

7-SESSION TEEN BIBLE STUDY

LEARNING TO
LEAD
AS A DISCIPLE
OF JESUS

PHILIPPIANS

BRENT
CROWE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brent Crowe is a thought-provoking visionary and communicator who has a passion to present the life-changing message of the gospel. Brent uses humor and real-life situations to relate to people at the heart of their struggles. The roles of husband, father, minister, evangelist, author, and leader have allowed Brent to influence people from all walks of life throughout his twenty years in ministry.

Engaging issues such as leadership, culture, and change, Brent speaks to hundreds of thousands across the nation and abroad each year and is currently serving as Vice President for Student Leadership University, a program that has trained over one hundred and fifty thousand students to commit themselves to excellence.

He is also the author of *Moments 'til Midnight*, *Sacred Intent: Maximize the Moments of Your Life*, *Reimagine: What the World Would Look Like If God Got His Way*, *Chasing Elephants: Wrestling with the Gray Areas of Life*, the Associate Editor of *IMPACT: The Student Leadership Bible*, and the co-author of *The Call*. His latest work will be released in November 2021.

The desire of Brent's heart is to see people realize that they have been set apart to the gospel of God, and in turn, they must set their lives apart in an effort to capture every moment in worshipful service to Him.

Brent Crowe is married to Christina and has six children, Gabe, Charis, Za'Riah, Mercy, Zi'Yon, and Aryanna. He holds a Doctorate in Philosophy and two masters degrees, a Masters of Divinity in Evangelism and a Masters of Arts in Ethics, from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

INTRODUCTION

How do you lead, influence, and shine in the world today? Many people toil tirelessly trying to build their own personal brand, faking it until they make it. But as a disciple of Jesus, how should you approach leadership, influence, and shining for all to see? What should direct your path and guide your thoughts?

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he offers a guide for our quest. To sum it up succinctly, leadership begins at the feet of Jesus. Paul knew this all too well. For a long time, he tried really hard to do it his way—and then Jesus. We really can stop there because that's what Jesus did on a dusty road to Damascus. He stopped Paul, then called Saul, dead in his tracks.

That's what this Bible study is all about, helping you learn how to lead like Jesus. Thankfully, it's not some aspirational, unattainable, distant star you can never reach. Leading like Jesus is simple, but costly. It means considering others, living in gratitude, serving with humility, embracing boldness, striving for excellence, and a divine optimism that can only come from Jesus Himself. It's countercultural and takes initiative, but it's worth it. I'm excited for you to take this journey and I look forward to seeing how Jesus will teach you to shine like stars in the world!

