**Episode 52: When Gratitude Becomes Avoidance**

Because of the holiday week, I wanted to offer a shorter episode for you this week. Because God knows our brains are all over the place with hosting people for Thanksgiving, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, or even grieving on not being able to do those things this year. So today will be simple, my friend.

I’ve seen a practice over the past few years grow in popularity on social media— the practice of naming one thing you are thankful for each day in the month of November. My friend Sarah Westfall is even hosting the liturgy of the little things on Instagram, and it’s so beautiful.

There’s also been a surge in the practice of gratitude on a daily basis. My planner and my daily journal both have spots to name what I’m grateful for each day. Counselors and therapists and coaches and social workers and pastors are all preaching the power of gratitude, how it can change your life.

And I’m not going to lie to you, it can.

There is so much research on this right now.

Expressing gratitude can help improve depression, anxiety, other mental health issues, broken relationships, spiritual health, even physical health.

And hear me today, I don’t want you to stop intentionally finding gratitude.

Because gratitude can heal.

But here’s what I don’t want you to do.

I don’t want to ignore the darkness as you reach for little bits of light.

Because the darkness is still there.

Finding gratitude doesn’t magically make it go away.

We don’t want to use gratitude as avoidance.

Avoidance of our painful emotions and thoughts and experiences.

Because when we avoid those things or pretend they aren’t there,

They only get worse.

Avoiding our painful emotions through gratitude could sound or look like:

No, I won’t worry about that issue in my marriage today. I’m grateful for

all he *does* do.

I’m going to smile though my depression and just remember my life is so much better than so-and-sos. So I can get through it.

Nope, I’m thinking positive thoughts. These negative thoughts will not stay.

(Though this relationship is abusive) I’m going to point out all the good things in my partner, loved one, leader, church, or job. That will help me keep going. Just find the good. Love keeps no record of wrongs. And I’m to love all people.

Do you hear the pattern here?

Finding gratitude every day is so healing, but this kind of gratitude can be more hurting than healing.

Because nothing changes with your gratitude in these kind of situations. The darkness will keep choking out the light. The bad stuff will keep happening if it’s not properly addressed instead of ignored in light of thankfulness.

So it’s simple today. This is all I want you to remember on this week we intentionally give thanks.

Be honest about the hard stuff, too.

It’s ok to thank God in prayer and also tell how him how bad everything else feels. David did this all the time.

It’s okay to choose to see the little bits of light but also hold the darkness at the same time.

Don’t pretend your relationship problems aren’t happening. Don’t pretend your depression or anxiety isn’t debilitating. Don’t pretend the abuse is over. Don’t pretend the betrayal didn’t break you. Don’t pretend you aren’t angry or sad or whatever.

Allow space for those experiences and feelings alongside your gratitude this Thanksgiving.

And maybe because of your authenticity and honesty with yourself, God, and others, just maybe then the little bits of light will begin to grow. And true healing begin.

To end our time today,

I’m going to read over you a part of the *Liturgy of Thanksgiving at the Return of Joy,* from *Every Moment Holy*, *Volume 2*.

For a long season, O Lord,

I considered as an impossibility

What I know now as unshakeable truth:

That after loss, pain, tragedy, tears,

Sorrow, doubt, defeat, and disarray,

I will hold a more costly and precious joy

Then any I have held before;

And this not in denial of my loss,

But manifest in the very wreckage of it.

And so I know this unexpected joy

Is no glib and passing fancy.

It is rather the diamond-hard treasure

Unearthed and recognized

Only when lesser hopes have collapsed.

It is the knowledge of your unwavering

Faithfulness, O Christ, now experienced

And owned. It is the bright beacon

of your promises blooming in the night

Like signal fires upon mountain peaks.

I came to the end of my own hope, O God,

And found that your hope held me still.

I saw through the ruin of my own happiness

That your better joy stood firm—

An unassailable fortress that even death

Could not throw down.

And you have lifted me from where I lay

Wounded on war-torn fields, and have planted

My feet solidly upon your ramparts.

Amen. (p. 322-323)