

Margin Through Gratitude
November 20, 2016
Lynn Haven UMC

Introduction

Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:14-22 NIV)

What does it mean to be grateful? Simply put, it is the quality of being thankful. A readiness to show appreciation and return kindness. Do we deserve this from others? Perhaps. The bigger question is: doesn't God deserve this from us? This week we will talk about how we can create margin in our lives by developing an attitude of gratitude.

Digging Deeper

I live gratitude when I am intentional about my...

Interaction with others.

- In verses 14-15 of 1 Thessalonians 5, we are instructed to pay attention to others in such a way that we lift them up and truly care for them. Why do you think God calls us to do these things? Are we truly our brother's keeper? Talk about the importance of loving, godly correction and how it can be received in both positive and negative ways depending on its delivery.
- Have you ever been around someone who just shines? Some people just exude a light. Happiness can rub off on you if you are not careful! Have you ever had an experience where you were so inspired by someone else's attitude that it improved your own? If not, try to be that person for someone else. A kind word or a smile can work miracles in the heart of someone who needs a reminder that God is always with us and moves through His people.
- As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. (Proverbs 27:17 NLT) Do you have an accountability partner? (If you don't, it's a really good idea to get one!) We all need someone to call us out on our stuff. But also to encourage us when we need to be reminded of our value as children of the Most High God. If you have one, talk about the ways in which this relationship has assisted in magnifying your capacity for gratitude.

Internal interactions

- In verses 16-18 of 1 Thessalonians 5, we turn our attention to the importance of creating a spirit of thankfulness that exists within and isn't affected by our circumstances. It is easy to be thankful when everything is going well. But when we honor God with thankfulness even when life is handing us lemons, we begin to cultivate a heart of gratitude that will endure forever. How can we find joy in the midst of trials? What are the physical and mental benefits of doing so?

- Practicing gratitude doesn't make all our problems go away but it can change our attitude about those problems. You've probably heard the expression, "don't tell God how big your mountain is, tell that mountain how big your God is." Spend a few minutes each morning this week jotting down three things for which you are thankful. Share your experience with your friends and family. Did the act of physically writing down your blessings alter your mindset and/or the manner in which you conducted yourself each day?

Interactions with God

- In verses 19-22 of 1 Thessalonians 5, we are reminded of the fact that the Holy Spirit resides within us. We were given this gift as a way to be in connection with God through Christ and share His message with all who will hear it. What are some practical ways in which we can strengthen our ability to hear and understand the Holy Spirit's direction for our lives? Would you say you possess the gift of discernment?

Conclusion

A life of gratitude is God's will for us. It also creates a better life for us. Every day we must make a choice to be thankful, no matter our circumstances. And when this spirit of gratitude becomes habitual, margin is achieved and God's people are unleashed into the world to serve as beacons for those in search of His light.

"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." Matthew 5:14-16 NLT