

Bible Study on Gratitude *4* *lessons on thankfulness*

This Bible study on gratitude looks at thankfulness the way Scripture does: not as good manners but as a response to God. Four passages: David preaching to his own soul in Psalm 103, the one healed leper who came back to thank Jesus in Luke 17, Paul's call to give thanks in every circumstance in 1 Thessalonians 5, and his thank-you letter from prison in Philippians 4.

It is a good study for November and the weeks around Thanksgiving, for a family or small group, or for anyone who wants a more thankful heart. Each lesson prints the passage from the Berean Standard Bible, then the big idea, notes for the leader, questions to observe, understand and apply, a memory verse and a prayer.

Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (BSB)

LESSON 1 OF 4

Do not forget His kind deeds

Read Psalm 103:1-14

The big idea: David commands his own soul to bless the LORD and not forget what He has done: forgiving, healing, redeeming and showing compassion.

Read

¹ Of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul; all that is within me, bless His holy name.

² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all His kind deeds— ³ He who forgives all your iniquities and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the Pit

and crowns you with loving devotion and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies you with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶ The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel. ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion. ⁹ He will not always accuse us, nor harbor His anger forever. ¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins or repaid us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving devotion for those who fear Him. ¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. ¹⁴ For He knows our frame; He is mindful that we are dust.

– Psalm 103:1-14 (BSB)

Notes

Psalm 103 is a psalm of David, and he begins by talking to himself: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all His kind deeds.” Gratitude often starts with remembering. Forgetfulness is the enemy of thanks, so David makes a list: God forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, satisfies.

The heart of the list is forgiveness. “He has not dealt with us according to our sins,” and “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” God is like a father who has compassion on his children, because “He knows our frame; He is mindful that we are dust.” We thank God most deeply when we remember how much we have been forgiven.

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. Who is David speaking to in verses 1-2?
2. List the things God does in verses 3-5.
3. What two pictures does David use for God's love and forgiveness in verses 11-13?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. Why would David need to tell his own soul not to forget?
2. Why do you think forgiveness comes first in the list in verse 3?
3. What does it mean that God ‘knows our frame’ (v. 14)?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. Write your own list of God’s ‘kind deeds’ to you this year, at least ten.
2. What do you tend to forget to thank God for?
3. Read verses 1–5 aloud each morning this week, speaking to your own soul.

Memory verse

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all His kind deeds—

— Psalm 103:2 (BSB)

Pray

Bless the LORD, O my soul. Father, I do not want to forget all Your kind deeds. You forgive my sins, heal me, redeem my life and crown me with loving devotion and compassion. Thank You that You have removed my transgressions as far as the east is from the west. Amen.

LESSON 2 OF 4

The one who came back

Read Luke 17:11-19

The big idea: Ten lepers were healed, but only one, a Samaritan, came back to thank Jesus; gratitude turns a gift into a relationship with the Giver.

Read

¹¹ While Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered one of the villages, He was met by ten lepers. They stood at a distance ¹³ and raised their voices, shouting, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

¹⁴ When Jesus saw them, He said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were on their way, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He fell facedown at Jesus’ feet in thanksgiving to Him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ “Were not all ten cleansed?” Jesus asked. “Where then are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found except this foreigner to return and give glory to God?” ¹⁹ Then Jesus said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well!”

– Luke 17:11-19 (BSB)

Notes

Ten men with leprosy cried out to Jesus for mercy. He sent them to the priests, and on the way they were cleansed. All ten received the same miracle. Only one turned back, “praising God in a loud voice,” and fell at Jesus’ feet in thanksgiving. Luke adds the surprise: “and he was a Samaritan.”

Jesus asks, “Where then are the other nine?” The nine were not wicked; they were doing what He told them. But they took the gift and kept going. The one who came back received something more: Jesus said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well!” Gratitude brings us back to Jesus Himself.

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. What did the ten lepers ask for, and what did Jesus tell them to do (vv. 13–14)?
2. What did the one man do when he saw he was healed (vv. 15–16)?
3. What three questions did Jesus ask (vv. 17–18)?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. Why do you think Luke points out that the thankful man was a Samaritan?
2. What might have kept the other nine from coming back?
3. What did the one man receive that the others missed (v. 19)?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. What answered prayer have you never gone back to thank God for?
2. Who has helped you this year whom you have not thanked? Write them a note this week.
3. How can you make ‘coming back to say thank you’ a habit in your prayers?

Memory verse

When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice.

– Luke 17:15 (BSB)

Pray

Jesus, Master, You have had mercy on me more times than I can count. Forgive me for the times I took Your gifts and kept walking. Today I come back to say thank You. Thank You for what You have done, and most of all for who You are. Amen.

