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Tis the Season for Gratitude

A 5-DAY DEVOTIONAL

by Demi

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cue the sleigh bells!

It's that time of year that I like to call the
"Holiday Hustle!"

Everybody is out-and-about getting ready for their ugly-sweater parties, finding ingredients for their special Christmas cookies, and doing some last-minute shopping! My husband and I love Christmas! (If it was up to Tim, he'd probably prefer to have our tree up year-round. No joke!) The holidays mean so much to us, and bring a variety of emotions for so many people. Whether you're in good spirits or feel overwhelmed with all that the end of the year can bring, I think - as we hurry around leading up to Jesus' birthday - it's a great time to stop and posture our hearts so that we don't forget what Christmas is truly all about.

I read a study on gratitude recently conducted by psychologists at the University of Miami. After observing three groups of students over a 10-week period, they found that the group who

wrote out what they were grateful for daily felt more optimistic about life, were more physically active, and had fewer visits to the doctor. Similar studies by Harvard, U.C. Berkeley, and Notre Dame essentially found the same thing. The overall gist is that gratitude improves relationships, correlates to better moods, and is the best thing for your physical health!

You may not always feel like it, but there's always a reason to be grateful. And on top of those things, it's commanded in Scripture - that we give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:16-18). If you've truly experienced the miracle of salvation, a new life in Jesus, then we can look at every day with a grateful heart because of what He has done for us, and what He'll continue to do in and through us in this life! In light of these thoughts on gratitude, I wrote this 5-Day devotional to help get my heart ready for Christmas - the true meaning of Christmas - and I hope you'll follow along with me too!

Please know, I'm praying for every single one of you who read this. May God use it to draw you closer to Him and bring you maximum joy during this season. Now, grab some hot cocoa, maybe even a blanket, and let's dive in!

DAY 1

Heart Posturing.

Read Proverbs 4:20-27

Have you ever heard the term “heart posture?”

People often use it as a phrase to prepare their heart and mind to hear from God. In this sense, it means one’s inner attitude - the thoughts, feelings, and emotions we have regarding our relationship with God.

Why is our heart posture so important?



Well if you think about physical posture, our physical posture is important for multiple reasons. Not only does it help us breathe better, helps us avoid back problems down the road, and even helps us sing or play instruments better! And on top of that, walking with good posture can even give us confidence. Heart posture is similar - Proverbs 4 says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” This means our inner attitude matters. It literally dictates how we see the world around us, and even tells us a lot about how we view God too. Scripture also warns us to keep our hearts with vigilance because our emotions can be deceitful, and following our “feelings” isn’t always a good thing. We have to check our hearts to make sure our feelings line up with God’s Truths. That takes a bit of a heart-check or a perspective shift; an intentional check in to remind ourselves of that Truth. I heard from our pastor once that we always live on a pendulum swinging between gratitude and resentment. We feel resentment when things go wrong, life circumstances aren’t going the way we expected or when we don’t get what we want. We feel slighted or that we’re not getting what we feel we deserve. But what I realized is that if we have experienced the life-giving gift of the Gospel, then we should always live on the side of being grateful for all Jesus has done for us, and all that He is going to do. But listen, I know this can be so much

easier to say than to live out each day, which is why we're doing this devo together! Heart posturing is a reminder to stop looking around at your circumstances, and fix your eyes on Jesus. You can't look at your circumstances with resentment or discontentment when your eyes are fixed on Jesus and the miracle of the Gospel in your own life.

Take a few minutes to talk to God about your heart posture. Don't worry, He already knows everything about you; it's just a time to talk to Him about your circumstances, confess and repent, give thanks to Him and just connect with the only One who can give you peace, contentment and joy.

“God, forgive me of taking my eyes off of you and putting them on my circumstances. Help me God to seek you first, knowing you will take care of all the rest. God thank you that you care for every detail of my life, and you want to work in and through it all. God go before me and with me today, direct my thoughts, my attitude, and help me live with joy today. Amen.”



DAY 2

Gratitude List.

