

CoreGroup Guide | Three Weeks of Thanks - Part 3

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Welcome

Hello and welcome to the third and final week of our series called “Three Weeks of Thanks.” Through this series we have looked at different aspects of being thankful. Our first week covered the complexity of thankfulness during joyous times. Last week was focused on being thankful during seasons of struggle. This week, our discussion will lead us into times when life is unpredictable, confusing, and sometimes out of control. Despite our best efforts, life can be chaotic. How are we supposed to be thankful then? Well, let's talk about it. But first, a prayer

Opening Prayer

God Almighty, we are thankful for you being a beacon of love and hope amidst the chaos of this world. We welcome your presence today in our discussion. Please guide us in ways of deep understanding and soften our words so that peaceful conversation leads to growth and wellbeing. It is in your name we pray, amen.

Ice Breaker

If you could have Thanksgiving dinner with any character (from a book, movie, music, or tv), who would it be? What burning questions would you ask them?

The Head

The first reading this week comes from the New Testament book of First Thessalonians, written by the Apostle Paul. Now Paul was a prolific writer and a person who was central to helping early Christians navigate how they should live their beliefs during the chaos of the Roman Empire. Paul would write letters to these Christians and many of his letters became books in the New Testament. It's also helpful to know that this letter was written to people who lived in a massive port city in Greece named Thessalonica. The population of this city in biblical times is thought to be around 200,000 people. Paul visited this city before the letter was written with a friend and colleague named Silas.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

12 Brothers and sisters, we ask you to respect those who are working with you, leading you, and instructing you. 13 Think of them highly with love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are disorderly. Comfort the discouraged. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. 16 Rejoice always. 17 Pray continually. 18 Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Now to add context, the ministry of Paul and Silas was cut short in Thessalonica. Together, they were forced to flee the city quickly under the cover of night because their preaching caused large riots of angry people threatening violence and they were in danger. Beyond physical threats, you can imagine the verbal insults screamed against Paul and Silas (and maybe Jesus) that were probably ugly and chaotic too.

- Read the verses above knowing what Paul had escaped. What thoughts come to mind?
- It's nice to receive clear instructions. New believers probably appreciated having this guidance and much of it is timeless, meaning we can apply these things today as well. Be respectful, live in peace, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, and be patient are among the list. What guidance stands out most to you?
- Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks are the final instructions in this group of verses. What is it about those things that help us as believers?

The second scripture this week comes from the New Testament book of Luke and recalls a time when Jesus was central in an unexpectedly chaotic scene.

Luke 10:38-42

38 While Jesus and his disciples were traveling, Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message. 40 By contrast, Martha was preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal. So Martha came to him and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me." 41 The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. 42 One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won't be taken away from her."

- The chaos in this passage is familiar and domestic. Describe a time when you have experienced a similar scenario.
- These verses say that Martha was first to greet Jesus and she was quick to invite him to their house. How did her acts of kindness become the source of chaos?
- How does Jesus react?
- How did Mary escape the chaos?
- What does this story teach us about thankfulness?

The Heart

The flow of information these days and the expectation to stay informed has been woven into our lives at various urgent levels. Having phones in our pockets that have more processing capabilities than the entire Apollo program at NASA adds to this chaotic urgency. Even more, the information we consume is very much focused on things we cannot control. Yet, we are called as believers to stay focused on things that are good and right despite the bluster. Even more, we are looking today at how we can live through that mess with thankful hearts.

- One way to begin is to name the chaotic things in your life, or chaotic things in general if that is more comfortable. What stuff is adding to the distraction and noise?
- Have you ever experienced an act of kindness that spun into something chaotic? How did that happen?
- What prevents you from feeling thankful during chaotic times?

The Hands

If we consider the last three weeks in CoreGroups discussing the difficulty of thankfulness during times of joy, times of struggle, and times of chaos, there is a throughline that emerges. Ultimately, it is distraction that leads our focus away from feeling and expressing thanks to each other and to God. The distraction can be deceptive. It ranges from really good joyous times to really confusing hard times. Often it isn't our conscious effort to avoid being thankful, but it is the intensity of the event that clouds our hearts from expression and we are left spiritually thankless.

- The good news is that God's grace abounds when we fall short. We can live with thankful hearts if we are intentional about it. What are some ways to live thankfully?
- What are good ways to stay focused when the intensity of life keeps us distracted?
- In our reading from 1 Thessalonians above, Paul instructed them (and us) to give thanks in every situation. Tricky for sure, but even bad situations often have helpers working in the background to make things right. As you move through the chaotic situations of your life, who are the helpers you are most thankful for? (How fun would it be to know it was the Holy Spirit, our helper, nudging those people all along?)

Closing Prayer

Hey God, we are especially thankful for your presence in our lives. It is really comforting to know you love us unconditionally. Please guide us in our efforts to see beyond the distractions to live thankfully. Please help us to be beacons of light for others when they need help. It is in your name we pray, amen.

Going Deeper

In another letter that Paul wrote to early Christians, he included this beautiful statement that provides peace and comfort in a world filled with chaos:

Phillipians 4:4-7

4 Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! 5 Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. 6 Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. 7 Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

From Pastor Charity

Advent is the 4-week season of preparation and waiting that comes before Christmas. This year, Advent begins on Sunday, November 30. Here are two resources for you and your group to use as you prepare your hearts and minds for the birth of Jesus, as well as his promised return.

Making Advent Special

Create a spiritually-rich Advent season in your CoreGroup and/or within your family. Check out this document for more ideas for how to make Advent special this year.

Advent Devotional

Click on this link to subscribe to The Gathering's 2025 Advent Devotional!