

FALL 2021

**WITH A
GRATEFUL
HEART**



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A NOTE

SHAWNA BOREN

“Don’t be so afraid,” I hear the inner voice of love say to me. “Recognize everything in your life as a gift, and consciously give thanks. Make more room for joy in your life. Let the stones be taken away, and be grateful. Go beyond your comfort zone, and trust. Have courage, open yourself to your heart’s deeper desire, and let the wall fall down. Open yourself, and allow Me to remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Henri Nouwen: *Spiritual Formation*

I like to think of gratitude, a posture of intentionally being thankful, as a way to actively lean into my faith. Gratitude reminds me of the goodness of God and of the beauty of His work in my life. As His beloved children, we have the opportunity to allow our lives to be grafted and shaped by gratitude. Through this lens we have the ability to see rightly the activity of God in our lives and can begin to notice all the many ways in which our lives are richly blessed.

We live in such a hectic time with roles and responsibilities pulling at us from various directions. It is in the midst of the chaos, that we get to respond to the special invitation to take a pause, to quiet the noise and activity of everyday life and recalibrate our soul. Gratitude enables us to do just that: to pause, to notice, to breathe deep the presence of God and then to live out of the fullness of His perfect love.

“Thou that has given so much to me, Give one thing more- a grateful heart ... Not thankful when it pleases me, As if Thy blessings had spare days; But such a heart, whose pulse may be Thy praise.” George Herbert, 17th century poet.

May we each embody a heart pulsing with gratitude during this special season!

*Shawna is the Engagement Pastor at Woodland.

AWAKENING GRATITUDE

“When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive—to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.” - Marcus Aurelius

What if we started each day with gratitude? Do you think our thankfulness would encourage a different heart perspective?

Intentionally cultivating gratitude can dramatically transform our mental health and our overall wellbeing. Ellie Cobb, a holistic psychologist, says, “Science shows we can train ourselves to experience thankfulness more often simply by paying attention to our lives differently. Attention is like a spotlight in the brain, as whatever we repeatedly bring attention to becomes stronger and brighter over time.”

Let’s shine a giant spotlight on God’s goodness this month.

Gratitude Challenge

Scripture: Read Psalm 118 out loud.

Application

Wake up to gratitude each morning for one week. Set an alarm or a reminder. Then look back on that week and see how gratitude changed you.

MORNING PRAYER

TYLER ROGNESS

Conversation with those I cannot see;
 Alone with another beyond myself.
 Words for my shaping come drifting to me
 On the old scent of magic and dust from the shelf.

Co-making with Maker; unfetter the pen:
 New worlds and new wonders will be.
 We walk on great paths that never had been
 While slowly these eyes learn to see.

With his sixpence I purchase a gift for my lord,
 In this dust he breathes spirit divine.
 This water I draw in your presence, my lord,
 And thence would you turn it to wine.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Morning Prayer is a personal reflection on and expression of gratefulness for the image in which we are made, and the ways that our God works in us to bring about more than we could hope to accomplish ourselves. Our Creator has made us creative beings, and set in our finite minds an echo of his infinite imagination. To express that creativity – and there are many ways to do it – is an act of worship; or even of prayer. Gratefulness is a creative act: a reimaging of our reality and a realignment with things of true importance, regardless of circumstance. I’m particularly grateful in this season of our year – and more broadly, of my life – for creative expressions that allow us the opportunity to partner in new makings and re-makings with our Creator in a chaotic world. May you also find and invest in those things that reveal the wonder-teeming world and its Maker to you in new ways.



PHOTO BY: DIANE RUDAY

HIS MORNING GLORY

DIANE RUDAY

“Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.”

