Gratitude In Changing Seasons

Growing Grateful Hearts for Thanksgiving

by Kelly Freed Arena



fromwearytoworship.com

Introduction

Writing last year's Thanksgiving Thoughts: 30 Day Devotional on Gratitude was an absolute delight. I hope God used it in your life to continually fill your heart with gratitude, as He did mine, even when I did not feel giddy with gratitude.

I do not know how many people read all thirty days. But that was not the point of writing. I confidently feel last year's writing project was an act of obedience, and what a hard and joyous adventure it was. Writing (and public speaking) is my passion, and the joy of writing made me realize I couldn't wait a whole year for a new project. And thus this Spring I wrote *The Kindness of God:* 7 Day Lent Devotional.

To be honest, I'm not feeling particularly grateful right now, so I write about gratitude because I need the message as much as anyone. Choosing an attitude of gratitude changed my life decades ago, and I pray that gratitude will remain an outflow from my heart.

There is a brevity to *Gratitude In Changing Seasons* compared to last year's devotional. However, my heart is still in every word. Scripture and application are incorporated throughout each day. I pray this devotional blesses and convicts you, and calls you to search for gratitude in every season.

Take heart. Jesus is with us and will lead us to Thanksgiving.

Love & Hugs,

Kelly Freed Arena

November 23

Gratitude For Family

If you are struggling with strained family relationships this Thanksgiving, you can jump to the next page, the optional Day 1, "Gratitude Despite Strained Relationships." Hugs.

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." - Ephesians 5:15-21

As a Christian, I believe every person is made in the image of God and has inherent value. While on earth, Jesus commanded us to love God and love each other. Jesus also explained that people would know we belonged to Him because of the love we show each other (John 13:34-35).

But how often do we unintentionally take our family for granted? How often do we hold grudges instead of gratitude towards one another? It's a lot easier to love people if we have gratitude in our hearts towards them. Holding a grudge while being grateful is nearly impossible. Thanksgiving may bring your family together. We reflect on the good times and bad, and celebrate another holiday season upon us.

This Thanksgiving season, try looking at your family through the lens of gratitude. Gratitude is a gift to give, and a contagious gift. How awesome would it be if we took time to share with our loved ones the gratitude we have for them? Let us address others in ways that build each other up, and ultimately point toward the goodness of God. For those who live far away, consider making a call or writing a note to a loved one expressing your gratitude for having them in your life. Love for the people around us, fueled by gratitude, is not fleeting or conditional love. This is the kind of love Jesus means for us to express towards one another and our watching world.

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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What about how God desires us to interact with others stirs your heart to gratitude today? Who has impacted your life, and how are you going to express your gratitude for them?

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Pray back Ephesians 5:15-21 to God and ask for help in treating your family wisely, kindly, and with thanksgiving that points back to God.

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November 23

Gratitude Despite Strained Relationships

Although I believe gratitude for our (safe and healthy) family is important, it is important for me to pause and acknowledge what, to you, may feel like an elephant in the room. The holidays can give us visions of Norman Rockwell paintings. But unfortunately, it seems that those images taking place in real life are few and far between. If you're facing strained relationships threatening to make your Thanksgiving holiday more complicated than it needs to be, then I am truly sorry. I pray that you see how Jesus stands in the gap and how we can be grateful for His relationship with us. Throughout Scripture, it is so fascinating to see how He is described in various relationship contexts. Some of these have resonated with me, and I remember the season of great comfort it brought me. My relationship with God grew astoundingly because He became more to me than my Savior (as complete as that is!) Truly, if all Jesus did for us was to die on the cross and rise again, then that would have been enough. But out of His goodness and love for us, He desires a personal relationship with us, and even those who are estranged from you. Jesus meets us right where we are. No matter where you are or what relationship struggles you may be facing this Thanksgiving season, I pray you lean into Jesus. May you experience Him more purposefully, personally, and profoundly than you ever have before.

Father ~ James 1:17
Mother ~ Luke 13:34-35
Husband ~ Isaiah 54:5-8
Brother ~ Mark 3:35
Friend ~ John 15:12-15

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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What strained relationship will you be facing this Thanksgiving?
How can you see Jesus standing in the gap for you?

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Pray back the verse you selected to God and ask to grow deeper in your understanding and gratitude for how the Lord shows up for us in that way, too.

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November 24

Gratitude & Grief

"The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him." - Psalm 28:7
"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High."
- Psalm 50:14

Last year, I lost my grandmother. This year, an Aunt passed away unexpectedly, and in my thirties, I now only have one aunt left on earth. And no more grandmothers. Grief doesn't have to only be the loss of a person. Many reasons for grief can feel all-encompassing. The loss of a job, a relationship, significant disappointments, a new change. And yet, are we really called to be grateful when we are overcome with the trials of life? Yes. Because gratitude is a gift to our hearts as much as it is a worshipful obedience to God. Gratitude is a gift that helps bring light into our darkness, a gift that gives us the courage we need to face a new day.

