# Growing in Gratitude

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**Study Overview**

Introduction

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**SERMON/STUDY SERIES- NOVEMBER 2020**

**MT. LEBANON EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH • mlepc.org**
In each season of the year, God has created something of beauty in nature. In the spring, we experience new growth with trees budding, grass growing, and flowers peeking through the frozen ground. In the summer, we have long days of sunshine with trees full of leaves and bright-colored flowers to enjoy. Currently, we are blessed with the glorious colors of fall - yellow, orange, red and brown leaves, mixed in with pine trees that stay forever green. And as a special gift to us this autumn in Western Pennsylvania, the leaves are reported to be the most vibrant in color that they have been for years. Even if you don’t like winter, you have to admit there’s something beautiful and pure in a fresh snowfall. We are grateful for the beauty of creation as we see it in nature throughout the seasons of the year.

Our lives have seasons as well, and we are all in a season of life that is challenging, now eight months into a pandemic. As the weather turns colder and activities are more limited, our prayer is for this short, three-week study to help us recognize and grow gratitude in three ways, through worship, giving, and relationships, putting on Christian virtues described by the Apostle Paul.

In this study, we will be using the Inductive Method of Bible Study. A guide sheet is attached for each lesson to help you work through this method of study. If you are part of a small group, working through the sheet ahead of time will allow your group time to be richer as all are able to share. If you are studying alone, the guide sheet will help you to work through the passage, prepare to hear the sermon, and apply the passage’s teaching to your life. A family page is included with each lesson as well.

The inductive method of Bible study is a tool for learning to read and study Scripture. By following three simple steps, observation, interpretation, and application, this method of study provides a means to evaluate a passage of scripture, what it says, what it meant to the original audience, and what it means today.

As you read each of the passages in this study, it is helpful to read the passage multiple times, even once out loud as it is good to hear the richness of the language as you speak it. First observe what the text is saying. Here, you are simply gathering facts, using the six basic questions: who, what, when, where, why and how. Make note of words that are repeated within the passage, anything that can be put into a list, words that indicate a change in topic or time, words that contrast one thing against another, and words that indicate cause and effect.

Second, interpret the passage to discover what is being communicated. It’s helpful to have a study Bible with notes or a commentary for this step. Consider:

- Who wrote the passage, and to whom did they write?
- What is the cultural and/or historical context?
- What else do I know about the passage, author, and broader context of the passage? What is the author’s prior relationship with the recipients?
- What other Scripture passages might help me better interpret this one?
- What is the clearest meaning of this text? Passages sometimes include figurative language and imagery; always start with the obvious interpretation first.
Write down any questions you have about the passage or any confusing terms so that you can return to them in your group time or reach out to one of the pastors for clarification.

Please consider joining in with a small group – scripture is so much richer when you study with others. If you are interested in becoming part of or forming a small group, please get in touch with Pastor Linda, lpokrajac@mlepc.org. You might also consider inviting two or three family members, friends, or neighbors together to study with you.

NOTE:

• The passage printed in the family section is from the New International Readers Version of scripture, a translation that is “family-friendly.” It is helpful, however, for participants in small group studies to have other versions of the Bible available to compare and contrast wording.

• The elements of the Inductive Bible Study method were taken from websites for Logos and Navigators, two respected Bible commentators, https://www.logos.com/how-to/inductive-bible-study and https://www.navigators.org/resource/inductive-bible-study/.

• Because we are living in an unusual time, this study will be published on the MLEPC.org website for everyone to access remotely and print copies at home. However, we would be glad to print and send hard copies to those who need one, just call the church office, 412-531-3387, and we will make sure you receive a copy. There are also copies in the drive-through lobby and narthex if you are attending in-person worship on Sundays.
In *What the Bible is All About*, author Henrietta Mears writes, “Probably no other book has so largely influenced the turning points in people’s lives, given expression to their deepest experiences and woven itself into every fiber of their character as the book of Psalms (p.127).” Psalm 136 fits that description as it praises God’s mercy in creation, redemption, fighting enemies, and for future glory. Psalm 136 was written to be used in worship; its liturgical pattern is clear as each verse ends the same, “For His steadfast love endures forever.” In Jewish tradition it is known as the “Great Hallel” (liturgical prayer) and was associated with Passover. The meaning of the Hebrew word *hesed* is difficult to capture in our English language. Translations use steadfast love, love, mercy, or faithful love. *Hesed* is the covenantal commitment and loving concern of God that is unchanging, even as humans are frail and fickle. Psalm 136 is a testimony to God-centered gratitude, gratitude to a God of *hesed* who is, was, and will be present with us throughout the seasons of our lives. Psalm 136 answers three questions: Who is God? What has He done? And what does He do for His people?

