

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday November 21, 2021. "The Practice of Gratitude."

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 participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're on a sprint towards Advent and Christmas and we hope you join us. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's, youth areas and coffee spot have been fully open also and we're seeing a good response. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Recap.

Last week we began a conversation about gratitude as we move towards Thanksgiving. The passage we dove into helped identify some specific things that we have to deal with in order to experience gratitude. We need to understand our tendency to drift towards stinginess. We have to cultivate a life, (by reforming our mind), that moves us towards generosity. And learn to separate our actual 'needs' from our 'wants'. Which is a classic tension. All of this is based on the scriptural truth that a life lived out practicing gratitude is a much healthier and better life than one stuck in a sense of entitlement which claims we're owed a certain life. That message and devotion are available online.

III Sunday.

This devotion will be shorter because most of the service on Sunday was working through a guided meditation to help deal with what tends to block our ability to experience gratitude. Now we hit some of those blocks last week as we dealt with some of the specifics from the passage in 2 Corinthians. But we took on a big one this Sunday. And that is the issue of how unforgiveness blocks gratitude. I know all of us carry real hurts from our past, we haven't been able to completely move on from them. They don't consume all our attention, but when we are reminded in some way about those events, there are still sensitive feelings, and struggles, maybe even tears that are connected to that event. PLEASE do not feel any guilt or shame for those things still hurting. Grief and hurt really never completely go away. That hole of loss and mourning will always be there somewhere inside of you. Wholeness comes from continually building health and life around that hole of loss.

The scripture for Sunday was **Matthew 18:21-35**. Read this, and we'll answer a couple of questions.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What connections could you see between the ability to forgive and experiencing gratitude?

There are basically two ways to interpret this teaching.

One- God will actively choose not to forgive you if you don't forgive others. You can make a case from this story for that interpretation, and it kind of holds up. Surface level punitive orientation can be read this way. We in the church world, for some reason, love to read most passages from a punishing, punitive angle rather than a loving, grace-filled, wholeness one. The problem is, when you look at other scriptures about the nature of God, our inability to completely purge ourselves of hurt and unforgiveness, this interpretation falls apart. It paints God as petty, goes against Romans 5:8 and basically all of scripture describing God. We will always hold some amount of hurt and unforgiveness. So, honestly if this interpretation is the one, none of us will actually be forgiven...EVER.

Two- leads us to another interpretation and understanding that aligns more with what we know about God from all of scripture. If we hold onto unforgiveness towards others, nurse bitterness, we simply cannot receive grace and forgiveness from God in such a way that it actually changes who we are. We're too busy holding a grudge, waiting for someone to get what WE think they should have coming, letting a root of bitterness grow within us, we miss experiencing the joy God wants to offer us. We will live in the bondage a prison of our own making, of unforgiveness. Missing actually living in gratefulness. Makes grace less earned, (works based), more of a gift, and absolutely scandalous.

This is why a proper understanding and interpretation in community is so important. Because of a lack of gratitude in our own lives, we can often interpret passages as punitive and graceless. God is holding a grudge and making us pay. Or we can read other passages that give us some perspective and context to help us move past our own limited fallen perspectives, and through the eyes of God.

Why are we drawn and tend to lean towards a more punitive reading of scripture?

What makes true grace and forgiveness so difficult and honestly scandalous?

This passage was used to connect the idea of gratitude with a fuller understanding and practice of forgiveness. In the final part of the story the king asked the servant; *"when I forgave you of such a giant debt because you begged me to, why weren't you..."***compelled to be merciful** (MSG) *to someone else?"*

"Compelled to be merciful" is being equated with the practice of gratitude. True gratitude is born out of an understanding that we are owed nothing, God has lavished us with grace. Once we embrace that truth then thankfulness will abound. The two are inseparably connected. When you can grow in your understanding of and receiving forgiveness and grace, the ability to truly practice gratitude will grow.

As a challenge, how can and will you practice forgiveness and gratitude?

IV Challenge.

Finally, because the service included a guided meditation, it would be beneficial for you to go back and actually watch the entire service. It will give you a time to walk through some of your past hurts. And if you're interested, post on any social media you use, what you are specifically grateful for. Feel the full freedom of posting familiar easy things, and also the hard and unusual things.

Tag it with: **#NCCGrateful** And let us all be an encouragement to each other and our world.