

Grateful

30 DAYS OF GROWING
IN THANKFULNESS



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ALLISON BROST

Grateful
30 Days of Growing in Thankfulness

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*To my children, for whom I'm so immensely thankful.
I pray I can leave an example, albeit imperfectly,
of living gratefully.*

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Tending the Soil



**CULTIVATING THE GOOD GROUND
OF GRATITUDE**

1

God, I Don't Feel Grateful

*“But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.”*

PSALM 13:5

First, I'll admit—writing about gratefulness is intimidating. It's almost like attempting to unlock the secrets behind a successful marriage or sharing the formula to stress-free parenting. I start by wondering whether it's even humanly possible. And then the moment I begin to feel as though I have a thing or two about marriage or parenting figured out, my children or spouse (or just as easily myself!) demonstrate how frail and flawed we humans really are. It's humbling, to say the least.

As I was commiserating with a friend about this, she gently reminded me that maybe this was exactly the attitude I *should* have when writing about this. If I thought I had it all figured out, would that really be glorifying God?

And so it's from this place that I write to you. As a fellow friend who's down in the trenches—fighting the five o'clock frustration when dinner needs to be on the table again and my

well-intentioned plans are still a solid block of ice in the back of the freezer, slipping into impatience more easily than calm, and routinely giving into grumbling over glorifying.

The truth is, I don't always feel grateful. And if that's you too, well, I want you to know you're welcome here. I don't know your story, but if you've walked around this broken-down world any length of time, I'm guessing you've experienced your own share of heartaches: strained relationships, tense family dynamics, tight finances... The list could go on and on. Sometimes the things we face in life can make it feel a whole lot easier to give up than give thanks.

Over these chapters, we're going to discover some of the ways we can grow gratefully, uncovering what Scripture says about the power of our thoughts, the importance of focusing on what is true and lovely, and the unshakable truths that point us toward praise for our Creator.

But before we get there, I think it's important that we start here—with honesty. One of the reasons why the Psalms are so special to me is because of the way in which they show the psalmists' humanity. Psalm 13 begins with such a spirit of vulnerability as the writer, David, cries out to God, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?" Then he goes on in verse 3, "Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death."

This doesn't sound much like a recipe for thankfulness, does it? But stick with me here for a moment as we pick up in verses 5-6: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me." Hear the turnaround David goes through during this passage. Can you sense the profound change from a spirit of discouragement and disappointment to one of trust and, yes, even joy? What is it that causes this seismic shift?

It's simply this: *he brought his thoughts and feelings to God.*

If you're going through something heavy and the last thing you feel is grateful or if you just sense a spiritual dullness about your days, this is where I want to encourage you to start. Begin by telling God exactly how you're feeling. Share with him the deepest worries and weariness of your heart. Lay down your hardest questions and heaviest concerns at his feet. God can handle it *all*.

Being grateful doesn't mean being dishonest about how we feel or hiding what we're going through—it starts with wholeheartedly surrendering it all to him.

Friend, I believe the hard or unexciting parts of your story don't need to lead to a lackluster faith or a downward spiral into discouragement. Perhaps they will actually prove to be the starting point for something so much better—the birthplace of a life that God is growing beautifully grateful.

Cultivate

Come before God with unfiltered honesty; tell him exactly where and how you are struggling to feel thankful. Invite God into these spaces as we begin this 30-day journey. Ask him to breathe new life into what's been broken or dulled and thank him for his promise of renewal.

2

The Choice

*“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!”*

1 CHRONICLES 16:34

It was our church’s Thanksgiving Day dinner and the entire sanctuary was brimming—row after row of tables filled with guests, volunteers serving platefuls of food, and a sectioned-off area full of toys for antsy little ones.

Just a few weeks prior, one of the pastors approached my husband to ask whether we might speak at the event. When my husband told me, I gulped. And then I quickly began contemplating all the ways I could tell them no without sounding rude. They wanted *us* to speak?

As I debated over what we could even say, I found myself bogged down with a list of hard realities that felt challenging to sum up and equally difficult to share with a sense of hope. What on earth did we know about gratitude? But slowly God began to meet my misgivings with these words from 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “In everything give thanks” (NKJV).

The words gave me pause. Could that verse really mean

what I thought it said? In the middle of disappointments and everyday inconveniences and circumstances that seemed downright wrong... to give thanks? Not just in the good times or the moments that made sense but in *everything*?

I'd heard this verse many times growing up, but it was one I'd always encountered with a heavy dose of hesitation. I mean, how could I live this way in any practical sense? And how on earth could these words be an encouragement rather than a reminder of all the ways in which I missed the mark?

But in the weeks leading up to that Thanksgiving meal, God began challenging me with this reminder—giving thanks isn't about my *feelings*; it's about *faith*. 1 Chronicles 16:34 is such a powerful reminder of this truth. It says, "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"

In the midst of minor irritations and mundane frustrations—*he is good*. In personal disappointments and general discouragements—*his steadfast love endures forever*. Whatever we may be facing, the foundation of gratitude remains firm on these unchangeable truths: *God is good and his steadfast love endures forever*.

This is where I've oftentimes become confused; I've tended to believe that unless I'm *feeling* grateful, I can't *give* thanks—that unless my mind is swarming with happy thoughts and I cease to struggle with grumbling, I'm simply failing at growing in gratitude. But notice here what 1 Thessalonians 5:18 doesn't say. It never tells us that we always have to *feel* thankful. It doesn't tell us to write down ten things we're grateful for each day or remind us to count our blessings more than our burdens, although these can both be beneficial habits. Instead, we're simply commanded to *give thanks*.

You see, God knows that giving thanks may not always fit with how we feel in the moment. At times, it might even feel fake or inconsistent with what we're walking through.

However, all that giving thanks requires is simply *obedience*.

Maybe this does mean taking time to create a list and actively acknowledging things you're thankful for each day. Perhaps it means being aware of critical thoughts and consciously combating complaints with words of gratitude. Or maybe it simply means giving thanks for each small thing as you go about your day. Let God lead you in his grace.

More than an emotion, gratitude is an *invitation*. It's an opportunity to place our trust and hope in God over anything else we may be experiencing in the moment. Having gone through some intense seasons of suffering in my own life, I know this isn't easy. But perhaps it makes thanksgiving that much more important. When our lives are surrounded by things that don't seem to fit with God's goodness, we can still choose the faith-building act of giving thanks, remembering that as believers we "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Gratitude may not always be something we *feel* but may it always, always be something we *choose*.

Cultivate

Take some time today to personalize those words of 1 Thessalonians 5:18. What situation can you decide to thank God for, even if your feelings don't match up? Find a journal, open up the notes app in your phone or use the space at the back of this book and jot down a prayer, to tell God how even in this you will give him thanks.