– Lamentations 3:23

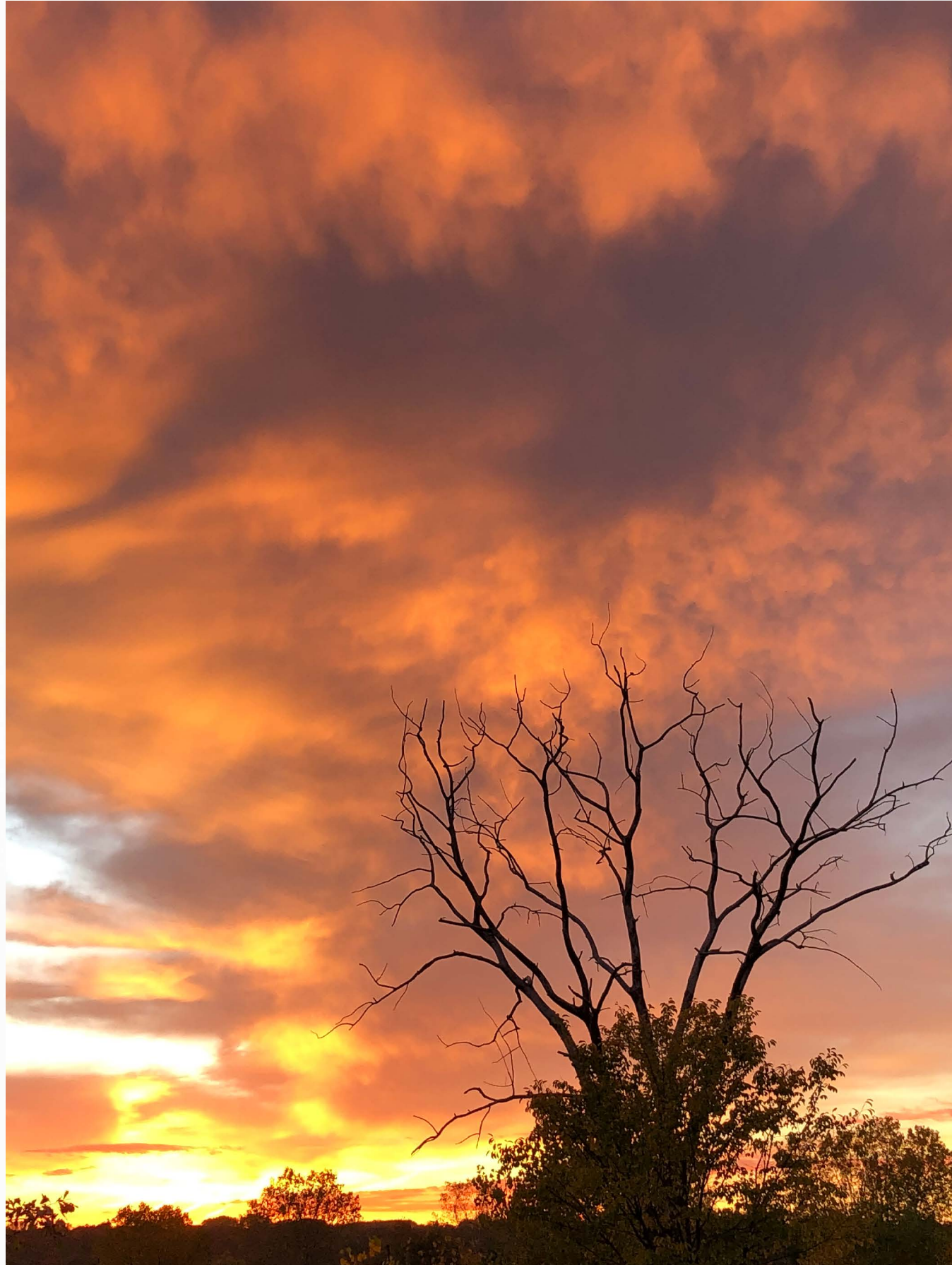


PHOTO BY: DIANE RUDAY

EVERY DAY

SHARON GRIFFIN

I rise before the dawn and wait
for God's morning star.
Slowly, then suddenly,
the eastern sky blazes tangerine and scarlet,
lighting golden the oaks and pines.

Hummingbirds dart from the
maple branches and hover greedily over
sugar-water feeders.

My heart is too small to hold it all,
Gladness swells like waves, rising to my eyes,
spilling over and down my cheeks.

This beauty impressed upon my soul
long before I saw a sunrise.
There is no other answer.
I stand with Job, humbled, in awe, and
grateful for the mystery of each day.

A NEW REALITY

“Alleluia is not a substitute for reality. It is simply the awareness of another whole kind of reality—beyond the immediate, beyond the delusional, beyond the instant perception of things. One of the oldest anthems of the church is Alleluia which simply means ‘all hail to the One who is.’ It is the arch-hymn of praise, the ultimate expression of thanksgiving, the pinnacle of triumph, the acme of human joy. It says that God is good and we know it. In the Hebrew Scriptures the word is an injunction to praise, a call to the people to summon up praise in themselves. It is a challenge to see in life more than is seeable in any single moment and to trust it. –Joan Chittister & Rowan Williams

What reality have you been living in lately? Have you taken time to slow down and breathe in God’s goodness?

