

30 Days of Gratitude – Fuel for the Journey November 17, 2019

Overarching theme: Living a year in God’s presence through the practice of following Jesus.

Instructions: When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: A life of gratitude develops a mentality of victory.

Start point: The scripture focus is found in the letter to the church at Philippi. Paul is acknowledged as the author of Philippians, as found in 1:1. The letter was written sometime between the years of 60 to 62 A.D., when Paul was incarcerated in Rome. It appears that Paul first encountered Philippi on his second missionary journey around 52 A.D., after his vision of the man of Macedonia (Acts 16:6-40). Philippi was named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, in 368 B.C. It was a city nestled in the range of hills that divide Europe from Asia in the area of Kavála, Greece. The hillside city overlooked the coastal plain and the bay at Neapolis (Kavála). Effectively, the city was a gateway between east and west. Before being named Philippi, the city was named Krenides, which meant fountains, or wells. Obviously, the city was associated with important resources being close to water, gold and silver mines, and a fertile coastal plain. Even though the region had some very good resources, and many citizens had wealth, the church in Philippi was particularly poor. So to send of a gift to Paul would have been a particularly praise worthy event. Philippi was known for the battle of Philippi which marked the start of the Roman Empire. This city became a prominent residence for the growing Christian community.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Philippians 3:1-14 (NRSV)

Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. ² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Questions to Ponder:

What jumps out at you from this passage?

What do you think Paul is referring to in verse 2?

What does it mean to have no confidence in the Flesh?

How was Paul having confidence in the flesh?

What should we have confidence in?

How does a confidence in the Lord ("rejoicing in the Lord") lead to a life of joy and gratitude?

What does it mean for you to follow Paul's words, "I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord?"

What is the practical understanding, for you, of verses 10-12?

What do you think the goal is?

Commentary:

Paul starts chapter 2 with being affirming to the Christian community at Philippi, but quickly moves to a warning. Remember, in the early church, Christians were converted from Judaism and Paganism. So, there were a lot of varying beliefs that needed to be overcome. The most prevalent struggle was with the Jewish tradition, since many converts were coming from Judaism. Those from the Jewish tradition were telling the new converts that they had to still follow the Jewish laws. The term "dogs" came from the Jews, who called the gentiles (non-Jewish believers) "dogs." Paul was turning the term "dogs" back on the Jews. So beware of the Jewish dogs who want to keep you under the law. "Mutilating the flesh" is in relationship to the Jews and circumcision. For the Christian, circumcision of the flesh was not a practice. Instead, circumcision of the heart was the image to illustrate the heart being given over to a relationship with God through Christ Jesus in Faith.

In verses 3 to 6, Paul gave an account of his earlier life as a Jew under the name of Saul. As a Jew and a leader in the community, he followed the law perfectly, while persecuting the Christians as a Jewish leader. There came a point when Saul met Jesus and his life was changed forever, along with his name, Saul to Paul. Paul's Jewish faith moved into Jesus faith, or Christian faith. When Paul came into the Christian faith, he gave up his high status in the Jewish community. In Jesus, he counted his past accomplishments as "Rubbish", or "Dung." Dung was considered the lowest form of matter. For Paul, the relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord came to mean more than anything else in life. The righteousness that came from Paul's hard work in practicing the law gave way to righteousness that came to him through faith in Jesus. In Paul's new sense of faith, God was in the process of sanctifying him as he was on the journey of life to perfection. At the heart of Paul was to know Christ better, the power of the resurrection, and share in Christ's sufferings. Paul, like Christ, wanted to be humble in ministry, obedient to the call of God, and live as Christ did. In doing this, he would attain a resurrected life, both here on earth and in heaven. From the time of Paul's conversion to the writing of this letter, Paul possessed Christ as Christ possessed Paul.

As Paul uses the metaphor of a race, he let us know that the Christian is one who is striving, or running a race, to move forward to a prize, which is the heavenly calling. So keep moving forward in your relationship with Christ until you cross the finish line of life into the eternal. For knowing Christ and following in Christ's way of living for others is far better than any other way of living. The fuel for Paul's life had become the relationship with God in Christ through faith, and in helping others realize the same. That was the overwhelming joy of Paul's life which gave him strength to live through the beatings, prison, hardship, travel, and struggle.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

To you, what does the race metaphor mean? How are you doing in it?

What have you given up and what have you gained for Christ?

What do you think the prize is?

What truly is your fuel for life's journey?

How do you experience joy in Christ so that others see?

What do you need to do to have Christ as your fuel for life and joy?

Activity of for the life of a disciple: Continue in the exercise of last week.

1. Read the daily devotional from FUMC on gratitude.
2. Each morning this week, take 5 minutes to write down five things for which you are thankful.
Afterward, say a prayer of thanksgiving for what you wrote.