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Grasping Gratitude

by Candy Arrington

Babies aren't born grateful. Think about it, when's the last time a newborn thanked you for playing peekaboo? Just as your muscles grow with exercise, you can also develop a thankful heart. Let's take a look at behaviors that zap (or drain) your gratitude. Then we'll find some tools to help you be *extra* grateful.

GRATITUDE ZAPPERS

Comparisons

Focusing on what other people have that you don't can zap your gratitude. Suddenly, you feel jealous and wish you had more. And it's not just about stuff. Comparing yourself to someone who makes better grades, excels in sports or is more popular can also rob you of contentment. Proverbs 14:30 warns, "Jealousy is rottenness to the bones." Don't let that happen. Instead, be thankful for the unique person God created you to be.

Selfishness

Due to our sinful nature, we're self-obsessed. We want things to go our way *every* time. Watch out! A selfish heart will never be satisfied. The more you want, the harder it gets to give thanks for what you already have. The Bible tells us to fight selfishness by putting others first. "In humility consider others as more important than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).

Complaining

Some people are never happy. God rescued the Hebrews from slavery and miraculously gave them food in the desert—and they still complained! Turns out, grumpiness is contagious. When you spend time around ungrateful friends, their negativity can rub off on you. Before long, you won't even remember *how* to say thanks anymore. "Do not complain about one another, so that you will not be judged" (James 5:9).

Apathy

God provides for us in so many ways. He created a whole universe filled with good things. It's like Christmas every day! Unfortunately, we can get so used to having comforts and conveniences that we grow numb to God's gifts. Because we take our blessings for granted, we forget to be thankful. James 1:17 reminds us that "every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."

GRATITUDE GRABBERS

Lists

"Count your many blessings, name them one by one," an old hymn says. What a great idea! Your list should include everyday things, like clean water, warm clothes and a loving family. But don't forget to write down the intangibles (things you can't touch), such as health, kindness or strength. Develop a habit of thanking God for big and small things. "Give a lot of time and effort to prayer. Always be watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2, NIV).

Sacrifice

For a day, a week or longer, give up something you enjoy. It could be your favorite food, a video game or TV show. Spending time without these things will help you realize how much you value them . . .

and how often you expect to have them. Before you take them back, thank God for His generosity and loving-kindness. "God will supply all your needs according to His riches" (Philippians 4:19).

Humility

When you win a game or ace a test, do you think, *I'm the best?* It's OK to feel good when you achieve something, but if you're not careful, pride may take over. We need humble hearts. God gave us our abilities and put us in place to use them. Next time you feel like patting yourself on the back, praise God instead. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God" (1 Peter 5:6).

Volunteering

Jesus modeled servanthood. He comforted the lonely, healed the sick, washed feet and changed lives. When you help others, it makes you aware of their needs and helps you appreciate the blessings in your life. At first, volunteering may feel like a chore, but soon you'll get as much as you give. Bring friends or family along to multiply the impact. "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).

Patience

We live in a "right now" world. People want instant gratification. When they don't get what they want, they start to itch. If that's you, take a breath. God allows times of waiting because He has a different, better plan. When you wait, it helps you figure out what you really need . . . and often you'll appreciate it more. "The LORD is good to those who wait for Him" (Lamentations 3:25).

Trust

Some things don't feel like gifts. People get sick, stuff breaks, houses catch fire. The Bible says to "Give thanks in everything" (1 Thessalonians 5:18)—but what does that mean? Even in the darkest times, God provides glimmers of light: friends, wise advice or a rainbow after the storm. More than that, giving thanks means trusting that God is always in control. He will turn tears into laughter and fill our hearts with praise.

Grab on to gratitude—it'll change your life. 🏠