



Thanks - Giving

GRATITUDE | GENEROSITY | PRAYER | GIVING THANKS

Family Devotional Book



**DeMotte
United Methodist Church**

Gratitude

the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness:

Scripture: James 1:2-4

Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.

Food for Thought: Matthew L. Kelley

When I was a kid, my family, like many others, would go around the dinner table at Thanksgiving and have everyone share one thing for which they were thankful. We would often say things like our home, our family, and the fun vacation we had that summer.

Once or twice, someone would mention something negative that happened, like being thankful for their doctor who got them through the big surgery they had that year. I never heard anyone say, "I'm thankful I got laid off from my job" or "I'm thankful for my divorce," or "I'm so thankful I have cancer."

Such statement would have brought an uncomfortable silence to the dinner table. how do you ask someone to pass the peas after they've disclosed a major life event like that?

In my years as a pastor, I've had the opportunity to walked with people through many difficult situations in life, and I've been surprised and inspired by the way some of them have responded to devastating news.

One man was diagnosed with inoperable cancer, and in the months he had left he took great pains to try to reconcile with friends and family members whose relationships had been strained. At his funeral, one of those relatives said if he had died in a car crash, they would live the rest of their life with regret over not forgiving each other.

"I feel weird saying this," his relative shared, " but I'm actually thankful that he got cancer, because probably nothing else would have led us to patch things up, and not we are both at peace."

Trails are a part of life, and there is nothing inherently good about the pain they cause. God does not put trials into our lives for the purpose of teaching us a lesson. Pain and struggle are part of the reality of living in a broken world. The writer of James invites us to broaden our perspective, because trials can give us the opportunity to grow.

One his children's TV show, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, Fred Rogers told his audience that his mother told him when he got scared by things going on in the world to "look for the helpers." We experience God's grace in the people and things that help us get through tough times.

God does not cause people to get cancer. God walks with us through it and helps us make the best of the time we have left.

God does not cause people to get divorced or lose their jobs, God cries with us in our pain, sits with us in our grief, and helps us ask deep questions of ourselves so our brokenness can be part of our transformation to being more whole than we were before. God is present with us in the “in-between” spaces to nudge us toward new possibilities.

Discussion

- How has God been present in your life?
- What are some ways you and your family could practice Gratitude this week?

Pray





Generosity

the quality or fact of being plentiful or large

Scripture: 1 John 3:16-17

This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear.

Food for Thought: Rev. Mary Kate Myers

When Christians consider what it means to be generous as it relates to our everyday faithfulness, the first person who undoubtedly comes to mind for many of us is Jesus Christ. Jesus was consistently in the business of giving aid to folks in need throughout his earthly ministry. Whether it was assuring that hungry people were fed, sick people were healed, outcast persons were reinstated within their community, or sinners like you and I were redirected from what are often death-focused ways to the Way, the Truth, the Life-Jesus knew what it meant to give himself to afford those around him a healthier and more holistic existence.

In no other manner did Jesus give more of himself for others than in his death. In Jesus, God sacrificed Godself so that creation across all of time and space would be redeemed, renewed, and restored by the unwavering and unstoppable love of God. Through that sacrifice, we now know that God's love will stop at nothing to welcome us in, remind us of who we are and who we've always been.

In 1 John 3:16, we are encouraged to remember that divine and universal belonging as we interact with our siblings in need. We, like Christ, exist to live generously for and with one another, especially when we encounter someone who is suffering. And, if we're doing it right, living in such a way will usually require us to sacrifice something-whether it be our pride, our fear, our wealth, our judgement, our status, our apathy, or our indifference.

When I was roughly eleven years old, my mom took a significant pay cut to begin a job at the middle school I attended so that she, my dad (who also worked in the school system), my sister, and I would all have the same breaks for Christmas, summer, and so on. We struggled financially during that time, but my mom went above and beyond to make sure our needs were always met because the trade-off meant more quality time with us. When I think about the sacrifice she made-in pay, in her career, in her peace about our financial situation-it reminds me of how we are called to live for one another, both for our biological as well as our spiritual kin.

