Grateful

GIVING THANKS TO GOD IN ALL THINGS

LIFEWAY WOMEN

Grateful

GIVING THANKS TO GOD IN ALL THINGS

LIFEWAY WOMEN

Lifeway Press®
Brentwood, Tennessee

Published by Lifeway Press® • © 2023 Lifeway Christian Resources • Brentwood, TN

No part of this book 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 in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to Lifeway Press®; 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707.

ISBN: 978-1-0877-7980-5
Item: 005841132
Dewey decimal classification: 248.843

Subject headings: GRATITUDE \ WOMEN \ CHRISTIAN LIFE

Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2020 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scriptures 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. zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

To order additional copies of this resource, write to Lifeway Resources Customer Service; 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707; order online at lifeway.com; fax 615.251.5933; phone toll free 800.458.2772; or email orderentry@lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

Lifeway Women Bible Studies • Lifeway Resources • 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707

EDITORIAL TEAM, LIFEWAY WOMEN BIBLE STUDIES

Becky Loyd
Director,
Lifeway Women

Tina Boesch
Manager

Chelsea Waack
Production Leader

Mike Wakefield
Content Editor

Laura Magness
Managing Editor

Tessa Morrell
Production Editor

Lauren Ervin
Art Director

Sarah Hobbs
Graphic Designer

CONTENTS

WEEK ONE GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S SALVATION **9**

The Gratitude of One 10
Jesus Meets with Nicodemus 16
For His *Hesed* Endures Forever 22
Alive with Christ 28
Gratitude Acknowledges God's Work 35

WEEK TWO GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S PRESENCE **43**

Meaningful Moments 44
Thankful Hearts 50
My Strength and My Song 56
Give Thanks in Everything 62
Gratitude Leads to Intimacy 68

WEEK THREE GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S WORK IN AND THROUGH US **75**

Giving Thanks to God in the Hard Times 76
Cultivating Gratitude in Community 82
His Name and His Word 86
Christ's Gratitude and Christ-Like Gratitude 92
Gratitude Produces Generosity 98

WEEK FOUR GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S PROMISES **105**

God Keeps His Promises 106
Grateful for the Ending 112
His Speaking Is His Doing 118
Forever Grateful 124
Gratitude Motivates Mission 132

EXTRAS

How to Use This Study 4
Introduction 6
Endnotes 136
Contributor Bios 138
Becoming a Christian 141
Get the Most from Your Study 144

How to USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *Grateful: Giving Thanks to God in All Things*. We pray this study fosters in you a heart of gratitude regardless of what time of year you choose to do it. We hope you'll find being grateful turns your eyes off yourself and helps you cherish your time and relationships in a new way. When we are a thankful people, we point to our good God who loves and provides for us.

GETTING STARTED

Because we believe discipleship happens best in community, we encourage you to do this study together in a group setting. Or, if you're doing this alone, consider enlisting a friend or two to go through it at the same time. This will give you study friends to pray with and connect with over coffee or through text or email so you can chat about what you're learning.

WEEK ONE | DAY FIVE

Colossians 1:9-12

Gratitude ACKNOWLEDGES GOD'S WORK

by Cynthia Hopkins

Zero percent of women who have looked at the cover of this study did so thinking, *I just don't know if gratitude is really all that important.* Granted, no poll or survey was conducted to confirm that statistic, but it has to be accurate, right? After all, the importance of gratitude is a generally accepted global truth. An internet search of quotes about gratitude proves this is true—Christians, Hindus, Jews, Universalists, Mormons, Muslims, Buddhists, and even atheists seek to identify reasons to be grateful. In every language, one of the first things parents teach children to say is "Thank you." Millions of viewers tune into annual award ceremonies to find out who will be awarded and how they will express gratitude. Stadiums full of sports fans spontaneously explode with applause and shouts of appreciation when athletes excel.

Gratitude is *nice*. We all know that; it's why we gather together as families at Thanksgiving. "Friendsgiving" has become a popular practice, too. That's not because we like turkey so much that we want to eat it oven-roasted on Thursday with our families and then deep-fried on Friday with our closest friends. No, it is simply because we like gratitude *that* much.

