

“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Lutheran theologian, Paul Tillich, once made the observation that, “If you don’t have hope, you haven’t looked deep enough.” These words take on greater meaning, especially in a world of such immense superficiality, where we presume that “reality” can be assessed simply by looking at the surface of things and the only “truth” we recognize is what can be “proven” by scientific method. Tillich’s words serve as a reminder that, unlike optimism, “hope” finds its source and strength in the promises of God, promises that often times fly in the face of “surface-deep reality.”

Might the same also be said of gratitude? In other words, if you see no reason for gratitude, is it because you are not looking deep enough? Or, closely enough? Or, patiently enough? Or, with the right set of eyes? Such “looking deeper” is not like Pollyanna, looking up the “happy verses” of the Bible, but more in the manner of St. Paul who could give thanks IN all circumstances (not “FOR” all circumstances, but “IN”) because he knew that all those outward, superficial “circumstances” could not change the far deeper reality of God’s love for him in Christ. In fact, it is a bit of a paradox: often, difficult circumstances force us to go deeper, enabling us to see blessings that, earlier, had escaped our notice.

Interestingly enough, the idea for this gratitude journal came from a book about dying – *The Divine Art of Dying – Living Well to Life’s End*, co-authored by Seminary Professor, Herbert Anderson and his close friend, Karen Speerstra, who was dying of cancer. In this book, the authors refer to people who “record their thankfulness moments” and how “healthy” an endeavor it is: “We might call gratitude our spiritual intelligence” (p.151). Referring to the “paradox” mentioned above, Prof. Anderson quotes from James Autry’s book, *Choosing Gratitude*:

“When you have a life-threatening illness, the days no longer pass like dry leaves in a gale, uncounted and unheeded. Instead they are individual glasses of rare wine, to be sipped and savored.”

Prof. Anderson thus concludes: “Savoring our gifts and passing them on breaks down barriers and embraces life.”

It is the intent of this book that you will take time each day to write in this journal something for which you are grateful – those “individual glasses of rare wine to be sipped and savored.” Each day includes a quote, offered, if needed, to help you probe beneath the surface of things and look a little deeper. Next comes the beginning of a prayer, “Gracious God, I give You thanks for ...” and the space that follows is meant for you to complete the prayer. Finally, a Bible verse is offered for you to read and ponder. You may choose to write a word or two for each day; or, you may write enough to fill the page. It is our prayer that, through this journal and the Spirit’s work, our gratitude in all circumstances may deepen, which is the will of God for us in Christ Jesus.

Pastor Jon and Pastor Lisa



Note about journaling:

Journaling can be done in many different ways. A journal, by definition, is a personal record of occurrences, experiences, and reflections kept on a regular basis.

If you need any help getting a thought started, here are some ideas:

- ◆ What personal strengths are you grateful for, and how have they helped you in life?
- ◆ We can learn a lot from ourselves through the challenges we face. What is something you are grateful for that challenged/challenges you?
- ◆ Where have you seen a caring act from others? How did it make you feel?

October 1

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

- Leo Buscaglia

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

grat·i·tude

[grat i tood]

noun

the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness

Ephesians 4:32a

October 2

Even if you should become rich justly and with God's help, do not depend on this either, and do not make mammon your god. Property is not given to you for you to build your trust on or boast about, all of which is vanity and nothing, but for you to use, enjoy and share with others. Possessions belong in your hands, not in your heart.

- Martin Luther

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Luke 12:15, 32-34

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October 3

Some believe it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I have found that it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay. Simple acts of kindness and love.

- Gandalf the Grey, *The Hobbit*

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Hebrews 13:16

October 4

The Atheist's Wail:

I can stand to writhe on a bed of pain, and I steel myself, and
I don't need God.

I can stand at the open grave of a loved one, and I steel myself
and I don't need God.

But when the autumn leaves are in full color, and the sun is
shining brightly, and I'm walking through the woods with my
beloved's hand in mine, it's a terrible thing not to have
anyone to thank.