When I think back on the first Thanksgiving, I am always in awe of the Pilgrims who feasted that day. They not only crossed an ocean, but also built a new community. Before the first Thanksgiving was the first winter. Half of them died. HALF. And as much rejoicing and feasting that took place at their feast the following year, it's probable that there were aching hearts, too. A pivotal time in my life, and in my relationship with the Lord, was my senior year of high school when I lost five friends in a span of seven months. Two by betrayal, three by death. I wish that was my most painful encounter with loss or compounded grief, but it wasn't. It was preparation, not completion. But even in the depths of my pain, I learned grief doesn't exclude gratitude, and gratitude doesn't cancel grief. So if you are grieving this Thanksgiving, know that it is possible, and perfectly ok to hold both grief and gratitude together.

Tragedies, strife, turmoil, loss, all seem to bring us back to the basics, the core of who we are and what we believe. So if this month, or even next month, too, if the only thing you can think of being grateful for is Jesus dying for you, then that is enough. That is a big win and a victorious stance in the scope of eternity. I am praying for your grieving heart. This Thanksgiving, may Jesus be your strength and shield.

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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Who or what are you grieving this Thanksgiving? How are you learning about the power of gratitude in your grief?

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Pray back Psalm 28:7 to God and rest in Him as your shield. Pray back Psalm 50:14 and ask for strength to offer up a sacrafice of thanksgiving in the midst of your grief.

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November 25

Gratitude In Preparation

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.” - Hebrews 12:28

Joy is in the journey. Gratitude isn’t reserved for the finish product, or the relief that goals have been accomplished. We look forward to the event, the goal accomplished, the day of our Thanksgiving gathering. But the small tasks, the mundane, the unnoticed effort - that is really how any of the noteworthy events happen. Instead of complaining or being annoyed by times of preparation, let us find reasons to be grateful as we faithfully put one foot in front of the other, with no recognition or applause. Gratitude is to be expressed through every part of preparation, not just when the work is complete.

In the movie, “Beauty and the Beast,” Mrs. Potts sings a line that fascinates me: “I have the napkins freshly pressed.” In the story, it had been a long time since there were people to use the napkins. But that didn’t keep Mrs. Potts from preparing them. She continued mundane tasks without the reward for accomplishing them in sight. But when the day of great thanksgiving finally came, everything was ready.

As Christians, every day on earth is preparation to spend eternity in God’s kingdom. We are a part of His kingdom, as Hebrews 12 says. Thinking of our time on earth as preparation for eternity, as we reflect God’s heavenly kingdom here on earth, gives me a new perspective on “The Lord’s Prayer” found in Matthew 6:9-13, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Many of us will spend today preparing for a Thanksgiving celebration tomorrow. Some of us have work to accomplish that will prepare us for future goals. We all have God-given gifts that prepare us to share the gospel and live kingdom-minded as we serve on earth, pointing towards heaven. And in all this, we have a Savior who is also busily making preparations for YOU!

John 14:2-3 “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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Do you consider yourself someone who is grateful once the goal is accomplished, or do you demonstrate an attitude of gratitude throughout the whole process?

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Pray back Hebrews 12:28 to God and ask to be filled with gratitude for how God is at work in the midst of preparation.

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November 26

Gratitude On Thanksgiving Day

“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” - Psalm 118:24

Before my feet hit the floor each morning, I want to be in the habit of saying Psalm 118:24. There was a time I did, and writing this, I am reminded. Today is the culturally acceptable day to give thanks - so let’s begin the day by rejoicing!

Growing up, I’d often play dress-up and be a Pilgrim or Native American. What fun I had! Some years I’d be surrounded by my ten older cousins (yes, I was very proud to be the family caboose) as we gathered together and ate delicious food. Other years were smaller. More recent years' Thanksgivings have been quieter, with a dull ache for the loved ones no longer at our table.

I hope today is bursting with reasons to be grateful. If so, don’t be too busy to thank God for it. If the day is stressful for you, then let’s be grateful that God gives us the grace we need for each moment. If the day is sorrowful for you, then let's be grateful that Jesus is near to the brokenhearted.

I love Thanksgiving because it reminds me that no matter what my week, month, or year has been, it is good and right to be thankful. This is the day the Lord has made - each day is a gift. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. What are you grateful for today?

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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Take time to express your gratefulness to God today. How are you going to share an attitude of gratitude with the people you interact with today?

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Pray back Psalm 118:24 to God and ask to be filled with gratitude for the day that He has made - no matter what your Thanksgiving may look like this year.

