



# Look... Learn... Lead Study Guide

Looking for the Holy Spirit's direction  
Learning through God's Word  
Leading others in a personal relationship with Christ

Sermon Series  
"Attitude + Gratitude =  
Generous Altitude"

WEEK 2

## Sunday, November 25, 2018 — Shortening the Gratitude Gap

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever. (Psalm 118:1)

Be thankful. (Colossians 3:15b)

## Monday, November 26, 2018 — Giving Thanks: "Central in Christian Living" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Philippians 4:6-7)

**Keep a Gratitude Journal.** Establish a daily practice in which you remind yourself of the gifts, grace, benefits, and good things you enjoy.<sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul did not write this counsel from some abstract ivory tower, sheltered from all trouble or conflict. He was in prison when he wrote Philippians (cf. Philippians 1:13). When some "super apostles" scorned his ministry in Corinth, he sent the Corinthian Christians a vivid portrait of his challenging path of service (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). He knew well what it meant to "give thanks in every situation."

- 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 Philippians 4.

Prayer: Lord, the Psalmist wrote, "I keep your word close, in my heart" (Psalm 119:11).

I ask for your help as I, too, seek to keep your teaching close in my memory and my heart. Amen.

"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."<sup>2</sup> What helps you remember to look at life's big picture more than the unpleasant little details?

- To memorize key parts of the Bible takes the Bible's message off the page and stores it in your mind and heart, where the Holy Spirit can call it to your attention at any moment of challenge or need. Which part(s) of today's passages would you most like to keep handy in your mind, where you don't even need a printed card or Bible in order to draw on their wisdom at a time of need?

## Tuesday, November 27, 2018 — Giving Thanks for God's Bountiful Creation (Psalm 65:6-13)

**Come to Your Senses.** Through our senses — the ability to touch, see, smell, taste, and hear — we gain an appreciation of what it means to be human and of what an incredible miracle it is to be alive.<sup>3</sup>

In the Psalms, we find a wide range of reasons for gratitude and praise. Psalm 65 directed the attention of those who sang or read it to the life-sustaining wonders of our world. The psalmist saw the rain that allows the fertile soil to bring forth nourishing crops, the crops and flocks and harvests that "crown the year," as evidence of God's sustaining love, for which we often have reason to give thanks.

- "Psalm 65 compares 'the noise of the nations' with the turmoil of the roar-

ing seas. The daily news bombards us with that deafening reality ... How might we cut through the noise and recall all that God does for us? What if we were to ... be still and recognize the wonder of the world around us in a magnificent sunrise, the blessing of spring rain, or each of God's unique creatures?"<sup>4</sup>

- Starting in verse 9, "God's care for the land now becomes the focus of the psalmist's meditation. The verb for 'visit' in verse 9 means 'to attend to, to care for.' As a result of God's provision, the rains come and the earth is fruitful."<sup>5</sup> In what ways can you take your gratitude beyond words and into actions, and make wise choices to help God sustain our planet rather than acting in ways that deface or deplete it?

Prayer: O God, as I look at the wonderful world you created, with all its beauty and fruitfulness, help me to join in shouting to you with joy and gratitude. Amen.

## Wednesday, November 28, 2018 — Giving Thanks When We Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

**Learn Prayers of Gratitude.** In many spiritual traditions, prayers of gratitude are considered to be the most powerful form of prayer, because through these prayers people recognize the ultimate source of all they are and all they will ever be.<sup>6</sup>

Israel developed and refined their understanding of the one God they worshiped over time. At certain points, they adapted language from the cultures around them, as in verse 3 of today's reading. They tended to refer to all supernatural beings, who the New Testament and most Christians call "angels," as "gods." But God was the great person they worshiped and thanked, the "great king over all other gods."

- One continual hazard of Israel's sacrificial system was the temptation to see

the sacrifices as a way to "buy off" God and win divine favor. Psalm 50:13-14 expressed the reality: God didn't need people's sacrifices, but valued them as an expression of gratitude for God's gifts. How have you learned to "come before him with thanks" in your times of worship?

- Verse 7 echoes many other psalms (including the beloved Psalm 23) in identifying us as sheep for whom God cares as a shepherd. The image may have been clearer to pastoral Israelites than to modern city dwellers. Sheep are utterly dependent on their shepherd to keep them fed, watered and safe. Left to their own devices, they tend to be helpless to ensure their own survival. How grateful are you that in a big, complex universe you are one of God's sheep, watched over with caring and love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for promising to be the "good shepherd" who cares for me, who doesn't run away in the face of trouble but is always there. I gratefully worship and praise you. Amen.

