



*The Simple
Joy of
Thanksgiving*

Simple Ways to Put the
Joy Back into the Season

Jean Ann
Duckworth

The Simple Joy of Thanksgiving

Discovering Gratitude in a Less Stressful
Holiday

Jean Ann Duckworth

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To Katherine Kelly Rechsteiner,
my mom

and

Lena B. Kelly, my grandmother

Thank you for teaching me that special
occasions and holidays are about the people.

Devotion Introduction

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

My Thoughts

There are 3 things God wants for us in all aspects of life:

1. To have joy in all things;
2. To pray without ceasing;
3. To be grateful no matter what.

While this may seem simple, it really isn't. There are times when it's hard to be joyful, to rejoice. Sometimes, we're having a really bad day, especially during the Holidays & we simply don't feel all that joyful. We get busy, wrapped up in life & we don't think to pray. We always think we'll get to it later but later never comes. A whole day goes by without us talking with the Lord. Not good. As far as giving thanks in all circumstances, well, forget about it. When nothing seems to be going right, it's impossible to be grateful. Sure, we know there are others that

have it worse but that mean nothing when our world is falling apart around us, or so it seems.

Still, as we begin the busy Holiday season, it's incredibly important for us to remember to focus on these 3 things throughout the day, every day. They help us keep our balance & sanity. They enable us to remain strong in all aspects of life. Most important, they allow us to celebrate with joy & thanksgiving with the Lord all season long.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

Introduction

Thanksgiving can be very stressful. It falls during a work week and involves food that can't be bought weeks in advance. Too many tasks must be done last minute, wedged in between all your regular activities. No wonder Thanksgiving causes so much stress! However, it doesn't have to be that way. With careful planning, anyone can get a firm grip on all those Thanksgiving tasks, scratching them off your lists one by one.

Everyday between now and Thanksgiving, I am sending you a daily task. Just one thing for you to do that day. Now some tasks are larger than others but none are so large than you can't easily complete it that day. Some tasks may not even apply to you so you get a break that day!

Finally, I would like to share ONE big piece of advice. If

you decide not to follow any of the tips or ideas I'm sending you in November, please, please PLEASE do this one thing:

Find a way to make it work for you

& do things that way!

I'm giving you permission to do things your way. The way that creates less stress for you. And if someone doesn't like it, then THEY can host Thanksgiving next year & do things THEIR way!

So take a breath, relax & let's do this together!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Jean Ann

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -23 Devotion

It's All in the Presentation

When you sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf.

Leviticus 22:29

Kids have a very strong sense of possession being 9/10's of the law. Once they are given something, it can be tough getting them to surrender it. Well, at least it was for me. There were birthday parties where my mom had to argue to get me to give the present to someone. I always gave it up but not with a willing heart.

Even as adults, we may do the same thing when we give to the Lord. Whether it's an offering or our talents and time, we only surrender them grudgingly. Who wants to accept a gift that's given unwillingly? God certainly doesn't!

We must offer our gifts with a willing heart, in a way that makes the Lord happy to receive it. Only then can we both

enjoy the thanksgiving.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -23 Tip

Create Your Guest List &

Determine Your Set-Up

Let me be honest: most people do this backwards. Most people decide the type of set-up they want to do for their Thanksgiving dinner, then they try to determine how they are going to fit everyone around the table. It is my experience that we all dream of a Martha Stewart Thanksgiving event. Beautiful table covered in linen. Sparkling silver & crystal. Bone china. Lovely centerpiece. Sigh! We are realistic, though. We know we can only TRY to come a bit close to the dream. However, we still plan out the entire set up of table & food before we even know exactly how many people we should plan for!

First things first: call around & determine about how many people will be at your house for Thanksgiving dinner. If you expect 15 people & can only fit 8 at your table, you need to rethink your set up. You can set a lovely buffet

table for your guests & seat them comfortably in your home rather than squeezing them around your table.

You always begin with the guests. It's about the people, not the event. If everyone is having a good time & enjoying the food, that's all that matters.

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -22 Devotion

Look What He Did!

*I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell
of all your wonderful deeds.*

Psalm 9:1

My mother always reminded me to say thank you. This habit has remained with me years later. I always say thank you to God when He does things for me, big or small. I want Him to know how grateful I am for everything He does in my life. This verse, however, tells us that saying thank you isn't enough. We must tell others about the "wonderful deeds" God has done for us.

Many of us aren't comfortable talking to others about our faith, most importantly our relationship with God. One way to do this is by telling others about the ways the Lord has blessed your life. It doesn't have to be an elaborate story.

You don't need to preach to or at anyone. Just tell them about the wonderful thing that happened in your life & why you are grateful to God for the blessing. Share the story the same way you would if a friend did something special for you. It really is just that simple and, once you do it often enough, it will be just that easy & natural.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -22 Tip

Plan Your Menu & Grocery List

Once you know about how many people are coming for dinner & you know how you want to seat everyone for the meal, you can begin planning your menu. Do your research to determine how much food you need to feed everyone from turkey to dessert. It also helps to understand the eating habits of your guests. Early in our marriage, we would entertain the single people that worked with my husband. Many of them were from out of town & had not family locally. Most were men. The first year, I served a variety of dishes, including salads. I quickly found they preferred lots of turkey, potatoes, bean, corn, dressing, gravy, rolls & pie. So I stuck with the basics & made sure I had plenty.

