

TEACH US TO PRAY.....WITH GRATITUDE (Number 1)

REPORT

On something you saw God do in this last week.

INTRO

At its most fundamental level, prayer is *relationship*, and God is love. Therefore, prayer (among other things) is a means of giving and receiving love. Gratitude or thankfulness – appreciation if you like, is the language of love and so our first month on “Teach us to pray” is about Gratitude.

*VERY IMPORTANT: If Jesus is teaching us to pray, then we learn by doing. Take the “weekly challenges” at the end of this study seriously and you will grow heaps in your prayer life this year AND you will be able to report on your progress each week.

READ Luke 17:11-19

[Key verse: v15, *One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice*]

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

God is at work constantly. Having an *attitude of gratitude* means tuning into what God is actually doing, recognising it and responding with thankfulness. The lepers in the story were *all* healed physically, but only *one* was healed spiritually. The blessing this one leper experienced in healing led to a deepening of relationship with the healer.

Note the phrase: “when he saw he was healed”

This is about noticing and attending to what God is doing and has done. Grateful people *see* the presence of God and his activity, even when life seems hard.

Q 1. How has a grateful person affected your own vision of what matters in life? How has someone who lives out of bitterness affected your life.

Note the phrase: “came back”

This is about returning to the source of our life and blessing, Jesus Christ. For some of us the practice of prayer and relationship with God is historical. This week is an opportunity to return to your source, kneel at his feet and thank him for who he is and what he has done.

Q2. Read Revelation 2:2-5. The danger is we can become skilled at ‘hard work’ and ‘perseverance’ and lose relationship with Christ. What does this passage teach or challenge you about “coming back” with gratitude and thanks?

Note the phrase: “praising God in a loud voice”.

The practice of “praising God in a loud voice” and “shouting to the Lord” is generally equated with old time Pentecostalism, but it was a central aspect of Jewish worship. See, 2 Chron 20:18-19. Sure, shouting for the sake of it shouldn’t be encouraged, but it could be that your shy, quiet gratitude is completely disproportionate to the blessing you have received!

Q3. When was the last time you truly shouted to God in praise? Where were you? What were the circumstances?

ACTIVITY

[you will need need A4 paper, textas or pens]

Give 5-7 minutes for each person to write their own psalm of gratitude to God for what he has done for them. Some things to get you started: families, relationship, where we live, physical healing, provision, forgiveness, your changed life, your sense of purpose, God’s provision to you.

Afterwards provide opportunity for people to read out their psalm of gratitude.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE (check when completed. Try to do 3 out of the 5).

- On at least 3 mornings this week spend ten uninterrupted minutes in thankfulness to God. Begin by asking him to open your eyes to the blessings you have received.
- On at least one occasion find somewhere where you won’t be self-conscious and have a “shout to the Lord” time, declaring in a “very loud voice” his goodness and blessing in your life.
- Begin a gratitude journal. On at least 3 evenings before sleep spend 10 minutes writing down the blessings you experienced from God during that day. (If married, swap notes with your partner). Finish with a prayer.
- Read out loud one of the Psalms. For example, 100, 103, 104, or 111.
- Read Ephesians 1:3-14. Note all the things God has done for you in Christ and be thankful

TEACH US TO PRAY.....WITH GRATITUDE (Number 2)

REPORT

Last session you were given five challenges and asked to complete at least 3. Which ones did you do, how did you go, what did you learn from doing that?

INTRO

Last week (Gratitude No 1) we focused on being grateful for what God *does*. This week we are focusing on being grateful for who God *is*.

READ PSALM 23

Spread out a large sheet of butchers paper (or similar) and write down what this Psalm teaches about God's character.

At the top of the paper write, 'God is...' and underneath list all the attributes of God that are either stated or implied in this one psalm. For example, "my guide".

DISCUSSION

Q1. (after completing the above exercise) Which attribute are you particularly grateful for right now and why?

Q2. Read Heb 1:3a. If God is everything we've just listed in Psalm 23 and Jesus is the 'exact representation of God' then we should expect to find the exact attributes of God in the person of Jesus. In what ways does Jesus exemplify the person of God in his words and life? (Give specific examples).

Q3. There is a gratefulness that goes beyond what God has *done* or *does* to who God *is* in the very essence of his character. What other attributes of God (beyond those listed from Psalm 23) could you add to your list?