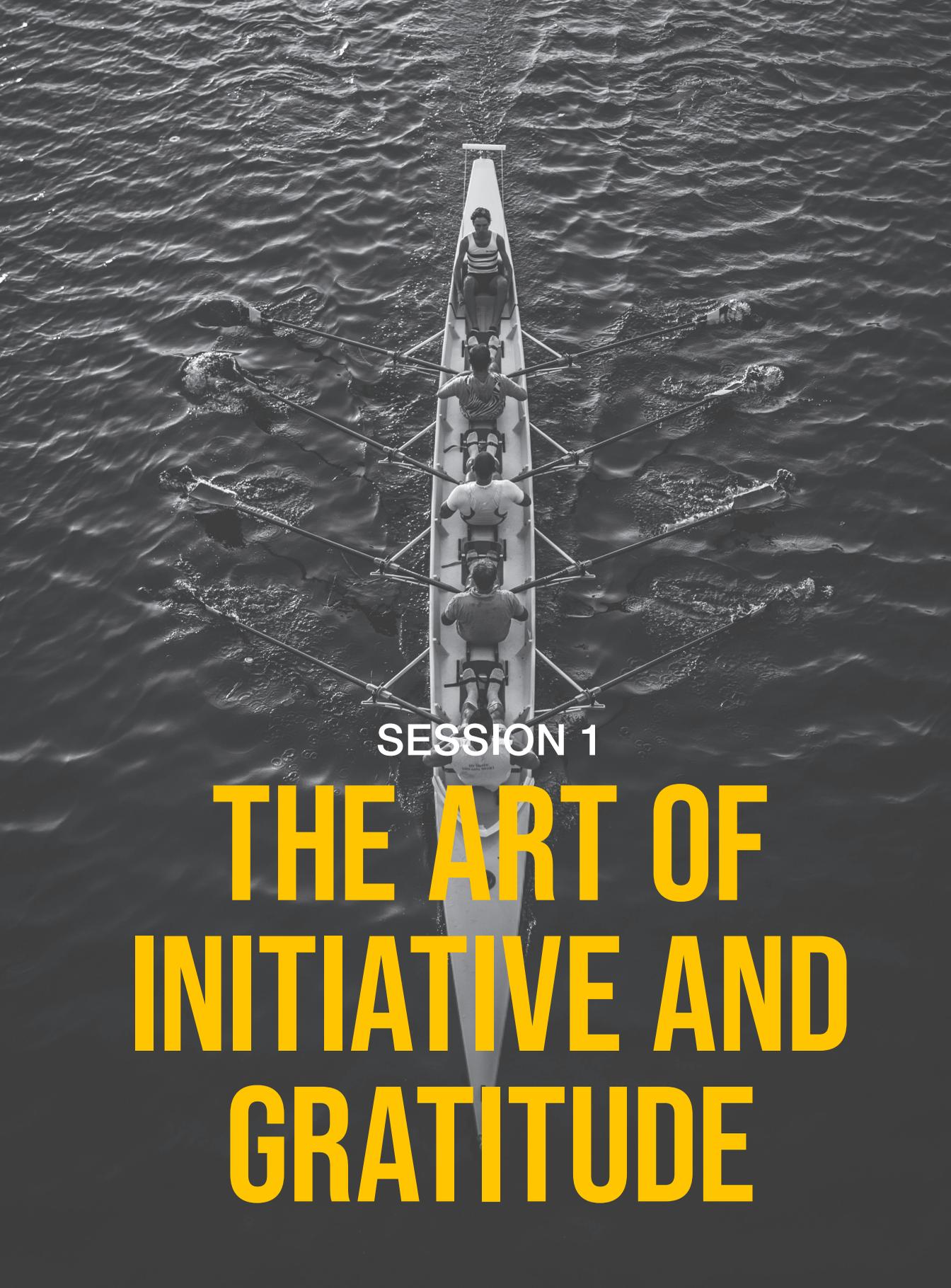
HOW TO USE

VIDEO GUIDE: Begin each session by watching the video of Brent's teaching and interviews. There is a Video Guide at the start of each session to help students follow along while watching.

GROUP DISCUSSION: Every session includes a Group Discussion to help lead students through the material, either on their own or as a group. Be sure to save time to answer the discussion questions at the end of each session.

PERSONAL STUDY: Each session also includes four days of personal study. Encourage students to set aside time throughout the week leading up to your next group meeting to complete these pages.

LEADER GUIDE: In the back of this study, there is a Leader Guide to help leaders prepare for each session with an outline, Scripture references, optional applications, and prayer prompts.



SESSION 1

THE ART OF INITIATIVE AND GRATITUDE

VIDEO GUIDE

SCRIPTURE:

I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart ...

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-7a

NOTES:

INTERESTING QUOTE:

KEY POINTS:

Larry Takes Flight

In 1982, at the age of thirty-three, a truck driver named Larry Walters was sitting in his backyard in Los Angeles, California. Leaning back in a lawn chair with a cool beverage in hand and a nice breeze on his face, a thought entered his mind, “I wonder what it would be like to fly?” It was a thought that had been with him since childhood. No one quite knows why this moment was different from all the others, but what happened next caught the attention of the world.

Larry acquired forty-five helium weather balloons, a two-way radio, a parachute, some sandwiches, and a BB gun.¹ The idea was to attach the balloons to the lawn chair, float up above his neighborhood, enjoy a simple meal, maybe talk to someone on the radio, then systematically shoot the balloons until he safely—and slowly—descended back to the ground below. What could possibly go wrong? (Don’t try this at home—things go wrong.)

Once Larry began floating up in his flying lawn chair, he just kept on going higher and higher. The next thing he knew, he was two miles above the earth’s surface and hovering in the airspace of Los Angeles International Airport. Planes on approach that day looked out their window and struggled to believe what they were seeing: a man with a BB gun floating in a lawn chair! As the balloons began to lose their helium, Larry rapidly came crashing back to earth and landed in power lines, which most likely saved his life.