**Observe Psalm 136 (What does it say?)**

1. Read the psalm with one person/group reading the verse and another reading the response.

2. Verses 1-3 and 26 answer the question, “Who is God?” List below all the descriptions of God you find in those verses.

3. What has God done (Verses 4-9)?

4. What are some of the specific things the psalmist thanks God for?

5. In Verses 10-22, the psalmist gives thanks to God for deliverance from Egypt and giving a land to His people. How did God accomplish this?

6. In the final section of Psalm 136, Verses 23-25, what does God do for his people?

**Interpret Psalm 136 (What does it mean?)**

1. Write down and then answer any questions you have about the reading or any confusing terms.

2. What is the clearest meaning of Psalm 136?

3. What does the Psalm tell us about the character of God?
4. How does God show His love in:
   Verses 4-9?  
   Verses 10-22?  
   Verses 23-25?

5. How does the passage connect back to the Gospels and the broader message/themes of the Bible?

**Application of Psalm 136 (What does it mean for you?)**

1. Psalm 136 praises God’s *hesed* in creation, redemption, in fighting enemies, and for future glory. How do you see that in the world today? In the church?

2. How do you think praise and giving thanks are connected? How does having a thankful heart impact your worship?

3. The statement, “for His steadfast love endures forever” ends each of the 26 verses. How does His enduring love sustain you when you suffer, when doubt clouds your mind, when you sin, when you feel lonely, or when you get discouraged?

4. Reread verse 23. What does it mean to be “rescued from our foes” or “set free from our enemies?” What does Jesus say about enemies (Matthew 5:43-44, Luke 6:27-28)? How can praying for our enemies “set us free?”

5. Create your own Psalm 136. On a separate page, write out some sentences and follow each with “His steadfast love endures forever.” Include sentences of gratitude to God for who He is, what He has done and what He has done specifically for you.

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**PSALM 136 FOR FAMILIES**

**Psalm 136 (NIRV)**

1 Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good. His faithful love continues forever.
2 Give thanks to the greatest God of all. His faithful love continues forever.
3 Give thanks to the most powerful Lord of all. His faithful love continues forever.
4 Give thanks to the only one who can do great miracles. His faithful love continues forever.
5 By his understanding he made the heavens. His faithful love continues forever.
6 He spread out the earth on the waters. His faithful love continues forever.
7 He made the great lights in the sky. His faithful love continues forever.
8 He made the sun to rule over the day. His faithful love continues forever.
9 He made the moon and stars to rule over the night. His faithful love continues forever.
10 Give thanks to the God who killed the oldest son of each family in Egypt. His faithful love continues forever.
11 He brought the people of Israel out of Egypt. His faithful love continues forever.
12 He did it by reaching out his mighty hand and powerful arm. His faithful love continues forever.
13 Give thanks to the God who parted the waters of the Red Sea. His faithful love continues forever.
14 He brought Israel through the middle of it. His faithful love continues forever.
15 But he swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea. His faithful love continues forever.

16 Give thanks to the God who led his people through the desert. His faithful love continues forever.
17 He killed great kings. His faithful love continues forever.
18 He struck down mighty kings. His faithful love continues forever.
19 He killed Sihon, the king of the Amorites. His faithful love continues forever.
20 He killed Og, the king of Bashan. His faithful love continues forever.
21 He gave their land as a gift. His faithful love continues forever.
22 He gave it as a gift to his servant Israel. His faithful love continues forever.

23 Give thanks to the God who remembered us when things were going badly. His faithful love continues forever.
24 He set us free from our enemies. His faithful love continues forever.
25 He gives food to every creature. His faithful love continues forever.

