

functional limitation or a lack of social interaction. Not being able to come to church can be spiritually devastating. People feel like the world moves on and they are left behind. But the book of Job reminds us that we can easily misread our loneliness and God's presence: Job cries out to God feeling alienated and scared. Yes, the comforters are with him; but Job wants God. When God comes to Job in a whirlwind—an answer to Job's prayer—and responds to Job's accusations, he demonstrates that his silence is no indication of his absence. God stands silently with Job through every painful moment. Job has no reason to feel alienated. God was there all the while. God was all Job needed.

Everyone will experience a measure of loneliness in his or her life. But the author argues biblically that the presence and severity of our loneliness is largely a choice. God offers us the means to engage him and to defeat our loneliness. What is more, God will use our loneliness to draw us closer to him. This reviewer highly recommends Lou Priolo's most recent book to all Christians who struggle with loneliness as well as those who would like to help them.

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Gratitude: Why Giving Thanks is the Key to Our Well Being, by Cornelius Plantinga. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2024. 176 pp. \$22.99.

The author, Cornelius Plantinga (PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary) is president emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary. He is the author of many books, including the *Christianity Today* Book Award winner *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, *Under the Wings of God: Twenty Biblical Reflections for a Deeper Faith*, and *Morning and Evening Prayers*.

Plantinga tackles the challenge of defining gratitude: "Gratitude is a glad sense of being gifted with something by someone and thus being indebted to the giver." Further, "it's a mixed sense of being blessed by and therefore indebted to a giver, usually accompanied by warm feelings toward that giver" (7). Feeling both warmth as a recipient and gratitude as a debtor capture two related but distinct responses to beneficence.

For Christians, we respond gratefully to God's most incredible blessings. The Apostles' Creed says, in him we have "the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." "You might say that the whole Christian life is a way of trying, however inadequately, to give thanks for these magnificent gifts" (2). For this reason alone, gratitude is "an urgent necessity" (3), a proper response to God we cannot afford to miss.

Are there personal benefits to being grateful? Studies demonstrate that grateful people have higher energy and lower blood pressure. They have less frustration and insomnia. They have more patience and hope. In fact, gratitude is the single best predictor of human well-being (4).

Gratitude heals. “If I have gratitude, it may console me in my loss of a loved one” (47). You will also see that the happiest human beings seem to be the most grateful. Why? Could it be that gratitude is an engine of joy? But is gratitude sustainable?

Gratitude is not just a periodic sense of being blessed and indebted. Grateful people are inclined to feel gratitude most of the time. They have, so to speak, a light trigger for feeling like this. We could say they have a grateful *disposition*. If it remains stable over time, this disposition may be called a character trait. It’s in *character* for a person with this trait to respond to good things with a sense of being blessed and indebted (7).

One common theme provoking gratitude in the hearts of ancient Israel was God’s mighty acts beginning with creation and continuing with God’s providence particularly when he rescues. Examples include the exodus but especially the death and resurrection of Jesus, the mightiest act of all. These acts are gratitude worthy because they show God’s goodness and especially God’s love. It is easy to miss the content of Peter’s sermon heard on the Day of Pentecost in other languages; it was the mighty acts of God. To this point, Plantinga reminds us that “the mighty acts of Christ are the acts of God” (21).

Gratitude should be a habit, a way of life, and not incidental. “Once we believers have gotten in the habit of being grateful, we find triggers for gratitude everywhere. All we need to do is to move through God’s world in an observant frame of mind” (25). But spoilers threaten our gratitude. The author demonstrates his sensitivity to the complexity of gratitude as he discusses the impact of greed:

Greed blocks gratitude *because it makes me discontent*. If I’m never satisfied and always want more, I’m unlikely to be grateful for what I already have. This is a real disadvantage, to put it mildly. Why? Because, as we’ve already seen, gratitude makes what we have enough. With greed there is never enough.... Simple things give me joy because I am so grateful for them. And I can be grateful for them just because I am content with them (36).

This is because “gratitude and contentment are classic ingredients in human flourishing.... The obstacle to gratitude...is not riches but *greed* for riches.... Greed is always a curse when it thwarts contentment and gratitude” (36–37).

In short, surveys and other studies demonstrate that “gratitude appears to be the single virtue most prominently associated with human flourishing” (58). Should it surprise us that these studies support what Scripture plainly teaches us? This book is a great read. Every Christian would benefit from this book. It is one of those books you could give to every family member.

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