

"Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."  
1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

Thankfulness is something we talk a lot about at this time of year, after all we have a holiday called "Thanksgiving" that we celebrate every year. At this time of year we hear about the virtues of being thankful and how we should take this special day of the year and give thanks for all we have as Americans. Yet in the verse above, God instructs us to be thankful for everything, always. It is part of God's will for every believer to be thankful 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, every year of our lives. To accomplish this, we will have to do something more than just celebrate the holiday of Thanksgiving - we will need to have a complete change of thinking. Outward expressions of thankfulness must come from a heart filled with gratitude which arises from viewing everything from a certain mindset, a new way of viewing things, a new attitude. The dictionary defines the word attitude as: "manner, disposition, feeling, position, etc., with regard to a person or thing; tendency or orientation, especially of the mind." How to cultivate this new way of thinking so that we will always be thankful for everything is the purpose of this study.

### **OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER.**

THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

"The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song." Psalm 28:7 (NIV)

1. In Psalm 28:7, David makes a couple of comments about God and then says he will give thanks to God in song. Hidden in the middle of the verse is the reason David is able to be thankful to God for everything that happened to him - what do you think it is? What are some things God has done in your life to prove that He is worthy of your trust?

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."  
1 Chronicles 16:34 (NIV)

2. What are the two qualities about God, according to this verse, that should cause us to give thanks to God? Why would believing that "God is good" and that "His love endures forever" be reasons to be thankful to God? List some ways in which you have experienced God's goodness and His enduring love. What connection would there be between trusting God and believing what this verse tells us?

3. Think about all of the horrible things that go on in the world: Natural disasters, terrorism, cancer, diseases, hatred, etc. What are some of the bad things in this world that you have experienced? If God is good, and His love endures forever, then why do these things happen and why in the world would we want to give thanks for them? Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 from above. In this verse it tells us to give thanks in all circumstances, not for all circumstances. Does this shed light on how we are to respond to all of the horrible things in the world, and if so, how?

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”  
Romans 8:28 (NIV)

“ You surely wouldn’t let them be killed when you destroy the evil ones. You (God) are the judge of all the earth, and you do what is right.”  
Genesis 18:25 (CEV)

4. What do you think these verses mean? How could the truths revealed in these verses help us to trust God more and be thankful for everything in our lives? Have you ever seen or experienced a situation that was not good but in the end you were able to see something good come out of it? What was the situation? Has God ever used a negative experience in your life to teach you something? What was it?

5. In his message, Pastor Rick gave us some tips to help us change our thinking in regards to being thankful and some things to avoid. One of the tips was to surround ourselves with positive reminders to be thankful. What are some things you could do to remind yourself to be thankful?

6. Pastor Rick said that one of the things we should always avoid is an attitude of entitlement. What do you think this means? What are some things that we tend to believe we are entitled to? How could an attitude of entitlement destroy an attitude of thankfulness?

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”  
Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)

7. Contentment and thankfulness go hand in hand. How does Satan use our society to cause us to be discontent? What can we do to avoid this trap?

### **MAKING IT PRACTICAL (OPTIONAL)**

Below are some practical exercises that your group could incorporate as a means of developing a grateful heart.

**Level 1 Challenge:** Create a daily reminder on your smartphone or make a mini-sized poster where you write down one of the following messages: ‘Today, I am thankful;’ ‘I have so much in my life to be thankful for;’ ‘Before you move on you must think of one thing that you are thankful for RIGHT NOW!’ or a similar type message that you make sure you see on a regular basis. The goal with this challenge is to try to put you back into a ‘gratitude state of mind’ every time you see it.

**Level 2 Challenge:** Create your own 'Be Thankful' poster or collage that you can read every day. Fill it with quotes, sayings, and pictures that resonate with you and make sure you put the poster in a place where you can read it every day. Creativity and daily modifications encouraged.

**Level 3 Challenge:** Create a Gratitude Log. Every day for the next 30 days (starting today!) write down three NEW things you are thankful for. By writing down three new things you're grateful for every day for 30 days you can literally re-wire your brain to start scanning the world not for the negative, but for the positive first. It is a little bit time intensive but is a challenge I believe is worth taking.

## SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE LEADER NOTES

### Suggestions for This Week's Study

- Let people describe briefly how they felt when they did something for someone and that person did not express gratitude. How did it make them feel?
- Focus on helping people understand and internalize that being thankful as a Christian for everything that happens in their lives is a demonstration of trust in God.
- Help the people of your group understand that God will always do what He knows is the best thing for us; this is what frees us up to be thankful in everything.
- Have your people share with the group who they are thankful to for influencing their lives. Then have everyone sit down and write a letter to that person thanking them for their influence. Assignment: Mail the letter or hand deliver it to the person. Do not do it by email, a hand-written letter expresses more of your gratitude to that person: You took time to write it down.

### Preparing to Lead Your Group

**1. PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.

**2. PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Glorify God, Relate to Everyone, Act Like Jesus, Care for Everyone, Express God's Love and make a plan to encourage your members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.

**3. PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment.

## **Using This Sermon Discussion Guide**

Going Further is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We've designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is more important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.

Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group.

Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as "I need to spend more time in prayer." It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.

Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.