26 Give thanks to the God of heaven. His faithful love continues forever.

Discussion Questions for Families

1. Read Psalm 136 as a litany, with one person or group reading the first sentence of each verse and the other the response.

2. What names are used in the Psalm to describe God?

3. Psalm 136 reminds us of many stories in the Bible. Read a Bible story about Jesus’ miracles (Verse 4), creation (Verses 5-9), Passover (Verse 10), or the Exodus (Verses 11-22).

4. Verse 25 says, “He gives food to every creature.” Talk about favorite foods and how grateful you are for God providing food. Draw a picture of some of your favorite foods or make a favorite food then enjoy it!

5. What does the “faithful love” of God look like to you? Write your own Psalm 136, listing ways God has blessed and helped your family. Describe in several sentences some specific things you are grateful for then follow each sentence with “His faithful love continues forever.”
LESSON 2  Week of November 15, 2020

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15 - GENEROUS GRATITUDE

2 Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul from Macedonia around 55-56 AD, about a year after he wrote 1 Corinthians. Paul was worried about how the church received his first letter, which addressed division and Christian conduct. As a result of that letter, some doubted Paul’s motives and denied his apostleship, saying he did not have the proper credentials, perhaps because he was not one of the original 12. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 address giving. In our passage for today, Paul talks about generous giving and the attitude we should have toward it.

Observe 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (What does it say?)

1. In one sentence, what is the apostle Paul concerned with?
2. What words or phrases are repeated?
3. What opposites appear in the passage (words or phrases)?
4. What imagery does Paul use?
5. What positive words do you find in this passage?
6. Look for all the times Paul uses the words “thanks” and “praise.” Who is doing the thanking and praising? To whom are they thankful? For what are they thankful?

Interpret 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (What does it mean?)

1. Write down any questions you have about the reading or any confusing terms.
2. What is the clearest meaning of this text?
3. According to this passage, how should we give?
4. What does it mean to be a cheerful giver? The word cheerful can also be translated “hilarious” – what would a hilarious giver look like?

Application of 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (What does it mean for you?)

1. What do the following verses tell us about how we should give: 2 Corinthians 8:2, 8:3, 8:12-13, 9:6, and 9:7?
2. In 9:6, Paul writes, “whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully.” How do you understand this image in relationship to giving? How do Verses 12 and 13 add to your
3. 2 Corinthians begins with a word of comfort (1:3), ends with comfort (13:11). In 2 Corinthians 9:8, we find the source of our comfort (9:8). Discuss this thought.

4. How does being grateful change the way we give?

5. If we give cheerfully, what happens to us (Verses 8-9)? What is the result in other people when we give freely (Verses 11-14)? Share about a time when giving cheerfully effected a change in you or when giving freely changed someone else.

6. Paul ends this passage with “Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!” How can you better express gratitude to God for His gift to us in Jesus Christ?

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**2 Corinthians 9:6-15 FOR FAMILIES**

**2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (NIRV) - Paul’s Advice to Give Freely**

6 Here is something to remember. The one who plants only a little will gather only a little. And the one who plants a lot will gather a lot. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give. You shouldn’t give if you don’t want to. You shouldn’t give because you are forced to. God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to shower all kinds of blessings on you. So in all things and at all times you will have everything you need. You will do more and more good works. 9 It is written, “They have spread their gifts around to poor people. Their good works continue forever.” (Psalm 112:9)

10 God supplies seed for the person who plants. He supplies bread for food. God will also supply and increase the amount of your seed. He will increase the results of your good works. 11 You will be made rich in every way. Then you can always give freely. We will take your many gifts to the people who need them. And they will give thanks to God. 12 Your gifts meet the needs of the Lord’s people. And that’s not all. Your gifts also cause many people to thank God. 13 You have shown yourselves to be worthy by what you have given. So other people will praise God because you obey him. That proves that you really believe the good news about Christ. They will also praise God because you share freely with them and with everyone else. 14 Their hearts will be filled with love for you when they pray for you. God has given you grace that is better than anything. 15 Let us give thanks to God for his gift. It is so great that no one can tell how wonderful it really is!