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November 27

Gratitude & Contentment

"You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." - 2 Corinthians 9:11

It's hard to be generous when you are jealous. Jealousy has been a long-standing, undesirable vice of mine. But as time progresses, I have discovered something fascinating. With my own struggle, I see how jealousy often stems from my lack of trust in my Lord. Trusting that He does, indeed, have a good plan. Trusting that He does care about the deepest desires of my heart. Trusting that He is taking care of me. And when I realize and repent of my lack of trust and ask again and again for the Holy Spirit to help me renew my trust, that is when jealousy begins to loosen its grip.

We cannot be generous with clenched fists. My fights with jealousy aren't normally money-related. But as many of us shop on this Black Friday, it is something to consider. Looking to God as our Provider challenges our perspective on generosity. May the old saying "It is better to give than to receive" ring true for us today, and as we embark on the Christmas season.

Hebrews 13:5-6 is also a good reminder: "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

In my own story, and for the particular things that stir jealousy within me, it's a contentment issue (or lack of contentment), and I repent of my discontentment as I look around at my blessings (my gratitude list). Then, with God's help, I try to focus on what I have instead of what I have not.

Psalm 37:4 reads, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." Realizing my deepest desire is a close and abiding relationship with Jesus changes my earthly longings. When we delight in Him, our deepest desires become fulfilled - our desire for Him! When we view everything we have as a gift from God, our mindset goes from entitlement or jealousy to gratitude. When we realize the gifts we have been given, we are to steward them, and not clench our fists - then we can give more freely, joyfully, and experience a profound sense of thanksgiving.

Instead of being discouraged by grumbling, we can be grateful for what we do have, and be generous with our story and resources to bless those around us.

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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Are you jealous or content? What local church, family or organization can you be generous towards this season through practical gifts, meals, volunteering or financial support?

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Pray back 2 Corinthians 9:11 to ask God to help you be content with what you have, and view it as a gift from Him, to be shared with others.

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November 28

Gratitude For Friendships

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” - Ecclesiastes 4:12 & Luke 1:39-47

I am so grateful for friendships! Being in the company of someone who has also experienced the kindness of God and is walking in obedience to God is a blessing! It’s no secret that finding and maintaining friendships as an adult can be a real challenge. Therefore, I love the model provided for us in the friendship of Mary & Elizabeth found in Luke 1:39-47. Christian friendships that have a deep spiritual connection are part of God’s design for us to learn from and encourage each other. Each time I read this story of the story of Mary & Elizabeth, I am awestruck by their love for the Lord and love for each other. Mainly, the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives made their deep connection possible, which reminds me of Ecclesiastes 4:12, “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Mary & Elizabeth’s mutual love for God and obeying Him made their bond so strong.

I’m grateful that the Holy Spirit guides, teaches, and equips us to follow this model of friendship found in Luke 1. The same Spirit in Mary and Elizabeth is in us who are followers of Christ! Their spiritual connection enabled them to rejoice together over God at work in their lives, and to use God’s truth to encourage each other’s hearts. It was not empty encouragement, but encouragement from believing the amazing story that was unfolding in both of their lives. They helped each other to continue relying on and following God. Godly friendship is found in those who delight in God’s Word and use God’s Word to encourage each other’s hearts.

If you are lonely or grieving friends this season, or if you are experiencing joy-filled reunions, may you be encouraged by this truth. The Holy Spirit, who connects our hearts with our friends, is our Comforter. If you are missing the friend who exemplified the characteristics of this story, know that Jesus is the best friend we can ask for. There is no earthly friendship that compares. All of our friendships here on earth are but a picture of what He offers us. He will use our testimony to bless others and glorify God.

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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Do we have friendships that are focused on the glory of God? Better yet, are WE the friend who encourages, share in someone’s joy, and point our friends to Jesus? Are we more concerned about the glory of God than our own glory?

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Pray back Ecclesiastes 4:12 to God and ask how you can better encourage your friends in their walk with the Lord.

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For a deeper dive on friendship, scan the QR Code to watch my talk “Blessed Are You” found on YouTube.

November 29

Gratitude For The Church

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." - Acts 2:42-47

Having gratitude for your church may be easy, touchy, or impossibly difficult. Although I can empathize with church hurt, today's devotion is purposefully on Thanksgiving in the Church. (If you are struggling with church hurt, I invite you to hear my heart on the topic via a blog post accessible by QR code under Your Gratitude Guide.)

There are many reasons for and benefits of attending church. Reflecting on my church participation, I believe God uses the church to anchor us in our faith. Although we have access to God and can worship Him while alone in our homes, worshipping God together reminds us that we are a collective people of God, brothers and sisters in Christ who are also on our own journeys of walking with the Lord. These people in your church need encouragement, prayer, or someone there for them, just like us. In short, the church is for proclaiming Christ and loving one another. Revisiting what the early church looked like in Acts reminds us of how God desires us to treat one another, as well as the characteristics to look for in a church.