Once you have your menu planned, go item by item & create a grocery list. Keep in mind all the ingredients it takes to make dishes. Butter goes into many of the things you are preparing for your meal. List EVERYTHING! No

one wants to run out to the store for a missing ingredient when they are in the middle of food prep!

To help you with your grocery shopping, I created a handy grocery list printable. Print it out on an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper, then fold the paper in fourths. I find this size makes it easy to clip them together & carry them wherever I go. I never know when I might be near a store, saving myself a special trip later.

Download your FREE printable by visiting simplejoy.org

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -21 Devotion

Listen Everybody!

*I will give you thanks in the great assembly;
among the throngs I will praise you.*

Psalm 35:18

I'm always quick to tell others about the wonderful things my husband, Mr. D does for me. I especially like sharing these stories when I have a larger audience. I want EVERYONE to know what a great man he is & how thoughtful he is. I want him to know how much I appreciate his kind deeds & one way to do this is by sharing the stories with an audience.

I also enjoy telling audiences about the kind & generous things the Lord has done for me, for our family over the years. I never do this in a bragging way. My intention is never to imply I am oh, so special to God, Lord at the great things He has done for me. I want others to become more

aware of the wonderful things He does for everyone. I also want to encourage you to share your experiences with groups of friends. Before long, others will begin to share their stories. This is a powerful way to strengthen everyone's faith & hope.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -21 Tip

Create Your Cleaning List

Decide what needs to be done to prepare your home for the Holidays. Now is the time to clean, not only for Thanksgiving but for Christmas as well. A good cleaning with only weekly touch-up should last through the end of the year. If any of the cleaning requires the work of professionals, like carpet cleaning, make appointments NOW! The early bird doesn't only get the worm, they get the time & date they want when booking the services of cleaning professionals!

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -20 Devotion**

Sing a Little Song

*I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with
thanksgiving.*

Psalm 69:30

Have you ever been so happy that you began to sing & dance? This is how David felt about the Lord. David loved to sing & dance as a way of praising God. Some days, when I consider all that God has done in my life, I am filled with joy. I turn on music & I sing & dance because my joy, my gratitude is too big to contain. I want God to know how very happy He makes me. I want Him to know how glad I am to have Him in my life. And I want to tell Him “Thank you!” For everything He has done for me. Take time today to remind yourself of all the things the Lord has done & is doing in your life until you are ready to burst into song or pop!

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -20 Tip

To-do List & Schedule

Write out a detailed list of EVERYTHING that needs to be done by Thanksgiving. No task is too small. In fact, the small ones need to go on the list even more than the big ones. We always remember the big tasks. It's the little ones that slip through the cracks!

To help you with your To-do lists, I created a printable for you. Just like the shopping list, you can download & print out. It folds into fourths so you can make separate lists the way it works for you.

For your printable to-do list, please visit simplejoy.org!

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -19 Devotion

I Want to Sing & Dance

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with
praise; give thanks to him and praise his name..*

Psalm 100:4

At one time, I belonged to a church that had this verse on the gate as you drove onto the property. We often think of this verse in terms of church, giving thanks as we enter the House of the Lord. Today, I want you to consider it in a different way. Think of His gates as the door of your home & His courts as the world outside that door. As you go out into the world today, out into His courts, His world, take a moment to give thanks for everything & everyone that the Lord puts in your path.

It's very easy to become overwhelmed by the world, to curse its existence & everyone in it. Ok, maybe it's not that

bad but the world, people can be very frustrating. It's hard to give thanks for the very things that seem to be making your life difficult. However, this is exactly when you want to give thanks. Giving praise for everything you encounter throughout the day can give you a different perspective on the world. You may find yourself entering His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise every time you leave home!

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -19 Tip

Hold a Family Meeting & Assign Tasks

Nowhere is it written that YOU have to do everything to get ready for Thanksgiving. Everyone in the family needs to pitch in to help get it all done. Have a meeting, discuss all the things that need to be done to prepare & then ask each family member what tasks they would like to do.

If all you get are excuses, relax. Rather than getting upset, just take a breath & let your family know that they will be enjoying Thanksgiving dinner at a restaurant this year. No threats. No sarcasm. Just tell them in a matter-of-fact manner. AND MEAN IT! You are busy too & you should not have to shoulder the responsibility for all the work.

Everyone enjoys the meal. Everyone should help. Be strong! You will be doing a lot of work so there is nothing to feel guilty about. Thanksgiving is a family event. The family should help prepare!

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -18 Devotion

Love You Forever

Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his love endures forever.

Psalm 106:1

Let's face it, people sometimes, or even often disappoint us. This can be especially true during the Holidays. We associate more with family, friends, even strangers more during November & December. Some days, it's enough to cause you to lose faith in humanity. Well, maybe it's not that bad but it can test your limits.

When you want to lock yourself in a closet to escape all the people around you, remind yourself that no matter how much people may disappoint you, God never does. In fact, this verse reminds us that God's love endures forever. No matter what, God will always love us. Some days, this is

just enough to keep us going.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -18 Tip

Associate your Lists & Always Carry Them with You

I have a system. Everyone thinks I am SO organized. I am NOT! For this reason, I must make lists & carry them with me. I take a piece of paper & fold it in fourths. Each paper is for a specific category, like groceries or each room of the house. Then I create a different list on each side. If there are more than 4 lists for each category, I use more than one sheet of paper, making a little book. Then I clip all my lists together.

I carry my lists everywhere. I might find myself near a store that carries an item I need. That saves me a trip. Even better, I might run into one of my guests. What does this have to do with anything? I'll tell you in tomorrow's challenge!

