



Grateful Hearts

Charles F. Stanley - In Touch Ministries



*For everything,
a season,
and in everything,
prayer.*



SEASONS OF PRAYER

GRATEFUL FOR WHAT?

Many people of various faiths and traditions have proclaimed the benefits of being a grateful person. However, it's one thing to be grateful for the people and circumstances of our life—it's something else to be grateful as a child of God.

Even when circumstances are at their worst, we have a loving heavenly Father who assures us that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

This means that, for the Christian, practicing gratitude is more than a mental exercise that's good for your health and well-being. And it's not just about having a positive attitude. Our thankfulness is essential to our sanctification, to living the life God wants to give us. Giving thanks is a powerful muscle that strengthens our faith when we exercise it daily and study God's Word.

When we practice gratitude, we're not turning a blind eye to the bad things in our life, but taking heart in the goodness of God instead. As Romans 5:3–5 reminds us, “We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” So while our circumstances may not change as a result of our thanksgiving, our hearts will.

That's why we've compiled this booklet full of Dr. Stanley's teachings on thankfulness. We hope the Lord uses this booklet to help you rejoice in all the good He is doing in your life as you pray through every situation with a grateful heart.

From your friends at
In Touch Ministries




IN EVERYTHING

Gratitude comes easily when everything is going our way, but 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks.” This includes both good and hard times. But when we don’t understand why God allows us to go through suffering and trials, we may let our situation extinguish a grateful spirit. Instead of rejoicing and praising God for who He is and what He’s done for us, we focus on our pain and confusion and begin to doubt the Lord and His Word. However, when we choose to be thankful in every situation, despite our feelings, we’ll reap many benefits.

THERE ARE TWO PROMINENT PASSAGES THAT SPEAK ABOUT GRATITUDE IN THE BELIEVER’S LIFE.

FIRST THESSALONIANS 5:18, “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” The Lord desires that we have a grateful spirit no matter what our circumstances. Even in the midst of pain or hardship, we can always thank Him for our salvation, His presence, and His work in our lives.

EPHESIANS 5:20, “Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.” Although we are told to thank the Lord “for all things,” this never includes anything that is contrary to God’s nature or His commands. However, we can thank Him for whatever He allows in our lives that is according to His sovereign will, knowing that He promises to work everything for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). We won’t always see the good immediately or even during our lifetime, but in heaven it will all make sense. Until then, gratitude demonstrates our trust in the Lord.. 

WHY SHOULD WE BE GRATEFUL TO GOD IN EVERYTHING?

It keeps us continually aware that we are walking in His presence, which contributes to a godly life. As believers, we will never walk alone because the Holy Spirit lives within us. Gratitude reminds us of His presence and motivates us to respond in a godly manner by seeking to view our pain and trouble from His perspective, perceive how He is working through the situation, and rely upon His promises. No matter what happens throughout the day, we can thank Him, knowing that our all-loving, omnipotent, and omniscient God is helping us walk through it.

GRATITUDE MOTIVATES US TO LOOK FOR THE LORD'S PURPOSE IN EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS.

Unexpected trials or suffering may cause us to question God or feel as though He's forgotten us, but He has promised to bring good from even our worst experiences (v. 28). Whether we understand or not, we can rely on His trustworthiness and thank Him for the good He's promised to produce in our lives according to His will.

BEING GRATEFUL BRINGS US INTO SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL WHEN WE'RE SUFFERING PAIN AND HEARTACHE.

In the midst of emotional or physical pain, we may not feel grateful to God, but that's when we should start to express it verbally. As we keep thanking Him, eventually our feelings will begin to match our words. God knows the weakness of human emotions and understands that our thanks may just be words in the beginning, but He honors our obedience in choosing to express gratitude.

BEING THANKFUL REMINDS US OF OUR CONTINUAL DEPENDENCE UPON THE LORD.

