



GPS GUIDE: JANUARY 30, 2022

Grow. Pray. Study

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Sermon: Gratitude

1 Thessalonians 5:15-18

Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Monday: Read Psalm 92:1-5

Psychological research confirms what the psalmist wrote long ago: "It is good to give thanks to the LORD." Here's one bit of research related to keeping a gratitude journal, "Take just a few minutes each day to jot down things that make you thankful, from the generosity of friends to the food on your table or the right to vote...List-keepers sleep better, exercise more, and gain a general contentment that may counteract stress and contribute to overall health." The ultimate source of joy in Psalm 92 was God's loyal love and faithfulness - realities that are always with us if we just recognize them. In verse 2, the psalmist spoke of expressing gratitude to God in the morning and at nighttime. In what ways have you or will you build recognizing and expressing gratitude into your habit patterns, so that you don't always have to try to remember to do it? Have you ever kept a gratitude journal? Consider making it a habit to regularly list those things for which you are thankful.

Gratitude Exercise: Today as an act of prayer make a gratitude list. Think back on the last week and make a list of those things for which you can give thanks.

Tuesday: Read Luke 17:11-19

In Jesus' day, "leper" meant a person with one of a variety of visible skin diseases. People thought all lepers were highly contagious, so they feared and shunned them. Jesus healed a group of ten such men—rejected and outcast due to their visible skin diseases. We see how isolated these sufferers were. They raised their voices and called to Jesus while "keeping their distance from him." But of the ten, only one Samaritan came back to say, "thank you." All ten were "cleansed." When the Samaritan came back to express gratitude, Jesus used a stronger word that can even mean "made whole" or "saved," saying, "Your faith has healed you" (verse

19). Bruce Larson wrote, “The other nine were merely cleansed. If ingratitude is more deadly than leprosy, they were in worse shape than before. Only one came back and was made whole.” What blocks gratitude in your life? What helps you remember to thank God every day? When one healed man returned to give thanks, Jesus asked, “Where are the other nine?” The text didn’t tell us. If you had been one of the ten, which do you think is more likely: that you’d have returned to express your gratitude, or gone about your business?

Prayer: Healing Jesus, you even cared about people everyone else avoided. This means that no matter my problems, you care about me, too. And for that, I thank you deeply. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Luke 8:4-8, 11-15

The image of growing seeds Jesus used to illustrate spiritual growth made sense, not only to people in the farming area around the Sea of Galilee where he told this story, but to any of us who’ve ever tried to garden or grow a lawn. Even good seed, Jesus said, can’t grow strong in poor or untended soil. Living as God wishes us to means cultivating an open, “good soil” heart. When we do that, “concerns, riches, and pleasures of life” won’t be able to crowd out the good fruit God is at work to bear in us. Jesus knew some people (the hard-packed path) never even start to respond to God’s message. Some, he said, start, but their growth is “choked by the concerns, riches, and pleasures of life, and their fruit never matures.” As one Christian counselor wrote, “People and circumstances can have more than one aspect—and this applies to both the good and bad. We can choose not only to see (or fear) the bad but also to look at and appreciate the good.” How can you allow God to direct your vision so that life’s concerns don’t choke your spiritual growth? What wishes and concerns most often compete with God’s kingdom to be the top priority in your life? What key choices have made your heart more open to God’s work in cultivating a “good soil” spirit? What shifts in attitudes, actions, and values would move you further in the direction of being “good soil” for God’s Word to grow in?

Prayer: Gardening God, I’m grateful that some days it’s easy to sense your power guiding and growing me. Other days a dozen urgent things seem to try to choke you out of my life. Help me learn how to “weed” those days, to keep my faith life growing strong. Amen.

Thursday: Read Philippians 4:6-7, 10-13

Many Bible students call Philippians Paul’s “epistle of joy.” From a prison cell, he wrote a letter “known for its emphasis on joy...Believers have this gladness because they know that having problems, or even enduring harassment, doesn’t mean God has deserted them.” But we need to observe that the apostle didn’t say his joy grew from a naturally grateful, upbeat disposition. Quite the contrary—“I have learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance” was his testimony in verse 12. Psychology researcher Robert Emmons wrote, “It is vital to make a distinction between feeling grateful and being grateful.... being grateful is

a choice, a prevailing attitude that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives.” A recurring theme in gratitude research is that choosing to be a grateful person does not mean you become blind to the bad things in life, or the sad or angry feelings you may have about them. It does mean, however, that we also choose not to let the bad things blind us to the things for which we are grateful. What way(s) have you found to remember the things for which you are grateful when your life takes a difficult turn? Scholar William Barclay wrote, “There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun the shadows will fall behind us but if we turn our backs on the sun all the shadows will be in front.” As this series focuses on gratitude’s benefits, are you finding yourself more inclined to resist changing the direction your life faces, or to seek to increasingly “face the sun”?

Prayer: O God, you are like the sun, always shining your love and mercy into my life. Help me learn how to keep my focus on you every day. Amen.

Friday: Read Psalm 42:1 – 43:5

“Psalms 42 and 43 belong together. Psalm 43 lacks a title; and more importantly, the shared refrain (42:5, 11; 43:5) indicates a literary unity. The refrain also divides the prayer for help into three sections, all of which include the psalmist’s deep desire to experience God’s presence.” This profound, honest prayer gives us a model for carrying our hurts to God while maintaining an intentional stance of gratitude and praise. Psychologist Robert Emmons’ research would support this psalm’s approach: “Telling people simply to buck up, count their blessings, and remember how much they still have to be grateful for can certainly do much harm. Processing a life experience through a grateful lens does not mean denying negativity. It is not a form of superficial happiology.” How can you keep your choice to maintain a stance of gratitude from turning into “superficial happiology,” for yourself or for others? For the ancient Hebrews, the waves of the ocean (42:7) symbolized the frightening, disorderly forces of chaos in life. What breakers are sweeping over your life today? Do they tend to drive you away from gratitude and trust in God, or make you want to cling more tightly than ever to God’s presence with you in all circumstances?

Prayer: Loving God, though sometimes it is difficult to recognize your work in my life, I choose to hope in you, to know I will again give you thanks. Amen.

Saturday: Read 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. Would you expect such a being to have the ultimate attitude of “entitlement,” to demand everything that was rightfully his? Well, we know Jesus didn’t do that. As he gave us a model of what it means to be fully human, the gospels showed that his healthy human life included giving thanks in many different settings. The Greek root of the word “Eucharist” means “to give thanks.” As you read Luke 22:14-19, 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 healing, strengthening power of gratitude in your prayers, even in hard times? Do you think Jesus’ reasons for praying were different from your reasons for prayer? Why do you believe Jesus prayed at all and didn’t just say, “I’m the son of God—I can handle this on my own?”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, at one point, praying, you said, “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.