

A Verse to Live by

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

Romans 12:12 (ESV)

November Prayer Focus

Pray for God to open your eyes to the blessings in your life and the good around you. Yes, there are indeed a lot of awful things going on and those do need our prayer and at times our attention. I am not suggesting we ignore things that are painful or difficult. If you are struggling with depression, anxiety or discontentment please give these three steps a try. And don't hesitate to seek medical help, there is no shame in needing support to get through difficult times.

Life Application Challenge

Keep a daily gratitude journal this month. Start getting into the habit of thanking God for your blessings each day. Give encouragement to those you know who are struggling with something. Go out of your way to show kindness to someone in need. We all know someone who could use some support.

Recommended Scripture Reading

Romans 12 - This chapter teaches us how to serve others and with a cheerful attitude.

1 Thessalonians 5 - Another good passage reminding us of the attitude we should have while serving others.

James 1 - A great chapter to read to encourage us when we face hard times.

Church On Fire!

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CHOOSE Joy

Keep Calm and Be Grateful

Is it just me, or does it seem the Holidays come around quicker each year? That's the funny thing about time: the older you get, the quicker it seems to go. The good thing about that is it tends to make us be more conscious of how we use our time.

Thanksgiving is a perfect time to check our attitudes and see if we are being truly grateful. As I was thinking about my own gratitude I realized something. There are 3 simple, practical behaviors I intentionally implement during difficult times that help me remain grateful and content. I am sharing these this month in hopes that you too will find them helpful.

Before I go on, let me be clear on something. There is a difference between being grateful "in" something and being grateful "for" something - a very important distinction. I want to put some of you at ease about something. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "... give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (ESV) Some of you may read this to mean be grateful for everything, whether bad or good, that happens to you. That leaves you wondering how on earth can a loving God expect you to be grateful for cancer, a car accident, a pandemic...etc? God does not expect you to be grateful for bad things that happen to you or others. I never once thanked God my son got brain cancer, but I did thank God for my time with Zack and the blessings he was given despite his cancer. We can thank Him for the lessons we learned due to the trials, the good that came out of the bad. That is still much different than being grateful for the trauma itself. I know several people who have resented God thinking they were required to be grateful for the suffering of their child or the tragic death of a loved one. God is a mighty God, but He is also a gentle God who saved us by a gentle Savior, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mtt.11:29 NIV) Jesus cares about you and what you are dealing with.

Now onto the 3 Simple Steps to becoming a more grateful and content person.

Step one (is quite simple): quit grumbling, "Do everything without grumbling or arguing," (Phil. 2:14 NIV). Ever worked alongside a complainer? They can drag you down fast. Before you know it, you too are complaining about your spouse, rebellious teens, gas prices, and the cold weather. After an 8 hour shift, you go home grumpy, snap at the kids, and have to resist the urge to kick the dog (because kicking the kids is really frowned upon). Grumblers can drag you down to their level and if you are not careful, you will

become one too. After all, there are a lot of legitimate issues we could grumble about. We must guard our minds against fixating on the bad stuff. But it is not enough to just stop complaining, we must replace those thoughts with something righteous, or that vacancy in our minds leaves room for satan to harass us. "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Pet. 5:8 ESV)

Step two: replace that grumbling with thankfulness, rejoicing, and prayer. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thes. 5:16-18 NIV)

So it is actually God's will, His desire for you, to be thankful. Thankful people are some of the most pleasant to be around. They tend to have a charisma that attracts people to them. What's their secret? I cannot answer for all of them. But I will say one thing they all share in common is an attitude of gratitude. Content people are not grumblers. They are not focused on what they don't have, but on what they do have. In order to be content (the hard part), we need to learn to be thankful. As Christians we should strive to be content, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Tim. 6:6 ESV) We all had, at one time, an idea in mind of what our lives should look like. And it sure did not include all the trauma, embarrassing mistakes, and regrets that we hide in our emotional closets. Broken marriages, lost friendships, financial struggles, health issues. The list goes on. Life can make contentment seem, well, impossible. Listen, my friend, your life may not have turned out as you wanted, but there is still hope. You may have messed some things up, made some bad decisions, or been hurt by others' bad choices. But God is still an almighty, perfect God and He can still make, "...all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Ro. 8:28 ESV) So just how do we find our hope and joy again?

Step 3: We change our view, "So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." (2 Cor. 4:18 NLT) When you are focused on Jesus "the things of earth grow strangely dim." Just how do we "fix our gaze" on Jesus? With daily Bible studies and prayer time. It really is that simple.

I encourage you to try these steps this month. I hope, and believe, if you do, you will feel less bitter and much better.

Watching God Work,

Carolyn Abel