

The background is a vibrant, abstract stained glass design. It features a central black circle containing the title. The surrounding area is filled with colorful, geometric shapes in shades of orange, red, yellow, blue, and green, separated by dark, black lines that resemble lead in stained glass. The overall effect is warm and artistic.

LIVING GRATITUDE

28 DAYS OF PRAYER
AND THANKSGIVING

LIVING GRATITUDE

28 DAYS OF PRAYER
AND THANKSGIVING

Abingdon Press | Nashville

Living Gratitude:
28 Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving

Copyright © 2022 Abingdon Press
All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act, the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Rights and Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, 810 12th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203 or e-mailed to permissions@abingdonpress.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022930730

ISBN 978-1-7910-2406-2

Scripture quotations unless noted otherwise are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org/>

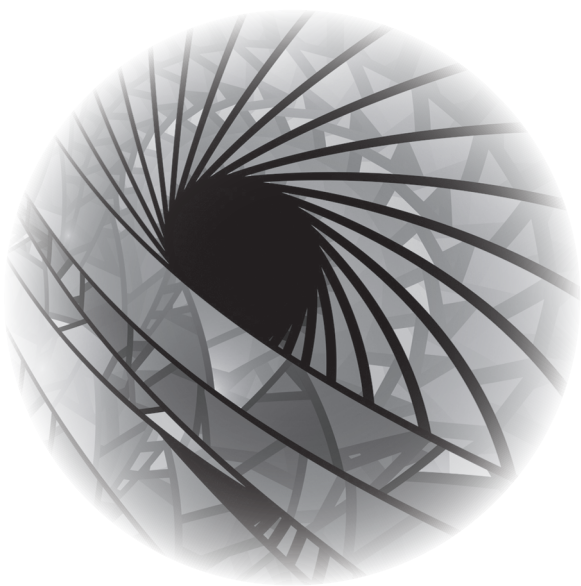
Scripture quotations noted CEB are taken from the Common English Bible, copyright 2011. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 — 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Gratitude.....	9
Generosity.....	23
Prayer	37
Call	51



There is power in gratitude. When we live in gratitude, we gain the strength to see God's grace everywhere. Anxiety loses its grasp on us, fear flees from our hearts, and we walk in the fullness of our calling. Jesus gave thanks with only five loaves of bread and two fish, and the abundance of Jesus's gratitude even in this scarcity was enough to feed all five thousand and more (Mark 6:30-44). Paul and Silas gave thanks to God when they were going through some serious mistreatment and persecution. Their audacity to live in gratitude opened the door for the precious opportunity to save a life, literally, as they prevented the prison jailer from harming himself. This birthed a cascade of impacts in the life of the jailer and he "believe[d] in the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:16-40). Gratitude has such a power; it turns the scarcity mindset to one of abundance, and it transforms a limiting circumstance to an exciting opportunity.

With the rise of the pandemic in recent years, many of our churches perhaps struggle with the scarcity mindset. Many of us may be challenged by the new limitations and boundaries we call "the new normal." Some of us may be looking at the five loaves of bread and two fish in our hands, wondering how we can serve our mission fields as we are called to serve five thousand and more. We are in the midst of coping with many losses in our lives, and the divisions among us put so much more weight on our shoulders.

The church of Thessalonica was also going through a time of loss in the midst of challenges. With religious disagreements and political turmoil in their communities,

they were coping with the pain of losing their leaders, their social status, and their beloved ones. But the apostle Paul exhorted them even in these dire circumstances, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). When Paul himself was again in a prison and the church of Philippi was in the middle of a serious division, he again exhorted them, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6 NIV). When we choose to give thanks instead of being anxious, we find God’s peace that surpasses all understanding guarding our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7)! We see that gratitude is an essential part of our journey with God, especially when we find ourselves in difficult challenges.

Then, perhaps this is a prime time for us to offer the living sacrifice of thanksgiving and wholeheartedly live in gratitude. Our foremothers and forefathers of faith stood firm not through weapons, nor through abundance, but through simply giving thanks and walking in gratitude. The reason that they were “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; . . . struck down, but not destroyed” is because they recognized the treasure in Christ Jesus and walked their lives in gratitude (2 Corinthians 4:7-10).

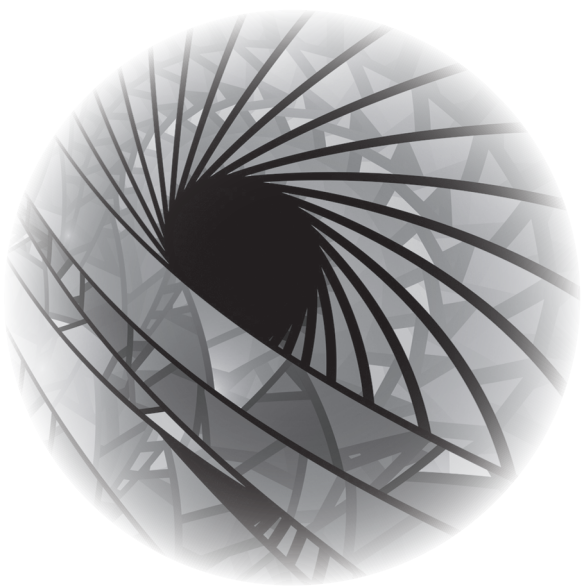
What is the treasure you find in Christ Jesus? What treasures can you find in your life and within you that you are called to faithfully steward and give thanks for? In such a time as this, perhaps one of the most powerful and prophetic ministries we can offer is to audaciously live in gratitude. So, we invite you to begin a journey of renewing this powerful spiritual practice of gratitude. For the next twenty-eight days, the diverse group of pastors, business and

church leaders, speakers, and authors who have contributed to this book will walk alongside you as you begin this journey of gratitude. Each week has a focus theme: gratitude, generosity, prayer, and call. Gratitude leads us to generosity. Gratitude is an essential part of prayers, which empower us to walk in the fullness of God's calling in our lives.