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -17 Devotion**

Thankful for Even a Little Bit

*They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them
also and told the disciples to distribute them.*

Mark 8:7

Imagine for a moment you have prepared Thanksgiving dinner for your small family, just 3, 4 or maybe 5 people. Suddenly, there are knocks at the door & the next thing you know, you have 20+ people in your home, all wanting turkey, dressings & the trimmings! YIKES! How would you manage?

This is exactly the situation Jesus was facing in the verse today. A multitude of people in the middle of nowhere, all of them hungry & only small fish & bread to feed them. What to do? Well, Jesus knew just what to do. He gave thanks for what they had & began breaking the fish & bread up to be distributed to those present. When everyone

had eaten, there was food left over.

We often think we don't have enough for the task at hand. Not enough time. Not enough money. Not enough resources. This is when we need to give thanks for what we do have & have faith God hears us & insures it is not one enough but some left over. God is good & He provides for our needs.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -17 Tip

Ask for Help

You should have already asked your family for help. If you find you need more assistance with something, you can ask a family member again. However, this doesn't just apply to those people that live with you. If you have an aunt that makes great pies, you might ask her if she would be willing to bring 1-2 pies to the dinner. You can ask other family members to bring a special dish to your dinner. As I have said before, Thanksgiving is a family event. Make the meal a family project. How wonderful to have a serving table filled with special dishes made by other guests at your dinner!

Now, about my comment yesterday about your lists & running into your guests. People often ask "Is there anything I can bring?" And too often, our immediate answer is "Oh, no, that's all right!" No it isn't! People want to be a part of your event. If they ask about bring something, let them! Pull out your list, see what you need

& assign them a task or dish. It can be something as simple as ice or dinner rolls but everyone gets to participate. And don't feel guilty. If they didn't want to help, they shouldn't have asked. And be sure to make note who is taking care of that item on your list. You are going to need to know who is taking care of each item later.

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -16 Devotion**

But for the Grace of God

The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

Luke 18:11-12

Wow, is that harsh! Imagine giving thanks that you aren’t like those terrible people over there! That’s exactly what this Pharisee did. He thought he was oh, so much better than other people. He thought he was so good, probably too good to have to associate with everyone else. Yikes! How could he possibly minister to anyone with this kind of attitude? Oh well, that’s a discussion for another day.

For today, I want you to focus on the blessings you have been given. Then take time for all the people around you that aren’t as blessed. They may have financial problems.

They may have family problems. Perhaps they have experienced a loss in their family. Take time to really look at the people you encounter during the day. I mean, REALLY look at them. Then take a moment to pray for them. You don't need to know their specific need because God already knows their needs. Then give the Lord thanks that you have the opportunity to pray for those around you. That is a tremendous blessing that the Pharisee would never experience.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -16 Tip

Inventory Dinnerware, Glasses, Linen, Etc

Nothing worse than preparing to set your table, only to discover your linen tablecloth is stained, worn or missing! Take time now to make sure you have all the items you need to set your table, set up your bar, serve your guest... you get the idea.

I want to share an idea that may shock you. Get ready! If you have a large crowd coming for dinner, you might consider using disposable dinnerware. I know you want a lovely table but this saves you HOURS in the kitchen when the meal is over. This also helps if you don't have enough dishes, silverware, etc. for everyone. You can also set a beautiful table with disposable dishes, napkins, tablecloths. I have done this to create a Thanksgiving themed table. You have to decide what works best for you. This is your event & you should do things the way you want, the way that makes life easier.

Still want a nice table setting but don't have what you need to make this happen? More in the next challenge!

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -15 Devotion**

Give Thanks? He Hasn't Done Anything Yet!

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

John 11:41-42

Jesus' friend Lazarus had been sick and Jesus arrived too late to prevent Lazarus from dying. Lazarus' sisters were upset. They just knew Jesus could have saved their brother if only He had arrived in time. Now it was too late. Jesus, however knew it wasn't too late and He began to pray aloud.

Jesus knew His Father would answer His prayers. Jesus didn't even need to say the words for His prayers to be answered. Jesus wanted all the people outside the tomb

where Lazarus lay to hear exactly what He was asking His Father to do. And, as Jesus knew, His Father heard Him and raised Lazarus from the dead.

I want you to notice that Jesus gave thanks even before His Father had answered His prayers. Jesus was so certain His Father would do as He asked that He immediately thanked Him.

We don't need to wait until God does exactly as we ask. Perhaps we should begin thanking Him even before our prayers have been answered, having faith, like Jesus, that our Father is listening and willing to answer our prayers.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -15 Tip

Borrow What You Need

One year, I hosted a series of Christmas teas. I don't own a set of formal dishes so I borrowed some from a friend. Just that simple. If you don't have something you need for your celebration, ask around to see where you might borrow the needed items. Perhaps relatives or friends that are coming to your house would lend you what you need. Remember, people LIKE to contribute to an event. They want to be a part of it, not just spectators. Check with people before you spend ANY money!

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -14 Devotion

What Does that Mean?

You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified. (speaking in tongues)

1 Corinthians 14:17

In this passage, Paul is talking about people giving thanks to God but they are speaking in tongues at the time so no one understands. When people can't understand, they can't learn and grow from the experience.

