

30 Days of Gratitude – What is your good harvest? November 24, 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 emphasis 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 4:1-23(NRSV)

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. ² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true,

whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. ¹⁵ You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. ¹⁶ For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. ¹⁸ I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Questions to Ponder:

What jumps out at you from this passage?

In this passage, what is Paul trying to get the reader to do?

Why rejoice? What does rejoicing do for the human soul and the church?

What do we worry about?

How do we not worry? How do we accomplish not worrying?

What is the result of prayer and supplication?

How can you find encouragement in verse 13?

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

How do you think the original receivers of this letter responded? How do you respond to it?

Commentary:

Paul starts this section with a struggle in the church between two people, actually two women. We do not know what the problem was, but he encouraged the community of faith to be of the same mind, work in unity, and to encourage one another. The encouragement of a faith community can be extremely uplifting to those who struggle, are hurting, and are seeking direction for life. One of the reasons that people are exhorted to attend church activities on a regular basis is to find a connection with people who are like minded and can encourage one another during good times and bad. Most of all, attending worship and learning/life groups helps those who participate to look up to God for wisdom on the journey of life. Faithful followers of Christ who attend church, have probably already been through crisis and have come out the other side in order to give encouragement to someone else who is going through that problem now. Don't go it alone! Be a part of a community of faith that can embody the love and grace of God in Christ.

The other aspect of this passage reminds us of a general principle in life which is likely to happen, than not: "*what we reap we will sow.*" Sometimes things happen to us that we cannot control, and then we respond with primal feelings and actions. Most of the time, we do create our own reality. So, think about this, what you put into your heart, mind, or soul will come out in your attitude and actions. So, if you put into your soul worry, then what you will experience in your attitude and actions is anxiety. If you put into your soul anger, then what you will experience in your attitude and actions is hostility. If you put into your soul grumbling, then what you will experience in your attitude and actions is discord. On the other hand, if you put into your soul positivity, then what you will experience in your attitude and actions is gratitude. If you put into your heart love, then what you will experience in your attitude and actions is graciousness. If you put into your mind prayerfulness, then what you will experience in your attitude and actions is peace. That is why Paul encourages the believers in their worries to give it to God through prayer, so that they can reap the peace in knowing that God cares and will uphold.

Be encouraged by the statement found in verse 13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." So, if you put into your heart, mind, and soul the strength of Christ, then what you will experience in your attitude and actions is the confidence of faith in Christ.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

How thankful are you really? Choose a number between 1 and 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, to describe your thankfulness/gratitude meter. What is going in you, and what attitude is primarily coming out of you? What do you need to do to have a higher thankfulness/gratitude meter, and to be expressive about it?

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

1. Finishing reading the daily devotional from FUMC on gratitude for November.
2. Each morning this week, take 5 minutes to write down five things for which you are thankful.
3. After writing down the five things in which you are thankful, take a few minutes to pray in thanksgiving to God, and then speak to God about two burdens that are on your heart.