

GRATITUDE

ICE BREAKER

“When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.”

-G.K. Chesterton

Question: What are some things that Americans typically take for granted?

CENTERING FOCUS

Have someone read Psalm 100 aloud, a psalm of thanksgiving. Encourage everyone to close his or her eyes, meditate on the passage, and use this as a time to draw near to the Lord.

*Lift up a great shout of joy to the Lord!
Go ahead and do it—everyone, everywhere!
As you serve him, be glad and worship him.
Sing your way into his presence with joy!
And realize what this really means—
we have the privilege of worshipping the Lord
our God.
For he is our Creator and we belong to him.
We are the people of his pleasure.
You can pass through his open gates with
the password of praise.*

*Come right into his presence with
thanksgiving.
Come bring your thank offering to him
and affectionately bless his beautiful name!
For the Lord is always good and ready to
receive you.
He’s so loving that it will amaze you—
so kind that it will astound you!
And he is famous for his faithfulness toward
all.
Everyone knows our God can be trusted,
for he keeps his promises to every
generation!*

LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE

Now that we have concluded our month practicing the rhythm of prayer, spend some time reflecting back on your experience.

Question: Which challenge did you choose to practice this past week? What has been the most rewarding experience in practicing the rhythm of prayer? What has been the most difficult?

THOUGHT PROVOKING QUESTION

Question: What are some things that Christians typically take for granted?

ENGAGING WITH SCRIPTURE

Gratitude: *the quality of being thankful; a word used to express thankfulness and praise*

Paul, when writing to the church in Rome says...

Romans 12:1 (NIV): *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*

Question: Here Paul states that our true worship is offering our lives as a living sacrifice. But, he wants to make sure that we understand that true worship is in response to something in particular. What is our worship in response to?

Question: How would you define God's mercy? How has God been merciful to humanity? (See 1 Peter 1:3-5 & Ephesians 2:1-10 for help)

Dr. Robert A. Emmons says that a spirit of gratitude requires two elements “(1) affirming goodness in one's life and (2) recognizing that the sources of this goodness lie at least partially outside the self.”

Question: According to Romans 12:1, where does Paul direct us to first to find the goodness in our lives? Where is the source of that goodness?

Have someone read these passages of Scripture...

Colossians 3:17 (ESV): *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through [Jesus].*

Ephesians 5:18–20 (ESV): *...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (ESV): *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Question: What are some current circumstances in your life that you tend to be thankful for? What are some things God has done for you that make it easy to be grateful?

Question: Is it difficult to hear Paul say, “give thanks in all circumstances”? What are some circumstances in your life that you’re not particularly thankful for? Is God telling us to be inauthentic? How do you wrestle with this tension?

Question: What does it look like to be thankful even when life is rough?

Have someone read this quote from an article on gratitude (read a few times if necessary)...

While basic gratitude is passively evoked by external events, of the exclusively positive variety, the spiritual discipline of gratitude is intentionally chosen, deliberately trained, and exercised in all circumstances. It is not dependent on changing conditions, but on mindset. It is not waited for, but pursued.

While basic gratitude is a set of fleeting and fluctuating feelings, the spiritual discipline of gratitude is an action. It is not just experienced, but expressed. The spiritual discipline of gratitude is practiced not just because it feels good, but because it’s the right thing to do — not just for one’s own good, but for the good of one’s family, community, and society. The discipline of gratitude is in fact not a feeling at all, but a moral virtue.

In short, the spiritual discipline of gratitude leaves behind the realm of simple emotion and instead becomes an attitude, a stance, a way. One that necessitates great effort to develop and maintain – the offering of a sacrifice of thanksgiving on the altar of life.
—The Art of Manliness

Question: What stands out to you about gratitude in this article?

Have someone read this Psalm...

Psalm 100:1–5 (ESV): *Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Question: How are joy and praise connected to gratitude?

Question: David declares that (1) God made us, (2) we are his people, and (3) we are sheep in his pasture. Why should these things stir gratitude within us?

Question: What about God's love does David point to that should instill gratitude within our hearts? What else does David point out?

"Repetition makes the extraordinary ordinary. Gratitude restores the ordinary to extraordinary."
—Renaut Van der Reit

Question: How does gratitude change our perspective?

NEW CHALLENGE

Every day this week begin your day by writing down 10 different things your grateful for. And then go back and actually take the time to thank God for those 10 things.

Question: How/when will you put this into practice this week? How can we help encourage one another in this challenge this week?