

“*Growing in Gratitude* is a must-read for anyone who has ever doubted, suffered, or just plain coasted in life. Starting in the Garden of Eden and continuing throughout the whole span of Scripture, Mary K. Mohler invites us to embrace the ‘big-dealness’ of gratitude for those who know Christ. In straightforward yet deeply penetrating ways, Mary opens the theological doorway to a grateful heart as graciously as she has opened the door of her home to thousands throughout her years of ministry. With perceptive illustrations, she skillfully wins us over until we are ‘abounding in thanksgiving’ (Colossians 2:7) in happy obedience to God’s word. This book would be a treasure if only for the truth found in her list of ‘Ten ways to thank the Lord when it hurts.’ But read the whole thing! Both your head and your heart will be lifted up into new paths of gratitude.”

Jani Ortlund, *Executive Vice President, Renewal Ministries*

“Popular mottos and self-help advice on being thankful abound. But Mary K. Mohler takes us deeper to explore the theological root of gratitude and the hindrances that keep us from developing a truly grateful heart. In this book, you’ll find solid, effective counsel. So listen up! I’m confident you’ll be grateful you did.”

Mary A. Kassian, *author of Girls Gone Wise*

“It was a real joy to listen to Mary’s wisdom from years of learning thankfulness. I love how she encourages us to stop and pray, putting into action what we’re learning, and her chapters on hindrances to gratitude are fresh and insightful. I have been challenged by Mary’s shrewd observations and genuinely can say this book has helped me to be growing in gratitude.”

Linda Allcock, *London Women’s Convention*

“Mary K. Mohler bares her lovely and redeemed heart in this book. And as I read it, I found myself scribbling notes, making book lists from Mary’s recommendations, and stopping to pray in both repentance and thanksgiving. I did this because I want the habits and heart of this book to seep into my own. Simple but not simplistic, profound but not inaccessible, this book shows how Christian gratitude, more than list-making and positive thinking, nourishes believers to become more like our Savior, preparing us to be conduits for his grace. As I was reading this book, I felt as if I was sitting with Mary in her kitchen, listening, learning, praying, and thanking God for the unity and beauty and power of the gospel to equip us, truly, to every good work, including the good work of thanking him when agonizing circumstances do not change. Although it was written for women, all Christians will benefit from this book.”

Rosaria Butterfield, *author of The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert; and Openness Unhindered*

“Gratitude is a lost art in our entitled and consumeristic society. Even in the church we have lost a sense of thankfulness for not only what we have but also for all that God has done for us in Christ. Mary K. Mohler exhorts us to fight that tendency, and she does so with care and with insight. I was convicted and encouraged to not only grow in my gratitude toward the Lord but also to pass on this legacy to my children. This book is a gift to God’s people, who must learn to not forget all his benefits.”

Courtney Reissig, *author of Glory in the Ordinary; and The Accidental Feminist*

“Gratitude isn’t an autumn attitude. As Mary K. Mohler explains, it is a deeply theological emotion that shapes and reveals our heart for God in every season of life. We are grateful to God for this insightful book that helps us all to see the gravity and the grace of gratitude.”

Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Whitacre,  
*authors of True Beauty; and True Feelings*

“*Growing in Gratitude* by Mary K. Mohler is an informative and inspiring volume on what has become a vanishing virtue for this ‘entitled’ generation. Mohler reminds us that the movement from grace to gratitude to giving is a divine mandate worthy of our most diligent efforts even in the midst of personal challenges and suffering. Even as your ‘thorn list’ runs parallel to your ‘praise list,’ you must choose to focus on the Lord and his power and love more than on your own pain and difficulty!”

Dorothy Kelley Patterson, *Professor of Theology in Women’s Studies, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

“Entitlement is the death of gratitude, and so no wonder our age is awash in unthankfulness. By contrast, the Christian life is a life of gratitude (how could it be otherwise when we are saved by God’s grace alone!), but being thankful is easier said than done ‘through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in woe.’ Mary Mohler addresses this vital subject here, positively helping us grow in gratitude as she points us to God’s word. I’m thankful for Mary, and I’m thankful for her study of Bible-based, grace-empowered thankfulness in this book, *Growing in Gratitude*, and her encouragement of us in it!”