Larry survived his flight, though he was hospitalized for a while. Eventually, he got back to normal life, and everyone wanted to interview him. Robert Fulghum wrote about Larry’s flight in his classic work *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. He pointed out that all the journalists and television talk show hosts who interviewed Larry asked the same basic questions:

“Were you scared?”

“Why did you do it?”

Each time Larry gave the same response, “Was I scared? Wonderfully so.” As to the why, he would simply say, “You can’t just sit there.”²

TAKING INITIATIVE

So much of leadership is about coming to that place in our lives where we think, “I’m not just sitting here anymore!” Our leadership journey doesn’t just happen. Instead, it begins when we take initiative. Initiative is a willingness to take an active role in our lives to learn to lead as disciples of Jesus. That’s right, leadership isn’t something separate from being a disciple, nor do the terms mean the same thing. Rather, as disciples of Jesus, we must learn to cultivate and steward our influence. For disciples who want to influence for the glory of God, leadership begins at the feet of Jesus.

Describe a time in your life when you felt like you couldn’t just sit there anymore and you took the initiative to lead.

Paul is one of the greatest examples of a leader in the world and in church history. He provided a starting point for our discussion in the opening words of his letter to the Philippians:

I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-8

LEADING THROUGH HARD THINGS

Paul took the initiative to lead in a very difficult and divided culture. Philippi was a complicated mess, struggling through a complex history. There was prejudice and political strife. As a result of the Battle of Actium (31 BC), the city of Philippi was re-founded as a Roman colony. This meant that the conquering Roman soldiers and their families remade the city into a Roman colony. The victorious Romans enjoyed all the fruits of being a citizen in the newly colonized city, while the indigenous people were discriminated against.

PHILIPPIANS

It was a seemingly impossible scenario. To make matters worse, Paul couldn't be there in person. He was imprisoned and had to help them from hundreds of miles away, communicating by letter. Paul displayed an unmistakable leadership lesson: *leaders take the initiative to do hard things.*

When have you seen someone lead through difficult circumstances?

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Paul also demonstrated that an attitude of gratitude is one of the most effective ways to serve and earn the right to have difficult conversations (which he did later on in chapter 1). It is clear within the first few verses of Philippians that Paul had a personal love for the church in Philippi. In Philippians 1:3-8, he demonstrated for us how to build up the believers through gratitude:

- Paul reminded them of their shared history: Shared memories enable the leader to speak into the culture. "I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you" (Phil. 1:3).
- Paul genuinely liked the people in the church at Philippi: Sincerely caring for people is essential to influencing as a disciple. "Always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer" (Phil 1:4).
- Paul valued collaborating with them: Healthy leaders understand the value and benefits of we versus me. "Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil 1:5).
- Paul believed the best about all the Philippian believers and sought to build them up: Accentuating the positive is a honoring approach to leadership. "I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).
- Paul was transparent about the genuine emotions he had for them: Expressing warm and authentic words is never wasted energy. "I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:7-8).

Discussion Questions

How has God taken the initiative with humanity?

How does God, in His goodness, continue to take the initiative with us?

Take a few moments to discuss how Paul took the initiative with the Philippians.

Paul uses words of gratitude to begin his letter. Why is the attitude of gratitude important to leadership?

How can we practice taking the initiative? How can we practice gratitude?

Take a sheet of paper and write out 3-4 sentences to a person or group of people you are grateful for. Use the five ideas that Paul demonstrated in Philippians 1:3-8 (see page 10).

