

COUNT  
YOUR  
*Blessings*



Our Daily Bread  
DEVOTIONAL COLLECTION

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*Count Your Blessings: Our Daily Bread Devotional Collection*

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# Introduction

Gratitude has gone viral.

In the past few years, a host of scientific studies have concluded that feeling and expressing gratitude has emotional, relational, and even physical benefits. Gratitude can improve your mood. It can lower your blood pressure. It can improve your friendships and your marriage. Gratitude is good for you.

As in so many areas of life, modern science is catching up to ancient wisdom that has guided God's people for thousands of years. All throughout the Bible, gratitude is key to a life lived in right relationship with God, others, ourselves, and our world.

In Psalm 8, for instance, the psalmist exuberantly invites listeners to praise God: "Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (v. 1). Why? Because of the jaw-dropping wonders of creation:

I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place. (v. 3)

Thankfulness is a natural response to God's power and provision, an accurate acknowledgment of who He is and what He has given us. And this right understanding of God leads to a right understanding of ourselves. Amazed by God's vast creation, the psalmist asks, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (v. 4). The psalmist recognizes our fragility and dependence on God, and marvels at the privilege and responsibility God has given humanity to care for His beautiful world (vv. 6–8).

In another part of the Bible, in the New Testament, we see another kind of gratitude: Paul's thankfulness for his fellow believers in Christ. "I thank my God every time I remember you," he wrote to the church

in Philippi (Philippians 1:3). He goes on to explain why: “I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel” (vv. 4–5). Paul was grateful for coworkers in spreading the message of Jesus, that he wasn’t alone in the work. Feeling isolated would’ve made sense, as Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter (v. 13). But in his gratitude, Paul realized the truth—he was surrounded by a community.

Paul shows us another important aspect of biblical gratitude here: It doesn’t depend on our circumstances. In fact, Paul told early Christians to practice gratitude in all things (Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). Throughout the most horrific events recorded in the Bible—from the destruction of Jerusalem to Job losing virtually everything he loved—we see God’s people practicing what Paul preached and praising God for His faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22–24; Job 1:21). Even when we can’t see any good in our circumstances, we too can cling to hope and thank God that He is working in all things for our good (Romans 8:28; see Genesis 50:20).

The 366 daily readings in this devotional are about gratitude in all its different forms: thankfulness, praise, celebration, worship, thanksgiving. Through these stories and biblical insights from a diverse company of *Our Daily Bread* writers, you will see many ways we can express gratitude in our walk with God. A “Practice Gratitude Today” prompt at the end of each devotion helps you show your gratefulness to God every day.

You will notice repeated themes, key Scripture verses, and gratitude prompts as you journey through the year with this devotional. As with other biblical habits, gratitude is not “one and done.” I can’t choose gratitude one day and then expect to automatically recognize God’s goodness the next day. Whether the devotions encourage you to enjoy creation’s beauty, reflect on God’s faithfulness in the past, or celebrate your friends and loved ones, returning to the same themes and practices helps establish (or reestablish) gratitude as a learned skill that you can take with you beyond this year.

My prayer for you is the same that Paul prayed for the church in Thessalonica: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

*Joel Armstrong*  
General Editor

# Every Breath

EZEKIEL 37:1–3, 7–10, 14

I will put breath in you.  
Ezekiel 37:6

When Tee Unn came down with a rare autoimmune disease that weakened all his muscles and nearly killed him, he realized that being able to breathe was a gift. For more than a week, a machine had to pump air into his lungs every few seconds, which was a painful part of his treatment.

Tee Unn made a miraculous recovery, and today he reminds himself not to complain about life's challenges. "I'll just take a deep breath," he says, "and thank God I can."

How easy it is to focus on things we need or want, and forget that sometimes the smallest things in life can be the greatest miracles. In Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 37:1–14), God showed the prophet that only He could give life to dry bones. Even after tendons, flesh, and skin had appeared, "there was no breath in them" (v. 8). It was only when God gave them breath that they could live again (v. 10).