Ligon Duncan, *Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary*

“With penetrating insight, Mary K. Mohler provides a thoughtful and thorough study of biblical gratitude and the necessity for each of us to grow in this area. She speaks with conviction and clarity, with humility and humor. I strongly recommend this Scripture-saturated, theologically robust, and eminently practical book.”

*Jodi Ware, wife, mother, grandmother, and faculty member of the  
Seminary Wives Institute at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

Mary K. Mohler



*Growing  
in  
Gratitude*

the good book  
COMPANY

*To R. Albert Mohler, Jr.  
The love of my life, whose amazing wisdom makes  
writing books look easy, and whose love and leadership  
fill my life with joy and gratitude.*

Growing in Gratitude

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## Introduction: A Life of Thankfulness



The sight is glorious as the leaves are changing in Kentucky. The temperature is dropping and most of us are glad to pull out vests, sweaters, and jackets that have been stashed away since April. The smell of pumpkin-spiced everything seems to be everywhere. Yes, Thanksgiving is just ten days from now.

So, it's time to think about being thankful yet again. We have meal planning to do and travel arrangements to make—and the Christmas shopping season has somehow managed to leapfrog over Thanksgiving. Yet we will not skip over this much-celebrated American holiday that comes just one month before Christmas. Challenged by a glut of blog posts and articles about thankfulness that floods our inboxes every November, we will slow down long enough to be thankful. It's what we do.

Those around us who don't follow Christ will enjoy the four-day weekend as they too gather with friends and family to express gratitude to one another—and perhaps to thank Mother Nature for the change of weather and the Man Upstairs for letting them live another year free of disaster.

But we, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, can do much more than that. We are profoundly grateful to our Creator for creating, loving, saving, and sustaining us to the praise of his great glory. So, for us, Thanksgiving Day is just like every other day in terms of our deep gratitude, although we probably take more time to be mindful of it as we pause before a meal of turkey, dressing, and pumpkin pie.

Or do we?

Is it possible that we daily intend to be grateful but fall short of it becoming second nature to us? Every single breath we draw is a gift from our Almighty God. That simple and profound truth is too often lost on us. We are surrounded by a contemporary culture where *entitlement* rules. People are convinced they deserve to be happy, healthy, rich, and empowered. Self-absorption creeps in and takes root.

Most of us know better. And we know we should do a better job of remembering this. So why do we need a whole book to remind us about what we already know? *Be more thankful. Got it. Now on to deeper subjects...*

But wait! This book is not just meant to inspire you to grow in gratitude. Please keep reading! Gratitude is

a rich theological issue. The presence or absence of it in our lives is very telling. It truly is a big deal. I am not talking about a “count your many blessings, name them one by one” kind of gratitude to God. I am talking about a deep sense of awe ingrained in our minds. I am talking about an awareness, in every waking moment, of the glorious truth that the God of the universe is infinite in all of his perfections. And he *loves* us.

Scripture is full of commands for us to praise and give thanks to our Lord, so it really does matter. What a delight it should be for us to thank him. My hope for this book is to encourage you to embrace the life-changing virtue of gratitude, and to let it spill out into everything you say and do. Perhaps you remember a time, when you first came to faith in Christ, when you had boundless joy and a grateful heart. What happened to diminish that? Let’s think about ways to re-discover that joy.

I have learned so much as I have explored what true gratitude is, and I am eager to share it with you. I have realized that, even as redeemed sinners, we face common hindrances to gratitude, so let’s tackle those head on and look to God’s word to find clear strategies to combat them. You will also be heartened to read true stories from people who can praise God for the victories he has given them over some of these hindrances.

As we focus on gratitude in this book, may we be drawn closer to the Lord as we invite the Holy Spirit to

*Mary K. Mobler*

convict us through biblical truth. May we be encouraged by those who have gone before, as their writings give us much to consider. May we seek to embrace gratitude in new and practical ways. May we be women who leave a legacy of thankfulness that others wish to follow. May we praise the Lord with our whole hearts.

