

Week 3

November 22, 2020



During Sunday's service, we partook in a guided prayer experience acknowledging the challenges many of us face when expressing gratitude. This week, and in the weeks to come, if you find yourself struggling to express or feel gratitude, you may find it helpful to revisit this prayer.

This season has certainly brought about a lot of hardships for so many people. There isn't a single person whose life hasn't been affected in some way or another by COVID. There are so many others among us who have lost loved ones, have lost jobs, have lost marriages, have lost significant milestones being celebrated.

In the midst of this kind of loss, gratitude can be a struggle. While we won't be able to deal with all we're carrying in five minutes, we can begin the process. We want to offer a space to pray and carry those heavy loads to the feet of Jesus this morning.

Scripture tells us that God is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. There is nowhere we can go that He cannot find us—even in the dark, darkness isn't dark to Him. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we don't have to fear because He is with us. He is Jehovah-Rapha—the God who heals. He is El Roi—the God who sees. He is the Prince of peace and wonderful counselor. And in every situation, circumstance, season, and with every breath, He is faithful and He is *good*.

With these truths in mind, we want to walk through a guided prayer time this morning. I'll lead us through each of the four movements, giving you a few moments of quiet space in between to offer your own prayer to God. Just be honest with him. Don't worry about the words being right. Tell him how you're feeling and what you're thinking. He won't be surprised. He already knows you and loves you still.

Let's take some time to pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to lead us.

Lord God, we know you are close to the brokenhearted and you save those who are crushed in spirit (Ps 34:18). We bring our brokenness and our heartaches into your presence today, God, you know every one of our struggles. You see our pain. We long to be filled with gratitude, but at times our hardships can eclipse the ways you are working in our lives.

So, today, we want to acknowledge the weight of the losses we have experienced in recent months.

Take a few moments to be honest before God about the weight you are carrying.

PAUSE FOR PRAYER

Lord God, we give you the weight of those losses we're carrying.

God, we want to take confidence in the fact that you are good, and you can be trusted.

Think about the goodness of God. Take a moment to remember his faithfulness, kindness, mercy, and love. Ask God to grow your faith and trust in him. Ask him to show you his goodness.

PAUSE FOR PRAYER

Almighty God, we give thanks to you because you are good. We know your love endures forever.

Jesus, praising you in the good times seems easy. Worshipping you when things are tough is harder. Lift our eyes to you, Lord God, the Maker of heaven and earth, where our help comes from. Allow us to see your majesty. Your sovereignty. To fix our eyes on your glory and grace.

Spend a few moments in worship of our amazing God. Tell him what he means to you. Praise him for his nature. Invite him to reveal his majesty and his glory to you.

PAUSE FOR PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You alone are God and worthy of praise.

God, while you alone can redeem my situation, you know my need for the body of Christ. Thank you for not leaving us alone in our situation. Thank you for our church community and for the people in my life who are walking with me in this difficult journey.

Spend a few moments thanking God for the specific people he has placed in your life to walk through this journey with you. If you haven't shared the difficulties you're facing with someone, ask God for the courage to share them. Ask Him to lead you to the right person who can listen and point you back to Jesus.

PAUSE FOR PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for the ways you welcome our sorrow and suffering. We look to you to guide us as we heal. Jesus, you are a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. You are familiar with pain and are Emmanuel, God with us—in every situation. You demonstrated your love for us by enduring suffering on the cross. Open our hearts to your love and may we be grateful as a result. Help us to find threads of gratitude even in the hard places. Amen.

Examen

Our daily work will look and feel a little different than normal... And that's because it IS different than normal. Throughout our gratitude series, we are going to be practicing The Examen. This is a prayer practice for discerning the voice of God and the activity of God throughout the day. It fosters gratitude and creates deeper awareness of God-given desires in one's life. The Examen is not about completing a task, but about building a relationship with God. Whether you begin or end your day with it, you're invited to use this practice every day this month. You'll receive a different version of the examen each week of our Grateful series.

BE STILL

Find a quiet place where you can be alone with God. Get into a comfortable position and allow yourself to relax. Quiet your mind, your body, and your heart before God. Pay attention to your breathing for a moment. Breathe in deeply the love of God and exhale the stress and distractions of the day. Try to turn down the volume on your random thoughts and preoccupations.

There's nothing magical about praying; prayer is simply a conversation with God. So, invite God to be with you in this time. Ask God to help you to be grateful and honest as you look back on the day. Let yourself see your day as God sees it.

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Gratitude cultivates our hearts and minds to see God working. Gratitude, practiced often enough, helps us find God in all things and can transform the way we look at our life and at other people. So, review the day and name the blessings, from the most significant and obvious to the more common and ordinary. Don't feel that you have to mechanically go through the day hour by hour or make a list of *all* the day's gifts. Instead, savor whatever gifts God shows you.

With God present, go back through your day. For what and for whom are you grateful? As things come to mind, pause and express your gratitude to God.

PRAY THROUGH YOUR DAY

Noticing Internal Enemies

As you review your day, were there places where any enemies of gratitude surfaced? Did you notice entitlement, selfishness, greed, or anything like them in your heart or spirit? Are there any places where you are addicted to criticism, analysis, or negativity?

Take some time, with God guiding, to look through your day. Allow God's loving kindness to lead you to repentance as you notice these enemies and confess them to God.

Noticing External Challenges

Were there any external challenges or circumstances that made gratitude difficult today? How did you handle them? Where is there evidence of God's presence in the hardship? Is there anything you can be thankful for in it?

If you are unable to see God's presence in your challenge right now, pray an honest prayer telling God how you feel. Spend some time with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). What does he want to tell you?

Noticing God's Love

Did you notice any situations or circumstances where you leaned into God's love and practiced gratitude in a new way? Thank God for these moments.

REJOICE AND SEEK FORGIVENESS

Rejoice in the moments God brought you closer to Him today.

Confess the moments when you resisted God's presence and ask for His forgiveness.

Thank God for the gift of awareness.

Receive God's grace for your entire day.

In Christ, there is no condemnation.

LOOK TO TOMORROW

Just as God was with you today, He is faithful and will be with you tomorrow.

Invite God to be part of it. Ask Him for a greater awareness of His presence.

As you think ahead to tomorrow, what do you need God's help with? Invite Him to help you. Is there a specific gift of grace you need? Thank Him for His grace.