



# Gratitude

## *Faithful & Grateful Living in Hard Places*

Jeremiah 29:1, 4–7; Psalm 66:1–11; 2 Timothy 2:8–15; Luke 17:11–19

### **Main Point:**

God calls us to live faithfully wherever He places us—  
enduring trials with hope, remaining rooted in His Word,  
and responding with grateful hearts that overflow in worship and witness.

### **Introduction**

Have you ever heard about what psychologists call the “gratitude experiment”?

In one study, participants were asked to write a letter of thanks to someone they’d never properly thanked. Then, without warning, they were told to actually go and read it aloud to that person.

The results were incredible. Almost every time, both the giver and the receiver ended up with tears in their eyes. But what was most striking was what happened afterwards. The people who gave thanks reported being happier, more optimistic, and less stressed — not just that day, but for weeks afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

Other research confirms this. People who regularly practice gratitude — whether through journaling, prayer, or simply saying “thank you” — experience better sleep, stronger relationships, lower stress levels, and even improved immune function. Gratitude doesn’t just feel good; it’s actually good for you.<sup>2</sup> And yet, as simple as it sounds, gratitude doesn’t always come naturally.

We’re quick to notice what’s missing, what’s wrong, how we would do it differently if it was up to us or what hasn’t gone our way.

That’s why the story in Luke 17 of the ten lepers is so powerful. Ten were healed, but only one turned back. Ten received the gift, but only one gave thanks.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.utexas.edu/2018/08/28/showing-gratitude-improves-well-being/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42761-022-0016-3>

Gratitude is the difference between simply receiving God's blessings and actually recognising His hand at work in our lives.

These gratitude studies shows us something we often forget: gratitude is not automatic.

It takes awareness, humility, and faith to stop, turn back, and give thanks.

And that's really the heartbeat of today's readings. Each of them shows God's people in hard or unexpected places — exiled in Babylon, tested in the wilderness, chained in prison, or living with leprosy.

Yet in every situation, God calls His people to respond with faith: to be present where He's placed them, to endure with hope in His promises, and to live with grateful hearts that recognise His hand at work.

### **Point 1: God Calls Us to Be Faithful Where We Are**

Jeremiah wrote to God's people who had been taken from their homeland and carried off into exile in Babylon. They wanted to go home. They longed for things to return to the way they used to be. False prophets were telling them it would all be over quickly.

But God's word through Jeremiah was startling: *"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city... pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."* (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

In other words: *Don't pine for the promised place, live the promise in your present place of exile.* Even in a foreign land, God's people were to put down roots, contribute to society, and seek the good of their neighbours. They were to be a blessing, even in a place they didn't want to be.

That's a word for us too. Sometimes we're waiting for life to change before we start living faithfully. We think, "Once I get through this season, then I'll serve. Once my situation improves, then I'll be generous. Once life settles down, then I'll follow God more closely."

But God calls us to be faithful now. Right where we are. Even if life feels like exile. Our clubs, workplaces or neighbourhoods—even difficult family situations—are all places where God calls us to seek the good of others. Faithful living in hard places begins with faithful presence.

### **Point 2: God Refines and Sustains Us Through Trials**

The psalmist calls the whole earth to shout for joy to God. Why? Because God has shown His power and His faithfulness to His people. He brought them through the Red Sea. He sustained them in the wilderness. But notice: the psalmist doesn't skip over the hard parts. He says:

*"You tested us, O God; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance."* (Psalm 66:10-12)

God doesn't promise to spare His people from trials—but He does promise to use them for good. Testing, refining, and strengthening us, just like silver in the fire.

Paul echoes this in his letter to Timothy. Paul was in chains, suffering for the gospel. Yet he declared: *"God's word is not chained."* (2 Timothy 2:9) Paul's hope was unshaken, because Christ had been raised from the dead.