This vision illustrated God's promise to restore Israel from devastation. It also reminds me that anything I have, big or small, is useless unless God gives me breath.

How about thanking God for the simplest blessings in life today? Amid the daily struggle, let's stop occasionally to take a deep breath, and "let everything that has breath praise the LORD" (Psalm 150:6).

*Leslie Koh*

## Practice Gratitude Today

Spend a full minute breathing in and out deeply. Feel your lungs expand and contract with each life-giving breath. Thank God for giving you breath and life.

# Thanks-Living

PSALM 23

Surely your goodness and love will follow  
me all the days of my life.

Psalm 23:6

Wanting to mature in her spiritual life and become more thankful, Sue started what she called a Thanks-Living jar. Each evening she wrote on a small piece of paper one thing she thanked God for and dropped it in the jar. Some days she had many praises; other difficult days she struggled to find one. At the end of the year, she emptied her jar and read through all of the notes. She found herself thanking God again for everything He had done. He had given simple things like a beautiful sunset or a cool evening for a walk in the park, and other times He had provided grace to handle a difficult situation or answered a prayer.

Sue's notes of God's faithfulness reminded me of what the psalmist David says he experienced. God refreshed him with "green pastures" and "quiet waters" (Psalm 23:2). He gave him guidance, protection, and comfort (vv. 3–4). David concluded, "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life" (v. 6).

I'm going to make a Thanks-Living jar this year. Maybe you'd like to as well. I think we'll see we have many reasons to thank God—including His gifts of friends and family and His provisions for our physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. We'll see that the goodness and love of God follow us all the days of our lives. *Anne Cetas*

## Practice Gratitude Today

Start a Thanks-Living jar. Your daily praises can be small or big, simple or profound.

# The Perfect Gift

ROMANS 11:33–12:2

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Romans 12:1

The weeks after Christmas are the busiest time of year in the United States for merchandise returns as people trade unwanted gifts for what they really want. Yet you probably know a few people who always seem to give the perfect gift. How do they know just what another person values and what is right for the occasion? The key to successful gift giving is not money; it's listening to others and taking an interest in what they enjoy and appreciate.

This is true for family and friends. But what about God? Is there anything meaningful or valuable that we can give to God? Is there anything He doesn't already have?

Romans 11:33–36, a song of praise to God for His great wisdom, knowledge, and glory, is followed by a call to give ourselves to Him. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (12:1). Instead of being shaped by the world around us, we are to be “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (v. 2).

What's the best gift we can give to God today? In gratitude, humility, and love we can give ourselves completely to Him—heart, mind, and will. It's just what the Lord is longing to receive from each of us.

*David McCasland*

## Practice Gratitude Today

How can you give your heart, mind, and will to God today? Let the gift of yourself be your thanks to God for calling you, having mercy on you, and giving you new life in Jesus.

# Give Thanks to God

LUKE 24:28–35

When he was at the table with them, he took bread,  
gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

Luke 24:30

*M*y friend hurried from her stressful job at the hospital, wondering what she would prepare for dinner before her husband returned from his equally demanding job. She had made chicken on Sunday and served leftovers on Monday. Then they had yet another round of chicken—this time baked—on Tuesday. She found two pieces of fish in the freezer, but she knew the fillets weren't her husband's favorite. Not finding anything else she could prepare in just a few minutes, she decided the fish would have to do.

As she placed the dish on the table, she said somewhat apologetically to her husband who had just arrived home, "I know this isn't your favorite." Her husband looked up and said, "Honey, I'm just happy we have food on the table."

His attitude reminds me of the importance of being grateful and thankful for our daily provisions from God—whatever they are. Giving thanks for our daily bread, or meals, models Jesus's example. When He ate with two disciples after His resurrection, Christ "took bread, gave thanks, [and] broke it" (Luke 24:30). He thanked His Father as He had earlier when He'd fed the five thousand with five "loaves and two small fish" (John 6:9). When we give thanks for our daily meals and for other provisions, our gratitude reflects Jesus's ways and honors our heavenly Father. Let's give thanks to God today. *Katara Patton*

## Practice Gratitude Today

Choose a meal today to slow down and savor each bite. Pay attention to the flavors, textures, and smells. Thank God for providing the food on your table.

