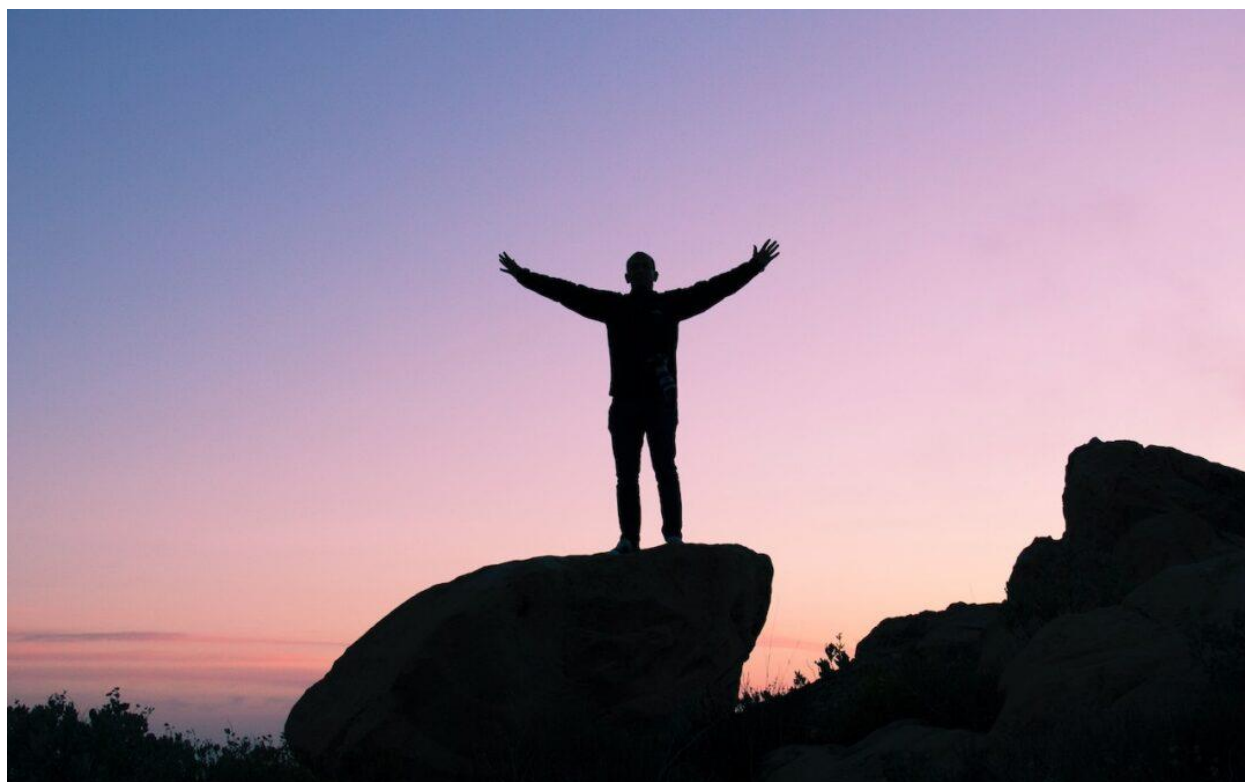


Attitude of Gratitude

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The attitude of gratitude or the state of being grateful in all circumstances is an important component in our life of faith and essential for personal growth. Without gratitude, it is difficult to develop an honest relationship with God. Gratitude is not something we are automatically born with. It must be cultivated as part of our character by watching mentors, studying sacred words, and making effort.



Why is gratitude important? Well, what does a person look like who is not grateful? That person may feel that the world owes them something or is out to get them. He might think that he is the center and others are not so important. Essentially, ungrateful people do not value others, and live and die in their own false construct of the world. This type of person is cut off from relationships of true love whether with people or God. They are also cut off from truth as their world is extremely limited. Gratitude opens us up to the necessity of people and God in our lives. We realize that we are all interdependent beings with a common Parent.

Through gratitude, we also realize that there are powerful forces in the universe that are beyond our control. The correct and honest worldview is that God is our Creator, and our understanding and compassion are limited. When things are going smoothly in our lives, we are easily grateful. When we are receiving lots of love and support, we easily praise God and feel good about our life, family and friends. How about when things are not going well? Remember the Biblical story of Job? He had everything taken from him and he deeply struggled and wrestled with his faith. In the end he was humble and grateful to God and overcame the trial.

I have conducted mountaineering adventure programs for individuals and families for many years. Naturally, I get to spend a lot of time in the midst of God's Creation and have found that gratitude is one of the key lessons I get to learn constantly in the natural classroom environment. At first glance, the two concepts of gratitude and adventure may not seem to go together. However, when we ask the question, "How can gratitude be cultivated?" we will see they are very closely connected.

We can strengthen our gratitude by putting ourselves in controlled challenging circumstances. This is one way that adventure activities can help us cultivate our character, including gratitude. Adventure activities can be fun and exciting. They also place us in very uncomfortable circumstances mentally, emotionally,

and physically. These challenging situations are the opportunities to "exercise" our gratitude. Gratitude, much like physical muscles, needs exercise and stress to stretch and grow. By willingly entering into challenging situations, we are testing and pushing our limits. When we learn to recognize and embrace challenges, knowing that the path through the obstacle is our way to growth, we can have the inner strength to be grateful.



Participating in adventurous activities in a wilderness setting helps us to understand our proper position in the order of Creation. First, in the wilderness there are factors that human beings cannot control, such as the weather or encounters with predators. Risk factors can be lowered with preparation, but not eliminated. We learn humility and gratitude as we navigate wilderness challenges successfully. Secondly, with so much awesome beauty and harmony around us, we cannot but be grateful to God for providing such a rich and diverse environment in which to grow. Feeling true love from our Creator stimulates our natural heartfelt response of gratitude. So when you are scared, cold, wet, hungry and tired, push through those complaining thoughts and allow your mind to go to a place of gratitude. Thank those around you and God above for the opportunity to become a better person - a person more able to give and receive true love. Because, ultimately, this is why we are here - to become people capable of deeply sharing God's love and joy with Him and our universal family.

Keith MacMurdie is a spiritual educator teaching through experiential learning in wild places including Montana where he resides.