



grow. pray. study. | weekly devotional readings

September 20, 2020 "The Walk: A Living Hallelujah"

Five Essential Practices for Living the Christian Life

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations. *Psalm 100*

MONDAY 9.21.2020 | Jesus often expressed gratitude

Read: [Luke 22:14-19, John 11:35-42](#)

Reflect: The creator of the world, the ruler of the universe, chose to "become flesh" and live on earth as a human being (cf. [John 1:14](#)). Would you expect such a being to have the ultimate attitude of "entitlement," to demand everything that was his by right? Well, we know Jesus didn't do that. As he gave us a model of what it means to be fully human, the gospels showed that his healthy human life included giving thanks in many different settings.

- The Greek root of the word "Eucharist" meant "to give thanks." As you read Luke 22:14-19, picture Jesus eating with his disciples, with the cross just ahead. On what realities do you think he focused to be able to "give thanks" at that moment? In what ways can you include the healing, strengthening power of gratitude in your prayers, even in hard times?
- Do you think Jesus' reasons for praying were different from your reasons for prayer? Why do you believe Jesus prayed at all, and didn't just say, "I'm the son of God—I can handle this on my own"? If you had been one of the first disciples, what difference, if any, do you imagine you would have noticed in Jesus after he had been praying?

Respond: Share. We draw nearer to God by sharing all of who we are, including our doubts, our fears, our worries, our temptations, our delight, our excitement. Take this time to share everything with God, and with gratitude acknowledge that God longs to be invited into every part of our lives.

Pray: Lord Jesus, at one point, praying, you said, "Thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me." Help me share that confidence and say "thank you" for it more often in my own prayers. Amen.

TUESDAY 9.22.2020 | Gratitude: chosen attitude, not just temporary emotion

Read: [1 Thessalonians 5:15-18](#)

Reflect: We often think gratitude is purely a feeling, a reaction to something outside of us. That makes “give thanks in every situation” puzzling—some situations do not trigger positive feelings. But psychology researcher Robert Emmons wrote, “It is vital to make a distinction between feeling grateful and being grateful....being grateful is a choice, a prevailing attitude that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives.” *

- A recurring theme in gratitude research is that choosing to be a grateful person does not mean you become blind to the bad things in life, or the sad or angry feelings you may have about them. It does mean, however, that we also choose not to let the bad things blind us to the things for which we are grateful. What way(s) have you found to remember the things for which you are grateful when your life takes a difficult turn?
- Scholar William Barclay wrote, “There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun the shadows will fall behind us but if we turn our backs on the sun all the shadows will be in front.” ** As you reflect on gratitude’s benefits, are you finding yourself more inclined to resist changing the direction your life faces, or to seek to increasingly “face the sun”?

Respond: Observe. There is so much beauty all around us, so much to be grateful for, but we often fail to recognize it. Walk outside and pick up a rock and place it in your pocket. Use it as a reminder to give thanks throughout the day. Write down instances when this rock was a reminder to give thanks.

Pray: O God, you are like the sun, always shining your love and mercy into my life, whatever may happen in my family, my workplace or my health. Help me learn how to keep my focus on you every day. Amen.

* Robert Emmons, “How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times,” syndicated from *Greater Good*, Sep 12, 2013 at <http://www.dailymail.org/story/532/how-gratitude-can-help-you-through-hard-times-robert-emmons/>.

** William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 207.

WEDNESDAY 9.23.2020 | Gratitude—central in prayer and worship

Read: [Philippians 4:6-7](#)

Reflect: Paul did not write this counsel from some abstract ivory tower, sheltered from all trouble or conflict. He was in prison when he wrote Philippians (cf. [Philippians 1:13](#)). When some “super apostles” scorned his ministry in Corinth, he sent the Corinthian Christians a vivid portrait of his challenging path of service (cf. [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#)). He knew well what it meant to “give thanks in every situation.”

- Artists and photographers know that often how we frame a picture alters what we focus on in it. Paul urged a kind of framing in Philippians 4. “When we bring the things that cause us stress into prayer, we put ourselves and our troubles inside a much bigger picture: the story of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ....And that leads to thanksgiving.” * What helps you remember to look at life’s big picture more than the unpleasant little details?
- Memorizing key parts of the Bible takes the Bible’s message off the page and stores it in your mind and heart, where the Holy Spirit can call it to your attention at any moment of challenge or need.

Which part(s) of today's passage would you most like to keep handy in your mind, where you don't even need a printed card or Bible in order to draw on their wisdom at a time of need?

Respond: Appreciate. We are grateful to God for so many things, but we don't always specifically take time to say thank you. Use this time to specifically recall instances when you have seen God at work. Write a letter to God expressing your appreciation for an event that took place this week. Try to be as specific as possible and include how you felt God connecting with you in this experience.

Pray: Lord, the Psalmist wrote, "I keep your word close, in my heart" (Psalm 119:11). I ask for your help as I, too, seek to keep your teaching close in my memory and my heart. Amen.

* Cynthia M. Campbell, sidebar article "Stress" in *The CEB Women's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, p. 1492.

THURSDAY 9.24.2020 | Giving thanks when we worship

Read: [Psalm 95:1-7](#)

Reflect: Israel's understanding of the one God they worshiped developed over time. At times, they adapted language from the cultures around them, as in verse 3 of today's reading. They tended to refer to all supernatural beings, who the New Testament and most Christians call "angels," as "gods." But God was the great person they worshiped and thanked, the "great king over all other gods."

