



*Spirituality of Gratitude: The Unexpected Blessings of Thankfulness*

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\*Explores how we can grow in gratitude even in times of difficulty

\*Fifty-two brief readings, ideal for daily or weekly devotions

\*From the bestselling Korean author of *Deep-Rooted in Christ*

## The Grace of Descending

*"Deep gratitude springs up from within. To become truly grateful is incredibly difficult, but the difficulty of the process makes the results all the more lovely."*

– Joshua Choonmin Kang

True gratitude is being grateful for everything. Being thankful for a wonderful situation is easy. But true gratitude is being thankful for the situation we can't be thankful for by our own strength. That kind of gratitude can be found only by one who knows the paradox of grace.

One paradox of grace is gratitude for "descending." We honor and applaud those who ascend—those who have earned achievement or success. On the other hand, we often pity, avoid or even scorn those who descend.

Those who have reached the pinnacle of success have ascended to the summit, and the summit can be a precious place. Some things can *only* be seen from that vantage point. There is much to learn from those who have reached the heights, and they can serve as excellent guides to lead others. But the summit can also be a dangerous place of exposure and vulnerability. It is not a good place for a long stay, and everyone who has ascended must eventually descend. But this can be a painful and terribly lonely experience, even more dangerous than the ascent.

Timing is key to a proper descent. When Peter Hillary, the son of world-famous mountain climber Sir Edmund Hillary, conquered Mount Everest in 2002, he called his father from atop the mountain. His father's advice was to "be more careful when you come down from that mountain. It is much harder to come down from the mountain than climbing up the mountain." One can get lost or fall, even die, on the down side of the mountain if the proper timing is missed. But only those who have reached the summit know how it feels to descend.

We need God's grace in order to conquer the summit. But coming down requires just as much of God's grace. Think of an airplane. If the airplane descends carefully and safely, we call it "landing." However, if the airplane loses control during the descent, as result of turbulence or other outside forces, we call it "crashing." Likewise, if a person who has reached the leadership summit descends willingly, it is considered to be beautiful. On the other hand, if a leader is forcibly removed from the summit, it can be a humiliating downfall. We need God's special grace in order to make a beautiful descent.

Leaders who descend beautifully, in God's perfect timing, can experience his amazing grace like never before. There may be new opportunities for them as a result of descending well at the proper time, having even greater impact in a new endeavor. When we descend, we are

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offered a different view. A poem by Nobel Prize-nominated poet Ko Un describes this concept:

*On the way down, I saw the flower I hadn't seen on the way up.*

Let us be thankful on the way down, for God's hidden grace is at the bottom, and it is there that we understand hardship.

There's unexplainable depth at the bottom that simply can't be felt at the top, which is why those used by God's hand all experienced severe hardships. And if we allow the rock-bottom experience to refine and redefine us, we can protect ourselves from falling from the top. Jesus' cross is that low place, but that cross reaches to heaven. This is why I daily draw near to the low place of the cross.

– Taken from chapter three, “The Grace of Descending”