Now, I know speaking in tongues may not be one of your spiritual gifts. Too often, however, we give thanks to God for our blessings in a way that doesn't instruct others. You want others to grow spiritually as they see and hear you giving thanks to God. Make certain you give thanks in a way that everyone is able to understand.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -14 Tip

Review Your Lists & Slow Cookers

Today you are 2 weeks out from Thanksgiving. You should have things under control. Take a few minutes to review the information I have sent you up to this point. Make certain you haven't overlooked anything. If you still need to take care of a task, PUT IT ON YOUR LIST!

Today I want to tell you about slow cookers. These handy devices save me HOURS in the kitchen on Thanksgiving. In fact, they're the reason we stock up on turkeys & all the trimmings. Thanksgiving prep is so easy for me that I am willing to repeat the process multiple times throughout the year.

I have 3 slow cookers: small, medium & large. When it's only the 3 of us for Thanksgiving, I use the large for dressing, the medium for potatoes & the small for green beans. Slow cookers are one of the things you want to

borrow from friends & relatives. Even if you must pick them up the day before, believe me, it's worth it. On Thanksgiving morning, I have the turkey, dressing, potatoes & green beans cooking in time to begin watching football at 9 here on the West Coast!

I once made a video, timing myself to see how long it took to get all this food prepped & cooking. 45-60 minutes is all it took. Slow cookers mean no last minute rush to prepare something. Slow cookers help free your oven for other items. Slow cookers! Look at your list & determine what can be prepared in a slow cooker. Count up the cookers. If you don't have enough, start calling people!

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -13 Devotion**

Showing Gratitude so Others Understand

All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 4:15

The apostle Paul was having problems with the church in Corinth. The people were turning from Paul and his teachings which meant they were turning from Christ. Paul sent Titus to Corinth to get the church in Corinth back on track. In this passage, Paul is letting them know that what Jesus did through His death, what the Father did by resurrecting Jesus, what Paul did through his teaching and sharing the Gospel was done for the benefit of everyone in the church in Corinth. God only wanted grace, forgiveness to reach more people and for those people to be thankful.

All this was not only done for the church in Corinth but

also for all of us today. Take time to feel the grace of God, to remember all He has done for us and to allow your thankfulness to overflow.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -13 Tip

Apple Peelers

There are these handy-dandy devices known as apple peelers. You clamp them onto a counter, secure an apple into place, set the peeler, turn the handle & TA-DA, it peels your apple! You need one of these if you have a large crowd coming. You need one of these. Now before you tell me that you don't need to peel a bunch of apples for your meal, you should know this handy device can also be used to peel POTATOES! You're welcome!

This is an old school item. You might find one at a small mom & pop hardware store, the kind of place you shop for canning products. Or go on Craig's List or Ebay. If you buy a used one, be sure to get one that is not rusty. It may have a few spots but you need to make it clear that you plan to use it, not simply display it. You still need to use a hand peeler to finish the job but the bulk of the work can be done with the apple peeler. If 3 of you work together, one can use the apple peeler while the second finishes the detail peeling & the third cuts the potatoes.

We did this for our church Giving Thanks dinner where we have about 200 guests & it worked GREAT! You may like it so much, you peel potatoes this way all the time!

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -12 Devotion**

Never Stop Giving Thanks

*I have not stopped giving thanks for you,
remembering you in my prayers.*

Ephesians 1:16

The apostle Paul prayed for the people he met in ministry. He prayed for them all the time. In all his letters, Paul told members of the church, not only that he was praying for them but also how thankful he was for all of them. Paul constantly gave thanks for all the different people in his life and ministry.

Today is a good time to consider the different people in your life, all the people you encounter throughout the day. As you think about them, take time to give thanks for them and then pray for them. Even if you know nothing about some of the people you see regularly, you can still give

thanks for them and the pray for them. It doesn't have to be a long pray or even a very specific prayer. After all, God knows their needs and concerns. Ask the Lord to see to those needs and watch over them. It's just as simple as that.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -12 Tip

Test Your Recipes & Any Other New Item

I always advise against trying a new recipe when hosting an important event. Too much can go wrong. Stick with things you know. However, I understand the temptation of wanting to try something new, something special for your guests. If this is the case, I STRONGLY advise you test the recipe first. Your challenge today is to prepare any & all new recipes for your family dinner. You should also test any new equipment you may be using for Thanksgiving prep.

So, if you are using a apple peeler to peel potatoes, use now. In fact, use it to peel potatoes every time you fix potatoes for your family. If you bought new slow cookers, use them. Never wait until the big event to test anything. It greatly increase the odds that it either won't work or will be more difficult to use than you expected.

On Thanksgiving, you should feel relaxed & comfortable, confident as you prepare your meal. Preparing new recipes

a few times before Thanksgiving helps eliminate the stress caused by the unknown.

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -11 Devotion

Watch What Comes Out of Your Mouth

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. Ephesians

5:4

It can be easy to forget ourselves and say the wrong thing. We might swear or tell a joke that isn't very nice. We might repeat a rumor we heard or make a snide comment about someone. This sort of thing has become so common today. The things people post behind the anonymity of the internet are disturbing. These are things none of us would ever want our children to say or write. We must always be careful about the things we say. Words have tremendous impact.

Paul told the members of the church in Ephesus that they needed to avoid saying inappropriate things. Instead, they should speak thanksgiving. This would fill their minds with positive thoughts and have a powerful and positive impact

on those around them. Paul's advice is still good today. Develop the habit of giving thanks for others rather than saying negative things. It may take time but the effort is worth it.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -11 Tip

Clean Out the Fridge

Someone in your family is going to be doing major grocery shopping very soon. There needs to be room for all that food, especially the perishables. Time to clean out the fridge & cabinets but especially the fridge. This is not the time to beat yourself up for the science experiment in the back of the fridge. It happens. Get out a new garbage bag & clean it all out. Then wash out all the containers. Then go through the freezer & get rid of all those old freezer burnt items that are taking up room. You are going to need room in there too!