Sundays are genuinely my favorite day of the week. A large part of that is because I get to go to church. I realize this is not true for everyone. I'm not sharing this to elevate myself, but to give you hope if church is hard for you. After experiencing church hurt, through God's grace, I was able to get back to loving Sundays again, and you can too. I'm grateful for the church, hearing the Gospel preached, and participating in corporate worship. Sundays help recalibrate us to the truth of Who God is in a world of constant bombardment of messages vying for our attention, many of which conflict with God's truth.

Regularly attending and being grateful for church doesn't mean my relationship with God and others is unscathed. Sometimes my relationship with God feels complicated, or I feel like I have too many questions about God. Sometimes my relationship with others is uncomfortable. Sometimes I feel annoyed by the very person I need to love most. Sometimes it's still hard to be in church. But going to church, even as an act of obedience, is worth it, as we are called not to neglect the meeting of the saints (Hebrews 10:25). There's something truly special about going to church that will deepen our relationship with God in unique ways that we may not otherwise experience.

I invite you to be grateful for the people in your church and to have gratefulness in your heart while in church. Church is a place where Christ is proclaimed, where we come to worship, to serve, and a place to love and be loved. Church is a place to express our thanks collectively to God for Who He is and what He has done for us. It's a place to learn more about Him, to sit under solid teaching, because we will never know everything about God. I'm so grateful for my current church community. I've experienced people coming to my aid in times of need. I've had people pray for me, and I've prayed for them. There is something truly remarkable that happens when you do life with your brothers and sisters in Christ. So, this Thanksgiving season, if it wasn't a habit before, will you consider regularly attending your local church?

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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Where are you on your church journey? How can you be thankful for your church today?

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Pray back Acts 2:42-47 to God and ask to be filled with gratitude for the church.

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If you are walking through church hurt, scan the QR Code for a more timely blog. Hugs.

November 30

Gratitude For Changing Seasons

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

This fall, my church’s Women’s Ministry event’s theme was “Beauty in Change.” I had the privilege of supporting a lady in our church who shared her testimony, including how she has seen God’s faithfulness in her life through changes in her life - joyous and sorrowful changes. Exciting and unwelcome changes. I used to resist change. If you asked me, I’d quickly say, “I hate change.” But I don’t think that’s the case anymore. Change can still be frightening, especially if it's unwelcome and surrounded by unknowns. But when we surrender our plans to God, I believe that is when we begin to see God’s merciful hand working in our lives. It doesn’t mean we will necessarily be given a road map for the changes we are walking through, or may be coming our way. But God does promise to light our steps and straighten our path. He is with us every step of the way. And that’s a reason to be grateful.

The best part is that God does not change. He’s the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. God’s stability in our lives anchors our hearts, as anticipated and unwelcome changes will inevitably continue coming our way. As I am learning that change isn’t something to dread, I look at it as a chance to discover a new name or attribute of God that we haven’t experienced yet. Change is an opportunity to continue being molded into the person who will more and more reflect Christ and His unchanging character, love, mercy, and grace.

As the season changes from Thanksgiving to Christmas, my encouragement and charge to you is: do not stop giving thanks during Advent. And as the New Year creeps upon us, let us be mindful of how we can continue an attitude of gratitude. Let us be intentional about how we incorporate a heart of thankfulness to the Lord in all seasons.

Your Gratitude Guide

Copy the verse(s) from the reading that stood out to you the most.

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How do you see God’s hand at work in the exciting or unwelcome changes in your life? Are you intentional about having a heart of thanksgiving in all seasons?

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Pray back 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 to God and ask to be filled with gratitude in all seasons of life.

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Conclusion

Thank you so much for spending Thanksgiving with me! I pray that this journey of gratitude has filled your heart and given you a new perspective on being grateful in all seasons of life.

Want to stay connected? Follow my Instagram.
https://www.instagram.com/from_weary_to_worship/

I would be grateful for the opportunity to speak at your church's women's retreat, conference, or business training day. You can reach out to me at:
kelly.arena@fromwearytoworship.com.

Acknowledgments

I can't write a gratitude devotional without saying "Thank you!"

I want to thank my parents, Clarke & Barb Freed, for raising me in a way that instilled a love for the Lord and having a grateful heart.

To all my friends and family who inspired various days of this devotional book. I am abundantly blessed by the community around me.

To the ONE who is always worthy of my worship, and endless reasons to be grateful.

To my church and mentors. I credit much of my spiritual growth to you.

Thank you for being a part of the From Weary to Worship community. God bless you!