So, if gratitude is a universally accepted value, then why do we need encouragement to embrace and practice that value?

The fact is, as much as we value gratitude, we struggle to practice it in daily life. We are tempted to focus more on the achievements, relationships, goals, status, and possessions we want that we do not have. We are largely concerned with what we think we deserve. Because of this, the gratitude most people know and practice is a distorted, lesser version, marked primarily by sentimentalism or routine. But sentimentalism and routine are not at all what God's Word encourages or commands.

Saying "thank you" can certainly be an expression of the kind of gratitude God commands. So can gathering with family and friends each year to celebrate the reasons you have to give thanks. If you sing songs of praise to God every Sunday at church, that can be an expression of gratitude, too. But those practices, in and of themselves, are not what God is after. True gratitude isn't merely an event. Neither is it just an expression of affection or nostalgia. For people who were dead in sin and are now alive in Christ, gratitude should be a continual condition of the heart that shows up practically in everyday life.

WEEK ONE: GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S SALVATION 35

PERSONAL STUDY

The five days of personal study each week will feature a profile of someone in the Bible who portrayed a grateful heart, two days of teaching from Scripture on gratefulness, one psalm of thanksgiving, and a day to practice being grateful.

REFLECTION PAGE

At the end of each week, you'll find a page for you to reflect on what you've experienced in the previous days of study. There's space for you to journal, write a poem or song, draw, or whatever best expresses your heart of gratitude.

LEADING A GROUP?

A free leader guide PDF is available for download at **lifeway.com/grateful**. The leader guide offers several tips and helps, along with discussion guides for each week.

scan me

FREE DOWNLOADS

Resources are available to help you promote the study in your church or neighborhood, including: invitation card, promotional poster, bulletin insert, and PowerPoint® template. You'll find these and more at **lifeway.com/grateful**.

INTRODUCTION

Say thank you!

Did you say thank you?

I've got to write my thank you notes!

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

From the moment toddlers learn to speak, we are teaching them to say thank you. This lesson in manners is hopefully something we all carry through the rest of our lives, intentionally voicing gratitude for what people do for us or give us. Depending on the country you live in, you may even have a national holiday set aside to remember to be thankful. But those are moments—circumstances, calendar dates, a feeling of "thankfulness" when good things happen.

Throughout the Bible, gratefulness is seen as a permanent characteristic of the people of God, not a temporary feeling. The apostle Paul said those who follow Christ are to be "overflowing with gratitude" (Col. 2:7b). But did he mean all the time? Even in suffering, hardship, and loss? Yes. In those times too. How do we reconcile this? How do we learn to be women who feel grateful even when our circumstances don't seem to warrant it?

Harvard Health Publishing released an article titled "Giving thanks can make you happier." In it, they shared the following from a research study on gratitude:

Two psychologists, Dr. Robert A. Emmons of the University of California, Davis, and Dr. Michael E. McCullough of the University of Miami, have done much of the research on gratitude. In one study, they asked all participants to write a few sentences each week, focusing on particular topics.

One group wrote about things they were grateful for that had occurred during the week. A second group wrote about daily irritations or things that had displeased them, and the third wrote about events that had affected them (with no emphasis on them being positive or negative). After ten weeks, those who wrote about gratitude were more optimistic and felt better about their lives. Surprisingly, they also exercised more and had fewer visits to physicians than those who focused on sources of aggravation.[1]

It seems (and I imagine this won't surprise you) that gratitude begins in what our thoughts dwell on. As women of God, do we actively think about Him and the promises and blessings the Bible tells us are ours as followers of Jesus? Or do we spend our time comparing ourselves to others—envying the perfect lives we see presented to us through social media feeds and bemoaning our daily grind or challenging relationships? Because to be women who overflow with gratitude as God's Word tells us to be, we can't do both.

Over the next four weeks, we'll live in this gratitude tension as we dig into Scripture together.

To write this study, we've brought together a team of godly, gifted women from many different seasons of life who have lived through a wide range of experiences. The wisdom they've gained through years of walking with the Lord has stretched their understanding of what it means to be grateful to God in all things.