Go through cabinets & rearrange so there is room for other non-perishable food items. Make space on the counter & clean it off really well so you are able to put things on there. Your kitchen may be crowded for a few days but I like to be able to see what I have & what I still need to pick up.

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -10 Devotion

Mind Your Manners

*...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Ephesians 5:20

Everything. What a great word. No exceptions. All things. Paul used these phrases in his letters, reminding his followers that there are areas of our lives involving the Lord where there are no exceptions. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. No exceptions. We are to give thanks to God for everything. No exceptions. No matter how small it might seem.

When I was in seminary at Fuller in Pasadena, CA, parking was at a premium. There was a small garage. There was a lot about 1/3 of a mile away. I never parked there, preferring to take my chances with the street. Working a rotating shift while attending seminary full time was a

challenge. When I was fortunate enough to get a good parking spot without circling the block over and over, I always told God “Thank you!” This small blessings made my life just a bit easier on those days.

One of my professors talked about people that gave thanks for minor things like a good parking space. She thought they, we were silly. She felt it was foolish to thank God for something so trivial. Trivial to her maybe. To me, it was enough to make me smile all the way to class. Everything. Because the Lord knows how important even the small things can be in our lives. In Jesus name!

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -10 Tip

Relax & Review

Take an evening off. Have some wine & chocolate. Review all your notes & lists. Highlight anything that you need to remember. Add items that you forgot before now. Talk to your family to be sure everyone is up to date on the tasks they need to handle. Make a few calls or send texts so you can update your guest list. You may find someone has made other plans & forgot to call you or someone had plans fall through & needs a place to spend the holiday.

However, more than anything, RELAX! Things are going to get very busy very soon.

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -9 Devotion

Me Worry?

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6

Yesterday, I talk about Everything. Paul tells us to give thanks for Everything. In this passage, Paul tells us not to be anxious about anything. In some translations, it says “Be anxious for nothing.” Nothing. That’s another one of those no exception words Paul likes to use. Paul tells us not to worry about Anything. Instead, we should put our energy into prayer, asking God for what we want, what we need. We need to thank Him as we ask, before He ever answers our prayers. Like Jesus thanking His Father for raising Lazarus before it has been done, we are to ask and then believe with all our hearts that God hears our prayers and

answers them.

This isn't always easy. Doubt is a powerful thing. When combined with fear, it can make it impossible not to be anxious. Yet prayer calms our hearts and mind. Thanksgiving assures us that all is well. Big problems or small, prayer and thanksgiving are the cure for our anxious hearts and minds.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -9 Tip

Study the Grocery Ads

Time to make a new series of lists. This set breaks down all your grocery needs & lists them on a page for each specific store along with the price of the items at that store. I like to make it easy to go in & quickly pick up the things I need, then move on to the next store.

Many stores create large displays in the front with many of the non-perishable items for easy shopping. You can quickly scan this area for the things you need to save yourself from wandering the entire store.

As I mentioned, I buy multiple turkeys & other Thanksgiving ingredients to enjoy the rest of the year. Most stores require you to buy a certain \$ amount of groceries to get the low, low price on the turkey. So I make sure I get as close to that \$ amount as possible. I want to avoid spending a fortune on Thanksgiving. I also try to stock up on basics that go on sale during Thanksgiving, like canned vegetables & sugar.

Spend time doing your homework so you don't need to work so hard at the store. It seriously cuts down on your stress!

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -8 Devotion

Not Just Thanks

and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 1:12

We are so fortunate. We are part of God's family and as such, we are included in His inheritance. When this passage talks about kingdom of light, Paul means as opposed to the kingdom of darkness. This gives us so much for which to be thankful. And Paul tells us to not just be thankful but to give joyful thanks. When we accept that we are no longer in the darkness, our hearts are made light and our spirit is filled with joy.

Consider everything included in our inheritance. Well, when I think about it, I guess there isn't anything that isn't included. The thought that all the Lord has to offer is

available for us should cause us to be joyfully thankful everyday, all year long.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -8 Tip

Finalize Your Shopping List

Almost time to hit the stores! Time to go over your shopping lists one more time. Study your menu. Make certain all the necessary ingredients are added to your list. It's easy to forget the little things that go into a recipe, like a seasoning you only use once a year or that you need extra butter for various recipes, not just the dinner rolls.

Check, double check, check again. Look over the ads to make certain your lists contain items you want to purchase at specific stores. Yes, I know this sounds tedious but it's better to take the time in the relaxing comfort of your home rather than trying to remember if you have baking powder in your pantry. Work smarter, not harder by planning ahead before you go out!

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -7 Devotion**

Faith AND Thanksgiving

*rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you
were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

Colossians 2:7

In this letter, Paul wanted to teach the Colossians that Christ is in everything and their lives should reflect that. When others watch us, they should see Christ in us. We are His representatives here today and others learn about Him by watching us. Unfortunately, we don't always do a good job of representing Him.

Paul reminds us that we should "walk in Him" with our faith, everything we have been taught, rooted deep within us. We must be strong in our faith, made strong by our faith. Finally, because of our faith, our strength, our thankfulness should be overflowing.

