

SESSION 1

*attitude of gratitude*





## *Introduction*

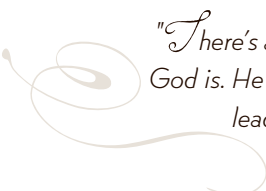
Picture a timeline. It is filled with years, months, days, hours, and countless seconds. On a timeline every moment looks the same. If you could pluck off one minute it would look just like every other minute. A simple span of sixty seconds. It seems like nothing special. It appears to be nothing unique.

Yet, all of us have minutes in our lives that shape us. Something happens in that sixty-second blip on the timeline that is deeply and profoundly personal. It was not just another minute in the history of the world.

As you look back on the timeline of your life, many of the days and weeks blur together, but there are minutes that will stand out for the rest of your life. Seared in your memory are the sounds, feelings, images, and even the smells of those moments.

None of us live long on this earth without recording one of those unforgettable experiences. Not one of us can travel the rugged roads of earth and avoid all of the painful potholes. It does not matter where you live, how much money you have, how much you love God, how careful you might be, how much faith you exercise, or how persistently you pray. Hurt and heartache are truly unavoidable.

In a moment, without even seeing it coming, we all hit life's unexpected potholes and feel jarring pain. The question is not: *Will you and I have these moments of loss and dizzying confusion?* The real issue is: *How will we respond to these inevitable and unavoidable moments?* When we discover the secret to a heart of gratitude, we can face these certain moments with grace, strength, and even what seems impossible: joy.



*"There's a reason I am not writing the story and  
God is. He knows how it all works out, where it all  
leads, what it all means... I don't."*

## *Talk About It*

When you look back on the timeline of your story, tell about a moment you hit a pothole in your journey of life.

## *Video Notes*

*As you watch the video for session one, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.*

Wounded moments that close our hands

Grace

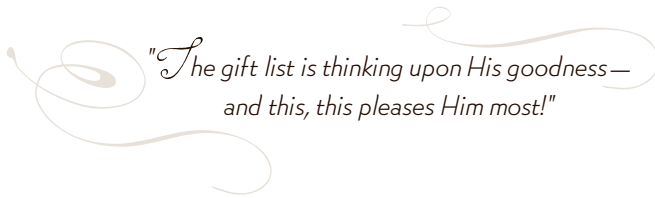
*Eucharisteo*: grace, thanksgiving, and joy

Thanksgiving precedes the miracle

Eyes on God, open hands in thanks

The list of one thousand gifts

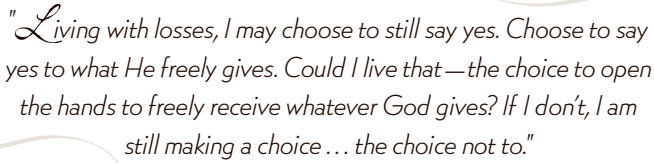
At all times, thank God



### *Video Discussion and Bible Study*

1. Tell about a moment in your life that was hard and painful and looked nothing like a gift, until later you began to discover that a gift was wrapped up in the pain of that moment.
  
2. What are some of the things that can cause us to close our hands and hearts to God?

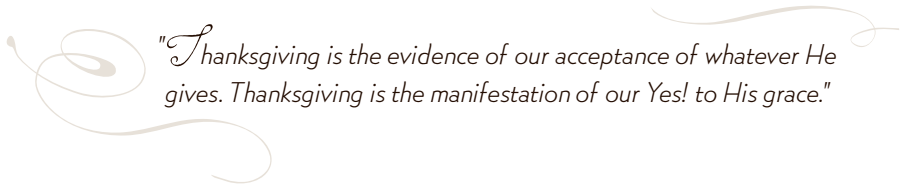
What specifically has helped you keep your hands and heart open, even through hard times?



"Living with losses, I may choose to still say yes. Choose to say yes to what He freely gives. Could I live that—the choice to open the hands to freely receive whatever God gives? If I don't, I am still making a choice... the choice not to."

3. Ann observes that there is a distinct difference between *receiving* the grace God offers at the cross of Jesus and *being filled* with grace to the point of overflowing ... every day. If a person has received the grace of Jesus and also walks in the fullness of that grace to the point of overflowing, what might this grace-extending life look like at *one* of these moments:

- When an opportunity to serve a person in need presents itself
- When someone betrays and hurts us deeply
- When we get unexpected hard news
- When a family member is unkind or insensitive
- When the future is uncertain and we feel anxious or fearful



"Thanksgiving is the evidence of our acceptance of whatever He gives. Thanksgiving is the manifestation of our Yes! to His grace."

