

sadness that my mother has been gone for a dozen years and all that she has missed with our family, just as you may feel about the people you've loved and lost. I also choose to look back with gratitude for all the happy memories I have and all I learned and want to remember, and I can be thankful for those times and memories. So much of how we respond to life and feel about life comes down to our perspective and how we see it. Some folks see their cup as half full, some as half empty, and then there are those **who are grateful they have a cup**. Just like it's important to pray when you find it hardest to pray, you benefit when you focus on gratitude when it's hardest to be grateful. Like when you're grieving, or in physical pain, or facing a challenging diagnosis. When we choose to look at, focus on, and be grateful for the good things in our life, rather than the bad or the depressing things we'll find so many reasons for giving thanks that we will be overflowing with gratitude, like a pot that can't contain all the water flowing into it.

Today's passage from 1 Chronicles 29 features the words of David who is at "10" on the overflowing with gratitude scale. David is at a high point in his life. He has survived many battles and enemies. He has come through hardships caused by his own selfishness and sinfulness. David is overflowing with gratitude for who God is and all God has done. The way he is expressing his gratitude is not only in his worship and praise, but in giving generously from his resources for the building of the Lord's temple. Listen to his prayer in **1 Chronicles 29.10-18**,

10 Then David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; David said: "**Blessed are you, O LORD**, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. 11 **Yours, O LORD**, are the **greatness**, the **power**, the **glory**, the **victory**, and the **majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.** 12 **Riches and honor** come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are **power and might**; and it is in your hand **to make great and to give strength to all.** 13 And now, our God, **we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.**

14 "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? **For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.** 15 For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the

earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. 16 O LORD our God, **all this abundance that we have provided** for building you a house for your holy name **comes from your hand and is all your own.** 17 I know, my God, that **you search the heart**, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my **heart I have freely offered** all these things, and now I have seen **your people**, who are present here, **offering freely and joyously to you.** 18 O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, **keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.**”

David’s life, like yours and mine, has been a mix of good and bad. He was in many battles and risked his life many times. He’s known the heights of success and power, and the depths of deep personal sin that had life and death consequences for other people. David, like you, has to choose where his focus will be. Will he dwell on the fragile, brief nature of life and the reasons he has to despair as when he says (v. 15), *“our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.”* Or will his focus be on the greatness, glory, and generosity of God who gives us the gift of life and so much else as well? David wants to insure that a temple is built and so he gives freely, joyfully, and sacrificially and encourages others to do the same recognizing that everything he has belongs to God.

What a difference it makes when we live our lives out of gratitude, sharing our thankfulness, praise, and joy with the world, bringing others in touch with the wonder of God’s love for us in Christ and the amazing world that God has made. A group of students was studying the *“Seven Wonders of the World.”* At the end of the lesson, the students were asked to list what they considered to be the seven wonders. Students said things like the Great Wall of China, the pyramids of Giza, the Eiffel Tower and other things human beings have built. The teacher noted that one student hadn’t turned in her paper yet. She asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list. The girl replied, *“Yes, a little. I couldn’t quite make up my mind because there were so many!”* The teacher said, *“Well, tell us what you have, and maybe we can help.”* The girl hesitated, then read, *“I think the ‘Seven Wonders of the World’ are: to touch, to taste, to see, to hear.”* She hesitated a little, *“and then, to run, to laugh, to love.”*

It is easy for us to look at the exploits of human beings and refer to them as "wonders" while we overlook all God has created and made possible as merely "ordinary." You need to remind yourself each day that all around you there are miracles and wonders. For those of us who are parents and grandparents, the example we set for our family is critically important. In *Celebrate Your Child: The Art of Happy Parenting*, Richard Carlson encourages parents to, ***“Demonstrate gratitude for the simple things in life. Show your child that you are a person who is truly grateful for the simple, good things in life: a sunset, rain, insects, birds, children laughing, or a kind gesture.... Appreciative people are happy; they see the beauty in life while others miss it.”*** If you wish you were happier or had more joy or contentment in your life, one of the things that is in your control is to start practicing and expressing gratitude for the simple and beautiful things in life. Keeping a gratitude journal and recording every evening five things you're grateful for from the day which is ending can transform your attitude and your life. As G.K. Chesterton noted, ***“When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.”***

King David was overflowing with gratitude because he chose the right attitude toward God and life and all his wealth. His gift toward building the temple in modern dollars would have been huge and he gave it freely and joyfully. One pastor (Gary Langness) describes the importance of sharing David's belief that everything we have is God's. *“When you and I acknowledge that God is the owner, then there is peace and enjoyment in life. If we think it belongs to us, then we spend much of our life rationalizing, arguing, hoarding and trying to hold on to what we think is ours.”* The great English preacher Charles Spurgeon said, ***“It's not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness.”***

