

## Gratitude: It's Own Memory Chain

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Christmas is a time of reflection. Some take time to reflect, slowing down to feel things. Sometimes pictures in the mind of whole scenes accompany these feelings from the past. Many pleasant memory chains are available to the mind from various cues and stimulants: the smell of baking which produces pictures and memories of how things were in the kitchens of our past, for example.

In some cases memory connections are simply experienced because of years of repeated patterns of things being a certain way. When in a particular year, things have a heart wrenching change, such as someone through death is not here this year, the strings of memory with the new reality carry a memory "punch," or a forced facing of the new situation. In this way, Christmas may be full of cues and triggers with memory strands that follow. Some of these memory chains are heart warming, and some of these memory experiences are sad.

There is yet another memory trail to walk a little differently from the spontaneous cues and triggered memory chains at Christmas. It is the pathway of proactive gratitude. In other words, there are ways to have positive memory experiences that you introduce through being grateful to God, rather than being in a reactive position to Christmas triggers.

Being grateful to God gives you new memory chains.

From the view of gratefulness, there is thankfulness for hot water and coffee every morning. A gratefulness for joy filled friends or children who may surround us. Eyes and time to see the effects of sun, wind, and the elements on the countryside can create spontaneous thanks to God and memories of past visual blessings. At Christmastime there seem to be many spectacular views around us, free of charge, to take in whether physically sighted or not. Gratitude is so much a part of God's grace: sometimes it is hard to know the difference between His pouring out blessings and our response of being thankful. God's grace and blessing. Wondrous things. Things to be thankful for.

Of course at some point in the journey of Christmas there may be difficult times. Does choosing the path of gratitude mean we have to suck it up and pretend life isn't hard? A façade of cheerfulness is pure pain underneath. There is something about giving thanks in all things that is different than simply looking on the bright side.

What if you are not grateful or don't want to be? How about an honest prayer or two in this vein: God if you are there/here, show me. God: adjust my vision today, please God. God show me about this Jesus thing.

Next to the sincere gift of gratefulness is the sincere blessing of honesty. God can "take" what and who you and I really are. Beginning your Christmas journey with simple

thoughts of gratitude may start a chain reaction down a road antithetical to the billions of dollars spent to make you feel like you are missing something. Gratitude is the great antidote to you being a target of what you don't have.

I remember the Christmas we got our first toaster. Yes, poverty is part of my memory chain, (also the opposite of poverty), but that is not the point at all. The joy of how the whole bunch of us were around that little toaster has very little to do with the toaster itself. It was how we looked at each other, eating the toasted bread, relishing the ease of just pushing down the handle and watching the bread pop up. Doing it over and over again until we could eat no more. We shared grateful exuberant hearts, touching, tasting, and savoring the time together.

I am grateful for that memory. Not for the toaster, but for the "weness," wonder, and laughter we all had over it. We didn't care about what the neighbors got, we were exuberantly happy together ... and grateful.

A "weness" event for Jesus' followers comes to mind. It is the occasion of Jesus presenting His wounds to Thomas. Think of it. Jesus knows Thomas' skepticism, and invites Him to touch His wounds. The group of friends and ministry workers around their beloved Jesus, experience Jesus moving right in to the skeptic's need for reality. In like manner, Jesus invites us to touch His wounds when we are weary and unbelieving. He wants "weness" with us. He is willing to reach out to our need to connect. At Christmas time our need to touch and savor the reality of Jesus, is available to us, as a baby yes, but also One who desires to love us as our Savior; as our Redeemer.

Jesus knows we absolutely need connection to Him. Thomas, place your hands on me, on my wounds, touch my experience, so you may know and believe it is me. You saw me die; you know my pain, see the reality of your risen God.

The awareness in our memory of Jesus' desire to share the reality of His love for us, is the ultimate place to go for a positive memory chain. He invites us to touch Him, to connect with Him, and to savor and share His love and victory.

I am grateful...for many personal memories, for Jesus' birth, and for our being able to touch Jesus with who we really are, and that He provides salvation through His victory over death.

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