# Fighting Life's Dragons

COLOSSIANS 2:9–15

Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Colossians 2:15

Have you ever fought a dragon? If you answered no, Eugene Peterson disagrees with you. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, he wrote, “Dragons are projections of our fears, horrible constructions of all that might hurt us. . . . A peasant confronted by a magnificent dragon is completely outclassed.” Peterson’s point? Life is filled with dragons: the life-threatening health crisis, the sudden job loss, the failed marriage, the estranged prodigal child. These dragons are the supersize dangers and frailties of life that we’re inadequate to fight alone.

But in those battles, we have a Champion. Not a fairy-tale champion—the ultimate Champion who has fought on our behalf and conquered the dragons that seek to destroy us. Whether they’re dragons of our own failures or the spiritual enemy who desires our destruction, our Champion is greater, allowing Paul to write of Jesus, “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15). The destructive forces of this broken world are no match for Him!

The moment we realize that the dragons of life are too big for us is the moment we can begin to rest in Christ’s rescue. We can confidently say, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). *Bill Crowder*

## Practice Gratitude Today

What difficulty or challenge feels too big for you today? Talk with God about it, and thank Him for triumphing over all the powers of evil, sin, and death on the cross.

# Someone to Celebrate

MATTHEW 2:1–12

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us  
kneel before the LORD our Maker.

Psalm 95:6

Many manger scenes depict the wise men, or magi, visiting Jesus in Bethlehem at the same time as the shepherds. But according to the gospel of Matthew, the only place in Scripture where their story is found, the magi showed up later. Jesus was no longer a baby in the manger but perhaps as much as two years old (2:16). Matthew 2:11 tells us, “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

Realizing that the magi’s visit happened later than we may think provides a helpful reminder as we begin a new year. Jesus is always worthy of worship. When the holidays are past and we head back to life’s everyday routines, we still have Someone to celebrate.

Jesus Christ is Immanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23), in every season. He has promised to be with us “always” (28:20). Because He is always with us, we can worship Him in our hearts every day and trust that He will show Himself faithful in the years to come. Just as the magi sought Him, may we seek Him too and worship Him wherever we are.

*James Banks*

## Practice Gratitude Today

Have you put away the manger scene and other Christmas decorations already? What is one decoration you can leave out a while longer to remind yourself to be thankful all year for Jesus’s birth?

# The Art of a Grateful Heart

PSALM 118:1–14, 26–29

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Psalm 118:1

On our wedding day, Martie and I gladly vowed to be faithful “in good times as well as in bad, in sickness as well as in health, for richer or for poorer.” In a way it may seem strange to include vows about the bleak reality of bad times, sickness, and poverty on a cheerful wedding day. But it underscores the fact that life often has bad times.

So what are we to do when we face life’s inevitable difficulties? Paul urges us on behalf of Christ to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). As difficult as that may sound, there is good reason why God encourages us to embrace a spirit of gratitude. Gratitude is grounded in the truth that our Lord “is good” and “his love endures forever” (Psalm 118:1). He is present with us and strengthens us in the midst of trouble (Hebrews 13:5–6), and He lovingly uses our trials to grow our character into His likeness (Romans 5:3–4).

When life hits us with hard times, choosing to be grateful focuses our attention on the goodness of God and gives us the strength to make it through our struggles. With the psalmist, we can sing, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psalm 118:29).

*Joe Stowell*

## Practice Gratitude Today

What struggle or difficulty is life hitting you with today? Pause in prayer to thank God for His presence, strength, and love, and ask Him to use your trials to make you more like Christ.

# Snow Muse

JOB 36:26–29; 37:5–7

He says to the snow, “Fall on the earth,” and to  
the rain shower, “Be a mighty downpour.”