St. Augustine wrote, *“God gives where He finds empty hands. A man whose hands are full of parcels can't receive a gift.”* Today we begin receiving the World Mission Offering which supports the work of people like Amanda & Jon Good who Joe and Shelby Greemore worshiped with earlier today in Debrecen, Hungary as well as servants like Madeline Flores-Lopes who has helped us with so many mission work trips in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. We remember our friends Tedi and Didi Oprenov in Sofia, Bulgaria and the many brothers and sisters we've come to know in

our more than 20-year association with Eastern Theological College in Jorhat, Assam, in northeast India. Like David and God's people in his time seeking to raise the funds to build the temple, I hope we can give freely and joyfully to support our missionaries and partners who are helping to bring the Lord's presence to people all around the world.

Pastor Rick Warren wrote, "When I get up in the morning, I sit on the side of my bed and say, "God, if I don't get anything else done today, **I want to know You more and love You better.** God didn't put me on earth just to fulfill a to-do list. He's more interested in what I am than what I do. That's why we're called human beings, not human doings. In Happy moments, PRAISE GOD. In Difficult moments, SEEK GOD. In Quiet moments, WORSHIP GOD. In Painful moments, TRUST GOD.

In Every moment, THANK GOD."

That's what it's like to be overflowing with gratitude. I like to think of gratitude this way - **Don't just give thanks, live thanks!** There was a faithful and grateful couple who were part of BBC back in the 1990's who moved to California. Their names were Robert and Elizabeth Cahill. They loved the Lord and this church and even after they moved to the west coast, they continued to support our ministry financially. Robert and Elizabeth have both passed away now and recently their estate sent us **\$150,000** that Robert and Elizabeth wanted to give the church to continue to help us to be a blessing to our community and to the world as we move into the future. Like David, they would say, "*O LORD our God, **all this abundance that we have provided...for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.***"

A great thing about gratitude is that it doesn't matter how much or how little you have materially of the world's wealth. Gratitude is like love, it's not a limited commodity. That's what makes gratitude different than an apple pie. An apple pie is finite. There are only so many slices and then it's gone. Gratitude, like love, multiplies and grows the more you give it away. The more you love, the more love you have. The more you choose to live with gratitude and thanks, the more grateful and thankful you'll be. That's why A.W. Tozer declared, "*Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, **and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it.***"

Pastor Tim Keller, the founder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City has been battling pancreatic cancer for a little over a year. He said, *“It’s one thing to be grateful. It’s another to give thanks. **Gratitude is what you feel. Thanksgiving is what you do.**”* There is much that can shake us in life. Whether a diagnosis like Keller and some of us have received, a pandemic, isolation, economic and other hardships. The New Testament book of Hebrews was written to Christ followers who had been subject to persecution, imprisonment, and loss of property as a result of their faith. They met those trials with joy and were encouraged to persevere and be thankful for what God had done for them in Christ. **Hebrews 12:28** proclaims, *“Therefore, **since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.**”*

The great 20th century actress Audrey Hepburn (1929–1993) speaking about surviving the hunger, deprivation, and death of World War II as a child in Holland and how it made her a grateful person said of those awful years, *“**It made me resilient and terribly appreciative for everything good that came afterward. I felt enormous respect for food, freedom, for good health and family — for human life.**”*

Practicing gratitude can help us better manage stress and increase feelings of happiness and well-being. One of the best ways to enjoy the benefits of gratitude is to keep a gratitude journal. If you do it, you’ll be surprised how the discipline of gratitude changes you. 19th century American preacher Henry Ward Beecher used the following image for a heart overflowing with gratitude, *“If one should give me a dish of sand, and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes, and search for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it, and how would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles, by the mere power of attraction! **The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find every hour some heavenly blessings; only the iron in God’s sand is gold.**”*

Blessing: Now “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach & admonish one another in all wisdom; & with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, & spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name in of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father through him.**” Colossian 3:16-17
Take the presence of the Lord with you into the world. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being “*overflowing with gratitude*” and 1 being, “*I feel like I have nothing for which to be grateful,*” how grateful are you feeling today?
2. What are three things about your neighborhood or town that you’re grateful for? What about your home?
3. What have others done in your life in the last few weeks that you’re grateful for?
4. What’s something enjoyable you get to experience every day that you may have come to take for granted? How can you learn to receive it and enjoy with renewed gratitude?
5. How does David’s gratitude to God impact his life – his attitude, his worship, his use of what God has blessed with him materially? What can you take and put into practice from his example?
6. Are you surprised that the percentage of Americans who give to charity has declined from 66% of households in 2020 to less than 50% in less than twenty years? Why is giving to the Lord’s work and other charities important to you?
7. How does believing what we have belongs to God help us to give freely, willingly, and generously, as David does?