Gratitude: Training Your Eyes to See.

Nov 8, 2026 – Mark McCatin

Main Idea: We don't experience life; we experience the life we are focused on. Gratitude helps us see life truthfully through the lens of God's goodness and grace.

I. Introduction – Expectations and Attitudes

"Negative emotions are almost always the result of reality failing to meet our expectations."

"Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond to it."

1. Our attitude is influenced by how we interpret circumstances.
2. We tend to blame external circumstances for our unhappiness.
3. We have more influence over our response than we often recognize.

II. Our Mindset Determines Much of Our Experience

A. Romans 8:5–6 – Two ways of setting our minds.

1. Mind governed by the flesh – self, control, desires, expectations.
2. Mind governed by the Spirit – God's priorities, purposes, values.
3. Results: Death versus life and peace.

B. Galatians 5:19–23 – Two different by-products.

C. What we focus on shapes what we experience.

III. What Are You Paying Attention To?

"The number of good things in your life depends on your ability to notice them."

"We don't experience life; we experience the life we are focused on."

IV. Learning to Mind Our Minds

Romans 12:2 – *Be transformed by the renewing of your mind*.

James 4:1–2 "Metacognition" – Thinking about our thinking.

V. Christian Gratitude Is More Than Positive Thinking

A. The foundation of Christian gratitude.

1. Gratitude is fitting because God is God and grace is grace.
2. Happiness is a possible benefit, not the primary purpose.
3. Thanksgiving remembers God's goodness and grace.
4. Gratitude guards against forgetfulness and idolatry.

B. Gratitude does not deny suffering. 1 Thess 5:18

1. Give thanks in all circumstances.
2. Grief, disappointment, and suffering are real.
3. We cannot always control circumstances or feelings.
4. We can cultivate truthful attention, prayer, gratitude,
5. and hope.

VI. What Are You Training Your Eyes to See?

A. Philippians 4:8 – Train your mind to focus on what is true.

B. The goal is not positive thinking but truthful seeing.

1. Attention does not create reality.
2. Attention powerfully shapes our experience of reality.
3. Faith does not deny difficulty.

4. Gratitude helps us recognize God's goodness even in difficulty.

VII. Conclusion – Choosing What We Focus On

"You do not simply see the world as it is; you see it through what you trust, fear, remember, and attend to. Scripture therefore calls us not to positive thinking but to truthful seeing—and gratitude is one of God's primary practices for training truthful sight."

Small Group Discussion Guide

November 8, 2026 | Gratitude: Training Your Eyes to See

Main Idea: We don't experience life; we experience the life we are focused on. Gratitude helps us see life truthfully through the lens of God's goodness and grace.

Key Scriptures: Romans 8:5–6; Romans 12:2; Numbers 13–14; Philippians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Suggested length: 60–75 minutes. Questions are arranged to move from personal reflection to biblical discovery, interpretation, and practical application. **Select the most relevant questions rather than feeling obligated to cover them all.**

1. Getting Started — Icebreakers (5–10 minutes)

1. What is something small or ordinary that happened this past week that you're grateful for?
2. Have you ever had an experience that you expected to be terrible but turned out surprisingly well—or something you looked forward to that turned out disappointing? What made the difference?
3. Do you naturally notice what's going right or what's going wrong? Would those closest to you agree?

2. Reflecting on Sunday's Message (10 minutes)

What stood out to you the most from Sunday's message? Was there a particular Scripture, illustration, statement, or idea that challenged your thinking or gave you a new perspective?

The message emphasized that our expectations, attitudes, and what we choose to focus on significantly shape our experience of life.

- **Can you think of** a recent situation where your expectations influenced your attitude or response?
- **What's the difference between** recognizing genuine blessings and simply trying to convince yourself that everything is fine?

"Here Are My Questions"

What questions did Sunday's message raise for you? Was there something you disagreed with, struggled to understand, or would like to explore further?

Take time to discuss these questions before moving into the Scripture study.

3. Romans 8:5–6 — What Is Governing Your Mind? (15–20 minutes)

Read Romans 8:1–11 together, paying particular attention to verses 5–6.

Discover — What does the passage say?

1. What two different mindsets does Paul describe in verses 5–6? What characterizes each?
2. What are the different outcomes of these two mindsets?
3. According to verses 9–11, what makes it possible for a Christian to live differently?

Interpret — What does it mean?

4. **What does Paul mean by** having our minds "set on" what the Spirit desires? How is this different from simply thinking positive thoughts?
5. **How does the larger context** of Romans 8 help us understand that living by the Spirit is more than having a good attitude?
6. **What relationship do you see between** a Spirit-directed mind, gratitude, and the experience of life and peace?

Apply — What difference should it make?

7. **What tends to dominate your thoughts** when things aren't going the way you expected—fear, frustration, control, disappointment, or trust in God?
8. What might change in your relationships, work, or family life if you were more intentional about directing your attention toward God's priorities and promises?
9. **What is one recurring thought pattern** you need the Holy Spirit's help to recognize and change?

4. Philippians 4:8 — Training Our Minds to See Truthfully (10–15 minutes)

Read Philippians 4:4–9.

Discover — What does the passage say?

1. What kinds of things does Paul tell us to think about in verse 8?
2. What instructions does Paul give concerning worry, prayer, and thanksgiving in verses 6–7?
3. What promises about God's peace do you find in verses 7 and 9?

Interpret — What does it mean?

4. Why do you think Paul connects prayer and thanksgiving with anxiety and peace?
5. How is choosing to focus on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable different from ignoring problems or pretending everything is wonderful?
6. How might Philippians 4:8 help us put Romans 8:5–6 into practice?

Apply — What difference should it make?

7. Think about what occupies your attention throughout a typical day—news, social media, worries, frustrations, conversations, or God's goodness. What are you training your mind to notice?
8. What is one practical way you could cultivate a more grateful, Spirit-directed perspective this week?

5. Bringing It Home — Gratitude in Real Life (5–10 minutes)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18.

1. Paul says to give thanks in all circumstances, not necessarily for all circumstances. Why is that distinction important, especially when someone is suffering?
2. What is one circumstance in your life that hasn't changed, but where a change in perspective might make a significant difference?
3. What is one specific thing you can do this week to train your eyes to recognize God's goodness and grace?

7. Closing Prayer

Invite each person to share one thing they're grateful for and, if comfortable, one area where they need God's help to see their circumstances more truthfully.
Pray for the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, help us recognize God's goodness even in difficult circumstances, and cultivate hearts characterized by gratitude, trust, and peace.

Optional Take-Home Challenge

The Seven-Day Gratitude Challenge
For the next seven days, take a few minutes at the end of each day to answer three questions:

- What did I notice today that I can thank God for?
- Where did I allow worry, frustration, or disappointment to dominate my perspective?
- What truth about God do I need to remember as I face tomorrow?

A thought to carry with you:

"We don't experience life; we experience the life we are focused on."
The goal isn't to ignore what's wrong but to become more aware of what's true—including the goodness, faithfulness, and grace of God.
Leader's note: The most important distinction to preserve throughout the discussion is that biblical gratitude is not denial, forced optimism, or a guarantee of happiness. Romans 8 contrasts life governed by the flesh with life governed by the Spirit; Numbers 13–14 contrasts unbelief with trust in God's promise; and Philippians 4 calls believers to direct their thoughts toward what is genuinely true and good.