

Called to Gratitude

What it means to live gratefully

by Leisa Anstinger



When “thank you” doesn’t say it all

A few years ago, my husband, Steve, rediscovered the hobby of woodworking. He spent hours in our garage one spring carefully cutting boards and piecing them together. Little by little, a cabinet began to take shape, and he told me he planned for it to be our gift to his mother for her birthday. Hour upon hour, day upon day, I watched as he built the cabinet. It was beautiful, and I was anxious to see his mother’s reaction to this gift of love. Then, one Sunday afternoon, returning home from an errand, our daughter seemed very anxious for me to go into the house. When I did, I was stunned, and fell silent. The cabinet was for me, donned with silver ribbon to mark our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. I must have said “thank you” a dozen times, and yet, the expression seemed

inadequate. My heart was so full that words could not capture the emotion, not only for the cabinet, which has a beautiful place in our

home, but more for the care and love with which the cabinet had been crafted. When I see it, I am still filled with gratitude.



What does gratitude have to do with our lives and faith, then? Sometimes it is difficult for us to grasp that all we are and have are gifts from God. So thinking about a time in which we have been moved with gratitude helps us to apply that realization to life and faith. Developing an “attitude of gratitude” changes the way in which we perceive daily life, and helps us to recognize God’s place in it.

Living gratefully calls us to be aware of our blessings, even in moments of difficulty. For example, those who struggle with physical illness may be challenged at times to be grateful, until they think about the skill of their doctor or the companionship of a friend. Living gratefully helps us to see God’s hand in our lives. We might otherwise miss this awareness of God’s presence by being caught in the constant seeking for more, better, or bigger that is such a tendency for humans.

The challenge: Growing in gratitude is simple, but for most of us, it takes conscious effort.

Let’s get practical. Each time we are tempted to whine, to focus on what we want, or to look at all that is not the way we wish it were, we must turn our minds instead toward the many ways in

which we have been blessed. Over time, this gratefulness-mindset becomes more natural.

Let’s be spiritual.

Recognizing God as the Giver of every good gift and being mindful of our blessings each day changes our inner life with God and our interactions with others. We are more likely to be satisfied with what we have, rather than seeking what we do not have; we will be more content in the present, and more hopeful for the future. When gratitude marks our way of life, we truly embody the Eucharist (the very word means to give thanks). Coming to Mass aware of all we have to be thankful for opens our minds and hearts to the fullness of Christ’s presence with us. We gather as members of Christ’s Body, aware of our many blessings, the greatest of which is Christ’s gift of new life and union with God, poured

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out in word and sacrament around the Eucharistic table.



The Stewardship Project
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“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. ...By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13: 34a-35)



Practical Ways to Grow in Gratitude

Develop an "Attitude of Gratitude"

Living gratefully calls us to be mindful of the grace of God in our lives. We can grow in gratitude by taking time each day to acknowledge our blessings:

The blessing of God's love:

Begin each day by thanking God for the wonder of God's love; look for signs of this great love in Sacred Scripture, the sacraments, and the ways you are touched by others.

The blessing of life and self:

Become more conscious of the gift of each day; even when life is difficult, find something to consciously be thankful for; share yourself with others and see how your selflessness touches their lives.

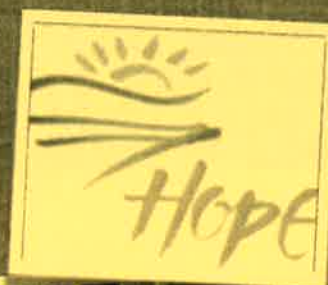
The blessing of family and friends: Thank your family and friends for signs of their love and care; remember that the love you experience in others is a reminder of God's love; intentionally reach out to friends with whom you lose touch or those whom you do not see regularly.

The blessing of financial or material resources:

Even when we experience loss of our job or underemployment, we can find blessings hidden in the circumstances of our lives. If you have work and are financially secure, be grateful and grow in willingness to share with others; if you are less materially secure, seek the blessing that may be hidden in the midst of your life at this time, perhaps in the concern you experience from others, including those in your parish and local community.

The blessing of your parish community:

Being surrounded by others who are growing in gratitude is the ideal way to develop a life of gratefulness yourself; contribute to your parish by offering your time to an organization or a seasonal service project; become part of an ongoing group such as those for people in various stages of life (mom or dad's groups, senior gatherings, teen or young adult ministry) or find something to which you have something to contribute. Belonging within our parish community will help us recognize our blessings more deeply than we might imagine!



"Central to our human and Christian vocations, as well as to the unique vocation each one of us receives from God, is that we be good stewards of the gifts we possess. God gives us this divine-human workshop, this world and Church of ours. The Spirit shows us the way. Stewardship is part of that journey." (SDR, 44)



After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:12-14)

How Do You Live Gratefully?

We are already stewards, whether we are conscious of it or not. We will always have ways to grow as stewards, too, aspects of our lives in which we don't care or share as readily as we should. How are you already living as a good steward? What areas of your life need attention in order to grow as a steward in the coming year? Use this space to record your thoughts and your commitment for the future: