

A DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL



# 364 DAYS OF THANKSGIVING

ANDREW C. SCHROER

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TO MY WIFE, CLARIZA; MY DAUGHTER, ISABEL; AND MY SON, ANDY.  
AFTER JESUS, THEY ARE WHAT I AM MOST THANKFUL FOR.

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Design Team: Carianne Ciriacks, Sarah Messner

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## WHY WRITE A BOOK ABOUT BEING THANKFUL?

A few years ago, a young mother tried to commit suicide. By God's grace she was unsuccessful. Because of a connection her family had with our church, her husband called me the next morning, asking me to visit her in the hospital.

As I spoke with her, it became obvious that she was deeply depressed about her marriage and family. The doctors ordered that she receive medication and professional counseling. She also asked that I visit her once a week.

Feeling overwhelmed by the situation, I asked a psychologist friend for help. He explained to me that depression is often anger turned inward. He suggested that she was so angry about the problems in her life, she couldn't see the good God had given her. Among other things, he advised me to have her keep a notebook by her bed.

Every morning and every evening, the young mother was to write down one good thing in her life—but each time it had to be something different. She couldn't repeat the same blessing even once.

Over the next few weeks, as her list grew longer, her attitude grew brighter. She began to notice all the blessings God had given her, especially God's greatest gift of forgiveness. She began to see that even the problems were part of God's gracious plan for her life. She began to smile again. Soon she was weaned off the antidepressant medication.

That young mother was the inspiration for this book.

Are you depressed? Are you frustrated by the problems and struggles in your life? The secret to happiness isn't to rid your life of problems. The secret to happiness isn't getting what you want. The secret to happiness is recognizing what you have in Christ.

This book is about seeing what God has done for you.

I am personally grateful to those who have helped make this book possible. I especially would like to thank Pastor Michael and Rachel Hartman; Christy Bagasao, owner and editor of *The Simple Homemaker* blog; and Julie Wietzke, editor of *Forward in Christ* magazine, for their valuable insights and encouragement.

But most of all, I thank my God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Everything I am and everything I have is because of him.

# CHAPTER 1

## OVERWHELMING GRATITUDE

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*“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues,  
but the parent of all others.”* — CICERO

*“A thankful heart hath a  
continual feast.”* — W.J. CAMERON

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The British author Charles Dickens once commented that we are somewhat backward here in America. Instead of having just one Thanksgiving Day each year, we should have 364. “Use that one day just for complaining and griping,” he said. “Use the other 364 days to thank God each day for the many blessings he has showered upon you.”

That is the simple premise of this little book. At the end of this book is a journal. My hope and prayer is that over the next 364 days, you take the time to think about and write down one thing each day for which you are thankful. There is a catch, though. It has to be a different blessing each day. Throughout the entire year you cannot repeat the same blessing even once.

On day 365, instead of spending the day griping and complaining as Charles Dickens recommends, read through your entire *364 Days of Thanksgiving Journal*. My prayer is that through this simple exercise, God will help you grow in your love and appreciation for his many and varied gifts.

Before we begin our yearlong journey of thanks, however, let’s remind ourselves what it means to be thankful, what it means to be *overwhelmingly* thankful, and how we display that thankfulness in our lives.

## AN EXAMPLE OF OVERWHELMING GRATITUDE

Jesus once was walking on the road to Jerusalem. As he approached a small village, he suddenly heard what sounded like whispers in the wind. He glanced around. There, standing about a football field away, were ten emaciated, disfigured men. Their voices were strained and weak, but they gathered the strength to get Jesus' attention.

"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" they cried.

They were lepers. Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, has been all but eradicated from our world today. In Jesus' day, however, leprosy was a plague. There were no treatments. A leper's march toward death was long and painful. Due to the contagious nature of the disease and the stigma attached to it, most lepers were sent away from society to live in enclaves called leper colonies.

In ancient Israel, lepers were considered "unclean." People suffering from such diseases were forbidden to join in the worship at the temple or to live with the rest of God's people. If someone were to approach them, they were to cry out, "Unclean! Stay away!"

