

Community Group Guide

thankFULL: whatever, whenever



The Gathering

Paul Jenkins

November 27, 2011

Various Scriptures

Community Groups are the primary vehicle for discipleship at The Gathering. It is through the interaction that takes place in each of these groups around our area that will enable people to begin to move from being drawn to God to a life that is being deepened by God. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word through His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

HEY!

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

Greet each other—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.

Week in review—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time. Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to revisit the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.

Opening prayer—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.

SAY!

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications in our lives:

Message Summary

1 Thessalonians 5:18 was the foundational scripture for the final teaching in our 3-week thankFULL series. As Pastor Paul admitted, this verse is one of the hardest in the Bible because of the command to be thankful in all circumstances. It isn't hard to be thankful sometimes, but all the time presents a real challenge because many times we find ourselves in difficult situations that nobody is thankful for. Knowing that we are safe in the family of God is critical if we are to understand this truth, and salvation into that family through faith in Jesus Christ is fundamental for that to happen. Without it, the teaching on thankfulness in all things is madness.

Pastor Paul shared 4 truths that can help us develop a thankful heart in any circumstance:

1. **Who you're with is greater than what you're in.** If we're living near God and others, it's easier to weather the storms in life.
2. **Thankfulness is best prepared in a microwave, not an oven.** Microwaves heat from the inside out, and we can't be thankful in all circumstances as long as our thankfulness is externally motivated.
3. **What confuses us passes through the hands of the One Who changes us.** There will always be situations in our lives that we don't understand. We can spend our energy thinking (trying to figure it out) or trusting (believing that God has a greater plan being achieved for His glory and our

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good). Trusting allows our perspective to change, which in turn gives us a level of expectation even in difficult times.

4. Determine blessings there, not here. All of us live in the present, but few of us ever look past the present, but when we start looking at what we can't see yet, we see our current situation in light of eternity. This is what allowed Paul to call his trials "light and momentary" in 2 Cor. 4:16-17. Knowing that our present difficulties are working for a greater eternal glory can help us see them as blessings in disguise.

Discuss

Use the following questions to review and apply the points learned in the message.

- Think back to a time when you faced a difficult situation. How did support (or the lack of it) help (or hurt) you?
- Have you ever been considered crazy for having joy in hard times? How do you think unbelievers judged the apostles in Acts 5:41?
- Ping-Pong balls are easy to break because they are empty inside. How does 1 John 4:4 give us hope that we can withstand bad circumstances?
- According to Col. 3:15, what is the internal force that helps us to be thankful in all circumstances?
- As a group, define "peace."
- On a scale of 1-10 (1 being none, 10 being a ton), how much does peace rule your heart?
- Read Phil. 4:7. Have you ever experienced this type of peace? Describe it.
- How does trusting God change the way we live through difficult times? Read Romans 8:28 and Genesis 50:20 for more insight.
- Having an eternal perspective – a "there" point of view – can help us look past current circumstances and see how God is working behind the scenes to accomplish His glory in the world. Read 2 Cor. 4:17 and substitute your specific circumstance for the phrase "light and momentary troubles." How does this offer perspective in your situation?

PRAY!

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of the message. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from the message?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from the message, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your desires/values need to change to align with His desires/values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this message?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength in the application of these truths and for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel.

Weekly Prayer Focus . . . (from the worship guide)

- **Lives and Church:** Pray for those at The Gathering who are currently seeking employment.

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- **Local:** *This week we're lifting up the needs of the Esther House and its ministry to battered and abused women. This week we are also praying for North Albemarle Baptist Church and Senior Pastor, Brad Lynch.*
- **Global:** *Pray for the unreached people group, Aweer, of Kenya, whose main religion is Muslim and is only 0.06% evangelical.*