Paul reminds Timothy—and us—that the Christian life is about endurance. *"If we endure, we will also reign with him."* (2 Timothy 2:12) And he urges Timothy to present himself as one approved by God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 3:17)

This is the shape of discipleship: endurance in hardship, confidence and living in the light of God's promises now, by being committed to the truth of the gospel. When trials come—and they will—we can trust that God is using them to refine us, to build endurance, and to anchor us more deeply in the resurrection hope of Jesus Christ. Faithful living in hard places requires enduring hope.

### **Point 3: God's Work Calls Forth Gratitude and Faith**

Finally, Luke tells us of Jesus healing ten lepers. They all cried out for mercy. Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests. As they went, they were cleansed. But only one—a Samaritan, an outsider—turned back. He threw himself at Jesus' feet, praising God and thanking Him. Jesus asks, *"Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"* And then He says to the Samaritan: *"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."* (Luke 17:17, 19)

It's a story, not only about Christ's authority over sickness and disease, but also about gratitude and faith. Ten were healed, but only one recognised the true source of healing. Only one came back to glorify God. His gratitude was evidence of his faith.

This is the heartfelt-response God desires: not just receiving His gifts, but recognising His grace, turning back, and living in thankful dependence on Him. Faithful living in hard places is not only about presence and endurance—it's also about grateful faith.

### **Application: Living Faithfully Today**

So, what does this mean for us?

1. **Be Present Where You Are.** Don't wait for the perfect season to live faithfully. In your volunteering, in your family, in your community—seek the peace and good of others. Pray for them. Be a blessing.
2. **Endure With Hope.** Trials will come, but God is at work in them. He is refining you, sustaining you, and preparing you for the abundance of His kingdom. Remember: even when you feel chained, God's Spirit is not chained.
3. **Live With Gratitude.** Like the Samaritan leper, take time to give thanks. Gratitude reorients our hearts to God. It reminds us that every good gift comes from Him, and that salvation and healing is His work alone.

If we live with presence, endurance, and gratitude, we will be faithful witnesses in hard places. And others will see, through us, the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Some families keep what they call a "gratitude jar" on the kitchen bench. Every day, each person writes down one thing they're thankful for — big or small — and drops it in the jar.

At the end of the year, they open it together and read aloud all the slips of paper. It's a simple practice, but it changes the atmosphere in the home. Instead of focusing on what went wrong,

they remember God's blessings. Instead of being consumed by stress, they find joy in what He has already done.

So, Jeremiah's exiles, the psalmist's trials, Paul's chains, and the Samaritan's gratitude—all point us to the same truth: God is faithful, even in hard places. He calls us to live faithfully, not someday, but today. Wherever you are, whatever season you're in—whether it feels like exile, testing, chains, or healing—remember: God is with you. God is working. And God is worthy of your trust, endurance, and thanks.

## *Closing Prayer*

Gracious God,  
we thank you that you are faithful in every season. When life feels like exile, give us courage to be present and to seek the good of others. When trials weigh us down, give us endurance and hope in Christ's resurrection. When blessings come, give us thankful hearts that turn back to you in praise. Make us faithful witnesses in hard places, so that others may see your goodness and give glory to your name.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## *Reflection Questions*

### **1. Faithful Presence (Jeremiah 29:1, 4–7)**

- Where has God placed you right now that feels like "exile" or simply not what you expected? How might you seek the peace and good of others in that place this week?

### **2. Enduring Hope (Psalm 66:1–11; 2 Timothy 2:8–15)**

- Think of a time when God used a trial or hardship to refine you or strengthen your faith. How does remembering Christ's resurrection help you endure when life feels heavy?

### **3. Grateful Faith (Luke 17:11–19)**

- Why do you think only one leper returned to thank Jesus? What helps you cultivate gratitude in your own life?

### **4. Living Faithfully in Hard Places**

- Which of the three themes—presence, endurance, or gratitude—do you most need to focus on in this season of your life? What practical step could you take this week to grow in that area?

### **5. Witness to Others**

- How might your response to challenges (being present, enduring with hope, or showing gratitude) be a witness to the people around you? Who in your life needs to see Christ's hope through you right now?