As we prepare for Thanksgiving and the hectic pace of the Holidays sometimes overwhelms us, it can be difficult to overflow with thankfulness. Take time to catch your breath. Draw on that deep rooted faith. Then go out with thanksgiving.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -7 Tip

Time to Head to the Grocery Stores

One week until Thanksgiving. Take breath. Everything is great. Today I want to talk to you about grocery shopping. The stores are very busy right now. I think the best time to shop is early, early in the morning. Most stores do stock work overnight. This means things are often well-stocked first thing in the morning. Stores also tend to be quiet early in the morning. Try to get there when they open so you can avoid the crowds.

Now, a word of warning: tempting as it is, try to refrain from doing your grocery shopping on your way home from work. I know how it is. You're already out. You don't want to make a special trip. You just want to get it done. Yes, you and hundreds of other people! The stores are PACKED during rush hour with people stopping to pick up a few things on their way home on a regular day. At Thanksgiving, it is just a mad house. Save yourself the aggravation by getting up very early & heading to the stores. In a few short hours you can be done. Then you can

relax & take a nap!

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -6 Devotion

Peace and Thanksgiving

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

As we prepare for Thanksgiving, our hearts and minds are filled with many things. Peace isn't always one of them. Face it, we have so many things going on and it's only going to get worse or at least busier. We drift off to sleep thinking about everything that must still be done and we wake up considering all we hope to accomplish that day.

How can we be thankful when we can't find a moments peace in our lives? Sometimes, you just have to force the issue. I actually have a chair in our bedroom closet. When I need peace, I go sit in the closet. It's quiet and dark. I sit and I pray. I sit and I think. I set and I find peace. I may not

be in there long but even a few minutes can be enough to bring me the peace I need. And for that, I am thankful!

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -6 Tip

Thaw the Turkey

That's it! Take the turkey out of the freezer & put it in the fridge. I always put a big towel under the turkey to catch any liquid that runs off as it thaws. You need a break if you did your shopping already. If you plan to do it over the week-end, get up really early! Everyone else is going to be at the store too!

You might also create a schedule of the items that need to go in the oven & things that need to be cooked in the microwave. You want to get all the food on the table & have it all HOT! Take time NOW to determine the cooking time on your dishes & schedule their cooking time.

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -5 Devotion

Worship with Thanksgiving

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Colossians 3:16

The lessons Jesus taught His followers, lessons Paul has passed along had a powerful impact on the people that heard them and they still have a tremendous impact today. The message of Christ is meant to guide us to do the right thing, to behave in the right manner and to treat others well. We are to help others grow spiritually, not just with the message, with the lessons but also with the psalms and music. Most important, we are to do all this with gratitude to God in our hearts.

There's a commercial currently on television. In it, Peyton

Manning is coaching Brad Paisley as Brad practices a jingle. Peyton tells Brad that he almost has it, Peyton wants to feel it “right here” and he points to himself. “In your chest?” Brad asks. “No, your heart,” Peyton responds.

This is true for us. It’s not enough to just share the message, to share our faith with others either with our words or actions. We need to feel it in our hearts. And others need to feel it too. I believe gratitude gives us that heart connection. We give thanks to God. God is grateful for us. We have gratitude for those with whom we share the message and they in turn are thankful for us, the message and the Lord. Gratitude is such a powerful tool when we are serving the Lord.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -5 Tip

Pick Up Borrowed Items

Are you borrowing various items from people in order to host Thanksgiving this year? Today is the day to go around & collect as many as possible. I like to know well in advance that I have everything I need. I tend to fret about things like this, worried that I won't have everything I need. The sooner I can have everything on hand, the sooner I can relax. I don't want to get things TOO early because I'll run out of space. But a little crowding for a few day isn't so bad.

Doing this task now gives you time in case there is any kind of problem. Then you can come up with an alternative. It also gives time if anyone isn't home. You still have a few days to pick things up rather than rushing around at the last minute.

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -4 Devotion

LOOK OUT!

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Colossians 4:20

As we quickly approach Thanksgiving and then Christmas not too long after, it becomes easy to forget to take care of ourselves. Paul, in this passage, reminds us to devote ourselves to prayer and to be watchful. There are many things for which we can be watchful but I think during this busy season it is important that women be watchful for their own well being.

I remember when I was working at the church and Katy was in school. I was so busy during the Holiday season that I didn't take care of myself. I failed to watch what I ate, what I drank (as in enough water) and that I was getting enough rest. Every year, I would come down with something in January. I managed to stay strong through the

end of the year but once the Holidays were over WHAM! I was sick as a dog.

Worse still, I would neglect my spiritual strength and well-being as well. No wonder I became so sick after the first of the year. I had left myself vulnerable, very vulnerable. And to take it a step farther, I failed to be thankful. Instead, I prayed for the end of the year, for it all to be over rather than enjoying the season, even the hectic days God brought my way.

As the days get shorter and life gets busier, never fail to fill your life with prayer, being watchful that you are taking care of yourself and giving thanks for everything, even the busyness of the season!

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -4 Tip

Out of Town Guests

Get everything ready for any out of town guests staying at your place this week. Make sure you have a few special items to make them feel welcome & at home. Confirm their arrival. You want to enjoy your company when they arrive so prepare now so your are able to relax & visit.

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) -3 Devotion**

So Much Joy!

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?