DAY 1
**FOUR WAYS TO STAY
FOREVER GRATEFUL**

**Remember God is at Work
in Our Sufferings**

We have seen the amazing, brave, and faithful initiative Paul took when he planted the church at Philippi, the first church on the continent of Europe. Yet the circumstances he found himself in as he wrote his letter were less than ideal. He had to express his gratitude all while being chained away in a dark prison. If ever there was an individual whose circumstances could have given him reason not to be grateful, it would have been Paul. Here is a shortlist of some of what he endured:

- There were multiple attempts and plots on his life (Acts 9:23-29; 20:3; 21:30; 23:10,12; 25:3).
- He was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19).
- He endured satanic attacks and pressure (1 Thess. 2:18).
- He was beaten and jailed in Philippi (Acts 16:19-24).
- He suffered name-calling and ridicule (Acts 17:16-18; 26:24).
- He was falsely accused (Acts 21:21,28; 24:5-9).
- On five occasions, he was given thirty-nine lashes by the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24).
- He was beaten with rods three times by the Romans (2 Cor. 11:25).
- He survived numerous violent storms at sea (2 Cor. 11:25; Acts 27:14-20).
- He was bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 28:3-4).
- He was forsaken by friends and co-laborers (2 Tim. 4:10,16).

If I were Paul, the minute a poisonous snake bit me, I would've been out of there. But Paul endured unimaginable pressure and pain. Instead he wrote:

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed.... Indeed everything is for your benefit so that, as grace extends through more and more people, it may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9,15

Paul's perspective can leave one speechless. All the assassination attempts, all the imprisonments, all the backstabbing, and deception, battling mother nature at sea and on land, all of it was to further the gospel. He was grateful for what he had endured so that people could experience Jesus, which is cause for thanksgiving.

More lives changed = More grateful people = Paul becoming more and more grateful. What a perspective!

God was present in the sufferings, and He was redeeming the pain so others could experience peace. I'm so glad we get a backstage pass to Paul's scars. Each scar is just a different memory of God using physical hurt to bring about someone's spiritual healing. Knowing God is at work on the good days and the ones when we suffer for His name's sake, and that He allows us to be a part of the story He is telling—that's a reason for gratitude.

How have you seen God work in your own seasons of suffering?

Close your time today with a season of grateful prayer. Even if you can't see how God is using your suffering, pray knowing that He can and will.

DAY 2
**FOUR WAYS TO STAY
FOREVER GRATEFUL**

**Remember God's Presence
in Our Provision**

*He who started a good work in you will carry it on
to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

Paul wanted the Philippian believers to know that it is Jesus—and Jesus alone—who could complete the good work that had begun in them. God was at work and would always be at work in them. If this is true, God's enduring presence in us is God's unailing provision for us. Furthermore, if God is ever-present, then there is always a reason to be grateful.

How have you experienced God's presence in your life to this point?

If God is always with us, then one of the greatest exercises a human can ever do is to practice the presence of God.³ Practicing the presence of God is an idea that has been long discussed. People have written books, taught seminars, and held retreats all aimed at wrestling with this idea. How do we practice the presence of God? In short, we practice the presence of God when we take the necessary steps to stay aware of God's presence in our lives. Some practices include morning and evening prayers, taking time each day to meditate on something in Scripture, and having plans that tear down any barriers that keep us from focusing on God. For example: when I start to feel like complaining today, I will use that as an opportunity for praise or prayer.

What is another way you can flip a barrier to God's presence into an opportunity to experience Him today?

The more we pursue experiencing God's presence, the more grateful we will become. Paul demonstrated this in Colossians 2:6-7: "So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him ... overflowing with gratitude." Living with Jesus can only make us grateful.

Take some time to think about and journal more steps you can take to be continually aware of God's presence and grace in your life. It may be helpful to recognize barriers that distract from experiencing God's presence. Then identify ways to overcome those barriers. Another habit I practice is to set an alarm for what I know will be the busiest part of my day. When it goes off, I pause to pray and spend a few moments being grateful for Jesus. Even if I'm in the middle of a very important meeting, no one seems to mind. They usually see it as an invitation to pray themselves. And before it is all over, we all pray together. This little practice helps focus the affections of my heart, redeem the moments at hand, and reminds me that God's presence is God's provision during a time of the day when God might be far from my thoughts.

What are three steps you can take to be more aware of God's presence?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are two barriers to being aware of God's presence in your life?

Identify one way you can be more grateful today for Jesus.

Close your time today in prayer using some of the strategies you just developed to experience God's presence.

