



WEEK 6 – THANKSGIVING

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... Easter is Sunday! What's your Easter tradition? Do you old-school paint hardboiled eggs in colored water? Do you go to worship then gorge yourself on ham and Reese's eggs? Or, is it like every other day and you simply take a Sunday nap? Discuss!

OPENING PRAYER

**God of Provision, never let us take for granted
the blessings you have poured out upon us.**

INTRODUCTION

Today, we wrap up our series, The SCRIPT, where we have been focusing on how to utilize various types of prayer in order to draw us

closer to God and prepare our hearts for Easter. For the last time, let's remember why we're doing this and what the SCRIPT is. It is a tradition of the Church to use the season of Lent the 6 weeks that lead up to Easter, as a way to prepare our hearts for the coming celebration of the resurrection of Christ. (You've got a few days left... it's not too late!) And to achieve that, we incorporate things like self-reflection, repentance, sacrifice to help us get rid of anything that stands in the way of our relationship with God. So, if that's the goal, to help set you up for success, we usually do a series on prayer for Lent. Now, as we've said all along, the majority of prayer should be listening for God's voice and what *God* has to say to *YOU*. But, what you say IS important and can be truly powerful for deepening your relationship with God and for your preparation for Easter. So, for 5 weeks now, that's what we've been talking about... what do you say when you pray? And hopefully, you've begun to fill your prayer toolbox with all sorts of tools of what to say when you pray. And that toolbox is what we've been calling... the SCRIPT.

Setup Question: There's no set-up this week, just a fun Easter war to begin. Ready? Peeps, best sweet of any holiday ever or invention of Satan? Are you a fan? Let the battle begin!

THE SCRIPT SETUP

Well, we've dotted our 'i's. Today, we cross the 't' to finish our acronym. Let's review...

SUPPLICATION

CONFESSION

RESTORATION

INTERCESSION

PRAISE

T

Supplication was simply asking God for what we want. *Confession* gives us a clean heart and lightens the weight of the load we're carrying. *Restoration* repairs broken relationships in our lives. Through *Intercession* we pray for the needs of others. And Prayers of Praise remind us of who God is in our lives. For the full description of these, go back to the reflections on the mobile app or website. (You'll need something to do as you're waiting for the Illini Final Four game this week!) Today, we'll look at the type of prayer that might just be the most foundational of them all. But first...

Question 1: Last week, we were challenged to go to God with our Prayers of Praise. Were you able to praise this week? What did that look like? If so, was it helpful in remind you of who God is in you life? If not, why not? Ready, go!

SCRIPTURE

To get at the 'T,' we're going to look at another example from the Psalms. Now, it really feels like we could have done this whole series

in the Psalms, but we wanted to mix it up a bit. However, the Psalms are a good place to find all these examples, so, if you ever need one, go to the Psalms. For today's type of prayer, let's take a look at one more.

Read Psalm 136, verses 1 through 4.

Now, it goes on... for TWENTY-SIX verses of this! (We're only look at the first 4... you're welcome.) The author goes on to say, "give thanks to the God who skillfully made the heavens, who set the ground among the water, who put the stars in the sky, who made the sun and the moon." They acknowledge God's deliverance and miracles and triumph over enemies. It's a beautiful piece of poetry, designed for worship, and gives us the perfect example of our last type of prayer.

Question 2: Consider this Psalm. Does anything stand out to you beside the obvious? Have you ever done a "call & response" like this in a worship setting? Does it help you get a sense of the message or what the writer is trying to get across? Would reading a scripture like this regularly help you with the way you pray to God?

REFLECTION

This Psalm was probably written by someone who was in charge of leading a worship setting. We don't have a heading that tells us for sure, but given the "call and response" set up, probably the case. In terms of the content, it doesn't take a Bible scholar to see what is

going on here. It's a perfect example of our last type of prayer... the "t" in the SCRIPT

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is another simple one... you just thank God for the blessings in your life. Easy, right? But as simple as it is, it might be one of the most important of all the 6. And today, we'll look at two reasons why. To understand the first reason, we need to address a concern: namely, we have a hard time differentiating between praise and thanksgiving. But that makes sense, right? When we think about praising God, telling God how amazing He is, we do so because our praise often comes from a place of gratitude. We praise God for being so good based on the blessings we feel in our lives. Which presents a bit of a problem... can you still praise God when you aren't feeling blessed? It doesn't come naturally then. When we aren't feeling it, it's hard to go, "God, you're so amazing." If we've just lost a loved one, or we got passed over for a promotion at work, or we bombed that test, or a relationship fell apart... it's hard to tell God how amazing he is.