1 Thessalonians 3:9

I recently asked people what caused them the most stress as they prepared for Thanksgiving. I laughed as one person told me what caused them the most stress was annoying relatives! It's true what they say. You can't pick your relatives. Sometimes it seems the Holidays bring out the worst, not the best in our families. Petty arguments and age old disagreements are brought out and hashed over again and again. Tensions rise and feelings are hurt. Unlike the people in the passage above, not everyone has joy when it comes to extended family.

Still, our families are part of our history. They define who we are whether we like it or not. Time to take a breath and

give thanks to God for all those who make us crazy and for all those that bring us such joy in the presence of God. We might just find our attitude towards the difficult people in our life changes once we are able to honestly give thanks for them.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -3 Tip

Confirm Your Guest Lists & Assignments

Take time to call your guests to confirm the exact (or close to it) number of people to expect for Thanksgiving. Verify they will be there for dinner, not just dessert. I always prepare for a few more just in case but try to get a better idea so you are certain you have everything you need.

At the same time, check your lists to see who is supposed to be doing what. Then call them to make certain they remember what they are bringing or doing. If there is a problem, no stress. See if you can assign it to someone else. Otherwise, either take care of it yourself or skip it. Remember, this is your event. Do it your way!

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -2 Devotion

Thanks for Choosing Me

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength,
that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his
service.*

1 Timothy 1:12

The women in my church host a boutique twice a year. I am responsible for finding the vendors for the event. I send emails, post on social media and other sites, send contracts, assign spaces, follow-up and more. Believe me, as it gets closer to the boutique, I am praying constantly for strength. I am sorry to say I am rarely giving thanks that Jesus considers me trustworthy enough to give me this task.

As I consider it, this is rather sad. Jesus chose me for this task because I have a special set of gifts and talents that makes me the perfect person for the job. sometimes we don't feel very thankful that Jesus has called us to serve.

Yet we must consider the fact that He could have called any number of other people to service but He chose US! He chose YOU!

Instead of complaining about all the work that must be done to prepare for Thanksgiving or to get ready for Christmas, we each need to take a moment to ask Jesus to give us the strength we need to fulfill the tasks He has called us to perform and to thank Him for trusting us enough to call us into service.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -2 Tip

Last Minute Cleaning

You & your family should have been cleaning over the last few weeks. Now it's time to do a few last minute things. Vacuum, dust, clean the bathrooms, pick up those everyday items. If you have been doing the cleaning over the weeks, this should be a simple task.

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: T(hanksgiving) -1 Devotion

I Mean Everyone

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— or kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

1 Timothy 2:1

There comes a time in all our lives when we look at those around us and ask God if He really means for us to pray for these people. I remember as a child being made to apologize to someone by my mother. Wow, was that a forced apology. “Sorry,” I would say in a bitter tone. Of course, then I would be told to say it like I meant it. Well, I didn’t mean it! I wasn’t really sorry and I didn’t want to apologize. Looking back, I feel bad about those moments. Yet, I sometimes feel I haven’t learned anything from those lessons.

In this letter to Timothy, Paul tells him and, through him, the members of the churches Timothy visits to pray, intercede and give thanks for ALL people, including the authorities. This wasn't always easy. These same authorities were often persecuting Christians yet Paul understood the importance of praying for the authorities. He felt god would lead those in charge to do the right thing, the thing God desired so the Christians could live “peaceful and quiet lives.”

Now is the time to pray for ALL people, including those in authority whether you agree with them or not. Pray for God to guide them as HE sees fit, not as you wish. I know this can be difficult. If, however, enough of us are praying for those in charge to do what allows us to live peaceful and quiet lives, then imagine the impact on our nation.

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

T(hanksgiving) -1 Tip

Time to Prep

The big day is almost here. In many homes across the country, the stress level is through the roof. In your home, calm reigns! You are ready for this because you planned, you worked smarter not harder. You can spend today doing anything that can be done ahead.

I clean my turkey & put it in the roasting pan then put it, covered, back in the fridge. I set the table, complete with serving dishes. Put a note in each serving dish so you remember what goes in each & you also remember to serve that item! Once the table is set, get help & cover the table with a clean flat sheet to protect it overnight. Set up the bar if you are having one.

Anything that can be made ahead & refrigerated the night before should be taken care of today. That leaves you time for all the tasks that can only be done on Thursday.

Get a good night's sleep. Relax. You've got it under control!

My Notes

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge: Thanksgiving Day Devotion

It's All Good

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

1 Timothy 4:4

Look around you. Not just what is around you inside your home or work. Take a moment to step outside and look around. Genesis tells us when God finished creating all things, He looked at His creation and saw that it was good. Paul wanted to remind us of this. Everything around us God created is good and none of it is to be rejected. We are to give thanks for all these things and because it is blessed by the Word of God, it is made good.

On Thanksgiving, we need to take time to give thanks, not just for the food we receive but for all things in our lives, in our world. We live in such an incredible time and we take

so many things for granted. All things can be used to bring praise God and we need to take time to give thanks for them. Even things we may feel we have no use for can be used in His service, can be used for good. Take time to give thanks for all things and consider how you might use the unrecognized blessings that surround you. You just might be surprised!

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge

Thanksgiving Day Tip

There are many things to be done but if you have planned well, you should have time to relax & enjoy the day. Plan things out so you are able to enjoy your company rather than spending all your time in the kitchen. Ask someone to come early to help you with any last minute tasks, like popping the rolls in the oven while you mash the potatoes.

When it's time to put the food on the table, recruit help. Things are hot, get them out fast!

