

## Lesson Nine

**Gratitude – Blessings aren't missing sometimes we need to adjust our perspective. Don't judge a berry (blessing) by its size (smallest can be the sweetest).**

When I get to the bramble, it can seem as if there aren't many berries to be picked. As I look around the tops of the canes, only a few may be visible immediately. By changing my perspective, dozens of berries are revealed hanging below the leaves. Sometimes I sit on the ground, carefully, and pick the berries from underneath. Even then, I frequently need to turn at 45 degree angles to shift my survey of the area. I have a tendency to focus on the largest berries, assuming that they are the best. They can be very juicy and flavorful, but they may also contain more seeds. The smaller berries may not appear to be as tasty, but in reality they are usually much sweeter than their larger cousins. It's important for me to remember not to "judge" the berry only by its appearance, and to learn to be grateful for each one and its individual characteristics.

The story of Joseph is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. I am outraged with Jacob when he discovers he was tricked into marrying Leah after working seven years for Rachel. I ache with Rachel in her barrenness, and I rejoice at the long awaited birth of her first son, Joseph. I dote over him with Jacob and I understand his attachment to the boy after Rachel's death. I ponder the meaning of Joseph's dreams and question Jacob's judgment in sending Joseph after his brothers alone, a decision I'm certain he regrets every day that he is separated from his beloved son.

Joseph's older brothers are jealous of their father's favoritism of Joseph. Jacob did not recognize the danger he placed his son in by showering him with special gifts and attentiveness. The resentment grew so strong among them they even contemplated murder! In the end, their greed superseded their envy and they sell Joseph into

slavery. When Joseph eventually winds up a servant in an Egyptian household, what is his attitude? Is he sullen, lazy or uncooperative? Does he attempt to escape? Does he pull the “don’t you know who I am” card and offer bribes to anyone willing to carry a message to his father promising a reward for his safe return? Honestly, if my dad were Jacob, a wealthy shepherd who doted on me day and night, I would have been telling everyone I came into contact with that my daddy was rich and he’d pay a LOT of money to get me back! Joseph does none of this. Instead, he devotes himself to the work assigned to him in such a way that he becomes distinguished and trusted by his master. He is given charge of the entire household and over servants who were there before him. Yet, we are not told that any of them resent him for it, leaving us to assume he is humble and treats others with respect.

What motivated Joseph to accept his new circumstance in life? Did he feel he had brought it on himself, talking about his dreams where the sun and moon and stars all bowed down to him? Did God speak to him and reassure him he was not alone? Was he expecting that his father was riding to the rescue and would arrive any day?

Joseph made the best of his predicament and served his master well. When he is falsely accused and thrown in prison, his attitude does not change. The warden also recognizes Joseph as trustworthy, hard-working and fair and gives him a position of authority in the jail. What was Joseph’s secret that allowed him to respond to these unwarranted events with grace and dignity?

Joseph trusted in the Lord. Maybe Jacob related the stories of his own life to Joseph, stories of deception and forgiveness, faithfulness and fraud. Had he heard the tales of working for Laban for fourteen years to earn two wives, when only one was desired? How about the hard work of shepherding flocks, only to have his pay changed time and time again? These unjust treatments were witnessed by God who delivered Jacob when the time was right. Perhaps it was the dreams that God had sent to Joseph, assuring him that he was meant to serve a bigger purpose? The

foretelling of God's promise to him that he would someday be in a position of great authority. Did Joseph understand that God was preparing him for his ultimate purpose? Joseph knew that he was in God's hands and whatever happened to him was somehow according to God's plan. This was enough for him. He trusted God with his future. Joseph's life demonstrates God's sovereignty and His long term plan. Genesis 50:20 is one of the most beautiful verses in the entire Bible, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Joseph's forgiveness is genuine, his humility is authentic and his submission to God complete. Joseph kept his eyes on God and His purpose and not his own circumstances. Paul reinforces this attitude in Philippians 4:11-12 where he teaches us that contentment comes not from how well our needs and wants are fulfilled, but in understanding that our strength comes from Jesus alone.

Dear sister, Jesus tells us that we will have troubles in this world. Those preachers who exhort a "health and wealth" gospel are not telling you the truth. This place is not our home and happiness here should not be our goal. Consider yourself a slave in Egypt, in God's training grounds for whatever is to come. This is the time that we are tested to see if we can be faithful with a little, and prove ourselves worthy of being trusted with much. Luke 12:42-48 tells us what the Lord expects from us and what our responses should be. Those who are entrusted with much and prove themselves to be good stewards will be rewarded with a larger role to play for God and His kingdom.