What we hope you'll take away from this Bible study is that God created you, saved you, loves you, and is using you for His good purpose—to glorify Him and extend His love to others. So, no matter how your life measures up against those around you or how hard things get from time to time, a heart of gratitude is possible simply because of who Jesus is and who you are in Him.

We're thrilled you're spending the next four weeks with us. Our prayer is that we will be women who learn to "rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:15-18).

Laura Magness

WEEK ONE

GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S SALVATION

A grateful heart flows out of an understanding of who Jesus is and who we are in Him. When we are rightly oriented before God the Father—our Creator and Redeemer—we are never without things to be thankful for. No matter the ebbs and flows of our circumstances, our identity as His daughters doesn't change. The Bible passages we'll study this week include a Gospel story and two important teachings that show us if the only thing we have to be grateful for is new life in Jesus, that's enough for our hearts to overflow with gratitude every day.

WEEK ONE | DAY ONE

Luke 17:11-19

THE *Gratitude* OF ONE

by Wendy Bello

There was a time in my life when gratitude was more of a foreign concept. Yes, I understood what the word meant, and giving thanks to others as a social convention was something my parents and grandparents instilled in me. But I didn't live with a grateful heart. Then one day the Lord used a book I was reading to reveal how the sin of ungratefulness had taken root in my life and how quickly I'd forgotten the wonderful things He had done.

Remembering God's goodness and mercies inevitably produces gratitude, but we have forgetful hearts. Just like many of the characters in today's story.

READ LUKE 17:11-13.

This passage is part of a large section in the gospel of Luke that narrates Jesus's journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–19:41). While on the way, Jesus had an encounter with a group of men who suffered from leprosy. *Leprosy* was a general term used for different acute skin conditions. The law of Moses required that lepers live outside the city (Num. 5:2-4) and not be allowed to mingle with the rest of the people. As they went about, they were to cover their mouths and cry out "Unclean, unclean" (Lev. 13:45-46). Therefore, when this group of men saw Jesus coming, they kept their distance and raised their voices so He could hear them.

What was their plea to Jesus? Why do you think they asked this of Jesus?

How would you have felt if you had been part of this group of people?

Sometimes we can feel like these men: outcasts, excluded, alone. We're not forced to live outside our towns or cities, but sometimes we choose to keep our distance from others and even from the Lord. Maybe we separate ourselves because of sin or shame, or perhaps we're confused or afraid. But let's be encouraged by this text. Like these men, we can call on the name of the Lord. He is a merciful God! But what exactly does that mean?

How would you define God's mercy?

One theologian defined *God's mercy* as "the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts."[1] Receiving His mercy does not depend on our merits or behavior. We can't do anything to win His mercy. It is His prerogative. And here's something amazing about God's mercy: it never runs out! There is an unlimited supply. In fact, Scripture tells us God's mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23).

Describe a time when you experienced God's mercy. What impact did it have in your life?

READ LUKE 17:14-16.

The law commanded that a person afflicted with any skin disease had to be examined by a priest. This examination would determine if the person was clean or not. If clean, the person was allowed to return to a normal life with the rest of the people (Lev. 14:2-32).

IN LUKE 5:12-13, Jesus had an earlier encounter with a leprous man. Read the passage and compare it to the Luke 17 encounter. What differences do you find?

When Jesus commanded the men in chapter 17 to go show themselves to the priests, they were still sick and unclean. Their healing took place while they were on the way to the priests. Can you imagine the amazement those men felt when they looked at their bodies and saw no traces of leprosy? Jesus hadn't even touched them, yet they witnessed the power of the one true God!

The faith and obedience of the ten were also involved in the process. They had faith in what Jesus said and obeyed His command. That should be the case in our walk with the Lord. The old hymn rings true:

> *Trust and obey, for there's no other way*
>
> *to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*[2]
>
> ***TRUST AND OBEY***

After the healing took place, Luke notes that one of the men returned praising God.

What do we learn from the text about the identity of this man? Why is that important?

The text emphasizes the nationality of one man, the Samaritan. Samaritans and Jews were not on friendly terms. The Jews despised the Samaritans and considered them unclean. The groups had a long history of racial and religious conflict. But it was the Samaritan leper who came back with a grateful heart. The mercy of Jesus had changed his life, and he could not remain silent. He returned shouting and praising God.