If we cultivate a spirit of independence, we deny our need for Him and exalt self-sufficiency, both of which lead to ingratitude. In reality, we are all dependent upon Him for every breath we take, but may not realize it until we face a situation that we are powerless to overcome or change. Adversity shows us our weakness and drives us to the Lord. A mature believer lives in absolute dependence upon God every day and rejoices in his heart with a grateful and trusting spirit.

GRATITUDE HELPS US TRUST THE LORD WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY.

Although God hasn't promised to explain why we go through pain or hardship, He has promised to be with us and enable us to face it. Thanksgiving reminds us that we don't have to understand the situation; we just have to be obedient in the process.

THANKSGIVING IS ESSENTIAL FOR REJOICING IN THE MIDST OF OUR SUFFERING.

There's no way we can "rejoice always" without giving thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:16, 18). Although the pain may be so penetrating that we cannot feel joy at the moment, we can choose to express gratitude with our lips until it becomes a reality in our hearts. God hears and understands the depth of our agony just as He understood Jesus' pain when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).



GRATITUDE TO GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES GIVES OUR WITNESS A GREATER IMPACT.

Our painful experiences and grateful response allow us to help those who are hurting in the same way. By sharing our struggles with others who don't understand what God is doing, our witness for Christ becomes more powerful.


THANKFULNESS REPLACES ANXIETY WITH PEACE.

The Greek word for peace, *eirene*, means "to bind together." When we keep thanking the Lord in the midst of sorrow, loss, and heartache, our bond with Him becomes stronger, and His peace fills us as our anxieties crumble. The pain and difficulty may remain, but we've changed inside. This kind of peace is only available to those who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Although anxiety may suddenly come upon us at the moment, we don't have to stay in that state. If we keep praying and giving thanks to God, His peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

THANKSGIVING FOCUSES OUR ATTENTION ON GOD RATHER THAN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

If we fix our eyes on the difficulty, the pain becomes unbearable, peace eludes us, and the situation seems hopeless. But thanksgiving shifts our focus to the Lord and reminds us of what we can know for certain:

- **We're not alone.**
- **God is with us.**
- **He loves us.**
- **We're eternally secure.**
- **The Lord walks with us.**
- **He will bring us through.**
- **God will turn this experience into something profitable in our lives.**

Gratitude energizes us physically, emotionally, and spiritually in difficult times. Pain, trouble, and disappointment drain us, but trusting God, focusing on Him, and thanking Him revitalize us. It's His presence within us that renews us physically, spiritually, and emotionally so we can keep going. 

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EVERY DAY

GRATITUDE TO GOD NOT ONLY HONORS HIM, BUT IT IS GOOD FOR US (PS. 92:1).

When God established the Hebrews as His nation, He gave them very specific and detailed instructions concerning His laws and sacrifices so they'd know how He wanted them to live. Through these ordinances, He taught them three important truths: (1) God is holy, (2) man is sinful, and (3) obedience is essential.

Because Jesus was the final sacrifice, we are no longer required to offer animal sacrifices. However, the principles the Lord taught through the sacrificial system are still true and applicable for us today. One of the offerings He prescribed was called a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and it was performed every morning and evening (Lev. 22:29–33). The twice daily offering reminded the Hebrews that the Lord was the one who brought them out of Egypt and gave birth to them as a nation. He alone saved, kept, and provided for them just as He does for us today.

Should we do less than the Hebrews—giving thanks to God every morning and evening in recognition of Him as the source of everything we have? One of His most precious provisions is His written Word, which instructs us and reveals everything we need to know about the Lord. Our gratitude for it can be gauged by our attention to it. If we're truly thankful for His Word, we'll diligently read it each day.

HOW CAN WE FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE TAUGHT BY THE DAILY SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING?

WE CAN BEGIN BY TAKING NOTE OF SIMPLE BLESSINGS THAT GOD PROVIDES EACH DAY.

So often we take things like friends, family, and food on the table for granted. But they are all provided for us by our loving heavenly Father who cares for us.