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, it can seem like life is wrapped up in a cloud of negativity. Anxiety follows us around like an old piece of gum stuck to our shoe. How do we shake off the funk of adversity and lean into thanksgiving?

As spiritual beings, we are meant to experience a world beyond what we can see. Communing with God helps us to tap into a new reality.

Gratitude Challenge

Scripture: Read Colossians 3:1-3.

Application

Practice God’s presence through prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal his reality today.

LOOK UP

YVETTE GRIFFEA-GRAY



PHOTO BY: YVETTE GRIFFEA-GRAY

I am grateful for hope. Nothing is impossible with God. I am reminded to change my perspective and reframe seemingly impossible situations in the hope of Christ. Look up! I look up to the mountains and hills, longing for God’s help. But then I realize that our true help and protection is only from the Lord, our Creator who made the heavens and the earth. He will guard and guide me, never letting me stumble or fall.

Psalm 121: 1-3

BLESSINGS UNAWARE

TED ROBB

Let me ask you something, have you ever received a gift—a wonderful gift, and though you were truly grateful for it, you couldn't even fathom the depth of its meaning? I recently received such a gift. To give some background first, I've been retired for five years and I really don't mind it at all. Also, I, like everyone else, had some real issues with the last year and a half of COVID stuff. Lock downs, quarantines, masks, etc. You may ask, "What does it matter to you? You're retired." To which I respond, "What's the use of being retired if you can't go anywhere or do anything?"

This spring, however, was supposed to carry with it an awakening. This spring I looked forward to the world opening up again and my own psyche coming alive again. I was going to fish and camp and ride my motorcycle and do hobbies and projects around the house. This year, stuff was going to happen ... I was going to get things done. That is until, on my first fishing trip of the spring, I fell and obliterated a tendon in my arm requiring surgery and a long recovery. I was grounded. I was relegated to very little activity other than TV and YouTube. Depression started setting in. I was really starting to wallow, until a former employer contacted me out of the blue and asked if I would be interested in some part time work. Remember, I've been retired for five years, and really don't mind it.

In my former life, I was a mechanical design engineer. Any other time, I would've turned him down on the spot, but I started thinking about his proposal and realized, two of the few things I could still do were push a mouse and use a keyboard. Also, my brain wasn't totally retired, so I said yes to his offer. It would keep me from going totally buggy and the money wouldn't be such a bad thing, either. So, I came out of retirement.

My wife and I both saw it as a gift from God and thanked him on more than one occasion. It wasn't until sometime later that we realized that the money was more than just an added bonus. Both of us had unplanned medical bills coming due along with some tax bills that we were not quite prepared for. The income from this job helped us immensely in wading through these financial challenges. Not only had God answered my need to do something more than watch TV and YouTube, he had foreseen our financial needs and provided for them as well. At this realization, I can only humbly bow my head and offer heartfelt gratitude from the depths of my soul.

The work and the money are now drying up, but we look at the future not wondering how it will all shake out but knowing that we have a Father God who knows our needs much more than we do, and we can trust him through whatever comes. To him I say, "Thank you."

BEAUTY IN THE BROKEN

YVETTE GRIFFEA-GRAY



PHOTO BY: YVETTE GRIFFEA-GRAY

I waited patiently for the Lord to help me,
and he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the pit of despair,
out of the mud and the mire.
He set my feet on solid ground
and steadied me as I walked along.

Psalm 40: 1-4

I am grateful for my Redeemer. There is a cinematic three part song by Victory Boyd entitled The Broken Instrument i, ii, and iii. The song shares a story about an instrument that has been used, broken and finally discarded by its owners. The instrument eventually makes it to the dump but tries to maintain hope by wondering if the legends of the maker are really true. Garbage piles on burying the instrument deeper and diminishing that hope until at last the maker arrives at the dump to redeem and restore! The Broken Instrument paints a beautiful picture of our King and Redeemer. Please consider listening.

SCARS & GRATITUDE

TIMOTHY CAMERON

I have a large scar on my head, acquired in 1976. I don't hide it. I'm not ashamed of my past nor wish to shut the door on it. I humorously call it my "Bacardi's 151 Scar." I also have scars from acne, fights, and police beatings, and more. I rarely pay these scars any attention, even if someone stares. I'm too focused on loving God and others as myself to wallow in condescension or self-pity. It's mind over matter. If I don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Scars are our Stories of Living, and anyone who doesn't understand scars' true importance hasn't lived yet.

