

WELLSPRING

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Sermon Series Devotional

11/7/21-11/21/21

Introduction

There are memes all over social media extolling the value of being thankful. And the closer we get to the holiday, the more we will see. BUT, it isn't always easy. For many, life has been turned upside down in the last year and a half and has been full of stress. To be told to be thankful feels like a slap in the face. How do we muster up that feeling when things are so hard? But, deep down we know that thankfulness is a choice and much more than a feeling. It is at the heart of our faith and we know at some level that if we can experience a thankful heart, our life will feel more abundant. So, how do we get there? This sermon series and devotional is designed to help you do just that.

Suggested Use

Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one sitting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

“Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good.”

-Maya Angelou

Week One - Grateful Hearts

There is a temptation to equate being thankful with a feeling. Maybe it is because Thanksgiving has a high association with feelings attached to externals. We surround ourselves with decorations and food and family traditions to summon the feelings that are associated with the day or season, but sometimes that falls flat. Watching football, eating turkey, or singing, “over the river and through the woods” may create nostalgia, but is it really thanksgiving? What if it is more than a feeling? What if it is something much deeper?

Reflection questions:

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. What was the most challenging thing you heard in the message?
3. What are you most likely to implement after having heard the message?
4. How could your life more reflect thanks-living?

Read Ephesians 5:15-20

1. How is “being wise and making the most of every opportunity” related to thanksgiving?
2. How does what we avoid make a difference in our faith approach?
3. How does our behavior help shape our attitude? (usually we think it is the opposite)

Read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

1. How did the Macedonians find it in themselves to be so generous in spite of their circumstances?
2. How would you describe Paul’s call to the Corinthians in comparison with the Macedonians?
3. What does Paul mean by “the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have?”
4. How does a person’s focus determine their capacity to be thankful? How is thankfulness expressed in generosity?

Read Romans 1:21-23

1. This is sort of the flip side of thanksgiving. When people gave up giving glory and thanksgiving to God, what was the result?
2. How does this illustrate that our lives are never static? How does our focus determine our destiny?

Read Matthew 20:1-16

1. Why did the workers from earlier in the day feel gypped? Did they receive what they had been promised?
2. How does our comparison with others affect our ability to be thankful for what we do have?

Week Two -Complications in Gratitude

We tend to think of thanksgiving as giving thanks for things or the way things are, especially if things are going well. We also tend to reflect on the golden moments that we have enjoyed. But is there a difference between giving thanks *for* things and giving thanks *in* the midst of things, regardless of whether they are pleasant or not? That difference in mindset can make or break how your life feels.

Reflection Questions:

1. As you reflect on the message/discussion for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. What was the most challenging thing you heard in the message/discussion?
3. What are you most likely to implement after having heard the message/discussion?
4. What is the most challenging thing to you when it comes to thanks-living?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1. What does this chapter say about whether difficulties in life are normal or aberrations?
2. How does our view of ourselves define how we see the world? What difference does it make to see ourselves as “children of light?”
3. In vs. 11, the value of community is lifted up in the struggle to see ourselves as God sees us. How do we do that?

Read II Corinthians 11:16-33

1. This scripture is a snapshot of Paul’s own experience in living the faith. What was it like?
2. How do you believe he was able to live a life of hope and thanksgiving in spite of it?
3. Can you “enjoy the play” without “enjoying every scene?”

Week Three - Going Deeper: What Strengthens and Deepens Gratitude

Have you ever admired someone for their capacity to be calm and grateful when their world seemed to be falling apart? Paul is one of those kinds of people. In spite of terrible experiences and persecution he had an amazing ability to hold on to his faith, hold on to his grateful heart, and encourage others at the same time. How did he do it? Is it possible for us to be like that?

Reflection Questions:

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. What was the most challenging thing you heard in the message?
3. What are you most likely to implement after having heard the message?
4. What do you want to do to deepen your experience of thanks-living?

Read Philippians 4:11-13

1. This is a picture of a mature Christian. How did Paul describe his experience of life?
2. What do you believe his “secret” was?
3. What did Paul say was the source of his strength?
4. Does this explain why sometimes people who have very little also seem to be happy and grateful?
5. Would you like to feel like this?

Read I Thessalonians 5:12-27

1. How does Paul describe a thanksgiving lifestyle?
2. What are the parts you struggle with the most?
3. How has your own experience validated what Paul describes?
4. Besides behavior, what role did anticipation play in his attitude?
5. How did giving thanks in all circumstances play a role in his ability to be content?
6. What alterations in your own life would you make to strive toward what Paul described?