So these men stood at a distance. They didn't come near Jesus. They simply called to him in their weak and scratchy voices, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

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### **YOU CAN'T BE THANKFUL WITHOUT HAVING SOMEONE TO THANK.**

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When Jesus heard their faint cries for help and saw their sore-filled faces, he did have pity on them. He yelled to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

If people were to recover from leprosy, they would need to show themselves to a priest. The priest would declare them "clean" and able to rejoin society. Until the priest declared them clean, they were still outcasts.

The men did what Jesus said. They turned and set off to see the priests. As they did, their pain dissipated. Their sores

disappeared. Their voices returned. Nine of the ten picked up the pace. They happily hurried to see the priests so they could return to their homes and lives. But one stopped. When he realized he was healed, he ran back to Jesus as fast as he could, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. Luke tells us he was a Samaritan, a foreigner.

When we hear that story, we often find ourselves angry with the other nine men. How could they be so ungrateful?

If you read the story of the ten lepers in Luke chapter 17, though, you will notice that it does not say the other nine were not thankful. In fact, they did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They went to show themselves to the priests. We can only imagine that when they were given a clean bill of health, they thanked and praised God as they returned to their families and lives.

The point of the story is not that the other nine were ungrateful. The point is how *overwhelmingly* grateful the Samaritan was. He put off the one thing that he had desired for so long—to be told by the priest he could go home—and put off being reunited with his family and friends to first return and thank the person who had healed him.

The Samaritan understood that thankfulness is not some nebulous, vague feeling. Gratitude cannot exist where there is no giver. You can't be thankful without having someone to thank.

The Samaritan realized it was God who deserved the credit. He recognized it was Jesus who healed him. So he ran. He cried. He fell at Jesus' feet and thanked him with overwhelming gratitude.

## **AN EXAMPLE OF OVERWHELMING GENEROSITY**

Not too long after his encounter with the ten lepers, Jesus visited the city of Jericho. In just a few short days, on Palm Sunday, he would enter Jerusalem surrounded by adoring

fans. Even now, crowds gathered around him. The paparazzi hounded him. The frenzied crowds reached out to touch him.

A man named Zacchaeus was part of that crowd in Jericho, but Zacchaeus had a problem. He was short. He couldn't see over the crowd.

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## **OVERWHELMING GRATITUDE LEADS TO OVERWHELMING GENEROSITY.**

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Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, however, so he climbed a sycamore-fig tree just to catch a glimpse of him. When Jesus reached the tree,

he looked straight up into the limbs and said, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

A gasp went out from the crowd. They knew who Zacchaeus was. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. In our day, someone who collects taxes isn't always very popular. In Zacchaeus' day, tax collectors were considered the scum of society.

You see, the Roman government hired individuals from each country to collect the imperial taxes. These tax collectors were required to collect a certain amount from each individual. If a tax collector could get more from each person during his collection, he could keep the difference. Oh, and behind the tax collector stood Roman soldiers, making sure the people paid.

Suffice it to say, tax collectors became very rich. They were considered corrupt politicians, traitors to their fellow people, the scum of society.

Now Jesus was going to stay at Zacchaeus' house. The people began to whisper. Jesus' enemies began to mutter, "Doesn't he know that he is going to be the guest of a 'sinner'?"

Zacchaeus, however, was overwhelmingly excited to have such a famous guest come to his house. Luke chapter 19 doesn't tell us what the two discussed in Zacchaeus' home, but we can be sure that Jesus spoke about sin and forgive-

ness. That was the most important message people needed to hear.

Realizing his sin and meeting his Savior changed Zacchaeus. He was so overwhelmingly thankful, he stood up and said, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Overwhelming gratitude is more than words. Overwhelming gratitude leads to overwhelming generosity.

Are you thankful? I’m assuming you are. You recognize God’s goodness and many of the blessings he has showered upon you. You say “thank you” to God in your prayers. You tell people that you are blessed. You are thankful.

My prayer is that this book helps you become *overwhelmingly* thankful. My prayer is that you find the joy of being overwhelmingly generous.