I recall a few years ago having a most curious sensation that maybe I have lived a truly meaningful life. I experienced pure gratitude. I believe it was God talking to me.

Here's another story for your bountiful harvest:

One of the most stunning sights I've seen was in a magazine of a woman who had a double mastectomy. A photographer revealed tattoos that masterfully covered her bare torso. Her breathtaking essence and very spirit itself were captured on film! She stood hands on hips, showing off her confident physical beauty; her smile revealed an indomitable spirit! She shone: I AM BEAUTIFUL! This woman left an indelible mark upon my consciousness. Every time I remember her, I feel beautiful, too.

Would you please allow me to crack one more egg to scramble on your skillet of gratitude?

I give thanks to a fellow MADD speaker that went through hell and back after being hit by a drunk driver. As her mother held her up as she walked from the bathroom to the bedroom, she saw her reflection in a window. Seeing her own pain-filled, grimacing face filled her with rage! She punched her hand through two panes of glass!

After returning from the hospital, she had a breakthrough! It was too much for her to handle alone, and she remembered her love of God. From that time forward, every morning, when her feet hit the floor, she thanks God for another day of living. I thought if she could do it, maybe I could, too!

I saw a plaque hanging on a wall that read that we should seek peace amid the storms of life rather than seek shelter. We've all walked on stormy seas; divorces, diseases, addictions, and other dire straits. These are all equal messengers on the PATHWAY TO PEACE that challenges worldly wisdom. Seeking liberation from these storms happens through an attitude of gratitude. Give thanks in ALL things!

SANDWICHED INTO ONE

MATTHEW JOHNSON

PHOTO BY: MATTHEW JOHNSON

As I looked at this sky
 I felt I was seeing a slice of eternity
 The picture before, the image in my head afterward
 And the awesome beauty of the moment.
 I thought of my high school reunion.
 45 years since I'd seen these people
 When I saw Carl, the image in my head was
 Of him stuffing Nathan into the locker.
 Of him drinking lime vodka and starting the
 False proscenium on fire behind
 the storage shed after the spring musical.
 Of him farting in a jar.
 With these images sandwiched into one
 I didn't see him as he was
 Or even what the credentials, MSW, behind his name
 Said he was.
 And just today, I read that someone lost their job
 For saying something in 1981
 That by today's standards, for sure, perhaps then too
 Reflects the judgment of youth, immaturity,
 Or naivete
 But not the beauty, perhaps of the person at this moment.
 How far do we have to dig to find
 The chunks of coal?
 Not too far
 How do we lift someone up in a way that
 Bears true witness to who they are?
 Right now

BOUND TOGETHER

"Thankfulness is a thread that can bind together all the patchwork squares of our lives. Difficult times, happy days, seasons of sickness, hours of bliss- all can be sewn together into something lovely with the thread of thankfulness." - Adele Calhoun

It can be hard to focus on thankfulness when we feel lonely and isolated. When we are struggling or going through a difficult time, we tend to pull away. Gratitude comes a lot easier when we feel connected.

Community Tool Box is a free, online resource that encourages positive social change. One of their greatest tools for growing healthy communities is gratitude. Their contributing experts say, "Gratitude and appreciation both bring us into deeper contact with our communities. Being able to focus even momentarily on what is working and what we are thankful for can lift us up and out of our single-mindedness and into a more integrated sense of connection with the physical world, and the community around us."

Though personal gratitude is essential for growth, fostering thankfulness in community is just as necessary.

Gratitude Challenge

Scripture: Read Colossians 3:12-17.

Application

Reach out to a friend or family member today and let them know you are thankful for them. Send them a text, email or card. You can even call them on the phone or set up a time to get together.

OUR BODY

TOM WATKINS

In our Body there are many members:

The fingers painting the pain away

The ears recognizing words of truth, love, grace and peace

The knees bending in prayerful devotion

The eyes seeing a vision far into the future

The nose catching the scent of fresh baked bread

The tongue savoring the wine celebrating our first love

The heart that keeps hoping, trusting and persevering in the face of conflict and misunderstanding

The hands spooning rice onto hundreds of plates

The legs aching from the long hike to the Mexican mission village

The arms surrounding the forgiven friend

The eyes filled with tears of inexplicable joy on the morning walk

The lips planting another kiss on the newborn

The lungs refilling with oxygen after being baptized

The veins carrying His blood out to every part of the Body seen and unseen

The stomach no longer hungry but being sustained with a meal provided with generosity and kindness

The torso twisting in the triune dance

And most of all, our head patiently guiding us so we can learn to love together!