## An Overflowing Fountain

**G**ratITUDE. Thankfulness. Praise to our great God. None of us has ever come close to living the life of a consistently grateful believer. We may strive to do so. But, as with most New Year's resolutions, even if we aim for a more consistent Bible-reading plan, a specific prayer list, and intentional expressions of gratitude, we easily get sidelined by our own lack of discipline.

Why is that? Why do we find consistent gratitude to God so hard? Are we making this too complicated?

### Back to the Basics

We know we are supposed to count our blessings from the Lord—and write nice thank-you notes! Scripture is filled with commands for us to be thankful, be

filled with gratitude, have grateful hearts, abound with thanksgiving, and more. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are to be characterized by gratitude.

Let's remind ourselves of the wonderful gifts believers have in Christ and will want to thank the Lord for. We were once hopelessly separated from God. We had no way to save ourselves from hell, no matter how hard we tried nor how many good things we did. But we were justified the moment we were prompted by the Holy Spirit to confess our sin to God the Father and believe that Jesus Christ alone stands in our place as our perfect substitute. From that moment on, God the Father has looked at us through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and is satisfied that our sin debt was paid in full through the shed blood of Christ. The Holy Spirit now lives in us forever. That process is how we stand forgiven and clothed in Christ's righteousness! Wonderful! (You will find some of the wonderful gifts believers have "in Christ" in 2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 1:4, 7, 11-14; 2:11-13; Romans 8:38-39; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21; and Galatians 3:26.)

As Christians, these glorious truths shape how we want to live. We spend the rest of our lives seeking to be more like Christ while still sinners on this earth. We live our lives in gratitude for what Christ has done for us—and we seek to be more like him even though we still sin. We look forward to the time when we will live with the Lord in heaven forever in our glorified bodies and will sin no more.

What an unspeakable gift we have been given through the perfect sacrifice of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. Hence, every single Christian should be filled with gratitude. No matter what our age, race, culture, language, social status, or life circumstances, all Christians should be known as characteristically grateful people. We, above all humans, have overwhelming cause to be thankful.

### Grateful or Grumpy?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if gratitude was one of the first things that comes to mind when people think about believers in Jesus Christ? They may not agree with us—and may even pity us for what they perceive to be our wasted lives—but even so, the world should be struck by how grateful we are for the gifts we wholeheartedly believe we possess from God alone.

Are they? Or do they too often see us as complainers or moody types who are frustrated and fraught with worry, just as they are?

Let's state the obvious: more than anything else, we are the most thankful for the inexpressible gift of grace in the salvation that we have in Christ alone. Paul reminds us at the beginning of Ephesians 2 just how desperately lost every single one of us was until God intervened (Ephesians 2:1-3). We were all once separated from God and totally unable to save ourselves—we were hopeless and helpless without Christ.

But Ephesians 2 continues with that dazzling—arguably the greatest—two-word theological phrase: *but God*.

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*                      EPHESIANS 2:4-7

What a stark contrast in what we read before and after the words “but God.” Once, we were separated from God and unable to save ourselves—but as believers, we are saved to the uttermost. We did not earn or deserve this gift and we cannot lose it—this is such good news since we know that if we could lose it, we would! We do not do good works in order to cause our salvation or retain it, but we do them as a *result* of it and in *gratitude* for it.

## The Bible Is So Clear About Gratitude

From cover to cover, the precious word of God confronts us with passage after passage related to praise and thanksgiving. Let’s look at some specific passages.

Paul encourages us earnestly many times in his inspired writings to be thankful. One such text is found in Colossians:

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and*



*established in the faith, just as you were taught,  
abounding in thanksgiving.*                      COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

The Greek word used here for “abounding” means “overflowing”—and it is a *continuous* action. It is the result of being rooted, built up, and established. We are to be like a fountain that is continually filled to overflowing. We are not only to exhibit gratitude but we are to overflow with it, such that it spills out into all that we do.

