

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS #3 - GRATITUDE

Sermon by Tom Fenske

May 7, 2017

CHANGING OUR EXPECTATIONS

John 6:11-13 Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

Gratitude means to _____ the _____ blessing of God.

HOW DO WE LIVE A LIFE OF GRATITUDE?

1. Accept _____ rather than try to earn _____
Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

2. Take _____ rather than be _____ of what you don't have
Proverbs 14:30 (NIV)

3. Live _____ rather than _____ to more stuff
Philippians 4:11-13

4. Be driven by _____ rather than by _____
Galatians 5:25-26

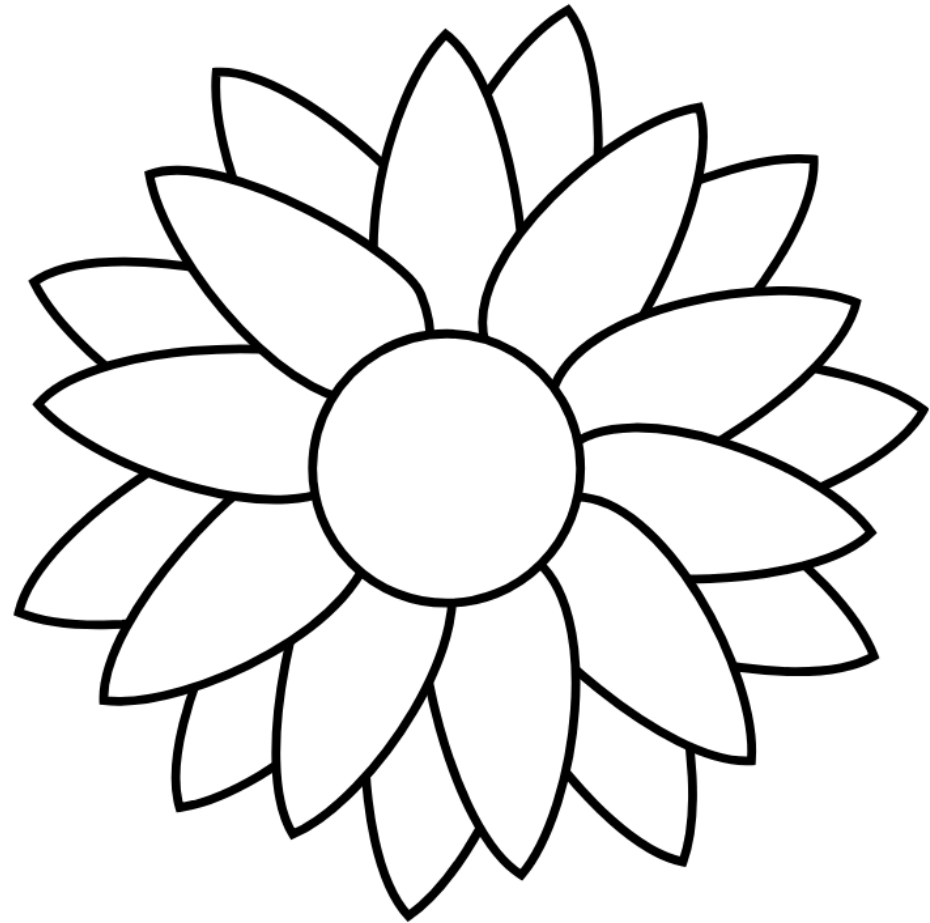
5. Serve _____ rather than _____ yourself
Matthew 20:25-27

WRAP UP

You can't _____ what you haven't _____
Luke 22:14-19

A Gratitude Flower

Take some time to reflect on some of the things which you are thankful for in your life and write them into the petals of the flower below. This could include things about yourself (personal qualities, character traits), people in your life (relationships), experiences (places you've visited or things you've done), things you have (assets) that you appreciate or anything for which you're grateful.



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People are trying to find their best self; they are trying to find an integrated, less stressed way of being. We are better off when we are healthier as individuals but we know as followers of Jesus that there is a level of existence that goes beyond physical and emotional wellness; we need spiritual wellness. Being thankful helps us to live a deeper existence. Tom talked about the “habitude” of being thankful.

CHANGING OUR EXPECTATIONS

John 6:11-13 Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.” So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

Gratitude means to receive the abundant blessing of God.

