

Unlike his letter to the Philippians, Paul was not referencing support of himself directly, but rather he referenced the mission of bringing the kingdom of God to earth by the witness of their lives. Even if they had failed to provide for Paul's needs, his gratitude and contentment did not depend on his circumstances.

It is possible to be disappointed in your circumstances and still practice gratitude. You may be experiencing difficult circumstances in your life right now. But despite the feelings of disappointment, you can choose to practice gratitude.

Is there something in your life you feel is hindering you from expressing gratitude? If so, don't be hesitant to acknowledge it, but also make the decision to find a cause for gratitude despite the circumstance. You may want to make a statement like this;

"I am disappointed by _____ (circumstance) _____ in my life, but I am thankful because _____ (your reason for gratitude) _____."

WRAP-UP

Like anything that is worthwhile, gratitude requires effort. We must practice our expression of gratitude in order for it to become a habit. Paul constantly expressed his gratitude, first to God, but also publicly to those he was thankful for. But Paul didn't allow circumstances to dictate his gratitude, rather he found contentment in every situation and didn't stop expressing his gratitude which flowed from a grateful heart anchored in his identity in Christ.

Memory Verse

Philippians 4:12-13 NLT - 12 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. 13 For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge- As you develop your habit of gratitude start small, be specific and don't just think it, be public and speak your gratitude aloud.

"It's A Habit" Gratitude #2

INTRODUCTION

As Thanksgiving draws near our thoughts probably turn to the details of preparing for the holiday. But let's take a moment to step back and reflect on the intent of Thanksgiving. Let's consider what and who we are thankful for and how we go about expressing that gratitude. Studies have shown that the benefits of gratitude to you include greater happiness, better sleep, and more life satisfaction. In other words, you will have greater contentment if you practice more gratitude. Paul's life was an example to this. He constantly expressed gratitude. And as we will see in his letter to the Philippians, he had also learned to be content in every situation. So, let's see what we can do to develop the habit of gratitude.

Ice Breaker (Optional—8 min)

How will you spend your Thanksgiving?

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. Are you skilled at Gratitude

Philippians 4:10-14 NLT - 10 How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. 11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 12 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. 13 For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. 14 Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

This passage contains a very bold statement. In verse 13 Paul says he can do everything through Christ's strength. This assertion does not result from Paul's demonstration of miracles or his prayer or powerful preaching. Rather this is his conclusion after declaring his contentment in every situation.

How do we know Paul's contentment was not linked to his circumstances? We intuitively think we can be content with full stomachs and when we have everything we need, but have you known people with everything they need who are yet discontent?

Paul's contentment can be linked to his gratitude.

What expressions of gratitude for the Philippians are contained in verse 10 and 14?

Paul is not simply grateful for the provision of resources, which appear to be sparse. In fact, he goes on to excuse the Philippians because they didn't have a chance to help him. Yet he expresses gratitude.

Do you remember a time when someone thanked you for who you are rather than for what you did or what you gave? Why does that make a difference to the one being thanked?

In this passage Paul states that he *learned* to be content, he *learned* the secret of contentment and he *knows* how to do this in every circumstance be it good or bad. His contentment as well as his gratitude is a skill that can be developed with practice.

2. Practicing the Habit of Gratitude

Expressing our gratitude does not always come naturally, but we can learn to cultivate a habit of gratitude through the practice of gratitude. Each of us is unique in the way we learn and so you should apply the practices that best suit your style of learning as you grow in your practice of gratitude.

We need to intentionally make a place for gratitude to grow. Here are four steps to do that.

• **Notice:** *Identify what can you be grateful for? Fill in the blank "I am grateful for _____."*
Some ways to create space to reflect on this question include journaling, taking a gratitude walk, or spending time in prayer.

• **Think:** *Why do you think you have received the things you are grateful for?*

• **Feel:** *We may miss this one if we don't stop and allow ourselves to consider not only why we are grateful for what we have been given, but what our lives would be like without it.*

• **Do:** *Who is the person to express that gratitude to? In addition to thanking God, Paul let the Philippians know he was grateful for them.*

Is there someone in your group who you haven't expressed gratitude for, but should? You can begin practicing the habit of gratitude now.

3. Our Identity Anchored in Jesus

Paul had a style of expressing gratitude that flowed from his identity in Christ. Most of his expressions of gratitude begin with thanks to God for those he is grateful for. Although Paul thanks God, he lets each person or group know why he is grateful for them.

As you read each passage see if you can find what it is Paul is grateful for in them.

Romans 1:8 NIV - 8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

1 Corinthians 1:4-6 NIV - 4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way--with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge-- 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.

Ephesians 1:15-16 NIV - 15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 NIV - 2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.