Source unknown

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Psalm 92:1-4



October 5

Coming back from his father's funeral, Joseph made a detour and visited the site where long ago he had touched the bottom of the abyss; for a long time he stood at the well's edge and looked into the darkness. The brothers assumed that he did this to remind them of their misdeeds, but in truth he wanted to recall his past to himself so as better to express his gratitude to God; he was thankful for what he had been allowed to experience up to that moment.

From: *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*
by Elie Weisel, Random House, NY, 1977. P. 185

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Genesis 50:15-21

October 6

You make a living by what you get; you make a Life by what you give.
- Winston Churchill

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

1 Timothy 6:18-19



October 7

TAKK FOR ALT

She was not quite ninety-seven
when she died.

One who waited at her side
heard her say it:

"Takk for alt" "Thank you for everthing."
It was her home-going word to God.

Like a good guest
she addressed her Host.
She spoke as one well-taught,
well-taught by life,
by memory and expectation!

To be gift-conscious is to be wise;
to know whom to thank is grace indeed.
To know the gift and love the Giver,
to have learned life's dearest lesson,
is to be rich toward God.

- Gerhard Frost



Gracious God, I give You
thanks for...

Luke 12:16-21

October 8

Scottish author, pastor and hymn-writer, George Matheson, completely blinded in his eighteenth year, once prayed:

I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my "thorn." Teach me the glory of thy cross; teach me the value of my "thorn." Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made my rainbow.

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

2 Corinthians 12:7-10



October 9

This year, mend a quarrel. Seek out a forgotten friend. Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust. Write a letter. Give a soft answer. Encourage youth. Manifest your loyalty in word and deed. Keep a promise. Forgo a grudge. Forgive an enemy. Apologize. Try to understand. Examine your demands on others. Think first of someone else. Be kind. Be gentle. Laugh a little more. Express your gratitude. Welcome a stranger. Gladden the heart of a child. Take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of the earth. Speak your love and then speak it again.

- Howard W. Hunter

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Hebrews 13:2

October 10

I think that the dying pray at the last not “please” but “thank you,” as a guest thanks his host at the door.

- Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Luke 2:25-32



October 11

Slow down and enjoy life. It's not only the scenery you miss by going too fast – you also miss the sense of where you are going and why.

- Eddie Cantor, American comedian, singer (1892-1964)

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Ecclesiastes 3:10-13

October 12

“Cirrhosis of the Giver”

This disease was discovered 34 A.D. by a husband and wife team, Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). It is an acute condition which renders the patient’s hand immobile when he is called upon to move it in the direction of the billfold or purse and then to the offering plate. The patent remedy, often used, is to remove the patient from the house of God since it is clinically observable that this condition does not occur in other places such as the bowling alley, supermarket, restaurant or club. Of course, the best therapy, a sure lasting cure, is to get right with God, as this affliction is symptomatic of a more serious problem: heart trouble.

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Matthew 6:19-21

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October 13

But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

- George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Colossians 3:3

October 14

You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.

- Amy Carmichael, American missionary (1867-1951)

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

1 Corinthians 13:3



October 15

Late Fragment

And did you get what
You wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

Raymond Carver

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



I John 4:7

October 16

We find by losing. We hold fast by letting go. We become something new by ceasing to be something old. This seems to be close to the heart of that mystery. I know no more now than I ever did about the far side of death as the last letting-go of all, but now I know that I do not need to know, and that I do not need to be afraid of not knowing. God knows. That is all that matters.

- Frederick Buechner

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Matthew 10:39



October 17

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain"; whereas you do not know about tomorrow... James 4:13-14a

The context of this verse suggests the folly of pouring all of our energy into making grand plans for our life, putting confidence in ourselves over God. However, to me it also applies to the type of self-reliance that rejects the vulnerability of hope.

Humility is not a harsh "putting us in our place." Humility is a gift, a freedom to not know. Freedom from control, freedom from figuring it out, freedom from having all the answers, freedom from being responsible for others, freedom from trying to be good enough.

Humility finds joy in not knowing, not controlling, not figuring it out. Humility frees us to live in the moment, to live in wonder, to receive the subtle and sacred gifts that come in unexpected places.

