

Practicing Thanksgiving in All Seasons

Discussion Questions:

(Summary) – There are three stages of gratitude: gratitude as a reaction (where gratitude is merely a function of our feelings), gratitude as a personal discipline (where we choose to be grateful for the material blessings we have even if we don't necessarily feel like it in the moment), and gratitude as an expression of faith (where we choose to be grateful, even in the loss of everything in this world, because of our Kingdom blessings which we have not yet taken hold of). Practicing thanksgiving in all seasons requires us to progressively develop from the first to the last.

- *Being honest...what type of gratefulness do you identify with the most? Is your gratefulness mainly driven by your feelings in the moment or have you developed the discipline to choose gratefulness regardless of your circumstances? Are you able to express gratefulness for your Kingdom blessings, even though you haven't fully laid hold of them yet, or is your choice to be grateful based more on your material blessings in this present world?*

Complaints are the opposite of gratitude. Complaints are what someone in the first stage of gratitude shifts to when he/she no longer feels happy. A clear sign that our gratitude is merely a function of our feelings is the speed with which we can alternate between thanksgiving and complaining.

- *Are you a complainer? Do you regularly find yourself bemoaning your circumstances? What might this indicate about where you are in your gratitude development?*
- *What is it about complaints that make them so spiritually toxic? Is there a way to express our pain and frustration in difficult times that acknowledges our feelings, but not in a spiritually harmful way? If yes, how do we do it? How does it differ from complaining?*

One way to define happiness is: *the general state of experiencing more positive emotions (joy, satisfaction, optimism, etc.) than negative ones (sadness, frustration, hopelessness, etc).* With this in mind, depression is the function of the reversal of this state. People become depressed when *they experience more negative emotions than positive over an extended period of time.* Some people are more prone to depression than others and at times it's necessary to treat depression medically.

However, developing the discipline of gratitude will naturally introduce happiness into our lives and combat depression, so it is in everyone's best interest to develop this discipline.

- *Are you a happier person by nature or are you more prone towards depression? (Keep in mind that this isn't a right or wrong question. The natural propensity towards happiness or depression isn't necessary something we can control. It is often just part of our personality.)*
- *If you struggle with depression, how do you cope with it when it comes? Does practicing gratefulness help bring you out of it over time? Describe a situation when practicing gratefulness brought you out of depression.*
- *Are you by nature introverted or extroverted? Is the propensity toward depression linked to these personality types (introverted = more depressed / extroverted = less depressed) or is the propensity toward depression unconnected to them?*