DAY 3
**FOUR WAYS TO STAY
FOREVER GRATEFUL**

Remember God Wants Us to Know and Be Known

A third way to cultivate a lifestyle of gratitude is through authentic relationships. The words of Paul in Philippians 1:7 are beautiful, “I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace.” Paul’s heart was emotionally bound to the people of the church at Philippi. He knew them, and they knew him. The Christ-followers in Philippi were aware of Paul’s needs and had continually sent him gifts for his work (4:15-18). God had shown His kindness to Paul through the people of faith in Philippi.

Who has been a blessing to you?

God often uses others to demonstrate His love towards us. That is why it is crucial to have healthy relationships. We all need individuals in our lives who act like doctors and patients of each other’s souls—having a genuine care for each other. One kind of relationship that is vital is healthy friendships. Friendships for leaders are often a challenging task. Ungodly thoughts such as, *does this person enhance my brand* and *I don’t want to trust anyone*, if left unchecked, can go through our heads.

What is another barrier to authentic relationships in your life?

But if you are going to be a disciple who takes their influence seriously, healthy and authentic friendships are indispensable.

Four characteristics should describe your friendships:

1. Friends prioritize presence over productivity. This means being present for each other is more important than what we can get from each other.
2. Friends don't have to qualify to receive quality. This means friends don't have to achieve a standard of perfection to receive love and compassion.
3. Friends seek to understand before being understood. This means friends first carefully listen to each other and then offer thoughtful advice.
4. Friends are quick to set aside themselves in order to sacrifice. This means friends have the needs of others in their hearts.

One of the greatest movies ever to grace the silver screen is the classic 1946 Christmas film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. The story chronicles the struggles and frustrations of George Baily. George had big dreams of traveling the world to build tall buildings in important places. Yet, at every turn, he was thwarted by obstacles and bad luck. In the depth of his frustration and a suicide attempt, an angel named Clarence was sent to save him. George Baily had grown to believe it would have been better if he had never been born. By the end of the movie, he realizes that the love of his family, friends, and the town he had dedicated himself to offered him immeasurable riches. As the movie comes to a close, Clarence the angel leaves George a copy of a book with the inscription: "Dear George: Remember no man is a failure who has friends. Thanks for the wings! Love, Clarence."⁴

Friendship is a gift from God that allows us to know others and be known. God did not design us to live on our own. He designed us for relationships. Relationships cultivate gratefulness in our hearts.

What is a relationship that needs some attention in your life?

Close your time today in prayer reviewing the four characteristics of friendship. Ask God to cultivate these attitudes and habits in your friendships.

DAY 4
**FOUR WAYS TO STAY
FOREVER GRATEFUL**

Remember God is the Giver of Good Gifts

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). Paul had experienced good gifts from the Philippians, but the trustworthy source of those gifts was God the Father.

What is a gift you have received from someone else, but you know came straight from the heart of God the Father?

According to James, there are two ways we can know that a gift is from God. First, it’s “good,” meaning that there is nothing sinful about the gift. Second, the gift is “perfect,” which is a word that expands upon good, emphasizing the moral quality of the gift.⁵

It is difficult for some of us to understand that God actually wants to bless His sons and daughters. A very insightful pastor wrote:

One of the enemy’s tricks is to convince us that our Father is holding out on us, that He does not really love us and care for us. When Satan approached Eve, he suggested that if God really loved her, He would permit her to eat the forbidden tree.⁶

What is one lie that Satan tries to convince you of about God?

Now let's be honest about something: God can and will bless people in different ways. God has a plan and a mission; a story that He is telling and He's the only one who knows how everything works together. Our responsibility is to be grateful and use the gifts He gives us honorably.

What is one way God has blessed someone differently from how He has blessed you?

Some people have different Spiritual gifts than others (Rom. 12:3-8). There are also different talents, looks, and abilities people have. One person might be incredibly athletic, another musical, and still another a mathlete. The point is, don't compare your gifts, talents, looks, or abilities to someone else, but spend your time recognizing the Giver of the gift and being grateful.

List three gifts, talents, or abilities God has given you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List a way you can use each gift, talent, or ability to honor the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

I know it sounds old-fashioned, but sit down and just begin writing out all the ways God has blessed you. If you're stumped on how to begin, start with the fact that the sun came up this morning. Recognizing the goodness of God in His blessings to us is another incredible way to nurture a spirit of gratitude.

Take some time to write out your prayer of gratitude today.