Can you recall a time in your life when you had been praying about something for a long time and suddenly the Lord answered? Describe the experience.

Did you come back to thank Him like the Samaritan, or did you just go on your way like the other nine lepers?

As we noted earlier, sometimes our hearts have memory problems. Too easily we go on with our lives and forget to thank the Lord for the many occasions He has been merciful to us.

READ LUKE 17:17-19.

It's interesting that Jesus asked about the other nine lepers who were cleansed. After all, He had told them to go see the priest and they had obeyed. But it seems as if He expected them all to come back.

Why would Jesus ask this?

READ VERSE 18 AGAIN. Jesus made a connection between gratitude and giving God glory. Remember when I told you earlier about my own ungrateful heart? Well, my journey also included reading through the Bible and learning what gratitude really means. One verse from Psalms was an eye-opener, "The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me" (Ps. 50:23, ESV). Giving thanks to God is honoring Him, a way of glorifying Him as we acknowledge what He has done. When we realize how merciful the Lord has been to us and the magnitude of our salvation, giving thanks should be the natural response of the heart. Jesus was bringing that to the attention not only of the cleansed Samaritan but also of His disciples who were watching the episode unfold.

The ten lepers came to Jesus looking for healing, but the last verse reveals that the Samaritan received more than he asked for. Jesus told the man "Your faith has saved you" (". . . has made you well" ESV, NIV). The Greek word for *saved* is *sozo*, a word used in the New Testament to speak of salvation from sin.[3] His healing went beyond the physical realm. The power of Jesus not only transformed his body but also his heart.

Take an honest look at your own heart. Would you say that your life is a sacrifice of thanksgiving that gives God the glory? When was the last time you took a moment to reflect on God's mercy and give Him thanks? Use the space below to write a prayer of gratitude to the Lord. Also pray that He would help you live a life of thanksgiving.

WEEK ONE | DAY TWO

John 3:1-21

Jesus MEETS WITH NICODEMUS

by April Rodgers

Imagine you are placed in a large darkened room, filled with obstacles. You're told to find a different way out than the way you entered. You extend your hands as you stumble around, desperately trying to find the exit. Panic begins to creep in the longer you search. But all of a sudden, light illuminates the room, and you are able to clearly see the other exit and the path to get there.

Sometimes, studying the Scripture can feel a little like finding our way through the darkened room. But God has given us His Spirit to lead us into all truth. Let's pray that the eyes of our hearts are enlightened today to receive the lesson the Spirit has for us. And who better to teach us than the ultimate Teacher Himself? Just as Jesus took the time to explain the mystery of salvation to Nicodemus, the same opportunity is extended to us. Let's pull up a chair at the table of gratitude and learn from the Master.

READ JOHN 3:1-21 and pay extra attention to these repeated words: *born, Spirit, believe, light*.

Nicodemus was an important man. A Pharisee. A ruler of the Jews. A man of prestige and authority. A man with many years of dedicated time spent studying the Scriptures and teaching them to others. Yet he came to Jesus seeking answers and desiring to know more. He knew that Jesus was a miracle-worker, but Nicodemus would come to know Jesus as much more than that. As Jesus began to unveil who He truly was and His purpose for coming to earth, Nicodemus struggled to comprehend. His earthly eyes were keeping him in the dark.

Have you ever desired to know the deep things of God, but when you opened your Bible, what you found felt foreign or confusing to you? Explain.

Did the "light" ever come on so that you could discern what God's Word was saying? Explain.

As Jesus patiently explained the process of salvation to Nicodemus, He used the term *born again*. Nicodemus struggled to understand because he knew in the natural realm, this concept was impossible. But if we dig a little deeper, we discover this phrase *born again* can also be translated born *from above*.[4] Jesus went on to talk about this new birth in a different way.

How did Jesus describe the new birth in verse 5?

Jesus was not talking about two separate events of being born of water and of the Spirit, but a combining of two things to bring about spiritual birth. We see this described by the Old Testament prophets.

For I will pour water on the thirsty land

and streams on the dry ground;

I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants

and my blessing on your offspring.