LESSON 3 OF 4

Give thanks in every circumstance

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

The big idea: Paul tells believers to rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in every circumstance, because this is God’s will for them in Christ.

Read

¹² But we ask you, brothers, to acknowledge those who work diligently among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ In love, hold them in highest regard because of their work. Live in peace with one another. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, to admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that no one repays evil for evil. Always pursue what is good for one another and for all people. ¹⁶ Rejoice at all times. ¹⁷ Pray without ceasing. ¹⁸ Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not extinguish the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt, ²¹ but test all things. Hold fast to what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil. ²³ Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your entire spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 (BSB)

Notes

Three short commands sit together: “Rejoice at all times. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in every circumstance.” Paul wrote this to a young church that had suffered for its faith (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14), so he is not describing a life without trouble.

Notice the word in. Paul does not say to give thanks for every circumstance, as if evil were good. He says to give thanks in every circumstance, because God is still good and still present. And he gives the reason: “this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” Gratitude is part of the life God shapes in His people, and He promises to finish it: “The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.”

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. What three commands does Paul give in verses 16–18?
2. What reason does he give for giving thanks (v. 18)?
3. What does Paul pray for in verse 23, and what promise does he give in verse 24?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. What is the difference between giving thanks ‘in’ and ‘for’ every circumstance?
2. How are rejoicing, praying and giving thanks connected?
3. Why might Paul put gratitude next to how we treat each other (vv. 12–15)?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. What hard circumstance are you in right now? Name three things you can still thank God for in it.
2. Try a ‘thanks at every meal’ habit this week: one specific thing each time.
3. Who in your church works hard among you (v. 12)? Thank them this week.

Memory verse

Rejoice at all times. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (BSB)

Pray

Father, teach me to rejoice at all times, pray without ceasing and give thanks in every circumstance. In the hard places too, You are good and You are with me. Thank You that You are faithful and You will finish what You have begun in me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

LESSON 4 OF 4

Thankful and content

Read Philippians 4:10-20

The big idea: Writing from prison, Paul thanks the Philippians for their gift, shares the secret of

contentment in Christ, and trusts God to supply every need.

Read

¹⁰ Now I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this out of need, for I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances. ¹² I know how to live humbly, and I know how to abound. In any and every situation I have learned the secret of being filled and being hungry, of having plenty and having need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, you have done well to share in my affliction. ¹⁵ And as you Philippians know, in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church but you partnered with me in the matter of giving and receiving. ¹⁶ For even while I was in Thessalonica, you provided for my needs again and again. ¹⁷ Not that I am seeking a gift, but I am looking for the fruit that may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have all I need and more, now that I have received your gifts from Epaphroditus. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

– Philippians 4:10-20 (BSB)

Notes

Paul wrote Philippians while in chains (1:13). The church had sent him a gift by Epaphroditus, and this passage is his thank-you note. He is warm and specific: “you have done well to share in my affliction.” Gratitude names what people did.

Paul also shares a secret: “I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances.” He has known hunger and plenty, and his contentment comes from Christ, “who gives me strength” (v. 13 is about contentment, not about winning games). He calls their gift “a fragrant offering” to God and promises, “my God will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. Where was Paul when he wrote this, and what had the Philippians done (vv. 10, 14–18; 1:13)?
2. What has Paul learned, according to verses 11–12?
3. What does Paul call the Philippians' gift, and what does he promise them (vv. 18–19)?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. Why do you think contentment has to be 'learned'?
2. How does reading verse 13 in context change what it means?
3. How are gratitude and contentment connected?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. Where are you most discontent right now? What would contentment in Christ look like there?
2. Write a specific thank-you note, like Paul's, to someone who has supported you.
3. Is there someone in need you could share with this week, as the Philippians did?

Memory verse

I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances.

– Philippians 4:11 (BSB)

Pray

Lord Jesus, teach me the secret of being content, whether I have plenty or I am in need. Thank You for the people who have shared with me. Make my giving a fragrant offering to You, and help me trust that my God will supply all my needs in Christ. Amen.

Tips for leading this study

Start a gratitude list. Ask everyone to bring three specific things they are thankful for to each meeting, and begin with them.

Use it in November. In the US the four lessons fit the four weeks of November, the last in Thanksgiving week. If your group meets only once, lesson 2 on the ten lepers works well on its own.

Be gentle with lesson 3. Someone in your group may be grieving. Giving thanks in hard times is not pretending they are not hard.

End with thanks, not requests. Close each meeting with a round of one-sentence prayers of thanks.

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Thanksgiving prayer points

A Thanksgiving prayer

Psalm 103, a prayer

How to keep a prayer journal

Questions