4. **Read:** Matthew 26:26–29 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. When Jesus broke the bread and offered the cup, He spoke this beautiful word: *eucharisteo*. This one word captures three distinct and powerful ideas. How did Jesus reveal each of the following in His institution of the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist)?


Grace

Thanks

Joy


What can we do to deepen and expand our thankfulness, joy, and experience of grace?

5. **Read:** John 11:38–44. Ann talks about thanksgiving raising the dead. What are some connections between thanksgiving and new life being unleashed in the dark and dead places of life?
  
6. In the video, Ann says, “Jesus offers thanksgiving for even that which will break Him and crush Him and wound Him.” How could Jesus express thanksgiving even as He faced the cross? How can Jesus’ example shape your own response to times of pain and loss?



*"Thanksgiving—giving thanks in everything—prepares the way that God might show us His fullest salvation in Christ."*

7. **Read:** 2 Chronicles 20:12–22. How was thankfulness connected to the victory God's people experienced in this passage? How does a thankful spirit lead to victory in our lives today?
  
8. Why is it so hard to express *eucharisteo* thankfulness when we are going through a time of pain, struggle, and darkness? What can help us remain truly thankful in these seasons of life?



*"As long as thanks is possible, then joy is always possible.  
Whenever, meaning—now; wherever, meaning—here."*

9. Take a minute to list five gifts you already have—anything that reveals God's grace, makes you thankful, and unleashes joy in your life—and then share one item from your list with the rest of the group.
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How does a life filled with *eucharisteo* profit us as well as bring delight to the heart of God?



*"We only enter the full life if our faith gives thanks."*



### *Closing Prayer*

*Take time as a group to pray in any of the following directions:*

- Thank God for the good gifts He has given you.
- Invite God to teach you how to experience *eucharisteo* in the hard times of life.
- Confess where you have forgotten to be thankful for God's unmerited gifts.
- Ask Jesus to so fill you with His joy and grace that others see it and are drawn near to Him.
- Pray for your family members and friends to discover the truth that grace, thanksgiving, and joy can be theirs through an intimate and living relationship with Jesus.



*"Prayer without ceasing is only possible in a life of continual thanks."*



## *between sessions*

### *My Gifts*

**Read:** Philippians 4:11–12. Ann articulates that the secret to living joyfully in every situation is something that is learned. She shares that “practice is the hardest part of learning, and training is the essence of transformation.”

After each small group gathering, you will have a space like the one that follows to stretch yourself, practice *eucharisteo*, and make a fresh new list of gifts God has given you. (Or consider starting your own separate gratitude journal.) Be creative, think deep, and reflect on big things as well as very small ones. You don’t have to be poetic or a great writer, just honest.

*Start by listing up to twenty gifts of God’s grace.*

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Look for opportunities to share some of the gifts on your list with others in the coming week. And ask them what gifts God has placed in their lives.

*"The brave who focus on all things good and all things beautiful and all things true, even in the small, who give thanks for it and discover joy even in the here and now, they are the change agents who bring fullest Light to all the world."*

## *My Timeline*

*In the space provided on the following pages, create personal timelines for up to three moments of loss, pain, and struggle in your life. Note how each situation impacted your past and has influenced your present.*

**Moment 1**

When I was \_\_\_\_\_ years old

I experienced:

This moment impacted my life in some of the following ways:

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This moment influences my life today in the following ways:

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**Moment 2**

When I was \_\_\_\_\_ years old

I experienced:

This moment impacted my life in some of the following ways:

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This moment influences my life today in the following ways:

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### Moment 3

When I was \_\_\_\_\_ years old

I experienced:

This moment impacted my life in some of the following ways:

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This moment influences my life today in the following ways:

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*"When we lay the soil of our hard lives open to the rain of grace  
and let joy penetrate our cracked and dry places, let joy soak  
into our broken skin and deep crevices, life grows."*

## *Eucharistean Mentors*

By God's hand and kindness, we all know people who have revealed lives of *eucharistean* grace, thanksgiving, and joy.

*Reflect on your journey of faith by listing a few people—past or present—who have been models and mentors when it comes to living like Jesus.*

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Next, pause to thank God for the examples these people have shown you and reflect on how you can internalize their example and let it continue to shape your faith and life.

Finally, during the next week, send an email or a handwritten thank-you note to one or two of these people. Let them know some of the ways you have seen their example of walking in grace, thanksgiving, and joy. Thank them for walking closely with God and being an example of *eucharistean*.