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## Thursday, November 29, 2018 — Giving Thanks Every Day (Psalm 96:1-2)

**Make a Vow to Practice Gratitude.** Research shows that making an oath to perform a behavior increases the likelihood that the action will be executed. Therefore, write your own gratitude vow, which could be as simple as “I vow to count my blessings each day,” and post it somewhere where you will be reminded of it every day.<sup>7</sup>

If we associate expressing gratitude to God only with “worship,” we might think that gratitude is a “once-a-week” experience. Psalm 96 anticipated much of the modern psychological research we’ve reviewed during this series, as it invited us to express gratitude for God’s saving work “every single day.” The apostle Paul similarly urged Colossian Christians to “overflow with thanksgiving” and “be thankful people” (cf. Colossians 2:7, 3:12-17).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, many more of us sing in the car or the shower than we do in public.

Help my heart to overflow with inner songs of gratitude to you, no matter what kind of singing voice I have. Amen.

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## Friday, November 30, 2018 — Thanks for God’s Forgiveness, Healing, Rescue and Faithful Love (Psalm 103:1-5)

**Watch your Language.** Grateful people have a particular linguistic style that uses the language of gifts, givers, blessings, blessed, fortune, fortunate, and abundance.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes even without a conscious intention (perhaps influenced by what we hear others saying), we adopt a “linguistic style” full of words like earned, deserved, produced, accomplished and achieved. There is nothing wrong with being conscientious workers, of course. But when the psalmist said, “Let my whole being bless the Lord,” it was not because of a belief that God should be grateful for what he had done, but because of gratitude for what God had done for him.

- Verses 3-4 strongly suggest that the psalmist had been through a hard

Prayer: O God, grow my comfort and enjoyment of language that recognizes you, and not my own merits, as the ultimate source of so much of the good in my life. Thank you for your many gifts to me. Amen.

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## Saturday, December 1, 2018 — Giving Thanks to God Eternally (Revelation 7:9-12)

**Go Through the Motions.** If you go through grateful motions, the emotion of gratitude should be triggered. Grateful motions include smiling, saying thank you, and writing letters of gratitude.<sup>10</sup>

A prisoner of conscience wrote the book of Revelation. The Romans exiled him for his faith on the small Mediterranean island of Patmos, isolated from the Christian churches he led and loved (cf. Revelation 1:9). Yet he produced (and somehow sent from the island) a work of awesome vision and praise. At its heart was the scene of “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” in the courts of heaven praising Jesus as the self-giving, saving Lamb of God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I offer blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might to you forever and always. (And when I don’t, please remind me.) Amen.

- “96:2 the news: The Greek word that translates the underlying Hebrew is usually translated as ‘good news’ or ‘gospel.’ See Isaiah 52:7, where ‘good news’ is also associated with the proclamation of God’s rule.”<sup>8</sup> What are some ways (besides standing on a street-corner handing out tracts) you can share the good news of God’s saving work every day?

- Some of us are musically gifted, and we like the idea of “sing to the Lord a new song.” Others, of course, tend to suffer in silence through the singing parts of worship, whether traditional or contemporary. Regardless of our musical aptitude or tastes, what is the heart attitude expressed by the poetic imagery of singing to the Lord a new song? How can all of us join in that spiritual experience?

time, perhaps a severe illness from which he could not deliver himself. What reasons for gratitude and praise has God helped you find in the wake of your painful experiences? How can you grieve life’s tragedies, personal or communal, and yet stay open to God’s healing Spirit and God’s pledge of a future free of terrible tragedies?

- 1 John 1:8 says “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” How does the first phrase of verse 3 in this psalm show that the psalmist felt no need for denial or deception about sin? How do God’s grace and compassion create a space in which moral honesty, with ourselves, others and God, is cleansing, rather than scary? In what area(s) are you particularly grateful for God’s forgiveness?

Gratitude isn’t limited to this life or this world, Revelation said. Gratitude to our God and Savior is the vocabulary of eternity.

- Jesus called his followers to have the same positive impact on our world as light in a dark place, or salt on flavorless food (Matthew 5:13-16). In what ways is your life brighter (not flawless, but brighter) because of God’s love, forgiveness, and presence with you? In what ways does the promise of an eternity of praise and gratitude shine into your life, your heart from day to day? How can you refract the light of God’s eternity in ways that brighten the lives of others, and add zest and joy to their world? Ask God to direct you to at least one person for whom you can be God’s gratitude-inspiring presence in this holiday season.

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<sup>1,3,6,7,9,10</sup> Each day this week we’re sharing one tip from Robert Emmons, “Ten Ways to Become More Grateful.” November 17, 2010 from Greater Good Magazine.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia M. Campbell, sidebar article “Stress” in The CEB Women’s Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, p. 1492.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Raser, sidebar article “Silence” in The CEB Women’s Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, p. 713.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Williams, The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 13: Psalms 1–72. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986, p. 473.

<sup>8</sup> J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 96:2 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 946-947 OT.