



August 2012

Dear Friends,

Thankfulness is a choice. Have you ever thought of it that way? There is a book called *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp that has changed the way I look at thankfulness and made me realize the importance of making it central to my life. The author describes a time in her life when she was just generally down about life, depressed, discouraged, emotionally beat down. God showed her that she should look for things to be thankful for each day and write them down. She started reluctantly keeping a thankfulness journal. After she got in the habit, she realized there's simply too much to write down if you really look for all the things to be thankful for. And, the best part is, you tend to focus more on the great things about life instead of the problems that weigh you down. You see more and more how much bigger and better God is than any problem on this earth.

Here are some of the things God's Word says about thankfulness:

Philippians 4:4-8 **Rejoice in the Lord always.** I will say it again: **Rejoice!** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

When you are asking for something, maybe for a better situation, for a better attitude, for good health, for others to change around you, etc., be thankful for what you DO have, for the incredible gifts God has given you. Ask Him to show you those things – a cool breeze on a hot day, a child's laughter, a fresh piece of fruit to eat, a beautiful blue sky or a night sky full of bright stars, a hug from a good friend. He tells us to focus our thoughts on the good around us.

Ephesians 5:15-20 Be very careful, then, how you live —not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, **always giving thanks** to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:16-17 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

It just looks plain crazy to the fallen world when we are singing in the midst of hard times. If we are always giving thanks, singing from within no matter what is going on around us, that is true joy. We recently asked our kids if they knew the difference between joy and happiness. They didn't. So we challenged them to find out. They asked friends, they searched in the Bible (with a little help), they prayed about it. They concluded that happiness is a feeling that doesn't last and joy is something inside you that stays and is part of who you are. This sinful world doesn't understand joy. Lost and lonely souls want joy like that. We will stand out like a bright light because of our thankfulness and our joy. And standing out gives us the chance to share Jesus with others.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 **Rejoice always**, pray continually, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Some of the things I am thankful for today...

- A community of Jesus followers who wants to love one another and serve Him
- An incredible Community Night on August 10 – it was a great time of celebration and a beautiful picture of our body of believers working together toward a common goal
- An unseasonably cool day
- Kids excited to be back at school and looking forward to learning
- Pretty flowers and multi-colored mushrooms popping up in the yard
- Stories of hope that people have to share with each other

Let's all start writing down what we're thankful for. It will be good for our souls and good to learn from years down the road as we look back and remember how faithful God has always been.

Much love and thankfulness,

Recipe of the Month: Apple Zucchini Bread (makes 2 loaves)

4 eggs	1 cup white sugar
1 cup brown sugar	1/2 cup vegetable oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract	3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda	1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons cinnamon	1/2 cup chopped walnuts (optional)
2 cups peeled, chopped zucchini	1 cup chopped, peeled apple

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease two 9x5 inch loaf pans. In a large bowl, combine eggs, white sugar, brown sugar, oil and vanilla until well blended. In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking soda, salt and cinnamon. Stir flour mixture into egg mixture. Fold in walnuts, zucchini and apple. Pour into prepared pans. Bake 1 hour, or until top springs back when touched lightly in center. Let cool in pans 10 minutes before removing to wire rack to cool completely.

Hebrews 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."