But, there is a path back to deepening that relationship with God. And it's today's tool... Prayers of Thanksgiving. Even when life falls apart, you can stop and think, even in the valley, what do I have to be thankful for? "Yeah, man, I'm going to miss that loved one. At the same time, I am so thankful for the time we spent together." Or, "Yeah, it sucks that I got passed over for that promotion, but, God, thank you so much for the clothes on my back and food on my table."

“Yeah, works sucks at the moment, but the Illini are in the Final 4!” When all else fails, Prayers of Thanksgiving bring us back to our relationship with God. Because that was the point, right? We started this series asking the question, how can we deepen our relationship with God and prepare our hearts for Easter? When asking for something seems self-serving, when confession isn’t enough, when praying for others is great, but doesn’t help *your* situation, and when you just can’t praise... Prayers of Thanksgiving are the path back to your relationship with God.

Question 3: Many of us already do something like prayers of Thanksgiving. What do yours look like? Do you thank God regularly, or just when something good happens that reminds you of the blessings in your life? If you don’t, what would encourage you to incorporate Prayers of Thanksgiving into your repertoire?

The second reason Prayers of Thanksgiving are so important to incorporate into your SCRIPT is this... Prayers of Thanksgiving are the only one of the 6 that works all the time. Now, you might be asking, “what do you do when you don’t think you have anything to be thankful for?” It’s a valid question. Life can be a struggle, and when we’re in the throes of the difficulty, it can be nearly impossible to see anything good in life. Now, without diminishing what you’re going through, (your loss, your struggle, your issues are valid, it’s okay to be not okay,) but if you look hard enough, there’s always something to be thankful for. On Sunday, Pastor Mike talked about his travels to some of the most devastated parts of the world, (poverty in Mexico,

persecution in Guatemala and the Middle East, genocide and civil war in Liberia,) and even though those people had every right to be angry, to blame God, and to run from their faith, many of them were the most faithful, praise-ful, and thankful people he'd ever met. Now, the idea is not to compare our problems to theirs, (don't diminish what you're going through, though sometimes it *can* put some things in perspective,) the point is to learn from how they handled their adversity. Their prayers would be full of praise and thanksgiving. Maybe because they had so little, maybe because they knew what was important, maybe because they had nothing else to depend on *but* God, but their prayers can teach us about being thankful in any situation. For example, our Liberian friends begin prayers with, "God, thanks for waking me up this morning." That's it. So, no matter what you are going through, there is always something to be thankful for if you look for it. There is always some blessing God has bestowed upon you. It's there if you try.

And if nothing else, take a note from this Psalm. The Psalmist has you repeat it 26 times. This phrase was not an accident... this phrase was not just the line that was popular that year. This was a phrase we see over and over again throughout the Bible, even in the prayers of praise from David we've already looked at. This line was a mantra, a staple of the Israelites, which is why it is used here, and why it's so important. The author of this Psalm wanted it burned into your brain so you *couldn't* forget it. Why can we be thankful in any and every situation? Because God's faithful love endures forever. The things of this life might be a struggle, if not right now, they have been, or will

be. And so, when you don't think you have anything else to be thankful for, go to this Psalm. Because we have a faithful God who carries us through all of it, who lifts us up, who sent Jesus to conquer death for our sake, and whose love endures forever. *That* is something you can be thankful for.

Question 4: Let's finish with an exercise. Take a moment to calm your heart and mind. Take a few deep breaths. Consider your day... your week... maybe your life. Write down 5 things for which you are thankful. When done, thank God for those things. Consider making this a regular practice of your prayer life.

CLOSING

Okay, there you have it... the SCRIPT. This is important, each one of these is a tool in your toolbox. Come back to this list when you need help praying, because each one is vital for your prayer life. Supplication connects us to what God wants for our lives. Confession repairs the broken relationship with have with God. Restoration heals relationships that can hinder our faith. Intercession puts others and God ahead of ourselves. Praise reminds us who God is in our lives. And Thanksgiving gives us a road back to our relationship with our Creator. Use this acronym, make this a priority. Because nothing is more important for deepening your relationship with God than your prayer life. And what better tools to use, than the SCRIPT.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**