

Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude

The Apostle Paul declares in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” As Christ-followers, we must intentionally develop our emotional muscles of gratitude. We must actively discover God’s provision all around us and express gratitude for them. That’s what Benjamin Weir did.

Missionary Benjamin Weir was kidnapped and held hostage in Lebanon by Hezbollah, an Islamic jihadist terrorist group. Benjamin lived under terrifying and miserable conditions for 16 months. In his first interview after his release, Benjamin was asked how he spent his time and how he dealt with the intense fear, discouragement, and sheer boredom. His answer stunned the reporters. He simply said, "Counting my blessings." The reporters responded with curiosity and asked for more information. "Yes," Benjamin explained. "God’s Word tells me, ‘In everything give thanks,’ so I looked for points of gratitude. For instance, some days I would get to take a shower. Sometimes there were some vegetables in my food. And I could always be thankful for the love of my family." We can understand why the reporters were astonished. It's hard for most of us to be consistently thankful for the commonplace blessings that make life pleasant and comfortable.

Have you learned to consistently thank God for His gracious supply of your “daily bread” in the form of the provision of food, shelter, clothing, mobility, health, and the companionship of family and friends? We are capable of ignoring and being apathetic regarding God’s lavish and expensive mercies of redeeming grace provided by Christ’s extreme sacrifice. Paul and Silas were unfairly beaten, thrown into prison, and placed in stocks, yet chose to “pray and sing hymns to God at midnight.” May we learn from our Biblical models and from faithful Benjamin Weir to count our blessings regardless of our circumstances?

Right now, ask God to anoint your vision so you can see the vast array of blessings surrounding you. Then, cultivate greater emotional health, strength, and stability by intentionally identifying those blessings and praising God for His gracious provision. In 1897, Johnson Oatman, a hymn-writing Insurance salesman who lived in New Jersey, wrote these meaningful words: “Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly, and you will be singing as the days go by. Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God hath done; Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.” My Friend, if intentional counting blessings works for Paul and Silas, Benjamin Weir, Johnson Oats, and me, let it be true for you.