HAVING A GRATEFUL HEART KEEPS OUR MINDS FOCUSED ON THE LORD.

The daily thanksgiving sacrifice was a continual reminder to the Hebrews that their God provided for all their needs. Likewise, each morning is an opportunity to thank the Lord for a good night's sleep. Even if we tossed and turned all night, we can still be grateful that He's given us another day.

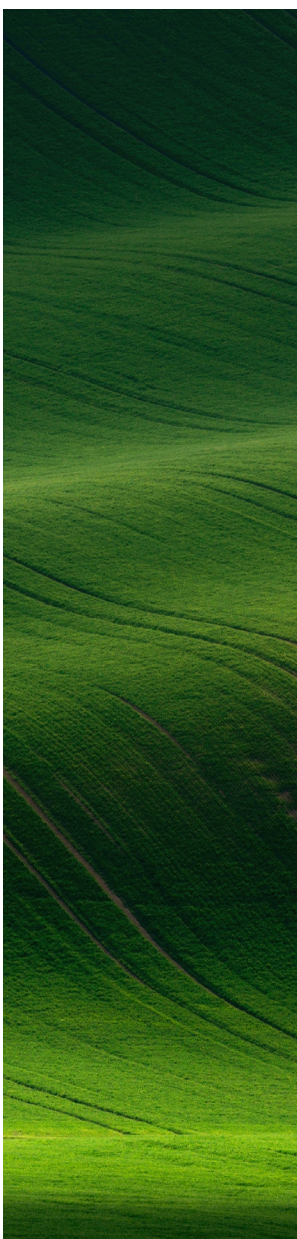
GRATITUDE HONORS GOD.

When we acknowledge the Lord as the source of all our blessings, we are exalting Him by declaring our dependence upon Him. Who hasn't breathed a prayer of thanks after narrowly escaping a car accident? Appreciation helps us realize that we cannot make it through life without God's help.

THANKFULNESS IS EXPRESSED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS.

Sometimes we gather in worship services to fellowship together and sing praises to God. But we can also worship the Lord when we're alone by letting everyday activities—no matter how simple—become reasons to thank Him. Another way to acknowledge the Lord as our provider and express our gratitude is to give Him the first part of our income, our tithe.

**TRUE, HEARTFELT DAILY THANKSGIVING HAS A POWERFUL IMPACT ON OUR LIVES.
IT RESULTS IN A CHANGED MINDSET AND A DESIRE TO OBEY THE LORD.**



GRATITUDE ...

- KEEPS US CONTINUALLY AWARE THAT WE ARE WALKING IN GOD'S PRESENCE. THIS CONTRIBUTES TO A GODLY LIFESTYLE.
- MOTIVATES US TO LOOK FOR THE LORD'S PURPOSE IN EVERYTHING IN OUR LIVES. EVEN IF WE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT HE'S DOING, THANKING HIM LIFTS THE BURDEN.
- HELPS US BRING OUR WILL INTO SUBMISSION TO HIS WHEN WE SUFFER PAIN OR LOSS. BY THANKING HIM IN THE MIDST OF OUR PAIN, WE ACKNOWLEDGE HIS LOVING SOVEREIGNTY.
- CONTINUALLY REMINDS US THAT HE IS OUR GOD AND MOTIVATES US TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT HIM.
- REMINDS US OF OUR CONTINUING DEPENDENCE ON HIM.
- HELPS US TRUST THE LORD. BECAUSE HE ALONE KNOWS WHAT'S BEST, WE CAN THANK HIM EVEN IF WE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY SOMETHING'S HAPPENING. GOD HONORS OUR THANKSGIVING THE MOST WHEN WE FEEL LIKE WE HAVE THE LEAST REASON FOR GRATITUDE.
- IS ESSENTIAL FOR REJOICING IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING. WHEN THE BOTTOM DROPS OUT OF OUR LIVES AND EVERYTHING LOOKS DARK, SONGS OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING RESTORE OUR HOPE, ASSURING US THAT GOD IS THE LIGHT IN OUR DARKNESS.
- REMOVES ANXIETY. GRATITUDE CAN DRIVE OUT WORRY.
- KEEPS OUR FOCUS ON THE LORD. THE SITUATION MAY NOT CHANGE, BUT OUR ATTITUDE WILL.
- ENERGIZES US PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY.

