

## **Gratitude and Perspective** by Cindy Powell

*Israel – September 2007*

Today I'm grateful for many things. That should be true every moment of every day, but I have to confess there are moments (sometimes long moments!) when I lose my perspective. There is a line from a somewhat obscure song by Twila Paris that comes to mind each time I think about gratitude and perspective: "*Could the joy of life be found in simple gratitude, and is gratitude as simple as perspective?*"

Ponder that for a moment. Is gratitude really as simple as perspective? The more I consider it, the more I'm convinced of its truth. I've been in Jerusalem for the past two weeks and have had several "perspective checks" that have served to renew a deep and profound sense of gratitude in my heart.

I've been at a large international prayer convocation for a good part of my time here. I've heard a lot of different estimates regarding the number of people in attendance but it is safe to say the number is closer to a couple thousand than a couple hundred. Yet there have been a relatively small number of Americans—probably less than 50. As you can imagine, just being in such an international environment easily broadens your perspective. Most of us in the west recognize that we live in relative ease—materially speaking—compared to most of the world. One pastor from Russia told of selling his car so he could come with his son. He's not sure what he'll do when he gets back, but he's trusting the Lord to work it out. That's really where the perspective comes in—we have a lot materially, but as a nation we are poor spiritually. We are the church in Laodicia—thinking we are rich, when in reality we are wretched, poor, and blind. Or worse, we are the church in Sardis—with a reputation for being alive, when in reality we are dead. I've known this in my heart for a long time, but it was humbling to realize the church in the rest of the world sees it so much more clearly than we do! The church around the world seems to have a much more accurate picture of the church in the west than most American believers. In many other parts of the world people have nowhere to turn *but to God*, so they seek Him with a fervor and desperation that is foreign to western society. As a result they see Him respond in ways we don't. *They feel bad for us—and they should!*

So why am I grateful? I'm grateful for the many blessings God *has* given me and my country and pray I (we) won't squander them. I'm grateful that believers in other countries are praying for *us* and I know that God hears. I'm grateful that He has heard the cries of believers in America through the years and in His mercy He *is* shaking our nation out of its complacency so that we will turn to Him. And mostly, I'm grateful for my own personal weakness. I lived too long without Jesus as the center of my life and, quite frankly, I was just a walking dead person. As a result, I *do* cling to Him with fervor and desperation because I know all too well what life is like without Him. Years ago the Lord showed me that my greatest spiritual strength was the deep knowledge of my own weakness. So I am grateful to be able to say along with the Apostle Paul, "*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest upon me ...for when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

My second perspective check came this past week in the form of an object lesson involving a very large and sharp knife. I am staying in Jerusalem with a friend and had just finished having a

nice dinner with her and her flat-mate. I was doing some dishes and had carelessly placed the above mentioned knife in the water, blade side up. When I put my hand in the dishwasher, my thumb skimmed across the top of the blade. The result wasn't pretty.

So why am I grateful? It could have been SO much worse. Sure, a lot of bad things happen in this world, but in that moment I realized just how many bad things *don't* happen. I got a glimpse of how often God protects us. But I also realized things can change in the blink of an eye. I want to enjoy every good moment as it comes because they pass so quickly. It was also a reminder that so many of the things that seem to bring "drama" into our lives are really quite superficial. They make a big mess, but there is no real lasting damage. That's how this cut was, it made a big mess and looked like it was really something, but when it finally stopped bleeding and all was said and done, some antiseptic and a couple of simple little butterfly bandages put it back together and now, just a few days later, you wouldn't have any idea how bad it originally seemed to be. Honestly, it didn't even hurt that much—it just "looked" bad. I'm so grateful that He is teaching me not to sweat the small stuff. And, in the overall scheme of things, *most* of it is small stuff. Let go of the things that don't really matter—hold fast to what is good. None of us have any idea how long those "good" things will last—enjoy them while you can.

My third and final perspective check (at least for this article!) came this weekend. Yesterday was Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement—the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. On Friday evening, my friends and I went to the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem for the service (think going to the Crystal Cathedral for an Easter service—people who may not go to synagogue on any other day, go on Yom Kippur) and afterwards we headed to the Kotel (the Western Wall). Everything stops in Jerusalem on Yom Kippur. No cars are allowed on the roads. Everything is closed. There is a sense of stillness over the city that is hard to imagine any other day—even on Shabbat. Everyone is out, though, walking with family and friends to synagogue or to each other's homes, dressed mostly in white. Of course in biblical times on the Day of Atonement the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to make atonement for all the people. Since the veil of the temple was torn at the time of Jesus' crucifixion and then some 70 years later Jerusalem was seized and the temple itself was completely destroyed, such a practice is no longer possible—which, of course, was God's intent, since He offered His Son as the final and ultimate sacrifice. Now, as I understand it (although admittedly my understanding of orthodox traditions is *very* limited), orthodox Jews will keep track of their sins through the year, and then on Yom Kippur they fast for 25 hours as they confess their sins and seek forgiveness and atonement in various ways depending on the degree of orthodoxy. The ultimate goal is for their names to be written in the Book of Life which is said to be sealed on Yom Kippur until the next year.

There is a reverence for God associated with Yom Kippur (and in many Jewish traditions), that we would do well to learn from, but there is also a sense of heaviness that comes from the lack of assurance that they have actually been forgiven. Even though the sense of God's presence in the city was so apparent, I had such deep sorrow in my heart knowing most will wake up the next morning continuing to carry the weight of their sin.

So why am I grateful? I'm grateful because I know that atonement *has* been made. I'm grateful that I *know* my sins have been forgiven and I *know* my name *is* written in the Book of Life and it will never be blotted out. I'm even grateful that I know I know!

But even more, I'm grateful that the time of His coming is fast approaching. Although the Bible tells us we won't know the exact day or hour, it clearly states that we *should* know the season. I don't know a single person whose ear is attentive to the voice of God who doesn't wholeheartedly agree that we *are* in that season. Recent newspaper headlines seem to be taken almost verbatim from the pages of Scripture. I'm grateful that in *that* day, all of Israel *will* be saved. I'm grateful that many, both Jew and Gentile, *are* beginning to hear His call and are turning to Him even now. More than anything, I'm grateful that the day *He* has longed for since eternity past will soon come to pass. The day when we, the church worldwide, Jew and Gentile, will be presented to Him—in *Jerusalem*—as one pure spotless bride. On *that* day, He will finally receive the due reward for His suffering.

Yes, I think gratitude *is* as simple as perspective. And today I am simply grateful...for *all* of the above.

And for so much more.