

CIRCLE 01/02: DON'T BE BLIND TO BLESSINGS

I have worked a lot of crazy jobs.

I've stacked books in a library.

I've washed dishes while I was drenched in water and covered in chili.

I've worked in a coffee shop (but not the cool hipster kind). This shop appeared to be exclusively for middle-aged moms.

And I have been a counselor at a day camp. This experience taught me so much. Primarily, I learned that kids are crazy.

One day after wrangling the kids into the cafeteria, I sat down to enjoy one of my favorite meals: tacos from a truck. Miraculously, my little amigos were all sitting down quietly with their lunch boxes. There was no screaming. There was no clapping or singing about Miss Mary Mack. There was just the sound of five-to-ten-year-olds eating and sniffing. This peaceful moment was interrupted by a blood-curdling scream from across the room.

I dropped my taco and ran over to investigate. "What is going on?" The child, let's call him Carl, stuttered through his tears, "I don't have a Hot Pocket." Assuming someone stole it, I started asking around. I quickly learned that he wasn't supposed to have a Hot Pocket. Carl was upset because his friend across the table had one, and he didn't. Carl's lunch honestly looked very good— a balanced meal his parents clearly packed with care. His sandwich even had the crust cut off. The other kid's dad just dropped a frozen Hot Pocket into a grocery bag.

Carl didn't see it that way, though. He didn't have a Hot Pocket like his buddy, so he threw a fit and made a scene. He didn't realize that the lunch in front of him was far superior to a lukewarm Hot Pocket with 700mg of sodium. His obsession with what he didn't have was a distraction to what he did have.

This is a pivotal life principle. If you always want what you don't have, you'll never be thankful for what you do have.

Let's travel back in time to a year into Jesus's ministry. At this point, Jesus had healed thousands of people, raised people from the dead, and become a small-scale celebrity throughout Judea. However, look at what happens in the Gospel of Matthew.

READ: MATTHEW 13:53-58

“When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.” And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.”

Jesus was in His hometown. He should have been welcomed as a hero. There should have been lines of people ready to experience His power and listen to His wisdom. Instead, the people in Jesus’s own hometown did not get to receive all He had to offer because they were blind to who He really was.

God in flesh was right there, and they missed it.
Don’t be blind to your blessings.
And here’s the kicker: Your blessings are often right in front of you.

I get it. School seems boring. However, over 40% of high-school-age youth don’t get to go to school. This prevents them from gaining an education, rising to a place of influence, and getting out of the poverty cycle. What a blessing we have that we get to go to school.

You probably just read that Scripture in Matthew on a screen. You have instant access to the word of God through the internet and the YouVersion Bible app. However, in the middle ages, a Bible would have cost a whole year’s salary. They were so expensive that only colleges had them. Most churches didn’t even have a copy. What a blessing we have in our accessibility to the Bible.

Gratitude will change your entire attitude.

Don’t be blind. Take a good, hard look around you. Take an honest inventory of all the blessings you have in your life. You will see that the list is near endless. If we aren’t thankful, then we aren’t paying attention.

It’s not happy people who are thankful. It’s thankful people who are happy.



THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE WAS WRITTEN BY JACKSON GARRELL. FOR ALL THE LATEST CIRCLES DEVOTIONALS, FOLLOW @STUDENT_CIRCLES.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Q1: What was your favorite school lunch as a kid?

Q2: Have you ever met someone who is ungrateful and complaining all the time? How does being around them make you feel?

Q3: Go around the group and list some of your blessings.

Q4: How can we keep ourselves from becoming blind to our blessings?

Q5: What can you do to embrace gratitude this week?

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

John 3:16-17

Luke 7:36-50

Ephesians 2:1-10

Titus 2:11-14

Psalms 105:1-3

Hebrews 4:14-16

James 1:2-4

Romans 8:26-30

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Psalms 34:1-3

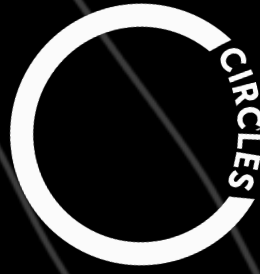
Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.



CIRCLE 02/02: **FINDING JOY**

Have you ever had one of those days where it seems like nothing can go right? The day I traveled from Florida to Hawaii to visit my fiancé was one of those days. There was an accident on the way to the airport that made me late, getting through security took twice as long as normal, my first flight to California was delayed for no apparent reason, and when I finally boarded the plane, I was seated next to a mom and her screaming baby. I assumed we'd be served a meal since the flight was five and a half hours long, but we weren't. The screaming baby and I both got very hangry. The delay forced me to run to my connecting flight and grab a sandwich from Subway really quickly along the way. As soon as I boarded my second flight, I realized I had made a terrible mistake. I had brought a chicken teriyaki sub onto a plane with very little ventilation and lots of frustrated people. It smelled so bad. People started commenting. I couldn't even eat my sub because I didn't want everyone to trace their anger back to seat 29C!

I landed in Hawaii hungry, tired, embarrassed, and smelling like warm teriyaki sauce. Did everything go according to plan? No. Was I happy? No, not really. Was I joyful? You bet! My heart was full of joy and love because I was with my fiancé. That's the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is an emotion based on happenings, but joy is a state of being based on what's in your heart.

An apostle named Paul wrote a letter to the Philippians that is known as "the letter of joy" in the New Testament of the Bible. Paul uses the word "joy" 16 times in just four chapters! Over and over again, he says things like, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4 ESV). You'd think this guy was writing from a beautiful mountain top during sunset on a full stomach of delicious food, right? Well, that couldn't be further from Paul's circumstances. Paul is actually writing on and on about joy while locked up in prison.

How is Paul so full of joy when his life seems to be going so wrong?

READ Philippians 4:11-13

"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Paul learned that he could find joy in the Lord in both the good times and the bad. Since Paul's joy comes from God in his heart, it is not dependent on what happens to

him or his environment. Like Paul, you can also choose joy. No matter what is going on in life, you can strive to have the same joyful mindset and heart as Paul.

He discussed choosing joy in his letter to the Philippians by doing three ways:

1. Pray

Paul found joy in prayer even when he was chained and bound in prison. Next time you find yourself lacking joy, try connecting to God in prayer! It brings joy to know someone who loves you is listening.

2. Be thankful

When negative emotions and situations start to overtake your joy, think about what you have to be thankful for.

3. Trust God

Paul trusted God to give him the strength to persevere through challenging times in prison. You can battle doubt, fear, anxiety, and other feelings that arise in bad situations with trust and faith in God.

Finding joy in the Lord doesn't mean life will be perfect. Life will still have its challenges, heartbreaks, tragedies, and setbacks. However, finding joy in the Lord means that you will choose to focus your heart on God— who always is with you, always listening to your prayers, and always loves you.



THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE WAS WRITTEN BY CHELSEA NYSCHOT. FOR ALL THE LATEST CIRCLES DEVOTIONALS, FOLLOW @STUDENT_CIRCLES.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Q1: Introduce yourself and share one thing you are thankful for.

Q2: Who is the most joyful person you know? What are they like?

Q3: How difficult is it for you to be thankful when life isn't going your way?

Q4: What does it mean to find the joy of the Lord during challenging times?

Q5: How does your attitude towards a situation change when you have trust in God?

Q6: We learned Paul chose joy by praying, being thankful, and trusting God. Which of these tactics could you try this week to find joy?

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Romans 5:3-5

Philippians 4:12-13

2 Corinthians 4:8

Philippians 4:6-7

John 16:33

Joshua 1:9

Job 2:11

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Colossians 3:12-14

Psalms 30:11-12

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