07

BECAUSE HE LIVES

For those of us who believe Jesus rose from the dead and have trusted in Him as our Savior, His resurrection is not only true but also relevant, personal, and a source of gratitude in our lives. Here are just a few things about Christ's victory over death that we can be thankful for:

WE DON'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH LONELINESS OF HEART.

We have absolute assurance that Christ is alive and living within us just as He promised. He did not leave us as orphans. Instead, He sent the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, to indwell our hearts (John 14:16-18). Since Jesus now lives inside believers through His Spirit, we are never truly alone.

WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY WHETHER GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR US.

Early in His ministry, Jesus told His followers that His Father, who takes care

of birds, grass, and flowers, would also provide for their needs. This promise would have meant nothing had Jesus been just a man, but because He is the Son of God who overcame death, we know we can trust His word. No situation or need is too large for His almighty, sovereign hands. In His perfect time and way, He will provide whatever we need.

A SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING IS THE RESULT OF REMEMBERING ALL GOD HAS DONE FOR US.

- GOD CHOSE US BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.
- WE ARE INDWELT AND SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- WE ARE ETERNALLY SECURE.
- WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT.
- WE HAVE AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.
- WE HAVE THE BLESSING OF GOD'S ATONEMENT THROUGH CHRIST AND TOTAL FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS.
- WE HAVE THE PEACE OF GOD IN OUR HEARTS.
- THE LORD LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY.
- WE'RE NEVER DISTANT FROM THE PRESENCE OF GOD.
- THE LORD PROVIDES FOR OUR NEEDS.
- WE'VE BEEN GIVEN THE WORD OF GOD, THE SOURCE OF ALL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING.
- WE HAVE HIS DIVINE PROTECTION EACH DAY.
- WE HAVE THE PROMISE OF A BODILY RESURRECTION.
- WE HAVE AN ETERNAL HOME IN HEAVEN AND THE PROMISE OF THE RESURRECTION.

WE CAN PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE.

After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father's right hand, where He intercedes for us. Knowing this assures us that He will answer our requests. And 1 John 5:14-15 says, "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" and will grant us our requests. Instead of doubting, we should wait expectantly and look for His answer.

WE CAN HAVE A GODLY, POWERFUL INFLUENCE IN OTHERS' LIVES.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Through the power of His indwelling Spirit, we can be an influential light in this dark world and a preserving flavor in our society.

WE EXPERIENCE THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US.

Although the disciples had been with Jesus for three years, they were not equipped to complete the work He'd given them until the Holy Spirit came to indwell and empower them. That's why Christ told them to stay in Jerusalem until they received the promised Spirit (Acts 1:4). This same Spirit who came to them also lives within every person who has trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. He's the one who opens our eyes, helping us understand that Jesus died in our place so our sins could be forgiven, and we could be saved. When we repent and believe in Christ, His Holy Spirit seals us as children of God, and no one can ever break that seal. Jesus' resurrection makes our salvation certain, secure, and unbreakable.


WE CAN HAVE PEACE IN THE MIDST OF THE MOST DIFFICULT TIMES.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27). Christ’s peace is like an anchor that sustains us in life’s storms. Although we may cry out to Him in confusion, He never forsakes us but sits at the Father’s right hand working on our behalf. Jesus understands our weakness and is always with us to take us through our difficulties and help us become the people He desires us to be.

WE CAN FACE DEATH COURAGEOUSLY, BOLDLY, AND CONFIDENTLY.

Jesus is alive and is the source of our eternal life. If He is our Savior, we will enter immediately into His holy presence when we die (2 Cor. 5:8). Because Jesus lives, we never truly die but live forever with Him.

