



**grow. pray. study.**

**November 10, 2019** *Contentment: Generosity, Gratitude and Joy*

**“Give Thanks to the LORD: Gratitude’s Power”**

Scripture:

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. *1 Chronicles 16:34*

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

### **Gratitude is good for you**

#### **MONDAY 11.11.19 Psalm 103:1-5**

Sometimes we speak as though gratitude to God is just automatic—and sometimes it is. But not always. The first verses of Psalm 103 sound more like the psalmist giving himself a “pep talk,” a reminder of how spiritually important gratitude is. There are times in almost all of our lives when we need that reminder, when God feels distant and our pain, disappointment or suffering may feel unending. At those times, this psalm “assumes we sometimes need to argue with ourselves.” \*

- This psalmist had apparently been through a hard time, likely a moral crisis that needed pardon, a severe illness or maybe both. The call (to himself) to “bless the LORD” (Yahweh) wasn’t a vague summons to act grateful even though he didn’t feel that way inwardly. It focused on God’s healing and forgiving as central reasons for gratitude. How can you, like this psalmist, learn at hard times to refocus your attention on the enduring reasons for gratitude to God?
- By the end of this psalm, verse 22 called for “all God’s creatures” to bless the LORD. But then the psalmist returned the psalm to the personal note: “let my whole being bless the LORD!” Do you ever sense that your personal gratitude and praise to God are part of a song the whole creation sings? In what ways can realizing that you are not a lone voice saying thank you to God broaden your view beyond your immediate troubles?

**Prayer:** God of all creation, you are the unchanging, dependable source of all the forgiveness and healing that I (and all of us) need. I thank and praise you for that. Amen.

\* John Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone, Part 2: Psalms 73–150*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, p. 97.

### **Jesus regularly expressed gratitude**

#### **TUESDAY 11.12.19 Mark 8:1-8, Luke 22:14-19, John 11:35-42**

The creator of the world, the ruler of the universe, chose to “become flesh” and live on earth as a human being (cf. [John 1:14](#)). Would you think such a being might have the ultimate attitude of “entitlement,” taking anything good for granted as his by right? Well, we know Jesus didn’t do that. As he modeled what it means to be fully, healthily human, the gospels showed that he gave thanks to God in many different settings.

- We sometimes call the communion service “the Eucharist,” from a Greek word that meant “to give thanks.” As you read Luke 22:14-19 today, picture Jesus eating with his disciples, with the cross just

ahead. On what realities do you think he focused to be able to “give thanks” at that moment? In what ways can you include the strengthening power of gratitude in your prayers, even in hard times?

- Why do you believe Jesus prayed prayers of gratitude, and didn’t just say, “I’m the son of God—I can handle this on my own”? Do you think Jesus’ reasons for expressing thanks were different from your reasons, or not? If you had been one of the first disciples, what difference, if any, do you imagine you would have noticed in Jesus after he had been praying and thanking God?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as you prayed, you said at one point, “Thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me.” Help me share that confidence and say “thank you” for it more often in my own prayers. Amen.

### **Jesus sang of gratitude just before the cross**

**WEDNESDAY 11.13.19 Mark 14:22-26, Psalm 118:1-6, 28-29**

Jesus and his disciples sang “songs of praise” at the end of their Passover supper just before Jesus’ arrest. We know Psalm 118 was the last *hallel* (hymn of praise) Hebrews usually sang at Passover. Jesus, just before his crucifixion, probably sang, “The LORD is for me—I won’t be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” and “Give thanks to the LORD because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever.” (Note: that line was both the first and last verse of Psalm 118. Cf. also [Psalm 136](#), which ended *every* verse with a call for thanks due to God’s never-ending love.)

- The Psalmist asked simply and profoundly, “The LORD is for me....What can anyone do to me?” To what extent are you able to trust and be grateful that God is always “for” you? How much stronger is your level of gratitude on a beautiful, sunny morning when all is going well than on a cold, gray day when something left you sad or disappointed? How can you carry the gratitude into the gray days?
- A review of researcher Robert Emmons’ work noted, “Cultivating an attitude of gratitude is tough. It is, according to Emmons, a ‘chosen attitude’....People must give up a “victim mentality” and overcome a sense of entitlement and deservedness.” \* How much do your feelings assume the “you deserve it” idea we hear in so many commercials? How can you cultivate gratitude for even basic gifts like shelter, food, loving relationships, and life itself, and not take them for granted?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I offer you my gratitude because you are good, because your faithful love lasts forever. Well, honestly, I don’t always do that yet, but it’s my goal. Please keep teaching me. Amen.

\* Excerpt from “The New Science of Gratitude” at <http://gratitudepower.net/science.htm>.

### **Gratitude--in every situation?**

**THURSDAY 11.14.19 1 Thessalonians 5:15-18**

The apostle Paul did not write these words from some abstract ivory tower, sheltered from all trouble or conflict. He’d won these Thessalonian Christians to faith during a short stay, after which they sent him to another city because of the threat of mob violence (cf. [Acts 17:1-10](#)). They had to stay in the city, facing the same type of hostility Paul had faced. When he urged those young Christians to “rejoice always” and “give thanks in every situation,” he wasn’t being naïvely pious.

