

[BUILD]

“... arise and build”

Nehemiah 2:20

Family Devotion
Week One

GRATITUDE FOR THE PAST



ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thess. 5:18 (NIV)

An attitude of gratitude puts everything and every circumstance in the proper perspective. It enables us to see the big picture and helps us to focus on God and His glory rather than on ourselves and our personal trials or triumphs. Such an attitude, openly expressed and lived-out, sends a powerful message to our families and friends: God is in control and I’m glad He is! We already know the ultimate outcome of life’s circumstances: “...in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). If we forget this promise we begin to take God for granted, and an attitude of gratitude is impossible. We can become self-focused and lose sight of what God is accomplishing in the greater scheme of things.

Baking a cake requires using a number of ingredients which, if eaten by themselves, are mostly distasteful: flour, raw eggs, baking powder, etc. But, if these same ingredients are carefully blended together and baked for the right period of time, you end up with a delicious dessert. God is at the “mixing bowl” of our lives. Our “flour and raw eggs” experiences, however distasteful, are the ingredients of a wonderful creation. We can give thanks in all circumstances because of our faith in God, knowing that the end result of all our experiences will be a perfect blend for our good and His glory.

In your family or devotional group, encourage each member to identify at least one good experience and one bad experience they have had recently. Take the time to give God thanks for both, remembering that from God’s perspective they are equally beneficial. It may be possible to identify the value of the finished product even as the discussion is going on. Conclude your devotion by reading Prov. 3:5-6 (NIV): “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

GRATITUDE IN THE FACE OF DISAPPOINTMENT

“Yet the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be the King over Israel.” 1 Chron. 28:4 (NIV)

This expression of gratitude immediately followed the greatest disappointment of King David's life. He had just learned from God that he would not have the honor of providing leadership for the building of God's Temple. David had said in 1 Chron. 28:2 that his heart had been set on building a magnificent dwelling-place for the God of Israel. Later, he describes the energy, enthusiasm, and unbridled generosity he had already invested in this God-honoring project: “With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God – gold for the gold work, silver for the silver work, bronze for the bronze...besides in my devotion for the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver...” (1 Chron. 29:2-3 NIV)

After all of this sacrifice and preparation David learns that he would not be the man to build God's Temple. What was his response? What would we do in the face of such disappointment? 1 Chronicles. 28:4 gives us a true glimpse of the spirit of David, “a man after God's own heart.” His response teaches us one of life's greatest priorities: focusing on the goodness of God. Instead of throwing a “pity party,” reflect on how wonderfully gracious God has been to you. That's exactly what David did. Upon learning that he would not be personally involved in building the Temple he reminded himself and others around him of the incredible honor he already enjoyed: “Yet the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be the King over Israel.” (1 Chron. 28:4 NIV)

David did not allow this disappointing circumstance to rob him of his joy, nor did he regret having sacrificed so much to build the Temple. He did not pout over his loss; he rejoiced in the honor which had been given to him as king and gave generously to the Temple project. David's lost opportunity could have made him resentful or bitter. Instead, he maintained an attitude of gratitude and remained focused on the big picture of God's purpose and glory.

Regardless of the disappointments you are faced with today, take the time to reflect on all the special expressions of God's goodness in your life.

A MEMORIAL FOR GRATITUDE

“These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.” Joshua 4:7b (NIV)

Joshua had instructed the people to carry large stones from the bed of the Jordan River and place them on the Caanan side of the river. Arranged together, these stones provided a memorial of God’s power, provision and purpose for the children of Israel. The Israelites would periodically return to this place, Gilgal, to express their gratitude for victories won in this new land. Significantly, they were commanded to bring their children with them on these occasions.

Carefully read Joshua 4:19-24. When the people of Israel were obedient to God’s instruction regarding these twelve stones, it provided a great opportunity to teach and instruct the next generation. “And he spoke unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, what mean these stones?” A child’s natural curiosity opens the door for a parent to testify of God’s remarkable power. Parents should lead their children back to the place where God has demonstrated His timely provision. It may be a story, a place, or even a picture, but whatever it is, let them see it over and over again until it becomes a defining moment in their lives and a monument to God’s grace.

Our capital stewardship campaign is an excellent opportunity for the entire church body, member by member, to build a “memorial of gratitude.” Communicate to your family members and friends that this memorial is not merely a building or a piece of property; it is, more importantly, the experience of trusting God and seeing Him come through. Gilgal was not just a pile of rocks. It was a powerful reminder of our indebtedness to God. The greatest heritage we can leave to the next generation is such a memorial of gratitude.

COMMUNICATION OF GRATITUDE

“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you” Mark 5:19 (NIV)

Jesus spoke these words after casting demons out of a man from Gadarene. His command was simple: go and tell others what I have done for you. What a powerful reminder this gives us of the need to express our thanks to God. Not just in private thanksgiving; but also in public acknowledgement of God’s goodness.

All believers face the danger of forgetting “how much the Lord has done for us.” When this occurs, we may grow timid in communicating gratitude both to God and to man. Our stewardship campaign is therefore a great opportunity for us to strengthen and renew a spirit of gratitude. Communicating gratitude is important for several reasons:

1. It makes us more reliant on God. Romans 1:21 tells of those who “when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were they thankful.” Thankfulness occurs inwardly, in what our heart expresses. Glorifying God happens publicly, in what our mouth confesses. Public expressions of gratitude strengthen one’s commitment to God while counteracting our human tendency to self-sufficiency and self-reliance.
2. It has a profound impact on those around us. Family and friends need to hear that our successes are not of our own making, but that we are beneficiaries of the goodness of God. Read David’s words in 1 Chronicles 29:11-13 to see how his gratitude set in motion a great celebration of sacrifice and praise among God’s people.

Following David’s example, take the time to identify some examples of God’s goodness to you and then express your gratitude to God in the presence of a friend or family members.

GRATITUDE AS A FORM OF WORSHIP

First Chronicles 29:10-20 is one of the greatest expressions of worship found in God's Word. Read this prayer in its entirety and reflect on the essence of true stewardship: the realization that God owns everything.

After you have read and reflected on this passage, take some time to consider the significance of being in partnership with God. Recognize Him not only as the senior partner but also as the sole financial backer of your life's venture. David was completely captivated by the reality of this, and as a result he became unre-servedly focused on building the temple for God's glory. His leadership influenced others to contribute in the same spirit of sacrifice and praise. "The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord" (1 Chron. 29:9 NIV).

Relative to your situation, plan a worship time with your family or a small group of friends which includes the following three features of true worship.

1. **Gratitude:** The recognition that all we have has come from His hand. We are but channels through which the work of God is carried out. When one's life is lived primarily in consideration of Him, it is less likely that what He provides for Kingdom work will be squandered on self-gratification.
2. **Sacrifice:** David said, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24 NIV). Sacrifice always involves cost. It has little to do with how much one gives. What is more important is the measure of one's sacrifice. Did it truly cost us something? When it does, then we have set aside something and made it sacred.
3. **Praise:** The distinction between gratitude and praise is this: gratitude is appreciation for what God has done; praise is appreciation for who God is. David was not only giving thanks in his prayer, he was expressing praise. "Now our God, we give you thanks and praise thy glorious name" (1 Chron. 29:13 NIV). As you conclude your worship time, recognize God for the Provider He is and commit yourself to becoming a good steward of His provision.