



LIFEGroup Relational Guidelines

Honoring one another in our group discussions is important. Guidelines and boundaries help with the flow and pace of the discussions, help us value one another, and help people to be more comfortable sharing deep and meaningful things.

SAFE GROUP: We will strive to create an environment where everyone can be real, open, and honest with their struggles and victories.

CONFIDENTIALITY: What is said in the group stays in the group.

LISTEN: We value one another during the discussions by listening to what is being shared. Avoid thinking about how you are going to respond, or what you are going to say.

PAUSE: Allow a pause in conversation after someone shares before responding. Give the person sharing the chance to finish and the group the opportunity to consider what was just shared.

SILENCE: It is important for silence in the group as it provides for people to share, and for members in the group, to process the topic or question being considered.

NO TALKING WHILE SOMEONE IS SHARING: Be considerate of others as they are sharing. No side conversations.

SHARING: Be sensitive about the amount of time you share.

CONFLICT: We will resolve conflict biblically. When conflict or sin issues between group members arise, we make sure to honor God and each other in the ways that resolve issues. The following are a few key Scriptures in this regard (*there are many others*).

- If someone sins against you - *Matthew 18:15-20*
- Restoring someone in sin - *Galatians 6:1-5*
- Forgive a sinner - *Colossians 3:12-13*
- Reconciling differences - *Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 7:1-5*

BE SELF-AWARE: Be self-aware of how you are personally affecting the environment through your words, actions, and non-verbal communication.

USE "I" STATEMENTS: It's easy to talk about the issues of others, but for our purposes, we want you to put yourself on the table. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them", "the church", "us", "we", etc.



Introduction to our Gratitude Journey

By Pastor Andrew Farhat

In 2007, my wife Daisy and I were living in Arvada, CO. I was doing an internship at a local church. For thanksgiving we all got together for dinner at her parent's home in Centennial. After dinner, we gathered together and Daisy's mother asked us to share what we were thankful for that year. It was a positive experience. It gave us a sense of connectedness. Some stories of gratitude were emotional. Others were edifying. There was something powerful as we all shared in front of others the reasons we were thankful. I remember walking away from that dinner with joy.

How can gratitude become a regular spiritual practice? How does God's Word form us for *practicing* gratitude? In particular, what happens when we experience conflict, anxiety, suffering, fear, or discontentment? How do we practice gratitude in those circumstances?

Writer and Research Professor, Brene Brown, discovered the relationship between gratitude and joy in her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*. Dr. Brown writes:

"After spending countless hours collecting stories about joy and gratitude, three powerful patterns emerged: Without exception, every person I interviewed who described living a joyful life or who described themselves as joyful, actively practiced gratitude and attributed their joyfulness to their gratitude practice. Both joy and gratitude were described as spiritual practices that were bound to a belief in human interconnectedness and a power greater than us. People were quick to point out the difference between happiness and joy as the difference between human emotion that's connected to circumstances and a spiritual way of engaging with the world that's connected to practicing gratitude" (The Gifts of Imperfection, p. 77-78).

After I read this book in 2017, I thought: "This research is great. It is affirming what Scripture has said all along!" What is it that Scripture has said? In the 1st century, St. Paul said: "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*" (1 Thess. 5:16-18, *all words in italics are mine in this study guide*). And, this comes from St. Paul who, while locked up in prison, wrote his famous letter to the Philippians, and mentioned "joy" 16 times in just 4 chapters! How did this man practice gratitude without a wife, children, money, a house, vacations, or access to good food!? In this study guide, we will focus on Philippians chapter 4, which I would call Paul's famous gratitude chapter. Additionally, here are 5 overarching biblical themes for the Christian to make use of on the road to gratitude:

Foundation of Gratitude: Salvation by Grace

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he makes it clear that we are saved from sin and death by grace (Philippians 1:2). He says that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:6), and that the Christian is righteous, not by their own morality, but are righteous "through faith in Christ" (Philippians 3:9). From this identity in Christ we fill ourselves with joy and gratitude because that is simply who we are in Christ. We are people that know who we belong to. We know where we are headed.

The following teachings therefore, flow out of our identity in Christ. Gratitude is not a means of salvation. Gratitude is the result.

The Battle is Won in the Mind

Paul says: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, *think about these things*" (Philippians 4:8). He also said: "*take every thought captive to obey Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) and, "*set your minds on things that are above*" (Colossians 3:2). What we choose to think about is an expression of our faith. In the midst of conflict for example, it is good to ask: "How does God want to bring about good in this situation or in me?" In the midst of anxiety or discontentment, we should ask: "Is my God big enough to handle _____?" I remember asking this question and I felt the emotion of relief and peace.

St. Paul says that the disciple of Jesus is "rooted and built up in him and *established in the faith*, just as you were taught, *abounding in thanksgiving*" (Colossians 2:7). Moments of conflict, anxiety, or discontentment are an opportunity for us to express faith.

What is that that a disciple of Jesus believes? We believe that our home is in the "heavens and new earth" (Revelation 21:1) and not here (Philippians 3:19-20).

- We believe that in that place there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain, for the old order of things would have passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).
- We believe that our lives here on earth are only temporary and not the end.
- We believe we are loved, forgiven, redeemed, righteous, and will inherit all of the Father's salvation blessings when Jesus comes again to the earth to bring about His new creation.