To be a disciple of Christ is to be-as the United Methodist Communion liturgy states- a “holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ’s offering for us.” Christ laid down his life for those in need throughout his earthly ministry and for all of us in his death. Christ sacrificed all to ensure we would not just know God’s love by words spoken, but that we would know God’s love by actions embodied.

How might you embody generosity that reflects God’s unwavering and unstoppable love in the season?

What is God calling you to sacrifice for the well-being of our siblings in need?

Discussion

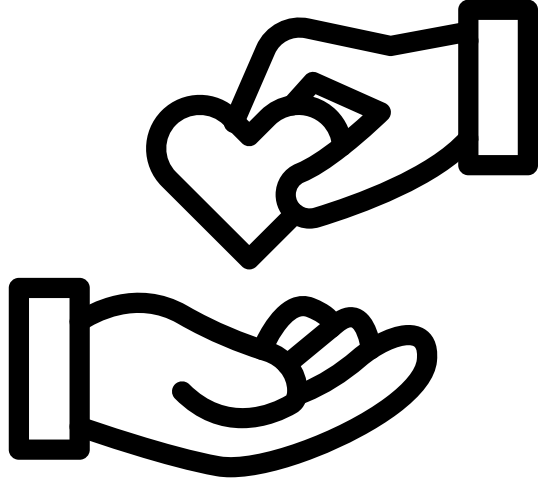
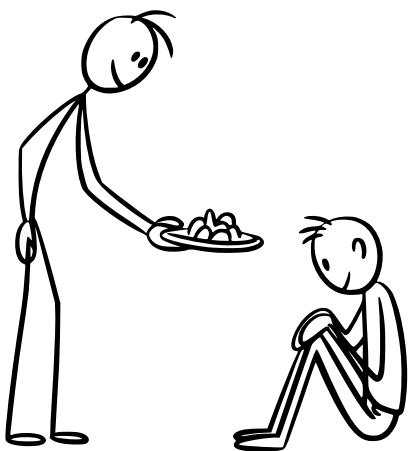
- How can you show generosity with your gifts, your time, your presence, and your talents?
- How is God’s generosity present in your life?

Prayer for Generosity

By St. Ignatius of Loyola.

**Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not count the cost;
to fight and not heed the wounds;
to toil and not seek for rest;
to labor and not ask for reward, except to
know
that I am doing your will.**

Amen.



Prayer

an address (such as a petition) to God

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:16-17

Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

¹⁷ Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

Food for Thought: Rev. Danielle Buwon Kim

Some of us may feel like we live in a culture that intertwines our worth with our productivity. Surprisingly, Hannah may have felt the same way. In her culture, a woman’s worth was closely tied to the number of children she was able to “produce,” especially male children. In her day, women were always the ones held responsible for infertility, and being childless could be a reason for divorce. But her husband, Elkanah, loved her so much that instead of divorcing her, he got married to his second wife, Peninnah, with whom to have his children. In this way, Elkanah was able to escape the pressure from his own parents to have children so that he could carry on his business and family name. But the hurt ran very deep in the family, and Peninnah’s insecurity provoked and irritated Hannah. I became so severe that the text reads, “it went on year by year.”

We can imagine why Peninnah felt bitter toward Hannah, as we see Elkanah gave Hannah the double portion of the sacrificed meat instead of their eldest son during the temple Fall Festival, according to Israelite custom. But Hannah inevitably saw that more went to Peninnah and her children even with her double portion, painfully reminding her of how “unproductive” she was in her community. So the text reports that she wept and would not eat, her heart was sad, and she was in misery.

Hannah was surrounded by all these external messages and pressures of the society that tell her, “You are worthless, and you are not enough.” In fact, even her priest, Eli, thought she was drunk and worthless when she was desperately crying out to God in prayer.