HOW DO WE LIVE A LIFE OF GRATITUDE?

1. Accept grace rather than try to earn honour

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

2. Take stock rather than be envious of what you don't have

Proverbs 14:30 (NIV) A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

3. Live simply rather than be tied to more stuff

Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

4. Be driven by God's Spirit rather than by competition

Galatians 5:25-26 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

5. Serve others rather than elevate yourself

Matthew 20:25-27 But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave.

WRAP UP

You can't give what you haven't received

Luke 22:14-19 When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table. Jesus said, “I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.” He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

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Icebreaker/Introduction

The 'Gratitude Flower' activity gets people thinking about things for which they are thankful. Read the instructions together and then give some time for your group to fill in some of the petals (say they don't have to fill every space – unless they want to!). Then share some of your answers together. Did anything surprise them about this exercise?

Ask if there was anything from this week's message that stood out – either a point that was made which really resonated with them, or perhaps a question or difficulty that came up for them.

The message started with a video about 'The Table' (you can view it at <http://connect.westheights.org/2017/05/08/spiritual-wellness-3-gratitude/>). What special memories do you have that happened around a table like that?

Tom suggested that there are 2 things about Western North American culture which make it difficult to be thankful: we have so much (wealth, opportunities, health care, etc.) and we're constantly told (by advertising) that we deserve more and better things. Which of these do you see as being most dangerous or influential?

CHANGING OUR EXPECTATIONS

Focuses on John 6:11-13

Tom shared about a time when a Christmas gift was a huge disappointment for him. Can you give an example of a time when you were quite disappointed? What was the expectation that wasn't met in the situation?

Gratitude means to receive the abundant blessing of God.

What did Tom say was the point of having leftovers with the miracle of feeding the multitude (that God provides more than enough to meet our needs). Have you found this to be true in your life? Can you recognize that in many ways you have more than you need?

Discuss Tom's statement that if we see life as overflowing with the blessings of God then it will encourage us to give more (rather than grab more for ourselves).

HOW DO WE LIVE A LIFE OF GRATITUDE?

1. Accept grace rather than try to earn honour

Focuses on Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

Tom said that we are raised/trained to think that we have to work for everything that we're going to get. Where have you heard that message in your life? In what ways have you bought into that idea?

Would you agree with Tom's statement that our spiritual wellness is ultimately a work of God? Is there nothing we can contribute to this? If we are talking about just salvation here does it change your answer?

2. Take stock rather than be envious of what you don't have

Focuses on Proverbs 14:30 (NIV)

Read Proverbs 14:30. What is an area where you can be tempted to be envious of others? Do you know why that is? What are the dangers of this?

How often do you do an exercise of thankfulness (like our Gratitude Flower)? Once a year (at Thanksgiving)? If you made it a more regular practice do you think it would make you more grateful?

3. Live simply rather than be tied to more stuff

Focuses on Philippians 4:11-13

Tom said that part of why we can't appreciate what we have is because we have too much. Would you agree with this? What area is the most piled up for you – your calendar, your closet, your fridge, or something else?

What is one possession that you could let go of that would probably help you be more grateful?

4. Be driven by God's Spirit rather than by competition

Focuses on Galatians 5:25-26

Practically speaking, what do you think it means to live by the Spirit? How does your answer to this fit in with the idea which Tom pointed out that this can still involve being 'driven' by God's Spirit (ie. it's not passive).

What are some of the dangers of comparing or competing with others?

5. Serve others rather than elevate yourself

Focuses on Matthew 20:25-27

Tom said that gratitude can become a motivation for serving – what are some other reasons why people serve others? In what ways does living with a grateful attitude makes it more likely that you will be concerned for the needs of others?

If you read Matthew 20:20-28 you see that Jesus changes expectations about leadership. How is an attitude of thankfulness related to humility?

WRAP UP

You can't give what you haven't received

Focuses on Luke 22:14-19

Tom reminded us that the Greek word for 'gave thanks' (in Luke 22) is 'eucharisteo' and so some church traditions call communion the eucharist. Have you ever thought of communion as a meal of thanksgiving? How consistently do you give thanks before regular meals?

What does 'worship' mean to you? Tom mentioned that it can involve saying thank you – does that make sense to you? Do you think about that (or other things) when you are at a Sunday morning service?