Tim Keller says: "It is fair to say that if you are a Christian with those beliefs-about who you are to God and what is in store for you-but you are not experiencing peace and meaning, then it is because you are not thinking enough" (*Making Sense of God*, p. 69).

Paul says: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). We set our mind on the bodily resurrection of Christ which is the reason for us becoming a new creation in Christ now (2 Cor. 5:17) and a new creation on the Last Day (Rev. 21:1-4).

Gratitude in Daily Prayers

Paul says: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). How is gratitude a regular spiritual practice included in our prayers? One suggestion is to write down your thanksgivings on a prayer log and express one or more thanksgivings at the beginning of your prayer time that day.

Thanksgivings Out Loud

One evening at my home, I remember being somewhat discouraged. One of my daughters was expressing all the things she did not have. So, at dinner time, I asked my family: “What are you thankful for that you do have?” We went around the room and each one shared. Afterwards, I remember my daughter was almost like a different person. She was filled with a hopeful outlook on life! There is something powerful that occurs during the auditory act of hearing your thanksgivings or others out loud.

King David says: “I...go to your altar proclaiming *thanksgiving aloud*, and telling all your wondrous deeds” (Psalm 26:7). One suggestion is to include your thanksgivings in a journal, if you keep one, or consider beginning journaling.

Paul also says: “For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase *thanksgiving*, to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:15). These are what I would call, “Kingdom Thanksgivings.” How can we recount how grace is extending to more and more people? How is the Word of God multiplying? How are the people around you repenting of sin or growing in their knowledge of Christ? How did you see God at work in your life this week? These are all opportunities to imitate Paul and practice thanksgiving and giving God glory.

Worship in Song

One woman who struggles with anxiety once told me: “When I worship the Lord in song, I forget my burdens all at once and feel a sense of peace.” Indeed, worship in song lifts up our soul and inner being to God and sets our minds on things that are above.

When King David brought back the Ark of God to Jerusalem they worshipped with singing: “Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving *be sung to the Lord* by Asaph and his brothers” (1 Chronicles 16:7). The Bible says:

- “I will praise the name of God *with a song*; I will magnify him with thanksgiving” (Psalm 69:30).
- “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with *songs of praise!*”
- “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts *with praise!* Give thanks to him; bless his name” (Psalm 100:4).
- “*Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving*; make melody to our God on the lyre” (Psalm 147:7).

These verses remind us to gather and worship the Lord as a congregation every Sunday as we anticipate being joined together again in the new creation.

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Wash Park Campus Pastor





LIFEGroup Gathering Guide

Week 1 - Philippians 4:1-13

Getting Started

- *Larger LIFEGroups may consider splitting into same gender groups in order to facilitate more meaningful discussion.*
- *Groups will not have enough time to discuss every question. Leaders are encouraged to skip questions and make substitutions based on what's best for their group.*

Warm Ups (15 Min)

- Everyone share a “High” from the week and a “Low” from the week.
- Everyone share a “God moment” from the week.

Scripture Study (30 Min)

- Paul says that Euodia and Syntyche need to agree on something for the sake of unity in the church. Previously in letter, Paul says that he hopes the Philippians are: “standing firm in one spirit” (1:27) with “one mind” (1:27, also 2:2), and that they would have the “same love” (2:2) and be in “full accord” (2:2). Why is it paramount that followers of Christ live in unity and are not divided?
- How have you seen a dispute between Christians handled in a positive and healing manner?
- Paul says that humility (Philippians 2:3), patterned after the example of Christ (Philippians 2:4-11) is the means to unity. How can the humility of Christ lead you during times of conflict?
- Reflect on this: After teaching us the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus said: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). The power to forgive comes when we realize the magnitude of God’s forgiveness for us (see Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 5:1-2 for further study).
- How does unity in Christ lead to gratitude?

- John says: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 1:4). And: “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).
- In the midst of conflict, how is it helpful to ask: “How does God want to bring about good?”
- Proverbs 29:25 says: “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.” Fear of man is fear of disapproval of others, and/or fear of what another person can do to you. Is it possible that one is elevating a person too highly if they are constantly occupying their thoughts?
- Paul says to pray with thanksgiving in Philippians 4:6. How can you be thankful for this trial which will bring about good in you?
- Some conflicts will not be solved on this side of heaven. Read Romans 12:14-21. How does this passage give you comfort?
- Who is someone God desires that you call to bring about greater unity?
- How will you seek to resolve conflict moving forward?

Group Prayer (15 Min)

Trios (20 Min)

Same gender groups of three. If numbers are uneven, go to groups of two.

- **Spiritual Velocity:**
 - How did you see God at work in your life this week?
 - What has God been teaching you in His Word as you’ve encountered it in this week’s Life Journal readings, Sunday message, or LIFEGroup study?
 - What’s an area of your life in which you know you need to repent or grow? How can we encourage you?
- **Joining Jesus on His Mission:**
 - What kind of conversations are you having with non-Christians? How’s your 3-2-1 challenge going? Share about connections you’re building and spiritual conversations you’re having with non-believing neighbors and friends.
 - List the names of non-Christians in your life that you can pray for:
_____.
 - What good can we do around here? (Missional party? Service project?)
 - How can we help each other, our neighbors, and our city in prayer?