There is no hope without Jesus and all hope for eternity with Him. When we trust Christ as our Savior, the gift of eternal life becomes ours.

If we are to receive salvation, we must repent of our sin, confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in His resurrection (Rom. 10:9). Salvation is wrapped up in God’s awesome love and power and not in our good works (Eph. 2:8–9). We must admit that we are sinners and believe that Jesus is the only one who can forgive us and make us acceptable to God. Then we can truly be a part of His family and inherit the treasures He longs to bless us with for all eternity. 



A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING & PRAISE

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER,

Forgive us for finding it so hard to be grateful at times. We look around and see the blessings of others and lose sight of our own. And so we go searching for treasure in the wrong places. We look to the world—to governments and churches; to family, friends, and loved ones; and even to ourselves—to find our worth when we ought to lift our eyes up to You, our heavenly Father. You have endowed us with a rich, eternal treasure: All the kindness, goodness, mercy, and love we could ever need is in You. You, Creator of heaven and earth, can move mountains to provide the physical resources we need. And as the King of all kings, legions of angels are always at Your beck and call to protect us—no one can take us before our time. You are a good Father who lavishes us with gifts and fills our cups to overflowing. And when we think about so great a treasure, how could we not be grateful? How could we not want to give You praise and glory? And how could we not want to share such an amazing gift with the world? “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever” (1 Tim. 1:17). Amen.



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GRATITUDE STARTER KIT

We may have many things we're grateful for, but sometimes we don't think to express our gratitude to God or others. The following prompts can be used in a variety of ways—start a gratitude journal with your answers or store the questions in a special box or jar and pull one out at random when you need to refocus your attention on the good things in life. You can even print them for use during the holidays as part of your celebrations. However you decide to utilize these questions, we hope they bless your spirit and help you cultivate a more grateful heart.

..... Where do you feel most at peace?	WHO HAS BEEN KIND TO YOU?
WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE NOVEL OR MOVIE?	WHAT BIBLE STORY HAS SPECIAL MEANING FOR YOU?
WHO MAKES YOU FEEL LOVED? What's your favorite scent?
HOW HAS GOD BLESSED YOU TODAY?	WHO MAKES YOU LAUGH?
..... What object makes your everyday life easier?	WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL STRONG?
HOW HAS GOD PROVED HIMSELF FAITHFUL TO YOU?	WHICH OF GOD'S PROMISES ARE YOU TRUSTING THE MOST RIGHT NOW?

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SOUND? What was the last compliment you received?
WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL WARM AND COZY?	WHO IS A PLEASURE TO WORK OR SERVE WITH?
..... What makes you feel confident?	WHAT ITEM DO YOU CHERISH THE MOST?
WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TREAT?	HOW HAS GOD REDEEMED A NEGATIVE EVENT IN YOUR LIFE?
WHAT SONG JUST MAKES YOU WANT TO DANCE AND PRAISE GOD? What's your favorite hangout spot?
WHO IS A JOY TO BE AROUND?	WHO HAS BEEN A GOOD FRIEND?
..... Where do you like to go to get away?	WHO HAS ENCOURAGED YOU DURING A ROUGH SEASON?

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DELIGHTED TO LEARN RECENTLY?	WHOSE PRAYERS MEAN THE MOST TO YOU?
..... What group gives you a sense of belonging?	WHO'S YOUR GREATEST CHEERLEADER?
WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TEAM?	WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME GOD SURPRISED YOU WITH AN ANSWERED PRAYER?
WHO IS ALWAYS HAPPY TO HELP YOU OUT? What do you love about being a part of God's family?
WHAT'S THE BEST PART ABOUT YOUR MORNINGS?	WHAT'S THE BEST PART ABOUT YOUR EVENINGS?
..... What are you most looking forward to in the future?	WHAT'S A FAVORITE MEMORY?
WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SEASON?	WHAT PASSAGE GIVES YOU HOPE?