Job 37:6

**N**amed for a tough blue-collar neighborhood in Cincinnati, Ohio, the grassroots musical group Over the Rhine sings about a transformation that took place each year in the city. “Whenever we’d get our first real snowfall of the year, it felt like something sacred was happening,” explains band cofounder Linford Detweiler. “Like a little bit of a fresh start. The city would slow down and grow quiet.”

If you’ve experienced a heavy snowfall, you understand how it can inspire a song. A magical quietness drapes the world as snow conceals grime and grayness. For a few moments, winter’s bleakness brightens, inviting our reflection and delight.

Elihu, the one friend of Job’s who may have had a helpful view of God, noted how creation commands our attention. “God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways,” he said (Job 37:5). “He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth,’ and to the rain shower, ‘Be a mighty downpour’” (v. 6). Such splendor can interrupt our lives, demanding a sacred pause. “So that everyone he has made may know his work, he stops all people from their labor,” Elihu observed (v. 7).

Nature sometimes seizes our attention in ways we don’t like. Regardless of what happens to us or what we observe around us, each moment—magnificent, menacing, or mundane—can inspire our worship. The poet’s heart within us craves the holy hush. *Tim Gustafson*

## Practice Gratitude Today

Depending on where you live, you may be able to step outside to enjoy snowfall today. Otherwise, find a video online. Allow the quietness of the falling snow to envelop you, and praise God for His creative power.

# Food in the Cupboard

MATTHEW 6:25–34

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.

Matthew 6:25

*M*y friend Marcia, the director of the Jamaica Christian School for the Deaf, recently illustrated an important way to look at things. In a newsletter article she titled “A Blessed Start,” she pointed out that for the first time in seven years the school began the new year with a surplus. And what was that surplus? A thousand dollars in the bank? No. Enough school supplies for the year? No. It was simply this: a month’s supply of food in the cupboard.

When you’re in charge of feeding thirty hungry kids on a shoe-string budget, that’s big! She accompanied her note with the verse 1 Chronicles 16:34, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Year after year Marcia trusts God to provide for the children and staff at her school. She never has much—whether it’s water or food or school supplies. Yet she is always grateful for what God sends, and she is faithful to believe that He will continue to provide.

As we begin a new year, do we have faith in God’s provision? To do so is to take our Savior at His word when He said, “Do not worry about your life. . . . Do not worry about tomorrow” (Matthew 6:25, 34).

*Dave Branon*

## Practice Gratitude Today

What level of physical health, financial stability, or emotional well-being do you think you need to feel secure? Pray and thank God that He has given you enough for today.

# Who Is He?

## PSALM 24

Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD  
Almighty—he is the King of glory.

Psalm 24:10

On our way home from our honeymoon, my husband and I waited to check in our luggage at the airport. I nudged him and pointed to a man standing a few feet away.

My spouse squinted. “Who is he?”

I excitedly rattled off the actor’s most notable roles, then walked up and asked him to take a photo with us. Twenty-four years later, I still enjoy sharing the story of the day I met a movie star.

Recognizing a famous actor is one thing, but there’s Someone more important I’m thankful to know personally. “Who is this King of glory?” (Psalm 24:8). The psalmist David points to the Lord Almighty as Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all. He sings, “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters” (vv. 1–2). In awestruck wonder, David proclaims that God is above all yet intimately approachable (vv. 3–4). We can know Him, be empowered by Him, and trust Him to fight on our behalf, as we live for Him (v. 8).

God provides opportunities for us to declare Him as the only Famous One truly worth sharing with others. As we reflect His character, those who don’t recognize Him can have more reasons to ask, “Who is He?” Like David, we can point to the Lord with awestruck wonder and tell His story!

*Xochitl Dixon*

### Practice Gratitude Today

What attributes, acts, or roles best characterize God for you? Today, tell someone about something God has done or an aspect of His character that you are thankful for.

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