Q4. A relationship with God, or a day by day friendship with God, is based on you giving yourself to God in response to who he is and what he has done for you. This is called **trust**. And **trust** says, "I believe who God says he is. I acknowledge that Jesus is God's Son and he is Lord of all. I gladly give my life to him knowing I can entrust myself to him."

Which attribute or attributes of God correspond to the issues of **trust** below:

*I can trust God to forgive my sin and accept me into his family, because God is

*I can trust God to show me what to do, because God is

*I can trust God with my finances because God is.....

*I can trust God with things I can't understand because God is.....

*I can trust God when I feel anxious or overwhelmed because God is.....

ACTIVITY

Have a group gratitude time for WHO GOD IS. No one is allowed to ASK for anything!! Focus completely on the character, beauty and sufficiency of God - his worthiness as God - his holiness, his love, his power and so much more! Perhaps put on an extended Kari Jobe worship song in the background. Encourage people to speak out exclamations of gratitude for who God is!! Let his presence and the truth of who he is transform you and your world.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

[VERY IMPORTANT. If Jesus is teaching us to pray, then we learn by doing. Take these “weekly challenges” seriously and you will grow heaps in your prayer life this year AND you will be able to report on your progress each week].

- We’ve been thinking about being grateful. We need to cultivate this as an attitude. Invite a few friends around for a meal that you prepare, and, just before you eat, say to those you’ve invited, ‘I want you to know how much I appreciate having you in my life - you have been such a blessing and a gift to me’
- Find some worship music you didn’t know existed (perhaps ask a friend for a recommendation) or type “best Christian worship music” into a search engine. Choose one song and learn the words off by heart. If you are musical, learn how to play it.
- Read Revelation 4 and 5 several times. Place yourself in the scene and join with the angels in worshipping God.
- Get up early and find a quiet location 20 minutes before sunrise. Take a bible, read a psalm. Enjoy the morning with God and his creation.
- Write a letter (or a long text) to three people telling them how much you appreciate them and why.

TEACH US TO PRAY.....WITH GRATITUDE (Number 3)

REPORT

Last session you were given five challenges and asked to complete at least 3. Which ones did you do, how did you go, what did you learn from doing that?

INTRO

Often people allow circumstances to dictate how they feel about their relationship with God. When they “feel” close, they are close. When they don’t *feel* close to God, then they drift even further away. This is disastrous. It puts way too much emphasis on the state of our feelings and not enough emphasis on the unchanging character of God. It also equates God’s character and relationship with him as something dependent on things going well for me. That’s bad.

An attitude of gratitude says, “come what may, I will praise him”

READ

Read Psalm 42

DISCUSSION

How did the Psalmist feel?

Why did he feel that way?

Is the feeling he experienced “wrong”?

What does he call to mind in regard to the character of God?

What does he decide to do in the midst of the situation?

Elsewhere the Scripture commands us to be thankful “in all circumstances”, 1 Thess 5:16-18. If this is the case, what exactly are we being thankful for?

ACTIVITY

Pray Psalm 42 together as a group (you will all need the same translation printed out or on the tv screen). Have a full 30 seconds between each verse allowing the strength of the words to resonate in your own heart. This time of silence is an opportunity to bring your own situation before God. (The leader of this activity is the one who breaks the silence and introduces the next verse with people joining in and saying the verse together).

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

- Start reading a book on prayer. If you want to read one that is focused on gratitude in prayer try ‘Prison to Praise’ by Merlin Carothers, 96 pgs, \$5 on Kindle.
- Do you know someone going through a difficult time? Perhaps they are feeling disconnected to God because of it. Go around to their house or meet up somewhere and offer to pray for them, pointing them to the unchanging nature of God’s character.

- Do an entry in your journal describing to God (even though he knows!) the difficulty of a particular situation you are facing and how you feel in the midst of it. Now turn your attention to God; writing down his attributes and allow yourself to come to a place of peace and trust in the midst of the situation.
- Locate an experience this week where you were tempted to stress out / be anxious / be negative etc, but instead you turned your attention to God, gave him thanks and allowed him to change your perspective
- Read the story of Ruth during the week. Pay particular attention to Naomi, her hardships and her faith perspective. Note what challenged or encouraged you.