1. Based on Verse 7, how would you define a “cheerful” giver?

2. If we give cheerfully, what happens to us (Verses 8-9)?
3. What blessings has God showered on you (Verses 10-11)?

4. What is the result in other people when we give freely (Verses 11-14)?

5. Read Verse 15. What’s the best gift you ever received? How is Jesus better?
The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Colossians was written around 62 AD. The church was started by a Colossian named Epaphras, who traveled to Ephesus and responded to the gospel through Paul (Acts 19:10). This new believer went home and shared the gospel, resulting in the birth of the church. As Paul writes to the Colossians, he assures them of Epaphras’s prayers and concern for them, saying, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.” Paul contrasts the character of someone who is spiritual maturity with someone who is living in their old and destructive ways. In Colossians 3:12-17, Paul describes the characteristics of a Christian that define “garments” that should be “put on” by Christians as they seek to grow in maturity.

**Observe Colossians 3:12-17 (What does it say?)**

1. How does Paul describe believers in Verse 12?

2. What virtues are believers to put on, listed in Verse 12?

3. Verses 13-17 describe appropriate actions for believers. What are they?

4. What words and phrases are repeated?

5. What specifically are the Colossians to be thankful for?

**Interpret Colossians 3:12-17 (What does it mean?)**

1. Write down any questions you have about the reading or any confusing terms.

2. How could you summarize the meaning of this passage in one sentence?

3. In Colossians 3:5-11, Paul identifies sinful tendencies that should not be carried over into the Christian life. Read the passage and list what Paul writes to “put to death.” How do the virtues in Verses 12-17 specifically address these negative behaviors?

4. Paul tells the Colossians to forgive each other as the Lord has forgiven them. How does The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, Matthew 18:21-35, help us to understand this command?

5. How does the passage connect back to the Gospels and the broader message/themes of the Bible?
Application of Colossians 3:12-17 (What does it mean for you?)

1. As the passage begins, Paul writes to put on compassionate hearts. How would you define a “compassionate heart?” Can you give an example of a time when you had a compassionate heart towards a person?

2. Paul begins his letter to the Colossians with a word of gratitude. In Colossians 1:3-5, what is Paul thankful for? He returns to the theme of gratitude in Verse 15 as he writes, “And be thankful.” What does Paul want the Colossians to be thankful for here?

3. In Verse 16, Paul lists several ways that allow the Word of Christ to dwell richly in your heart, with an attitude of gratitude. What are these ways? Which one(s) work for you? Can you list any other ways to allow the Word to dwell in your heart?

4. Verse 17 tells us to do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. What are you thankful for today?

5. How would it impact your work, school, home, and interactions with other people if you grew in gratitude – if you sang “to God with thanksgiving in your heart” throughout your day? What are some things that might help you remember to be grateful in your day-to-day life?

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17 FOR FAMILIES

Colossians 3:12-17 (NIRV)

12 You are God’s chosen people. You are holy and dearly loved. So put on tender mercy and kindness as if they were your clothes. Don’t be proud. Be gentle and patient. 13 Put up with one another. Forgive one another if you are holding something against someone. Forgive, just as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these good things put on love. Love holds them all together perfectly as if they were one. 15 Let the peace that Christ gives rule in your hearts. As parts of one body, you were appointed to live in peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message about Christ live among you like a rich treasure. Teach and correct one another wisely. Teach one another by singing psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing to God with thanks in your hearts. 17 Do everything you say or do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Always give thanks to God the Father through Christ.

1. What is your favorite piece of clothing? In Verse 12, Paul tells us how we are to dress. Talk about what dressing with tender mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience might look like.
2. Verse 16 says, “Let the message about Christ live among you like a rich treasure.” Decorate a treasure box and use it to collect favorite scripture verses.

3. Paul writes to sing psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit with thankfulness. Find a favorite psalm or sing a favorite hymn or worship song. What in that reading or song causes you to be thankful?


5. The passage ends, “Always give thanks to God the Father through Christ.” Make a list of the things you are thankful for and say a prayer of thanks to God for them.