- One continual hazard of Israel's sacrificial system was the temptation to see the sacrifices as a way to "buy off" God and win divine favor. [Psalm 50:13-14](#) expressed the reality: God didn't need people's sacrifices, but valued them as an expression of gratitude for God's gifts. How have you learned to "come before him with thanks" in your times of worship?
- Verse 7 echoes many other psalms (including the beloved [Psalm 23](#)) in identifying us as sheep for whom God cares as a shepherd. The image may have been clearer to pastoral Israelites than to modern city dwellers. Sheep are utterly dependent on their shepherd to keep them fed, watered and safe. Left to their own devices, they tend to be helpless to ensure their own survival. How grateful are you that in a big, complex universe you are one of God's sheep, watched over with caring and love?

Respond: Thank. Think about someone who has taught you something valuable. It may be a school teacher, a family member, someone at church. Take this opportunity to reflect on how their words and action have changed you. (Write a thank you note to a teacher. Consider sending them a hand-written note or an email sharing this note.)

Pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for promising to be the "good shepherd" who cares for me, who doesn't run away in the face of trouble but is always there. I gratefully worship and praise you. Amen.

FRIDAY 9.25.2020 | Gratitude every day: a life of worship

Read: [Psalm 96:1-2](#)

Reflect: Worship is not limited to one hour (or even one day) each week. Psalm 96 anticipated much modern psychological research as it invited us to express gratitude for God's saving work "every single day." The apostle Paul similarly urged Colossian Christians to "overflow with thanksgiving" and "be thankful people" (cf. [Colossians 2:7, 3:12-17](#)). Each day and hour of our week can be a time of gratitude, an ongoing act of worship.

- “96:2 *the news*: The Greek word that translates the underlying Hebrew is usually translated as ‘good news’ or ‘gospel.’ See [Isaiah 52:7](#), where ‘good news’ is also associated with the proclamation of God’s rule.” * What are some ways (besides standing on a street-corner handing out tracts) you can share your gratitude for the good news of God’s saving work every day?
- Some of us are musically gifted, and we like the idea of “sing to the Lord a new song.” Others, of course, suffer in silence through the singing parts of worship, whether traditional or contemporary. Regardless of our musical aptitude or tastes, what is the inner spirit of gratitude expressed by the poetic imagery of singing to the Lord a new song? How can all of us join in that spiritual experience?

Respond: Notice. It can be easy to let the minutes and hours pass without taking time to stop and give thanks. Be intentional about noticing all the things, big and small, that you have to be grateful for. Set the timer on your phone to go off every hour. Stop in that moment and focus on something at that very moment that you are grateful for. Write them down here.

8 am _____	3 pm _____
9 am _____	4 pm _____
10 am _____	5 pm _____
11 am _____	6 pm _____
12 pm _____	7 pm _____
1 pm _____	8 pm _____
2 pm _____	

Pray: Lord of my life, continue touching and transforming me to make my everyday, ordinary life an offering of gratitude to you, an ongoing act of worship. Amen.

* J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 96:2 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 946-947 OT.

SATURDAY 9.26.2020 | Gratitude for God’s works is always in order

Read: [Psalm 92:1-5](#)

Reflect: The psalmist wrote long ago: “It is good to give thanks to the LORD.” Here’s some research that supports the goodness of giving thanks: “Take just a few minutes each day to jot down things that make you thankful, from the generosity of friends to the food on your table or the right to vote.... Listkeepers sleep better, exercise more and gain a general contentment that may counteract stress and contribute to overall health.” * The ultimate source of joy in Psalm 92 was God’s loyal love and faithfulness, realities that are always with us if we just recognize them.

- In verse 2, the psalmist spoke of expressing gratitude to God in the morning and at nighttime. In what ways have you, or will you, build recognizing and expressing gratitude into your habit patterns, so that you don’t always have to try to remember to do it? Spend some time today praying about choices you can make to incorporate gratitude more fully into your daily practices as a Christ follower.

Respond: Bless. If it is not your custom to pray before every meal, take a moment to offer a blessing over your meal. Taking time to connect with God at this routine time will give you a time to reflect on the gift of the meal that you are sharing. Consider one of these prayers:

Be present at our table lord. Be here and everywhere adored.

These mercies bless and grant that we, may live in fellowship with thee.

*Thank you for the food we eat, thank you for the friends we meet,
thank you for the birds that sing, thank you God for everything.*

Family Activity: How does your family approach going to church each week? Are you excited, happy and joyful? Do you complain about the weather and the walk from the parking lot? Are you struggling to get dressed and out the door on time? Is your home filled with words of encouragement or hollering and hurried words? To help you remember you are going to God's house for worship, consider playing some praise music as you prepare. Maybe you could say a prayer for a soft heart and positive spirit the afternoon or evening before you go. Read a story from the Bible to help center your mind on God. Nothing works perfectly in family life, but choose one to focus on this next week and appreciate a more fulfilling experience in God's house!

Pray: Lord Jesus, you made me for praise and gratitude. When I'm tempted to grump my way through a day, remind me to worship you—to give you thanks for your ever-present love and faithfulness. Help me to be grateful. Amen.

* From Lauren Aaronson, "Make a Gratitude Adjustment." *Psychology Today*, March 1, 2006, found at www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200603/make-gratitude-adjustment.