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**2018: Your Year of Gratitude**

Think of the three happiest people you know – people whose lives effervesce with joy and peace. Chances are they also have a profound thankfulness for all that God has blessed them with. They also seem to live with a sense of contentment. Reflect for a minute. Isn’t that the case?

By contrast, you may also know folks who are considered wealthy but are profoundly UNhappy. Likely they not only fail to exude thankfulness for their wealth, but they also mistakenly believe they need even MORE possessions to be happy. Isn’t that right?

Now, which kind of person do you tend to be?

Thankfulness. Happiness. Contentment. These joyful characteristics work together, reinforcing one another. Human experience proves this simple fact to be true: People who are grateful for all they have and all they are tend to be happy and content. Moreover, don’t they also tend to possess spiritual depth and emotional maturity? A coincidence? Hardly.

Thankfulness, happiness and contentment interact, but gratitude holds the key. Develop gratitude, then happiness and contentment follow. It doesn’t work the other way around. With prayer, devotion and simple exercises, the Holy Spirit will lead you to deeper spiritual maturity and more happiness. Here are some ideas for you and your family.

* **Pray daily.** Ask God to give you a greater sense of thankfulness. And then thank God for all the day’s blessings.
* **Chart thankfulness.** On a big wall calendar mark one thing for which you’re thankful to God. Invite other family members to do the same. When you get in the habit of looking for them, you will find blessings everywhere.
* **Keep a “blessing list.”** Write down the things you are grateful for. Then as you say your nighttime and morning devotions, pray over the list: “God, I’m thankful for *this*, and I’m thankful for *that*.” Revise the list as needed.
* **Start a refrigerator “gratitude board.”** Using sticky notes, post on your refrigerator the things for which you are most grateful. Use a different color sticky note for each family member. Keep the board updated.
* **Send out thank-you notes.** Buy a box of inexpensive thank you notes and send one every week. Go deep, thanking not only the folks who have given you a present or done a favor for you, but also those whose love, support, friendship, laughter, energy or presence are important to you.
* **Make a “thank offering.”** Express gratitude in a tangible way by making a contribution to your congregation or favorite church cause. Make the donation “just because,” or in honor or memory of a loved one, or on the occasion of a special event or blessing in your life.

Adopt one or more of these exercises as a spiritual discipline and, with God’s help, you will develop the attitude of gratitude that will bring more satisfaction, greater happiness, spiritual depth and emotional maturity to your life. Blessings for 2018.

*--Rob Blezard*

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