudes

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