Read Joshua 4

If you're anything like me, you love making a to-do list (or a few to-do lists). I'm the kind of person that writes in things I've done that day that weren't even on the list just so I can cross it out; I'm all about being efficient and productive! So, why not take that quality and use it to help posture our hearts towards gratitude? The reason behind making a gratitude list reminds me of the stones of remembrance in the Bible. The stones of remembrance are mentioned throughout Scripture but one example is in Joshua. After the people of Israel supernaturally crossed the Jordan River

to enter the Promised Land, God commanded Joshua to “choose twelve men, one from each tribe. Tell them, ‘Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight’” (Joshua 4:2-3). These stones of remembrance would serve as a permanent national reminder and a memorial to future generations of the miraculous river crossing. The concept of the stones is that placing an actual, physical reminder (where you can always see it) helps us remember how God came through for us. It reminds the people in Scripture that God is always faithful, God always upholds His Promises, and God promises to never leave or forsake you. When we are reminded of those times, it’s easier to get through hard circumstances when they arise because all we have to do is look back and remember how God took care of us and brought us through it. I think making a gratitude list is similar in that it’s a way for us to stop looking at our current circumstances, and change our perspective to see all of the many things He’s done for us or given us that cause us to be thankful. You can’t look at a list of all that you’re thankful for and NOT look at your day with more joy. I’d encourage you to start on your list today and try and think of as many things as you can. I usually add 2-4 items per month to my list, so anywhere from 24-30

DAY 3

Give Thanks.

Read Psalm 100

I don't know about you guys, but when life gets busy, when the demands on your time are high, it's easy to not make time for the things that truly matter. This month, it's felt like I've been on a plane more days than I've been home, and sometimes that means I don't carve out enough time to spend with Jesus, to pray or spend time in His word. After a few days go by, it's easy to start feeling distant from Him.



During these “on-the-move” times, I’ve found that the best way to approach my faith is starting out by thanking Him for all He’s done for me and all He’s given me. It’s really modeled for us in the Lord’s Prayer! The Lord’s prayer gave us a sort of instruction for how we are supposed to pray. I don’t think that means we pray that prayer to Him every time, I think it’s more of a way to help us understand how to talk to God. It starts out by praising God for who He is and what He’s done. I think that’s the same as starting out our prayers with just thanking God for all He’s done in our lives, for His promises, for Who He is and all He’s given us (including forgiveness, mercy and salvation). It’s a supernatural experience when I start my prayer with gratitude, how it seems to open the flood gates of prayer for me. When I may have started out hesitantly or all about my needs for the day, quickly becomes a connection like coming home. Ephesians 5:20 says, “Always giving thanks to god the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Scripture not only tells us to give thanks to God, but I truly believe when we start out our prayers this way, it shifts our mindset - cleanses our hearts from the demands of life - to talking to our heavenly Father. We begin “setting our minds on things above.” (Joshua 1:8) So try it today! Start out your prayer time whether it be by kneeling by your bed or in the carpool line, start talking to your Heavenly Father by thanking Him for who He is and all He’s done for you.



“God, thank you, thank you, thank you.
Thank you for Who you are. Thank you
for my salvation, for setting me free in
You. Thank you, God for the blessings in
my life. Thank you for my gratitude list.
Thank you for your grace and mercy.
Thank you that you are faithful even when
I am not. Thank you for this day. Go
before me and with me today. Amen.”

items. And listen, it doesn't all have to be big things in life like God's Grace and your spouse, it can be small things that give you joy too, like the joy your pet brings you or a kind gesture someone offered you! Keep your list somewhere where you can see it so whenever your heart starts to get resentful rather than grateful, you can read your list and be reminded of all the many blessings you have in your life.

If you make a list and want to share any of it with me, just share it on social and tag me in it! I'd love to see them!

“God, thank you for the many blessings you've placed in my life. Thank you for who you are and what you've done. Thank you for my salvation, and for your grace that is new every morning. Thank you that your love for me isn't based on my performance; that I can rest in your love no matter what. Give me a grateful heart today as I go about my routine. Help me to be a light for those around me. Amen.”