- Artists and photographers know that often how we frame a picture alters what we focus on in it. Paul urged a kind of framing in verse 17. “When we bring the things that cause us stress into prayer, we put ourselves and our troubles inside a much bigger picture: the story of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ....And that leads to thanksgiving.” \* What helps you remember to look at God’s big picture of life more than the unpleasant little details?
- Memorizing key Bible texts takes the Bible’s message off the page and stores it in your mind and heart, where the Holy Spirit can remind you of it at any tough moment. If “memorizing” feels daunting, short texts like today’s are a great way to start. Which part(s) of today’s passage would you most like to store

in your mind, where you won't even need a printed card or Bible in order to recall their wisdom at a time of need?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, there are quite a few situations that are not what you want for me, for our world. I'm thankful Paul didn't say to give thanks for those. But help me grow in my ability to give thanks in every situation, including those. Amen.

\* Cynthia M. Campbell, sidebar article "Stress" in *The CEB Women's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, p. 1492.

## Experiencing a gratitude "high"

### FRIDAY 11.15.19 Ephesians 5:15-21

In the Roman Empire, as today, too many people tried to numb themselves against life's hurts with alcohol and other addictions. The letter to the Ephesians said psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and always giving thanks to God were a much better alternative, with better life results. "The church is to live out the Lord's will, which is that people trapped in destructive behaviors will turn and join communities of goodness and justice." \* ([Click here](http://cor.org/leawood/recovery) {cor.org/leawood/recovery} to learn more about how Resurrection can help you stop destructive behaviors.)

- *The Message* paraphrased verses 18-19 this way: "Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs!" \*\* Can gratitude to God not just numb life's hurts, but move you beyond them? Might gratitude even be habit-forming? Have you ever experienced gratitude's life-enriching power? What are some benefits of replacing destructive behaviors with a "gratitude habit"?
- Researcher Robert Emmons wrote, "I asked people with debilitating physical illnesses to compose a narrative concerning a time when they felt a deep sense of gratitude....It was evident from reading these narrative accounts that (1) gratitude can be an overwhelmingly intense feeling." \*\*\* What can help you look beyond whatever challenges you face today by tapping into the power of gratitude?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I choose to live wisely, not foolishly. Help me set aside any hurtful behaviors, and gratefully imbibe "huge draughts" of your Spirit. Amen.

\* Timothy G. Gombis, study note on Ephesians 5:17 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 370 NT.

\*\* Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message* Numbered Edition Hardback . Navpress. Kindle Edition.

\*\*\* Robert Emmons, "How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times," syndicated from Greater Good, Sep 12, 2013 at <http://www.dailygood.org/story/532/how-gratitude-can-help-you-through-hard-times-robert-emmons/>

## Gladness, gentleness, gratitude—and peace

### SATURDAY 11.16.19 Philippians 4:4-7

The apostle Paul wrote Philippians from prison (cf. [Philippians 1:13](#)). He didn't have a Thanksgiving holiday for which to prepare, of course. But it seems likely he would have loved this holiday! "Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad!...bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks," he wrote (from a dank Roman cell). "Philippians is known for its emphasis on joy. This joy or gladness isn't just happiness of the moment. It's a confident disposition rooted in hope....Believers have this gladness because they know that having problems, or even enduring harassment, doesn't mean God has deserted them....this gladness is a steady and hopeful disposition that shapes believers' lives as they rely on God's love for their salvation." \*

- Paul was either hopelessly naïve or filled with divine wisdom. He had learned his approach to life from Israel's psalms and prophets (cf., for example, [Psalm 32:11](#), [35:9](#), [64:10](#), [97:12](#), [Isaiah 41:16](#), [61:10](#)). Why not try out that approach to life, or build it more fully into your way of life? As you prepare for Thanksgiving on November 28 (whether elaborately or minimally), "be glad in the Lord," and "bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks." See how doing that

consistently shapes your thoughts and feelings, and your interactions with others. See if you don't find greater gratitude and peace.

**Prayer:** Loving God, build in my heart and mind that confident disposition rooted in hope. Help me to offer you deeply heartfelt thanks this holiday season, rooted not in this broken world but in your unfailing love and goodness. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Play "Penny Praise!" Have an adult or older youth obtain 1-2 rolls of pennies from the bank. Have that person hide pennies all over the house, in the car, in shoes, backpacks, etc. Set a timer for two minutes. Invite the whole family to go on a penny hunt, finding as many pennies as possible. Have everyone, when they find a penny, shout out a praise to God for something or someone they are thankful for. Voices shouting praises to God will fill your house! When time is up, come back together. Have everyone share how many pennies they found and name a few of the praises they shouted. Some pennies are probably still hiding, so continue the game through the week, inviting each person to shout a praise whenever they find a penny. Thank God for all the reasons to praise Him! (Warning: Pennies are a choking hazard, so if you have very small children in your home, substitute a larger item for pennies.)

\* Jerry L. Sumney, introduction to Philippians in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 373 NT.

**Prayer Requests** – [cor.org/prayer](http://cor.org/prayer) *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Ruth Caldwell and family following the death of Cory Jo Caldwell (daughter), 10/28/2019

Samantha Potter (Staff Member) and family following the death of Ronald Maxwell (grandfather), 10/27/2019

Phyllis Freeman and family following the death of John Freeman (husband), 11/4/2019

Paulina Greer and family following the death of Max Greer (husband), 11/4/2019

Michael Davidson and family following the death of Jacki Davidson (wife), 11/1/2019