This is not talking about a count-your-blessings-and-squirrel-them-away-in-a-pretty-notebook type of gratitude. Nor is it a suggestion to be a glass-half-full type of happy-clappy Christian in the midst of disaster. This gratitude is so much more than that. It is transformational. It is an intentional mindset that stems from the fact that since we have indeed received Christ Jesus the Lord, are walking with him, and are rooted and established in the faith, we will overflow with thanksgiving as a result. In spite of how we fall short of the glory of God in our sinful natures on this earth, we are blessed with a glimpse into what a phenomenal gift we have been given in Christ. We will want to overflow with praise and thanksgiving as a result.

Think about that picture of the overflowing fountain. If you should happen to jostle us, we spill gratitude. You don't have to reach way down into our psyches or personalities to discover that, okay, Christians are indeed thankful people. You should not have to ask us the right questions to eventually get there. No! Gratitude

abounds, overflows, flows out as a characteristic of who we are—on good days and bad ones too.

## Grace Leads to Gratitude

You cannot push a button and make gratitude start to gush. It comes as a result of receiving Christ Jesus as Lord. The grace we have received compels us to be grateful, and in turn to desire to show grace and generosity to others.

Here is another way to look at how gratitude is vital and fulfills such a key role in the life of the believer. Think of it as the middle step in a three-step process.

### *Grace — Gratitude — Giving Generously*

Paul says in Colossians 2 that we have received Christ Jesus as Lord and should walk in him. This is all about grace. We have received this free gift of grace and our response is thanksgiving—but it does not end there. Our thankful hearts spur us on to act like grateful people who in turn seek to show appreciation in a variety of ways to build up the church and spread the gospel.

We do not stall on the fact that we have new life in Christ; instead it spurs us on to live a life of gratitude that in turn causes us to be generous people. We will want to be generous with our time, talents, and treasures. Grace leads to gratitude which leads to giving—and the Lord is glorified in the process. Fabulous!

Paul reminds us of that end result in 2 Corinthians:

*For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:15

Returning to Paul's epistle to the church at Colossae, we see that he urges his readers three times in one short passage to be thankful. Do we get the idea that this is beyond important?

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And **be thankful**. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **with thankfulness** in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him.*

COLOSSIANS 3:15-17 (*bold text mine*)

What a privilege to seek not only to have the peace of Christ rule in our hearts but to have those same hearts be thankful. Gratitude is so much more than running through the same old lists in our heads as rushed prayers while nodding off at night. We must not trivialize it for the simple reason that the Bible does not do so. Paul is here describing

characteristically thankful people. And surely we want to be such people.

The writer of the book of Hebrews provides yet another prompt in chapter 12:

*Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.*

HEBREWS 12:28

## Grateful Sheep

Let's also look to the well-known words of the 100th psalm as a classic example of a call to gratitude:

*Know that the LORD, he is God!*

*It is he who made us, and we are his;*

*we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving,*

*and his courts with praise!*

*Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

PSALM 100:3-4

Here's another great visual for us to embrace. We are now his sheep and belong to him forever. So it follows that we enter his gates with thanksgiving and praise as we bless his name. Further, we dwell safely within those gates under our loving Shepherd's providential care.

Consider Isaiah 43:25. Neither praise nor thanksgiving is mentioned, but these words should cause every believer to stand in awe:

*I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*

ISAIAH 43:25

Our all-knowing God keeps no record of our sins for the sake of his great glory. As believers, we stand before him clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord has not only blotted out our sins but he will remember them no more. Our gratitude should thus know no bounds.

### **The Opposite of Gratitude Spells Disaster**

By contrast, let's think about the opposite of this virtue. We can better understand gratitude by looking at ingratitude. We can trace ingratitude all the way back to Eden.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.*

*He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to*

*the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

GENESIS 3:1-7

Picture the idyllic lives of Adam and Eve in the paradise of Eden. All was perfect and unblemished. Every need was supplied in that place of utter joy, beauty, and contentment. God said they could eat of all but one tree. But being given all of the other trees was not good enough for them. Oh, if only they had just been grateful for what was given to them instead of wanting more. Ingratitude is thus at the root of the original sin in the garden—resulting in the fall.

