

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday Oct. 11, 2020. "Now What? What do I have to be grateful for?"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to watch the live stream service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk.

Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

We're still gathering in person. A small but dedicated group who follow all the guidelines and were so encouraging with your love and presence gathered with us. If you're still joining us online we love and so appreciate your presence also. We still are your church family and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions you have, please pass them our way. We feel just as isolated as you, and we want to maintain that connection with each of you.

II Recap.

After last Sunday's uptick in attendance, the staff was thrilled to see so many here, and we hope this trend continues. Especially in the middle of this important series. Last week we began this series; "**What now?**", as a conversation about this pandemic we find ourselves in. We didn't plan for this, see it coming, and many of us are trying to figure out how to navigate this bizarre new world. And we don't just want to just survive, but we want to make the most out of our lives as possible. And...have some control over what our future will look like. The first Sunday we talked about the importance and benefit of learning from honestly reflected experience. In these really odd times, if we can look back and see what fed us and what drained us, we can see what we need specifically in our lives, to get through this. In addition, we're not the first to go through something unusual, and there are others who we may not be able to get specific plans from, but we can gather wisdom from their experiences.

III Sunday.

This Sunday we talked about how we can care for our soul and spirit during these challenging times, and a huge part of that is regularly practicing gratitude. This is difficult to do, because we're having to give up so much and deal with so many unexpected issues, but, (and that's an important truth), the regular practice of being thankful for what we do have can help us weather the difficult times. The scripture was a psalm, but it was split in half and we read the second half first. So, let's read that, talk about it a bit, read the first part, talk a bit more, then unpack some specifics about the benefits and tips for practicing gratitude. Read **Psalm 77:11-15** first.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

What did you notice about the writer's frame of mind?

What do you think led to this passage?

Now read **Psalm 77:1-10**, and answer the same questions above.

That first passage, verses 11-15, was from a heart of thankfulness. There seems to be a deep and profound sense of gratitude for the important things of life. But, it was born out of verses 1-10, where there was this sense of struggle and frustration that first led the writer to a place of almost giving up. So, we'll talk about the place of frustration first, and then talk about what helps build a life growing the so important practice of gratitude.

Have you ever felt the heartache and struggle of verses 1-10?

What causes those moments for you?

In what ways specifically do you carry and handle those kinds of struggles?

Now let's talk about verses 11-15.

Have you had moments of gratitude and thankfulness like those?

What helped you bring them about?

How did they help you handle whatever it was you were dealing with?

Then Kal gave a list, not exhaustive, but some ideas from the passage in how to practice gratitude.

1. Stop and notice.

There's a "*but*", which is the first word in verse 11. The definition of the word "but" is it's an abrupt shift that leads to a new statement that is in contradiction to the previous one. It's a new truth. Something that will force you to at least consider an alternative. This pandemic has forced us to stop...now it's time to intentionally notice. As you go through your day, doing the things you do, **build in moments where you stop and just take in all around you, that you can be thankful for**. Set an alarm, tie something to your wrist, whatever works to make you stop in the moment and just notice.

2. Catch yourself being ungrateful.

Vss 1-10. Develop a third person, self-aware ear to catch yourself not being grateful. When grumpy old dude...dudette, comes out, catch yourself being ungrateful, demanding, expecting rather than appreciating. We all have that inner complainer, and just know when he/she comes out. All through the psalms, we see writers doing what this one did. Moan, complain, and then catch themselves doing it, and then STOP IT! We as a staff have had to master this.

3. Be thankful for things that aren't things.

The writer wasn't thankful for any of his stuff. It's natural to be thankful for tangible things, like family, job, health, a roof over your head, etc. These are really important things to be thankful for, and express gratitude for those. But thankfulness can't always be dependent on physical things. Because physical things aren't dependable, and if we place our gratitude on things; "*where moths and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal*", then our gratitude will not be a solid place. The writer placed his gratitude in things that were eternal and lasting. This is an incredibly important truth about cultivating a life to last through tough times. In this pandemic, all we thought we could trust in and depend on, has disappeared. Our gratitude has to be in things greater than just stuff.

4. Make thankfulness an intentional regular practice.

There seems to be a break in the middle of the psalm that the writer forced himself to take. He must have had some practice that moved him from complaining to a posture of gratitude. Often this doesn't come naturally and we have to build rituals into our regular life that will move us towards gratitude. Do things like, **journaling, practicing mindfulness, etc.** You could start with venting the grossness of ingratitude out first. Once that toxic poison is purged from our system. All the negativity, entitlement, expectations of how things are supposed to be, then we have created room for genuine, real, lasting gratitude. We realize as a staff, once we get past catching ourselves being negative, we move into recognizing the good things we have.

5. Create your own practices that can grow gratefulness in you.

If you're so inclined; establish a thankfulness jar, try journaling, make it a part of dinner conversation, or before you start the day, before you go to sleep, make yourself mention three things you are grateful for. Be creative and come up with your own. True gratitude, to help you in the toughest times isn't the product of a specific process. It's the product of a desire and heart bent towards wanting to be grateful. Of living the "*but*" life.

IV Challenge.

The skill of practicing and growing the ability to regularly experience gratitude seems to come more naturally to some than others. We realize for some of us this will just be more difficult than for others. But we cannot oversell or underplay in dealing with difficult times the importance of learning to do this well. Your future and ability to handle whatever life hands you is dependent on practicing gratitude in a healthy life-giving way. It creates this inner strength, fortitude, maturity that will help you handle anything that might come along. But it takes time, and intentional effort, to grow a regular practice and heart of gratitude.

So, what one or two things could you work into your regular routine that could help you be more grateful?