DAY 4

I don't have to; I get to.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

I don't HAVE to; I GET to. It's all a matter of perspective. I'm a firm believer that you get to choose how you're going to view any situation, and while you may not be able to control what other people do, you can always control your own reactions. You get to choose whether or not you view it with a thankful heart or with bitter resentment. You can try and understand another perspective, or you can draw a line in

the sand. I heard this once from someone I admire and I thought, wow, that's so true. Words are powerful, and the words you speak to yourself are even more powerful because they determine how you view yourself and the world around you. Science has proven that our thoughts, our minds, what we're thinking and telling ourselves will change our life for the worse or the better. Scripture even talks about the power of our mind and thoughts. The battle of the mind is a real thing and sometimes we have to choose to change our own thoughts and mindset. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." I've literally imagined myself capturing a negative thought, and replacing it with something else. So, if there are things in your life that are stressing you out, things in your life that are hard, circumstances that make you resentful, simply by changing the words in how you THINK about those things can change your heart too! Instead of I have to get this done or nobody else will, like I have to make dinner for my family, change it to I GET to do those things. I GET to make dinner for my husband, and I'm so grateful because this is the one time a day we get to sit down and connect. Or I get to go to work today and I'm grateful because I know so many women dream of having a career they love. I GET to stay at

home with my kids and while it's hard sometimes, many parents wish they had more time with their kids. It's a total attitude game-changer! I think what starts with our words, can change our minds and ultimately our hearts when choosing to view things differently. What are some things in your life that leave you feeling resentful that you can change your perspective on? Let's start with making a list of those things we feel resentful about. Now, write out a sentence for each thing as to why you GET to do something, and why you're grateful for it.

“God, forgive me that sometimes I don't view all of these things with a grateful heart. Even if I don't like my circumstances today, I know there is so much to be thankful for. Thank you for your promises to never leave or forsake me. Thank you that I GET to do the things I've been called to take care of each day. Thank you that you love me even when I fall short. Help me capture any thoughts today that aren't aligned with your Truths. Help me change my attitude today. I love you, Lord. Amen.”

DAY 5

Bring PEACE.

Read Colossians 3:12-17

As I was praying through this devo and what God wanted to share - I came back to a few Truths that I think are important to end with. Living with joy, being at peace, and having an attitude of gratitude really come from a position of ultimate trust. If you truly know your Savior, you know all of the traits about Him, and those traits should give us all a feeling of ultimate peace and safety. When we understand WHO God is, and who we are in Him, we can't help but trust Him. When we have a heavenly father, a King of the Universe, that loves us and has promised good things to us, we can live a life of peace - we can trust Him despite our circumstances - we can live with a grateful and joyful heart because we know how this story ends. The world isn't really watching those believers that are flourishing and praising in the peaks of life. It's those that are sometimes in the valley, or facing hard circumstances or just react in ways that are different from the world, that the world pays attention to. It's that believer that praises despite facing loss. It's the believer that

chooses to forgive and love someone that hurt them. It's the believer that acts differently than this world expects where people really see the Spirit of God. As we approach Christmas day, that can sometimes be hard with family situations, loss of loved ones and many other complicated situations. The way we enter the room and the attitude we have may be someone's only glimpse of Jesus this holiday season. Let's ask ourselves if peace enters the room with us. Do we put others at ease or do we bring tension?

Take some time to reflect on some of God's promises today. When we reflect on these, then we can trust Him with our day, trust Him with our circumstances, and trust Him to take care of it all. When we can approach our day with that kind of trust in our Father, we can't help but have a grateful heart. When we have a grateful heart, we can enter the room with joy, and bring PEACE with us. Praying that each of you (including me) brings peace into the room on Christmas, and that each of you feel so truly loved by the creator of the universe.



Some Truths you can reflect on:

- God is faithful even when we are not.
- God never changes.
- God will never leave or forsake you.
- God's love is not based on your performance.
- God promises to provide you with all that you need.
- God answers all of your prayers (even if it's not the answer we were hoping for).
- God is always good, and He loves His children.

“God, I thank you for this time together. I thank you for changing my heart, changing my perspective. I pray over my friends and family this Christmas, that you would fill our home and hearts with love, grace and peace. God remove any negative thoughts from my mind today and help me to see everyone through your eyes. God fill me with all hope today and let it be infectious! It's in your name I pray, Jesus, Amen.”

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Merry Christmas, Friends!



Demi
xoxo