Paul, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, states in Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,” and goes on to state three times how God “gave them up,” (v 24, 26, 28)—perhaps the most terrifying phrase in all of Scripture. He gave them up for two simple reasons:

*For although they knew God, **they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him**, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for*

*images resembling mortal man and birds and animals  
and creeping things.*

ROMANS 1:21-23 (*bold text mine*)

They neither honored God nor gave him thanks. Simple yet profound. It is striking that these flaws are of so much consequence that they trigger such a strong response from God. Did you notice that these flaws are not related to complex issues requiring lots of words and deep discussion? The issues were failing to honor God and to show him gratitude. The people decided it was more important for themselves to be happy and wise in their own eyes. They foolishly did what they thought was best even though it robbed God of his glory. Their actions had the disastrous and unthinkable result of their being abandoned by God!

Paul later includes ingratitude in a list of traits in 2 Timothy 3 that will characterize godlessness in the last days before Jesus returns:

*But understand this, that in the last days there will  
come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers  
of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive,  
disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, unholy,  
heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-  
control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless,  
swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than  
lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but  
denying its power. Avoid such people.*

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5 (*bold text mine*)

Look at all of those descriptors. And right in the middle of this list of wretched traits, we find the characteristic of being *ungrateful*. Paul is clear that ingratitude is not a trivial issue but is among the sins that plunge depraved sinners further and further away from the Lord.

### Ungrateful Grumblers

We learn so many lessons about what not to do as we study the grumbling and rebellious Israelites. Exodus 16 gives a good snapshot of their ingratitude:

*And the people of Israel said to [Moses and Aaron],  
“Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD  
in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots  
and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out  
into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with  
hunger.”*

EXODUS 16:3

What stunningly short memories these people had. The Lord had miraculously delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians. We read just fourteen chapters earlier in Exodus 2:

*During those many days the king of Egypt died,  
and the people of Israel groaned because of their  
slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue  
from slavery came up to God. And God heard their  
groaning, and God remembered his covenant with*



*Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—**and God knew.***

EXODUS 2:23-25 (*bold text mine*)

God *knew* all right. His steadfast love for his chosen people was unfailing, but their short memories gave way to their deceitful hearts. Exodus 16 continues with the account: not only manna but quail was provided from heaven to meet their needs perfectly. What must it have been like when that manna began to fall and those quail arrived like instant dinner on a plate? No traps were needed, for quail are ground-dwelling birds which sit motionless if alarmed. These birds could be caught by hand!

Did the Israelites feel foolish and ashamed for doubting the Lord's provision and perfect plan? Apparently not in any long-standing way, since we read of this pattern being repeated over and over and over again. Sadly, we are often just like the Israelites, as ingratitude becomes our default response instead of a rare occurrence. The profound plea of the psalmist in Psalm 90 is one that I often pray as I fight my own tendency toward ingratitude:

*Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,  
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

PSALM 90:14

## Looking Ahead

My favorite cultural commentator of the age is none other than my beloved husband, Albert Mohler, who said this on his website:

Mary K. Mohler

*We need to recognize that gratitude is a deeply theological act when it's rightly understood. As a matter of fact, thankfulness is a theology in microcosm. You come to understand an entire system of theology, an entire set of doctrines and beliefs, by what the Christian believes about gratitude and this is thus the key to understanding what we really believe about God, what we really believe about ourselves, what we really believe about the world we experience.<sup>1</sup>*

Clearly, this topic is worthy of our attention and should be a hallmark of our lives.

*Precious Father,*

*As we consider how to grow in gratitude, remind us of how we were once overwhelmed with joy at the unspeakably wonderful gift of your kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

*May we rediscover that joy that has waned.  
May we resolve to keep it in the forefront of our minds as we press forward to the day when we will see our Savior's face.*

*Make us grateful people for your glory alone!*

*In Jesus' name,*

*Amen.*

### Think It Through

1. Is it a stretch to think of yourself as one who, when bumped, spills out gratitude? How can this word-picture help you to be more intentional about living out thankfulness?
2. Can you see clear examples in your own life of how grace leads to gratitude—and gratitude leads to generosity? How does remembering what the Lord has done for you motivate you to serve others?



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