A THREAD IN THE TAPESTRY

KAY LEE PENTON



I didn't know her,
had never seen her
before that day in the clinic
waiting for blood tests.
She was slouched in a wheelchair,
had wispy white hair,
a worn throw on her lap
wrapped around her folded arms.

She was there first.
I sat down, pulled out my cellphone
preparing for a long wait but
she needed to be greeted,
acknowledged,
and I needed to not be rude.
"Hot humid weather; need rain; cold in this room"
led to me asking "Who brought you here?"
wondering why she was unaccompanied.

An aide from an assisted living facility
had dropped her off.
She grew up in a tiny town not far away;
was raised, along with a sister,
by her grandmother.
Two brothers, now deceased,
were raised by their mother.

She is eighty four years old;
recently met a brand new grandniece:
Seven pounds, four ounces, and twenty inches at birth.
Her nephew had placed the baby in her lap.
"That tiny girl is so pretty,
so precious.
Her name is Cadence."

I was called first
and stood up to go.
The wheelchair had become a throne
and she was an ancient queen
wearing a silver crown and royal robe
nearing the end of her reign,
at peace and content.

THANKFUL

SUSAN PRAUSE

Diapers, size 2 over small,
 chubby legs,
 Wooden crib from friends that held 4 sleeping
 babes before her,
 Paper turkeys made from tiny handprints in daycare,
 The peas on the floor that
 outnumbered the peas in her mouth,
 The bibs lovingly cross-stitched by her grandmother years ago
 now covered in stains of foods she loved or didn't,
 The tiny arms that clung tight and raised in request,
 hold me longer, more, always...

The cries in the night that woke me instantly and the
 sleepy head that begged to be nestled close to my heart,
 The firsts came and went so quickly, baba or mama,
 which was first, I will choose mama because she is my first
 and only.

An eternal Father who understood the longing of my
 heart and showed me Hope revealed in the flesh of a babe...
 my babe now a young woman who asks what she was like
 when she was in diapers, size 2.

The memories tumble through my mind,
 pictures become stories and I'm there with that babe,
 at the same time with this young woman...
 I am thankful for all the moments up until
 this moment...
 and my heart is contented.

NEW ONE

TYLER ROGNESS



Today I heard the wondrous news
 while pillow held my head.
 As blankets folded me this morn,
 your tidings gladly said:

New feet you'll have to walk the fields
 and stride amid the glade,
 And wander all throughout the earth,
 and reckon the Maker-made.

New hands to mar, new hands to mend,
 new hands to work and play.
 To grapple with this broken world;
 for beauty make a way.

A heart to love, a heart to ache,
 to wonder and to wit.
 A heart to know its sacred source
 that moves inside of it.

Welcome, new one, dearly loved.
 You will always have a place
 within our arms. We tense await
 the day we see your face.



PHOTO BY: YVETTE GRIFFEA-GRAY

I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE... GOODNESS

*"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living." - Psalm 27:13*

Navigating life can be complicated and overwhelming. Of all people, Jesus could attest to this. In John 16:33, Jesus told his disciples, "In this world you will have trouble." It's comforting to know that we are not alone in our hardship. He is able to empathize with our struggles. Even more than that, his sacrifice brought us hope beyond despair. He goes on to say, "Take heart! I have overcome the world." His loving kindness made a way for us to experience the gift of his overwhelming goodness.

Gratitude Challenge

Scripture: Read all of 1 Chronicles 16. Then read it again in light of Jesus' redemptive work on the cross.

Application

Make a list of God's goodness and hang it on your mirror, on your fridge or near your desk at work.

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE CITY

EMILY MORRISON

My favorite part of fall is the way God graffiti's up the trees in red and orange and yellow.

During my four years in South Minneapolis, I've walked hundreds of miles of city streets, and I've unexpectedly fallen in love with human graffiti, too: the unconventional art and poetry that shows up on sidewalks, bridges and utility poles.

There is rage, grief and fear, but the chalk and stickers and paint also burst with joy, humor and love. Taken all together, I find the hopes and dreams of a city, and the full spectrum of what it feels like to be human.