Most important, you should enjoy your celebration. If you aren't having fun, no one is going to enjoy themselves. Relax & have fun. Enjoy your company. Remember, it's about the people, not the food or the location. You want to be the #1 guest at your celebration!

My Notes

**Thanksgiving Countdown Challenge:
T(hanksgiving) +1 Devotion**

Give Thanks for Jesus

Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:38

Thanksgiving is over and we can now relax. NOT SO FAST! Christmas is just around the corner. Ok, maybe not the next corner but it can come quickly upon us. We have a few days before December begins, time when we can catch our breath. And time for us to reflect on the season ahead.

Christmas can be overwhelming for moms. We are already busy and our lives become even busier. It can be difficult to give thanks for such a stressful season. I understand. Take a moment to read the verse above again. For generations, people had waiting for the Messiah to come to save them. This verse tells the encounter Mary, Joseph and the infant

Jesus had with a woman named Anna at the temple. Ann recognized the baby as the Messiah as soon as she saw Him. She knew He was the one she had waited all her life to see. She gave thanks to God, not just for Jesus but also for being able to see Him herself.

At Christmas, it is easy to lose sight of the real purpose of the holiday. We forget why we are celebrating. We may not even feel like celebrating at all. Take time to remember what the birth of this Child meant and still means to the world. And give thanks!

My Thoughts

Thanksgiving Recipes

I wanted to share a few family recipes with you for your Thanksgiving & Holiday meals. They are older recipes so you may want to make some substitutions to make them healthier. I like them just the way they are. Each one reminds me of Holiday dinners at home. I hope you & your family enjoy them.

Broccoli Casserole

2 10-ounce packages frozen broccoli

1 cup minute rice

¼ cup melted butter

2 tablespoons instant minced onions

1 can cream of chicken soup

½ cup milk

1 8-ounce jar Cheez Whiz

Thaw broccoli. Combine thawed broccoli with rice, butter, onion, soup, mild and Cheez Whiz in a large bowl. Mix well. Spoon into a greased nine by 12 inch baking dish. Bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes or until bubbly and rice is tender.

Makes 10 servings

Corn Pudding

1 small onion, chopped

1 stick margarine

1 16-ounce can whole kernel corn

1 16-ounce can cream-style corn

1 small package corn muffin mix

3 eggs, beaten

1 cup sour cream

1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese

Sauté onion in the margarine in a skillet until tender. Remove from heat. Add the whole kernel corn and cream-style corn; mix well. Add the muffin mix and the eggs; mix well. Pour into a greased 9 x 13" baking pan. Spread sour cream on top. Sprinkle with the Cheddar cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes.

Pineapple Orange Salad

- 3 8-ounce cartons whipped topping
- 1 Large container small curd cottage cheese
- 2 3-ounce packages orange gelatin
- 1 3-ounce package pineapple gelatin
- 1 large can crushed pineapple, drained
- 2 small cans mandarin oranges, drained

Place whipped topping in large bowl. Sprinkle gelatin over topping and mix until thoroughly combined. Add cottage cheese and fruit. Pour into bowl, smooth top and place in fridge. Serve chilled.

Baked Corn

2 cans cream-style corn

1 can sweetened condensed milk

½ cup chopped green pepper

2 tablespoons chopped onion

2 teaspoons salt

4 eggs, beaten

Combine the corn, condensed milk, green pepper onion, salt and eggs in a bowl; mix well. Pour into buttered casserole. Bake at 350 degrees for 45-50 minutes.

Bourbon Sweet Potatoes

4 lbs sweet potatoes

1 stick (1/2 cup) butter or margarine, softened

1/2 cup bourbon

1/3 cup orange juice

1/4 cup light brown sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

1/3 cup chopped pecans

Heat oven to 350. Scrub potatoes. Cook, covered in boiling salted water in a large saucepan, about 35 minutes or just until tender. Drain, cool slightly, peel. Mash potatoes. Add butter, bourbon, orange juice, brown sugar, salt and spices. Beat until smooth. Spoon into buttered six-cup baking dish

(1 1/2 quarts) sprinkle nuts around edge. Bake for 45 minutes or until lightly browned.

Cherry-Cola Salad

1 20-ounce can black cherries

2 3-ounce packages cherry gelatin

12 ounces cola

1 cup chopped nuts

Drain cherries, reserving juice. Heat the reserved juice to the boiling point in a sauce pan. Add the gelatin; stir until dissolved. Combine the gelatin, cherries, cola and nuts.

Stuffed Acorn Squash

2 small acorn squash, cut into half, seeded

1/2 pound pork sausage

1/4 cup chopped celery

2 tablespoons chopped onion

2 tablespoons chopped green pepper

3/4 cup bread crumbs

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons butter, melted

3/4 cup bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place the squash cut side down in a shallow baking dish. Bake for 45 minutes or until tender. Scoop out and mash the pulp, reserving shells. Brown sausage with celery, onion, and green pepper in a skillet. Add the mashed squash, 3/4 cup of bread crumbs

and salt; mix well. Spoon sausage mixture into the squash shells. Mix butter and second $\frac{3}{4}$ cup bread crumbs. Sprinkle mixture around edges of squash. Bake for 10 minutes.

About the Author

Jean Ann Duckworth is the author of 12 books.

Jean Ann Duckworth is the founder and Executive Director of Heart in Home Ministry for Women. Jean Ann is a popular author and speaker. Jean Ann is a veteran of the United States Navy with an M.Div. from Fuller Seminary. Jean Ann and her husband, Terry live in Southern California with their daughter, Katy & cat, Mimi.