There are times when I find myself disappointed that my prayers were not answered in the way I desired. My expectations may be to have the Lord swoop in and solve a problem in one grand gesture, completely eradicating the crisis so we can all move on with our lives in peace and contentment. He of course knows what fickle creatures we are and if all our obstacles were removed, we would soon drift away from Him. The Lord's Prayer asks only for **today's** bread, not for a lifetime's supply. God delivered manna **daily**, not a week or a month in advance. Each day, the

Israelites were reminded of God's faithful provision and they learned reliance on Him. Each month our bills are paid may seem like a small thing when we really want our mortgage completely paid off. Learning to be grateful for His provision for today, for the smaller blessings in life, is the first step to increased trust in Him and the confidence that He is always with us. He doesn't want to just provide for us and then go on His way. He desires the close personal relationship built through our daily dependence on Him.

In Lesson One, I wrote about my Gratitude Journal. The main purpose was to re-train myself to recognize everything in my life as a blessing from the Lord. Yes, there are the big events that we tend to focus our attention and when they are resolved, it is cause for celebration. If we train ourselves to examine every aspect of our life as a gift straight from His hand, we begin to see the bigger picture of the world around us. We learn about God's purposes and how we need to change our thinking and motivations. Viewing the world through an eternal perspective diminishes our own importance and sets us on the road to true humility. Our temporary discomforts become investments in our heavenly future. We develop a heart after God's own.

Dear sister, do not take God's blessings and provisions for granted. Realize that every day you and your family spend healthy, well-fed and safe is a direct result of His protection. His intervention shields you, His love encompasses you. Maybe you haven't gotten to vacation in Disney World, but every day you spend with a roof over your head is a good one. There are many families who have lost homes and livelihoods. If you've ever spent more time in a hospital than at home in a single day, you appreciate sleeping in your own bed and using your own bathroom!

I have a vivid memory of having my hair done while my grandfather was ill. It was a rare day when I took three hours to myself. My hairdresser commented that I had not been in for a while and I related the family commitments that had kept me away. When she took me to the shampoo sink, she spent a great deal of time washing my

hair gently and massaging my scalp. There was just something about the process that made me feel her compassion for me. It was as if she wanted me to know how much my sacrifice for others was appreciated. Tears streamed from my eyes down into my ears as I lay back in the sink. It was one of the most tender things anyone has ever done for me. I don't know if she understood how much her simple act of kindness meant to me, but I will never forget it. It was a small thing that meant so much.

There are people in our lives that need our help. We may find ourselves in situations where a responsibility rests completely on us. When my grandfather was in hospice, I couldn't understand why the Lord allowed him to continue suffering for so long. There was no hope of recovery, why didn't the Lord release him from his pain and bring him home? One day when I arrived to feed my grandfather his lunch, one of the nurses commented on my devotion. She told me it was rare to see someone spend so much time with a family member while in hospice. Most people have a difficult time seeing their family members in such decline and they avoid visiting. I replied that I didn't really feel the situation was about me, but about my grandfather and how he needed to know he was not abandoned and forgotten. It was my recognition of a life well-lived and gratitude for the love he had shown me all my life. I wonder sometimes if my care and dedication during the months of my grandfather's stay there influenced any of the staff, if it provided a glimpse into the faithfulness of Jesus Christ that required months to illustrate and would not have been possible over a few days' time.

Sometimes just a smile of encouragement given to a stranger in the grocery store can make someone's day. I remember hearing a story of a man who committed suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. When they examined his apartment afterward, they found a note he'd left saying, "I'm going to walk to the [Golden Gate] bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way, I will not jump." Be the person who smiles. Be the ray of sunshine in someone's life that tells them, "Jesus loves you."

## **Assessment and Further Thought**

Do you tend to focus on the negative aspects of a situation?

How can you re-train yourself to see things with “better eyes” – to recognize the benefits of an event?

Consider a troubling time in your life, past or present. Can you see ways the Lord may have been working in others’ lives and not just your own?

Commit to paying someone a genuine compliment daily. It can be the grocery store clerk’s hairstyle, or a co-worker’s outfit, but it must be sincere.

## Verses for study and encouragement

**Ruth 2:10-12** - At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

**Psalm 4** - Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods. Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him. Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord. Many, Lord, are asking, “Who will bring us prosperity?” Let the light of your face shine on us. Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound. In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

## **Prayer time**

Dear Jesus, please help me to see the world and my place in it with better eyes. Help me to recognize Your hand in my daily life and all the blessings that you bestow on me and my family. Show me Your purpose and fill me with gratitude that You have included me. Bring to mind those who need me and show me how best to serve You. Help me to remember that others are watching my behavior and reactions in bad situations and enable me to react in a manner that brings glory to You at all times. Amen

## **Additional items for prayer**