

WE'RE HARD TO IMPRESS

We miss the little things that should make us happy because we're so focused on the big things. We think that joy is a jackpot that comes with lights, bells, and sirens. And so very often while we're waiting for the jackpot, joy slips right by in other guises. We fail to appreciate our families. We don't take satisfaction in a job well done. We forget to be thankful for our wives and husbands because we spend so much time thinking about how we'd like them to be different. We don't notice how blessed we are because we're too busy noticing how many more blessings the folks across the hall or down the street have.

A friend of mine believes that gratitude is the cardinal virtue of believers, the one characteristic that Christians cannot be without. Once you notice how often biblical writers emphasize the importance of being thankful, it's hard to argue with them. "Through Jesus ... let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise." Continually? Oh, come on. We can be thankful sometimes. Most of us can muster up a few hours of thankfulness per week. But continually? Is that really possible?

It's all in what you choose to focus on, isn't it? A kindergartner can have the Best Day Ever if he chooses to see being first in line as a great blessing. Surely a believer in Jesus — for whom Christ died and is now interceding with the Father, in whom the Holy Spirit lives — has reason to celebrate each day. Surely, even in sadness, pain, and disappointment, we can see clearly enough to be truly grateful for all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us.

You don't have to fake a chirpy voice or a syrupy smile. You don't have to close your eyes to the hard realities of life. God can handle our pain, anger and grief, wants us to pour it out to Him. But don't forget to be thankful for what God has already done. Don't forget to praise Him for His faithfulness to you in the past. Remember the grace He has shown you, the forgiveness He continually offers. Remember the victories He has enabled you to win. Thank Him for the times when His will has overruled yours because His wisdom outweighed yours.

Keep gratitude as your default setting by cultivating the habit of praise. That's what it is, habit: habitually seeing the

kindness and grace and love of God where others cannot. Make sure your prayers are loaded with thankfulness. Develop the habit of praising God in your conversations. Train your spirit to feel God's breath in the kiss of your spouse, hear His voice in the kind words of a friend, see His fingerprints in a brand-new summer day, sense His protective presence in a long journey. Even in dark valleys, when you can't see Him or hear Him or feel Him, you know He's there, right? Thank Him for being with you even when your senses are too limited to recognize Him.

I can't guarantee that all your days will be the Greatest Ever. But I can promise you that your God is.