I've often sung the hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth," thanking God for:

The beauty of each hour
The hill and vale and tree and flow'r

But this fall something resembling a hymn comes out of me in a sideways sort of way. It is a song of gratitude for the sidewalks of South Minneapolis, and it goes like this:

For the beauty of this city
For buildings that scrape the sky
For the stencil dripping dry
For the whimsy on this fence
For the love etched in cement
For the color over grey
For the wonder of this day

Lord of all (both city and countryside), to thee we raise,
This our hymn of grateful praise.

this
is
not
new
york



DEEP ROOTS OF GRATITUDE

TERESA SAYLES

PHOTO BY: TERESA SAYLES



Sitting on my couch, I can see the trees, their shifting boughs an explosion of color. I can hear the rattle of hundreds of leaves slapping and scraping against one another in the comforting blow of a crisp fall wind. It is the kind of scene I relish and am grateful for each year. But I know it will not last. In a matter of days, those very leaves I am enamored of now will slip from their branches, flutter through the air, and fall to the ground. All life will be drained from their veins until they, like their forebears, return bit by bit to the earth from which they were made.

I have always loved trees. There's something majestic in how they stand with boughs outstretched toward the heavens while their roots plunge deep into the earth to anchor them against time and storm. And yet, as solitary as a tree may seem, it is one of the most generous of God's creations.

Genesis 1 says God caused dry ground to come up from the endless sea. The dry ground then brought forth life in the form of growing things. And while this garden was beyond beautiful all on its own, it had a deeper purpose: It was in this perfect garden - this piece of heaven come to earth - that the Triune God placed their crowning creation. Humanity was formed and given its first breath of life within this utopia of growing things. God told the humans to be fruitful and multiply, spreading the goodness of God's creation beyond themselves into the world just as the fruitfulness of the trees of the garden provided sustenance and life for them. All this, God proclaimed to be very good.

It was at the foot of a tree that humanity failed, taking that which does not produce life and refusing to trust in God's goodness. Yet, it was upon a tree that God gave up his life, redeeming humanity with a love they could not comprehend. And when God's ultimate victory is fulfilled and every tear is wiped away and the world restored to what it was meant to be, we are told there will be trees whose fruit will give eternal life and whose very leaves will heal the nations.

Throughout Scripture, trees and growing things are often found in or near pivotal moments when God meets with people, asking them to step forward in faith, and I find even for myself when I am in moments of struggle or decision-making, I need to find trees. To walk among them, hear the whisper of their leaves in the breeze, and feel the rough bark under my fingers. They still my soul, drawing me back to that moment in time when the world was unbroken and very good. And while the leaves of the trees I look at now will inevitably fall, I know God uses even their death to nourish the soil and bring forth future life.

I want to be more like a tree, willing to let go of that which needs to change or even be given away to bring new life to another. I want to be fruitful, allowing the works of my hands and my mind to be purposeful and restorative. I want to grow my roots deep into the soil of God's goodness, trusting in God's strength to hold me against whatever may come my way. I want my branches to spread wide as they soak up the light, my leaves in turn providing oxygen, shade, rest and new life for others.

If we could all be a little more like trees, what a mighty, life-giving forest we might be in this broken world.

SAVORING THE SUN

PAM TAYLOR



GRATITUDE KNOCKS

PAM TAYLOR



PHOTO BY:PAM TAYLOR



PHOTO BY:PAM TAYLOR

ABUNDANT HARVEST

PAM TAYLOR

CREATIVITY & GRATITUDE

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” – Ephesians 2:10

Creativity as a practice invites us to draw closer to God and his Kingdom. Alabaster is a company that integrates art with Scripture. One of their blog writers, Geoff Gentry says, “We are not only invited to create new things but to partner with God to fill the Earth with the divine creative Spirit that humans received as a gift.” When we meditate on the abundance of God and create with him, gratitude spills over and flows forth.