But Hannah refused to internalize these external pressures provoking her, by saying “do not regard your servant as a worthless woman.” Her courage to confront even her respected leader, Eli, perhaps came from her prayer earlier. Through her prayer, she aligned herself with God to view herself as “[God’s] servant” and she dauntlessly fought the message that she was “worthless.” Through her prayer, Hannah courageously accepted her identity as God’s servant, and resisted wrapping her self-worth and identity with what the others had to say about her.

This is the power of the gift of prayer. Prayer gives us opportunities to align ourselves to God so that we may resist all the other messages that tell us we are “worthless.” Through prayer, we reclaim our unconditional and sacred worthiness in God who made us in God’s image to reflect God’s grace and love for all.

Through prayer, we gain wisdom to differentiate between “being deeply troubled” and “being worthless.” We gain courage to continue being faithful in our daily lives with God’s peace that surpasses all understanding.

Are you tapping into this power of prayer in your journey with God? Hannah’s dauntless prayer teaches us that God, who empowered Hannah to accept her sacred worthiness in God, is ready to affirm and nurture us in our prayers no matter how daunting our circumstances are!

Discussion

- What does Hannah teach us about prayer?
- Create a family prayer practice to try this week.



Hannah's Prayer

*“My heart rejoices in the Lord;
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.
My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.
“There is no one holy like the Lord;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.”*

1 Samuel 2:1-2





Giving Thanks

The action being pleased or relieved, which leads to provide love and support of others

Scripture: Acts 4:33

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.

Food for Thought: Todd Salmi

In our mid-twenties my wife and I decided to start regularly attending church again. We both grew up going to church every week but fell out of the habit during college and in our early careers. We visited a local neighborhood Methodist church and were welcomed at the door by Sharon. Ruth made a point to greet us during the passing of the peace. Time led beautiful music with his guitar and the choir. John frequently made BBQ for potluck. It seemed every person in the church had some amazing gift to offer. After a few Sundays, my wife and I joined the church.

One Saturday, the church decided to organize a workday. A church member put together a list of needed projects around the building. I decided to help with painting the fellowship hall. It seemed a simple task, but as I put paint on the walls, my soul awakened. I realized I was doing more than simply volunteering to do a good deed. I was responding to the call of the church. The church was inviting me to actively use my gifts in God's ongoing ministry in the world.

The disciples witnessed the ministry and miracles of Jesus firsthand. Peter and Andrew answered Jesus's call to follow.

The disciples saw Jesus calm the seas in the middle of a storm. Martha saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. The disciples heard Jesus teach about God's love, even as the religious leaders created traps to arrest him. Mary was the first person to encounter the risen Christ.

Forty days after Easter Sunday, the disciples were eager to know what the resurrected Jesus would do next in ministry for them. Christ did not give detailed plans for himself, but instead promised to send the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, Jesus ascended to heaven and the disciples waited.

On Pentecost Sunday, God called the church in existence. As the Holy Spirit poured out, the disciples were transformed into apostles. The apostles were no longer passive followers of Jesus, but active in ministry as they responded to God's call through the Holy Spirit. From miracles at Solomon's Colonnade to powerful proclamations of God's promise fulfilled in Christ, "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33a NIV).

The resurrection call to apostleship continues today. God calls us to more than weekly church attendance. God calls us to more than simply following Jesus. God gives us the church. God gives us faithful friends. God gives every person gifts and talents. God gives us an invitation to meet the needs of our neighbors around us. In our response to God's call, we are incorporated into Christ's ongoing ministry with the promise that "God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all" (Acts 4:33b NIV).

Disscussion

- What more is God calling you to do this week?
- In the midst of family gatherings, how can you practice giving thanks?

thanksgiving prayer

Thank You, God, for this day of thanksgiving. I am grateful for a day dedicated to gratitude, appreciation, and abundance. Thank you for a table set with food, good people to share it with, and love of You, the divine provider. As

I extend thanks, I am reminded of how difficult it is for those less fortunate to enjoy this holiday. Please, bless them with plenty and watch over us all.