I do not know the least thing about what may happen in my life tomorrow. But I do know the God that is moving and will move in undeniable ways, who will move as a Healer. So, I hope and worship and rejoice.



- Katie (a former confirmation student of Pastor Jon)

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Psalm 25:9



October 18

Go with us Lord and guide the way,
Through this and every coming day.
That in your Spirit strong and true
Our lives may be our gift to you.
(Sung to: Talis Canon)

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Psalm 121:7-8

October 19

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless you with discomfort

At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger

At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears

To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war,
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness

To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done,
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. Amen

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Micah 6:8



October 20

Materialism: Buying things we do not need, with money we do not have, to impress people we do not like.

- Source unknown

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

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Hebrews 13:5

October 21

As I pen this reflection, I know I am living on borrowed time. I have just finished a wonderful Easter celebration at the Gesu, my parish in Milwaukee; a celebration of HOPE in the power and presence of the Risen Christ. So I judge that Jesuit Pedro Arrupe captures my present disposition best when he writes: "More than ever, I find myself in the hands of God; this is what I have wanted all my life. But now there is a difference: the initiative is entirely with God. It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel myself so totally in God's hands." Thank you, Creighton family, for being my companion on this journey of life and wonderment. Never forget the words of St. Paul: "If we have died with Christ, we shall also live with Christ."

-Fr. John Schlegel, S.J. (former president of Creighton University)

Written in Creighton's quarterly publication, weeks before
Fr. Schlegel died of pancreatic cancer.

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Luke 23:44-46

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October 22

Love Reaches Out

Some years ago there was a powerful earthquake in Alaska. All over the world people responded with offers of help. Some sent needed medical supplies and others food and many sent money. One of the most moving letters came from a third grader in Bemidji, MN. He wrote to the governor of Alaska and enclosed 25 cents from his allowance. After signing his name he added this note: "P.s., If you need more, please let me know."

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Matthew 25:21

October 23

A mystery of hospitality is how often one senses God's presence in the midst of very ordinary activities. Even in writing on the topic, I frequently found myself walking on holy ground. Over and over again, I've come to see that in God's remarkable economy, as we make room for hospitality, more room becomes available to us for life, hope, and grace.

- Christine Pohl

"Making Room – Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition"

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Luke 24:28-35



October 24

Perhaps too much of everything is as bad as too little.

- Edna Ferber, American author and playwright (1885-1968)

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Proverbs 30:8-9

October 25

I got out of bed
on two strong legs.
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did
the work I love.

At noon I lay down
with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day.
But one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.

- Jane Kenyon

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Psalms 90:12



October 26

Walking in the dark with a friend is better than walking in the light alone.

- Helen Keller

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

October 27

Having... wounds is one of the things that makes all of us human and is part of the baggage every person carries through life. As we all know, wounds can leave lasting scars that cause us to build higher and higher walls carefully constructed to keep the world out. Wounds, however, can also be a gift – a gift that transforms our life and empowers us to see the world through a very different lens.

- Henry B. Freeman

Unlacing the Heart: Connecting With What Really Matters (p.110)

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Romans 5:1-5



October 28

And because of His visitation, we may no longer desire God as if He were lacking: our redemption is no longer a question of pursuit but of surrender to Him who is always and everywhere present. Therefore at every moment we pray that, following Him, we may depart from our anxiety into His peace.

- *For the Time Being*, W.H. Auden (1907-1973)

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...



John 14:27

October 29

Don't let yesterday use up too much of today.

- Will Rogers, American humorist (1879-1935)

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Matthew 6:34



October 30

Be slow to pray. Praying puts us at risk of getting involved with God's conditions.... Praying most often doesn't get us what we want but what God wants, something quite at variance with what we conceive to be in our best interests. And when we realize what is going on, it is often too late to go back.

- Eugene Peterson

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Matthew 6:9-14

October 31

The second happiest people in the world are generous people; the happiest people in the world are grateful people.

Source unknown

Gracious God, I give You thanks for...

Psalm 100:1-5

grat·i·tude

[grat i tood]

noun

the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness