

to choose gratitude.

THANKSGIVING 2020



"Gratitude is the basis of all holiness. The most holy person you know is the most grateful person you know."
Ronald Rolheiser

THE HEART OF GRATITUDE by Corey Widmer

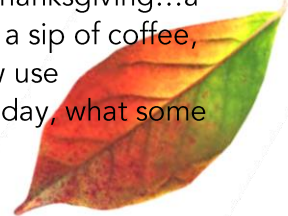
At the heart of gratitude...is awareness that all of life is grace. *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows"* (James 1:17). Everything is a gift. Air, light, soil, water. Friendship, community, family. Food, wine, coffee (!). We live on a graced planet. Nothing is earned, nothing is deserved. **All of life is grace.**

And **the grace of our Lord is wastefully generous.** God could have made one kind of bird—instead he made 10,000 species of winged color. He could have made food taste all the same, supplying our need for daily nourishment—instead he created an environment that can produce the likes of curry, jambalaya, and apple pie. He made a world where ants build hills, water falls from the sky, and leaves change colors and regenerate in a matter of months. There is enough wonder and delicious diversity in our world to keep a person in awe for a lifetime.

The degree to which we are aware of this truth is a measure of our gratitude. Plenty of people notice our world, but **gratitude goes beyond observation to receiving reality as a gift.** It was the original lie of the serpent that God is distant and uncaring, and that we humans should go it alone. This is still the lie that humans believe; in fact, in our culture we are taught that independence and self-sufficiency make for the good life. But the truth is the opposite—dependence on the all-sufficient Father makes for the good life. **The grateful person lives in total awareness and reliance on the Father's good gifts every moment...**

Gratitude is not a passive disposition but a learned habit. It is a discipline of awareness to the Father's grace and our own response to it. Paul commands, *"Give thanks in all circumstances."* (1 Thess. 5:18). Or just simply, *"Be thankful"* (Col. 4:2). I think I always considered gratefulness as something that happened to you when a happy, positive circumstance occurred. But Paul suggests exactly the opposite: the discipline of gratitude in the midst of any circumstance leads to joy. It is not the happy person who is grateful—it is the grateful person who is happy, whose eyes are open to the abundance of all things.

So how has this changed my life? **On waking,** I let my first words be words of thanksgiving. *"Thank you Father, thank you Son, thank you Spirit..."* Waking from sleep and having a new day to live in the mercy of the gospel is an amazing gift in itself. Then, **throughout the day,** I look for cues that prompt thanksgiving...a simple prayer to utter every time you experience even the smallest good: a text from a friend, a sip of coffee, light filtering through the trees. *"Hear the praise of this grateful heart"* is a prayer that I now use innumerable times throughout the day. **Before bedtime,** I try to conduct a brief review of the day, what some



have called *the practice of "Examen."* Doing so helps me remember the gifts of the day and to close my hours with thanks. I don't always keep these habits, but even the sporadic discipline of gratitude has awakened me to the Father's love and the gift of ordinary life. As Diana Butler Bass writes, **"Everything is a gift. The degree to which we are awake to this truth is a measure of gratefulness, and gratefulness is a measure of our aliveness."** Want to be more alive? Cultivate gratitude. **"O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever!"** (Psalm 107).

from www.thirdrva.org/blog/gratitude-a-reflection. Corey Widmer is lead pastor at Third Church Richmond.



A THANKSGIVING PRAYER by Diana Butler Bass

GOD, there are days we do not feel grateful. When we are anxious or angry. When we feel alone. When we do not understand what is happening in the world or with our neighbors. When the news is bleak, confusing. God, we struggle to feel grateful. But this Thanksgiving, we choose gratitude.

We choose to accept life as a gift from you, and as a gift from the unfolding work of all creation.

We choose to be grateful for the earth from which our food comes; for the water that gives life; and for the air we all breathe.

We choose to thank our ancestors, those who came before us, grateful for their stories and struggles, and we receive their wisdom as a continuing gift for today.

We choose to see our families and friends with new eyes, appreciating and accepting them for who they are. We are thankful for our homes, whether humble or grand.

We will be grateful for our neighbors, no matter how they voted, whatever our differences, or how much we feel hurt or misunderstood by them.

We choose to see the whole planet as our shared commons, the stage of the future of humankind and creation.

God, this Thanksgiving, we do not give thanks. We choose it. We will make this choice of thanks with courageous hearts, knowing that it is humbling to say "thank you." We choose to see your sacred generosity, aware that we live in an infinite circle of gratitude. That we all are guests at a hospitable table around which gifts are passed and received. We will not let anything opposed to love take over this table. Instead, we choose grace, free and unmerited love, the giftedness of life everywhere. In this choosing, and in the making, we will pass gratitude onto the world.

Thus, with you, and with all those gathered at this table, we pledge to make thanks. We ask you to strengthen us in this resolve. Here, now, and into the future. Around our family table. Around the table of our nation. Around the table of the earth. We choose thanks. **In Jesus' Name, Amen.**

from Grateful. Diana Butler Bass is an author and commentator. Follow her at dianabutlerbass.com.

THEOLOGICAL HORIZONS

www.theologicalhorizons.org info@theologicalhorizons.org

