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Cultivating a heart of THANKS

by Beth Jones

We all can't wait for Thanksgiving Day, gathering together with family and friends, and enjoying a delicious feast. As the juicy turkey roasts in the oven, we make mashed potatoes with thick, brown gravy, green bean casserole, candied sweet potatoes, dressing, salad, warm buttered rolls, and several pies and cakes. YUM! Just the thought of this meal makes my mouth water!

We set the table with the linen holiday napkins and the elegant, fine china, say a prayer of blessing, and then sit down together with our loved ones with a very thankful heart. And afterwards, we smilingly say we ate too much, and we want to take a nap!

Aren't you glad that Thanksgiving only comes once a year? Otherwise, we'd all be the size of the Good Year Blimp! It is a very special time of year which reminds us to have a thankful heart for all of God's blessings on us. But wouldn't it be great if we had a heart of joyful thanks throughout the entire year – to never forget what Jesus has done for us, and continues to do for us! Using the acronym THANKS, here are some tips for cultivating a heart of gratitude:

Today savor the moments. Yesterday is gone; we don't need to worry about tomorrow. Focus on *right now* with your loved ones. Really live! Don't put off the things that are in your heart to do. Don't wait until next year to have that adventure, write that book, go back to school for your degree, improve

your marriage, spend more time with your children (or grandchildren), take that cruise, go on the missions trip, laugh.

The Bible says, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, today is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2) Yes, right *now* we need to enjoy life!

When you are constantly looking in the rear-view mirror at yesterday in regret or with longing, or are preoccupied with tomorrow’s possibilities or troubles, you won’t be able to have a heart of thanks. You will be missing out on the very best God has for you – this precious moment!



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Hope in Christ. When life is not real fun and you’re going through troubles, it’s easy to begin to grumble and complain like the Israelites did in the wilderness on the way to the Promise Land. It’s impossible to have a thankful heart when you’re too busy griping! Abraham had plenty of problems and trials in his life, but in hope he looked toward the future promise of God – the Messiah and the heavenly city as his reward.

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them,^[c] embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” (Hebrews 11:13-16, NKJV)

Whatever you’ve been through or are going through right now, God is with you and He has a good plan for your life. (Jeremiah 29:11) He can turn your messes into miracles, change your troubles into testimonies. Jesus is your anchor and your hope in the fiercest storm. Just around the corner is

your needed break-through, God's answered prayer and your blessing! Stir up that faith and hope in Christ. Meditate continually on God's word. "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth." (Psalm 119:97)



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Ask God to give you a humble, thankful heart. Repent of any unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment, depression, self-pity, jealousy, envy, competitiveness, or pride that you are struggling with today. Like bees, these sinful thoughts and attitudes will sting you endlessly, poisoning your mind, heart, and soul. They will not allow any room in your heart for gratitude.

Begin counting your many blessings. Praise and worship God for all He has done in your life. Worship is one of the most powerful weapons we have! It ushers in the very presence of God, and fills you with joy. Pray to the Lord and ask Him to remind you of His goodness to you.

In the Old Testament there are several examples of men building memorials to God to worship Him, and to give Him thanks. Noah built an altar to God after he safely came out of the ark (Genesis 8:20). Jacob set up a pillar of stone in the place where he had spoken to God, and poured out a drink offering with oil on it (Genesis 35:14). The Israelites brought up 12 stones from the bottom of the Jordan River as a memorial after they had crossed the Jordan (Joshua 4). The prophet Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, calling it "Ebenezer," the Lord my help. (1 Samuel)

Let our hearts be a continual memorial to God, thankful for all that Jesus has done for us!



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Never take your eyes off of Jesus. The disciples were crossing the lake and encountered a strong wind. Jesus went to them, walking on the water, and they thought He was a ghost. When they saw Him, Peter called out to Him, and said if it was really Him, to tell Peter to come to Him. When Jesus did, Peter actually climbed out of the boat and began walking on the water! What a miracle! But as soon as he began looking at the winds and the waves, he began to sink. Jesus saved him, but asked him why he had such little faith and had doubted. (Matthew 14:22-33)

When we have circumstances in our lives that test our faith, it's easy to become distracted and to get our eyes off of Jesus. When we begin to lose faith and to nurse unbelief in our hearts, we won't have a thankful heart. Instead we will have a worried, fearful, stressed, or even angry heart. Doubt will choke out any gratitude and praise in our hearts.

Practice the presence of God each day. Study the Bible each day. Sit at Jesus' feet like Mary did, drinking every true word in. (Luke 10:39) Keep your eyes on the Lord, and God will do amazing things for and through you –and your heart will overflow with thanksgiving!

Kee a “thankful” list. Each week, write down the things you are thankful for in your life. Journal about God's answered prayers, the funny, little things your children say, your husband listening to you share your heart, your good health, girlfriends who call you just to chat, your bank account that has enough money for shelter, clothes, and food, and on and on!

Send thank-you notes to people for birthday, anniversary, and holiday gifts, or for the little, kind things people do for you. Thank-you notes and written letters are a lost art in the postmodern culture we live in today with email, Facebook, and Twitter!

Verbally express gratitude to people for helping you – the boy who sacked your groceries, the bank clerk for cashing your out-of-town check, the mail carrier for delivering your stack of books from CBD, the pizza delivery person, your in-laws for remembering your child’s birthday, your mentor for pouring her knowledge and expertise into you, etc.

Show your appreciation to family and friends with little tokens of love, with a note thanking them for being there for you and letting them know how much they mean to you.

“⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” (Philippians 4:8, NKJV)

Continually think about the blessings in your life!



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Smile a lot. “²²A happy heart is good medicine and a cheerful mind works healing, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22, Amplified Bible)

Have you ever noticed that people who are happy are also very grateful people? They don’t dwell on negative things for very long, they don’t like to complain much, but find things to smile and laugh about every day. Each day is a precious gift, and they feel blessed!

Children are our best role models. They laugh at almost anything, and they love to play. This makes them very light-hearted. It also makes them very thankful, for the smallest things. Our granddaughters Annabelle and Violet

love to pick “the pretty flowers” for their mommy and me (dandelions which are really weeds!). Don’t be a Grumpy (Snow White and the Seven Dwarves). There is *something* that you can smile about today, and thank the Lord for! You really don’t have to look that far; God’s blessings are all around us each day. “O, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Psalm 34:8)



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We don’t have to wait until Thanksgiving each year to cultivate a thankful heart. We can start today, with these THANKS tips:

1. Today savor the moments.
2. Hope in Christ.
3. Ask God to give you a humble, thankful heart.
4. Never take your eyes off Jesus.
5. Keep a “thankful” list.
6. Smile a lot.

Our hearts can overflow with gratitude for God’s daily goodness to us. The greatest gift of all that God has given us is His Son Jesus, who died that we might have eternal life with God. For that we can continually give God thanks and praise!

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