

Week 1

November 8, 2020



Group Discussion Guide

*The group guides for the **Grateful** series will be a bit different than previous ones. You'll find these to be more prescriptive. Hopefully, you'll find them to be centering as we press into practicing the way of Jesus. You'll want to review this ahead of time, get any supplies for the night ready ahead of time, and allow approximately 90 minutes for discussion.*

Begin with 5 minutes of silence + prayer (7-10 minutes)

As you begin your gathering, spend five minutes together in prayerful silence. Then, after a few moments of quiet centering, have a specified person in the group pray this general prayer of thanksgiving from the Book of Common Prayer (we'll return to it each week in this series).

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

Read this overview (1 minute)

God's word says, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever." So then, what does it mean for us, in the midst of cynicism, pride, and discontentedness, to simply be a grateful people? We want to foster within ourselves an awareness of the Holy Spirit's prompting to live with grateful hearts and we want to learn to be thankful people. To do that...we need an understanding of the "why." That's why, this past weekend, Dan taught us on the *power of gratitude*.

Scripture + Debrief in small groups (15-20 minutes)

Split your group into same-gender triads to read the following Scriptures and debrief the sermon together.

- Read **1 Thessalonians 5:18** and **Colossians 2:6-7** in small groups.
- How did this message expand how you think about gratitude?
- What is something you are grateful for today?
- When was a time you've seen gratitude bring color and life while enduring a hardship or struggle?

Transition back to one large group (5 minutes)

Ask a few questions about each person's time in their smaller groups:

- What were some of the things that came up during individual group discussions?
- What were some of the things that you are grateful for today?

Practice gratitude as a community right now (15-30 minutes)

For this practice, we want to be intentional about recognizing how gratitude has beget gratitude in our lives (or perhaps places where the cycle of gratitude has been lost).

Have people view the "The Spiral of Gratitude" practice (*Note: You'll want to print out the practice for people ahead of time or have them access it at thecreek.org/devotionals under the "discussion guide" tab*).

Instruct your group to spread out and find a quiet space to use the "bubbles" below to notate where a gift has been given and where gratitude has been reciprocated...in their relationship with God and in their relationship with whomever they decide.

Take some time to do this practice. Have people read the excerpt below and follow the instructions afterward. You can spend anywhere from 15-30 minutes completing it.

Gratitude recognizes that a gift has been given, a favor has been done by someone. There is a gift and a giver. But there is more. Gratitude also calls for a response to that gift. We thank the giver with an expression of appreciation—a handshake, a hug, a note. A gesture of gratitude completes the exchange, closes the circle, lets the love flow back to the giver.

I remember bringing a gift to a birthday party when I was a child. The birthday child met me at the door, grabbed the gift without a thank-you, ran into the room, and threw it among all the other gifts.

Why do I still remember that incident? Because the giving of that gift is not complete after all these years! I never received the thank-you needed to close the circle and establish a mutual exchange. Actually, the exchange is more like a spiral than a circle—a spiral in which the giver gets thanked and so becomes the receiver, and the joy of giving and receiving rises higher and higher.

A mother bends down to her child in his crib and hands him a rattle. The baby recognizes the gift and returns the mother's smile. The mother, overjoyed with the childish gesture of gratitude, lifts the child up with a kiss. There is our spiral of joy. Is not a kiss a greater gift than a toy?

The gesture of thanks moves both the giver and receiver to another level. It expresses a unity; it solidifies a relationship...An external expression of thanks—a note, a handshake, a hug, a kiss—unites giver and receiver, if only for a moment...

Expressing thanks includes acknowledging a dependence on the person who gave the gift. You acknowledge that you are not self-sufficient—that you need the support a phone call brings, the encouragement a compliment gives, the understanding an intimate conversation involves, the warmth a hug provides. A humble give-and-take between real people breaks through a false independence. It acknowledges interdependence: you need each other and the gifts each can provide.

In realizing that God showers us with gifts, we also recognize our dependence on God. We don't like that very much. We'd rather be independent and self-sufficient, make it on our own strength. Dependence sounds weak and immature. But admitting we have weaknesses can actually bring us strength...It is at the point of our weaknesses that we can experience God's grace, God's saving presence and action.

God is the Giver. We are thanks-givers. As thanks-giving people, we admit that we did not create ourselves. We exist and continue to exist because of God's creative and covenantal love. We belong to God...We depend on God, the Giver of all good things. And when we receive life and all it contains from God, we can respond with gestures of gratitude.¹

Inside the first bubble, write in the first significant gift you remember being given in that relationship. Then, to the side of that first bubble note the following:

- What precipitated that gift?
- What internal/externals responses did that gift bring out in you or in the other person?
- What did that gift do to either your relationship with God or with the other person?

After completing the first bubble, do the same thing in the subsequent bubbles with the next significant gift that arose in your relationship – note it and to the side answer the questions above. Fill 3-5 bubbles.

For example, in your gratitude towards God you might write something like:

¹ Don Postema, *Space for God: Study and Practice of Spirituality and Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1983), 72-73.

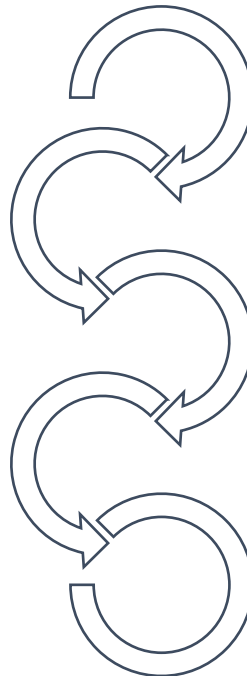
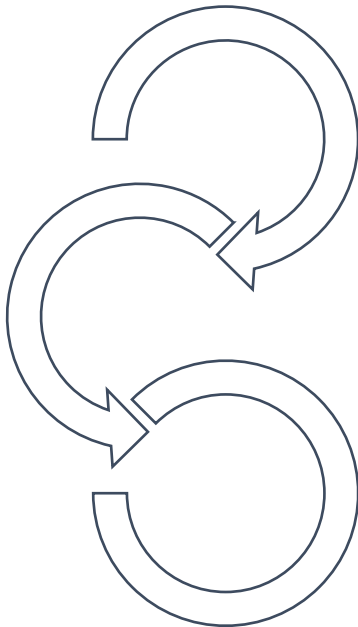


- The Lord speaking to me from the Sunday sermon
- Internal: Joy, relief, excitement; External: sharing my story with others
- It helped me first get to know Him

- Asking God in prayer for help
- Internal: Trust, relief, awe, thankfulness; External:
- It helped me realize that God is always good

My relationship with God

My relationship with _____



Finally, after reflecting on these questions, consider this: *What does this gratitude exercise reveal to me about my relationship with God? What does it reveal to me about my relationship with _____?*

After you finish, come back together as a large group to talk through the questions from the next section.

Work through these discussion questions (10-15 minutes)

- What did this gratitude exercise reveal to you about your relationship with God? What did it reveal to you about your relationships in general?
- Do you think this is the kind of practice that Jesus Himself would have practiced? Why or why not?

Finish with prayer (10 minutes)

Like each week, finish your group session with prayer. You might designate someone in your group to write down everyone's prayer requests and then send them to the whole group for everyone to be praying about through the week.

- What is on your heart that you need prayer for?
- Who in your life needs prayer?

Have someone close your time together by interceding for the requests that were shared.