Gratitude Challenge

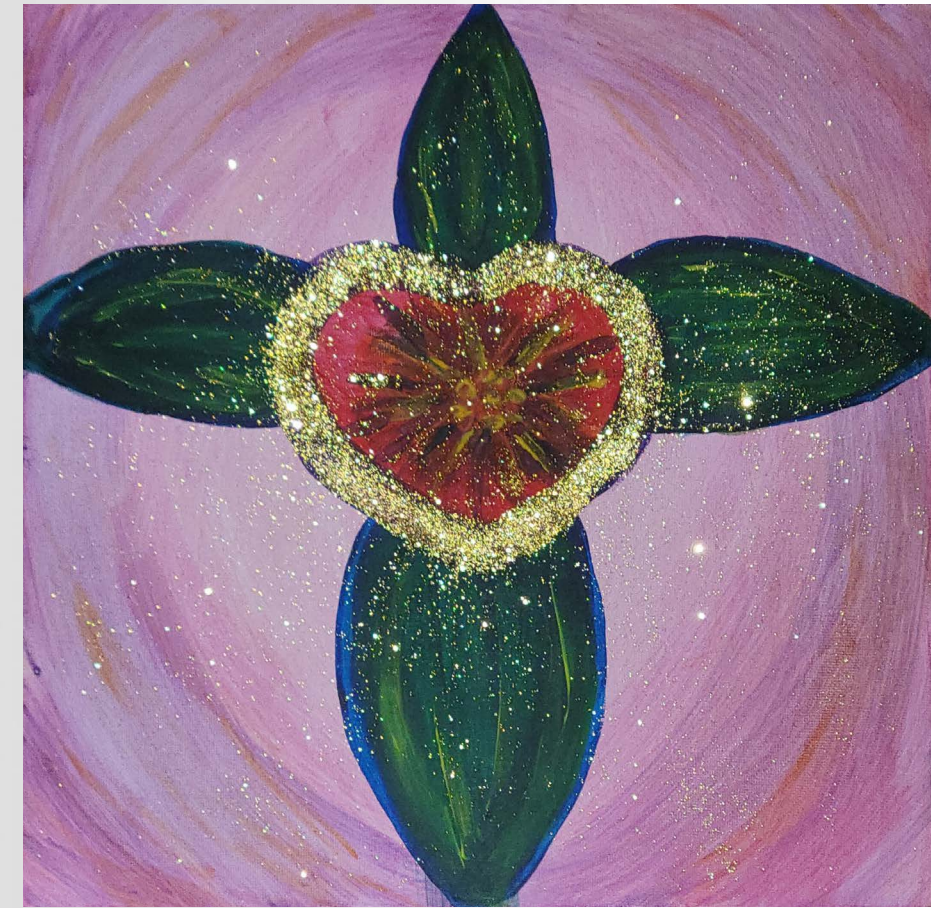
Scripture: Read Psalm 139:14.

Application

Set aside some time to create and invite God into the process. Write in a journal, paint a picture, bake, doodle, go outside and take photos.

ART FOR THE HEART

MEGAN ROMERO



This painting was created during a time when God took hold of my life in a major way. He put me in a HUGE spiritual timeout and gave me a choice to make. I had to choose if I was going to keep running from him or surrender.

Surrendering to God has been and still is the hardest thing I have done in my life. It has also been, without a doubt, the most freeing and rewarding thing. Left to my own will I want control, I want to do things my way, I want to run, to fight, to hide, to overpower. Life is a constant battle of my will versus God's will.

I am learning to walk in surrender and obedience. As I obey and choose God, he transforms my heart. He is giving me a heart of flesh instead of stone. Slowly, as I learn to walk by faith and not by sight, God changes me. He changes my heart.

This painting was birthed out of a day I chose to do things God's way instead of my own. Doing things my way usually involved getting high and emotionally avoiding life. God gave me art as a way to reflect and process life. God showed me how to use art to heal my heart. In the painting, I was expressing what I was sensing in my spirit. That Christ is my source of life, that he can make our hearts grow like flowers. That when we choose God, we choose to grow. Growing isn't always easy, but it is so worth all the beauty that it brings. I am grateful for the growth and how God can use art to touch our hearts.

ROSE IS STILL A ROSE

YVETTE GRIFFEA-GRAY



PHOTO BY: YVETTE GRIFFEA-GRAY

I am grateful for the promise that I am a new creation in Christ. The old has passed away. The new has come. I am who God says I am.

GRATEFUL FOR THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

LILA DILLER



ABUNDANT THANKS

“Gratitude is a divine emotion: it fills the heart, but not to bursting; it warms it, but not to fever.” – Charlotte Bronte

Dear reader,

After reading this, we hope you feel warmly embraced by God’s love and encouraged to keep pressing forward. Gratitude is the great connector and encourager.

Dear artist,

Thank you for tapping into gratitude and sharing your unique perspectives with the broader community. May your whole being continue to be nourished by thanksgiving.