

Gratitude

Many years ago a devout follower of Christ shared a journey of gratitude she was practicing based on lessons from *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp. Every day she was noting in her journal blessings for which she was grateful. I remember thinking how incredibly easy it would be to come up with at least 1,000 things for which I'm grateful. So, I started a list: my husband, my family; my friends; my church; my job; my house... My, my, my. To my chagrin, the first things that came to mind were all about me, so I switched to adding things that might seem more general and selfless: books; music; the beauty of nature; art; kindness; laughter... Then I started including what seemed like ordinary, little or silly things: restful sleep; comfy clothes; chocolate; coffee; raspberries; coloring books... The more I worked on my list, the more aware I became of the vastness of God's blessings because through each of our senses we continually experience God's endless gifts. But then it hit me: embarrassment that my very first thoughts of gratitude weren't specifically for God the Father's unfailing love and mercy; for Jesus's ultimate sacrifice for all humankind; for the Holy Spirit's presence within that provides guidance; and for the most important book there is—the inspired Word of God as documented in the Bible. I think it was this realization that helped inspire a deep desire in me to have a more intentional, personal relationship with God. I knew this would require spending more time reading the Bible, which was difficult and frankly quite intimidating for me because I struggled to “unpack” that ancient text. Was it coincidence—or a God-incidence—that around this time a neighbor acquaintance unexpectedly (and quite out of the blue) invited me to join her for a Bible Study of the Book of Acts on Thursday mornings in Essex? She had grappled with whether she should even ask me because she really didn't know where I was on my faith journey, she knew I was working fulltime, and the class was being held during my regular working hours. She had no idea I was longing for help to understand, connect, and reconcile that ancient text to the messiness of our current-day world—but now I know that God knew and that she obeyed whispering from the Holy Spirit to go ahead and extended the invitation. She says she was surprised when I accepted her invitation with enthusiasm and immediately re-arranged my work schedule to join the class. (Little did I know that by accepting her offer to chauffeur us, the speed at which she would drive back to Huntington as we talked about what we'd explored in class would turn the 30-minute drive into just under an hour. Looking back, I'm surprised she never got a ticket for driving so slow.) In spite of having to work more late night and weekend hours to attend that class, I can't adequately express my gratitude for the ongoing gift with which I've been blessed by that invitation. Today that neighbor has become a dear sister in Christ with whom I spend countless hours in deep conversation as we explore scripture and how it meaningfully connects to our current world. I don't know who wrote this little prayer, but it resonates with me: *"Father, thank you for Your Word that is available to me every day. Thank you for the hope, truth, and wisdom it provides, guiding me in Your ways and comforting me in difficult times. I am grateful for the strength and peace it brings to my life."* I have profound gratitude for our little church here in Huntington where each week, through worship, prayer, and teaching, we continue to dive deeper and deeper into the Word of God. We welcome you to join us!