ISAIAH 44:3

This concept is especially clear in Ezekiel 36:25-27. Read it and summarize how the new birth was described.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17. How did Paul describe what takes place when we're born again?

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Who wouldn't want the old and crusty parts to be gone and to receive a new and fresh life? Yet to be born from above requires trust. We must believe that Jesus is who God says He is.

READ BACK OVER JOHN 3:14-18 and answer the following questions.

What is Jesus's relationship to God the Father, and what was His mission on earth?

What is the repeated action verb in this passage?

What are we given if we believe Jesus is God's Son?

Belief is a big deal to God. It's not just enough for us to acknowledge that Jesus was a good teacher or a miracle worker. God wants us to find Him trustworthy and in turn, place our complete faith in Him. God's desire is that His free gift of salvation be accepted by us and not tossed to the side in search of the next best thing. He wants us to know just how deeply He loves us because at the core of it all, love has always been the motivation.

When I was a little girl, I loved to play with Barbie® dolls, dressing them in the fanciest dresses and shoes. My best friend had a Barbie Dreamhouse® with an elevator that could move Barbie from the first floor to the second, and I thought that was the most magnificent thing. I wanted one of my own. So I asked my parents for my own Barbie Dreamhouse for Christmas. My father worked many nights in the garage long after I had gone to bed to build me a Barbie home from real wood, lining the walls with scraps of elegant wallpaper and giving Barbie plush carpet to rest her high-arched feet after a busy day of dress up.

When Christmas morning finally arrived, I rushed into the living room hoping to see the gift my heart desired, yet instead of the Mattel® Dreamhouse, there stood my father's creation. I was devastated to find that Barbie's home did not have an elevator or even stairs. How was she supposed to move from room to room unless I moved her (gasp!)? My eyes couldn't see the beautiful gift that was in front of me and how it was ten times better than the cheap plastic alternative. I'm sure it crushed my father to watch me reject his gift made with love because I longed for something inferior.

Our heavenly Father has given us a priceless gift. For God so loved you and me that He gave His only Son in order to rescue us from a life of darkness and sin. But ultimately, we have to decide to believe in Jesus. The gift of eternal life has been given. The question is this: will we receive it?

Friend, if you have never put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, today is the day. Repent of your sins and believe in Him. Allow Him to breathe new life into you and make your spirit come alive as a new creation. Accept His free gift of love and eternal life. (For more information and guidance on this decision, see "Becoming a Christian" on page 141.)

Write out your response to His gift below.

If you have already received Jesus as the Son of God, write out a prayer of gratitude for all that He has done for you. Ask Him to strengthen and grow your belief in Him as you find Him trustworthy all over again.

In the end, Nicodemus brought his own gift to Jesus. John records that Nicodemus assisted Joseph of Arimathea in taking Jesus's body off the cross and placing Him in the garden tomb (John 19:38-42). As he anointed the body of the Son of God with myrrh and aloes, I wonder if Nicodemus reflected on their earlier all-important conversation, where being "born again" seemed impossible. What Nicodemus would soon discover is that nothing is impossible with God! For in three days' time, Light would once again break through the darkness as Jesus rose from the grave. At the core of it all, love was the motivation. For that, we can be truly grateful.

THANKS BE
TO GOD
FOR HIS
indescribable
GIFT!
2 Corinthians 9:15

REFLECTION

As you finish your week of study, take a moment to process what you've learned and how your heart has been stirred concerning gratitude. Use the space below however you wish—write a prayer of thanks to the Lord, summarize what you've learned, write a poem, create a list of what you're grateful for, draw a picture, write a song, confess your struggle to be grateful, or document other expressions of your heart.

FOR THE GROUP TIME

If you're doing this study with a group, consider the following questions and be ready to discuss during your time together. (If you're leading the group, check out the leader guide at lifeway.com/grateful to help you prepare.)

Which day was your favorite day of study? Why?

What stood out to you from this week of personal study? What has stuck with you? What surprised you or was new information?

What's one thing you learned this week that will help you cultivate a heart of gratitude? How will you apply what you learned?

To continue developing and nurturing a heart of gratitude, get a copy of the *Gratitude Prayer Journal* at lifeway.com/grateful.