We pray that at the end of this twenty-eight-day journey of gratitude, we experience God's grace that transforms our scarcity mindset to one of abundance and generosity. We pray that we find the power of the five loaves of bread and two fish in our hands through this sacred practice of gratitude. We pray that God gives each one of us wisdom to see our limiting and challenging circumstances as unique opportunities for working in the kingdom of God. In such a time as this, we pray that our practice of gratitude collectively will be a powerful prophetic voice to the world that speaks of God's goodness and love for all of us in the midst of these difficult challenges we face in our world.

So, friends, let us remember God's grace and be thankful. We look forward to your powerful witness of gratitude in such a time as this.

Rev. Danielle Buwon Kim



DAY ONE

Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Luke 17:19

When the turn of the century saw an explosion of research into the beneficial effects of gratitude, I jumped right on board, filling notebooks with lists of people, circumstances, and things that made my life better. It seemed that science was confirming the old "count your blessings" adage with evidence of increased productivity and measurable satisfaction, and after a long span of personal dissatisfaction, I had plenty of blessings that needed counting. Each time I catalogued items I was thankful for, I walked away with renewed energy and optimism. But each time I stumbled over a new obstacle, that optimism crumbled. Between lists, I was only one flat tire, one broken sump pump, or one toddler meltdown away from ingratitude.

In the midst of my uncertainty, I came across Luke's account of Jesus and the ten lepers who roam the borderland between Samaria and Galilee, displaced from homes and families by levitical law. Although they come from inimical cultures, they cry out to Jesus in uniform despair, and when Jesus responds by sending them to the priest for inspection, the men find themselves restored along the way. When healing dissolves the suffering that had united them, the nine men who continue toward the

GRATITUDE

priest for ceremonial reintegration into their communities don't seem to miss the Samaritan man who hurries back to Jesus. My heart went out to those nine men who finished their journey to the priest. After all, they were obeying the command of the Healer! The Samaritan who returned had abandoned obedience to follow his own impulses, hadn't he? On the other hand, maybe he recognized the Healer as the true priest, and his cries of gratitude, which Jesus calls "praise," reflect wholehearted faith in a God who outlasts every temple. Falling at the feet of Jesus, the restored Samaritan is commended for his faith.

When I finished the story and looked back through my gratitude lists, I noticed that the only thread connecting my blessings was their net effect on me. I had become skilled at identifying things that I was thankful for, but I had entirely neglected to direct my gratitude toward the One I was thankful to. Like the nine lepers, I inhabited my healing with no further regard for the Healer. That afternoon marked a spiritual shift. Instead of propping up my tenuous contentment with lists of things that made me happy, I slowly began to thank God, directly, for creating and sustaining me, for designing and loving my family, for diffusing pink light into an inimitable sunrise, and for inventing the possibility of song. I gave thanks at the feet of the Priest who still ushers us into holy places even as we wander in the wilderness between temples. When I offer thanks to God in the sacred space of conversational prayer, gratitude becomes an act of worship, a declaration of faith in a God who remains constant, even when the good things around me give way.

Amy Linnemann

DAY TWO

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4 NIV

When I was a kid, my family, like many others, would go around the dinner table at Thanksgiving and have everyone share one thing for which they were thankful. We would often say things like our home, our family, and the fun vacation we had that summer.

Once or twice, someone would mention something negative that happened, like being thankful for their doctor who got them through the big surgery they had that year. I never heard anyone say, “I’m thankful I got laid off from my job,” or “I’m thankful for my divorce,” or “I’m so thankful I have cancer.”

Such statements would have brought an uncomfortable silence to the dinner table. How do you ask someone to pass the peas after they’ve disclosed a major life event like that?

In my years as a pastor, I’ve had the opportunity to walk with people through many difficult situations in life, and I’ve been surprised and inspired by the way some of them have responded to devastating news.

One man was diagnosed with inoperable cancer, and in the months he had left he took great pains to try to reconcile with friends and family members whose relationships had been strained. At his funeral, one of those relatives said if he had died in a car

crash, they would live the rest of their life with regret over not forgiving each other.

“I feel weird saying this,” his relative shared, “but I’m actually thankful that he got cancer, because probably nothing else would have led us to patch things up, and now we are both at peace.”

Trials are a part of life, and there is nothing inherently good about the pain they cause. God does not put trials into our lives for the purpose of teaching us a lesson. Pain and struggle are part of the reality of living in a broken world. The writer of James invites us to broaden our perspective, because trials can give us the opportunity to grow.

On his children’s TV show, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, Fred Rogers told his audience that his mother told him when he got scared by things going on in the world to “look for the helpers.” We experience God’s grace in the people and things that help us get through tough times.

God does not cause people to get cancer. God walks with us through it and helps us make the best of the time we have left.

God does not cause people to get divorced or lose their jobs. God cries with us in our pain, sits with us in our grief, and helps us ask deep questions of ourselves so our brokenness can be part of our transformation to being more whole than we were before. God is present with us in the “in-between” spaces to nudge us toward new possibilities.

Maybe no one is going to specifically raise a glass to a pandemic or other trials this year, but we might be able to share our gratitude for how God walked with us through this time of trial.

Matthew L. Kelley