

## **30 Days to A More Grateful Life**

### **First Presbyterian Church**

#### **Jefferson, Iowa**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gratitude is an important aspect of life. Studies show that those who practice the attitude of gratitude in their lives are healthier, happier, more resilient, see more in life to celebrate, improve relationships with those around them, continue to discover more reasons to be grateful, attract others who are grateful, improve in behavior, and are humbled knowing how blessed one is. Studies come to one conclusion: **PRACTICE GRATITUDE IN YOUR LIFE AND YOU WILL HAVE A BETTER LIFE.**

But as children of God we have been told this all our lives through scripture. Just a simple survey of scripture reveals almost 400 times where we are instructed to give thanks or praise to God for all the good gifts God has given us. Worship on Sunday morning is a time of giving thanks in our worship and remembering the grace we receive through Jesus Christ. As Christians, we acknowledge all good things come from God. We have so much to be grateful for in our lives and in our lives to come in the kingdom. We should be people known for our grateful hearts.

The problem is that too often life overwhelms us. Our focus is on schedules, jobs, kids, health, finances, and families. The list goes on. We don't have time to think or even talk about the good things we have encountered in the day. We don't take time to "stop and smell the roses" and be grateful for their beauty. Practicing gratitude is an important spiritual discipline that can change your life, change your outlook, and strengthen your relationship with God who is the source of all we are and all we will be.

Experts also say that if we do something new for 30 days it will become a habit or change in lifestyle. So here is the challenge. Practice gratitude every day for thirty days. The following is a guide that includes a simple activity each day that seeks to help us to be more aware of a different aspect of life for which we are to be grateful for in our lives. You are encouraged to journal or write down your thoughts throughout the month. The journal will help you at the end of 30 days to see why we all have a greater capacity for gratitude. It will also remind you of those things we so often never think about as a blessing or a good gift. It will be a reminder to practice gratitude on a regular basis. It may even become a habit in your lives or a spiritual discipline of saying thank you to God every day.

## **WAYS TO PRACTICE GRATITUDE**

We are offering various forms of this resource. We have the hard copy of all thirty days. You can place it in a convenient place. You can read it daily, read ahead and plan how you will do the activity. The resource is also on our website and Facebook page if you would like to download the resource to your computer or print out extra copies.

If you would like a daily reminder to practice gratitude, you can like First Presbyterian Church Jefferson on Facebook where you will receive a daily posting of the activity for that day. If you are not on Facebook then let us know and we will send you a daily email with the day's activity.

We also encourage you to share this resource with people you know. Our mission is to help as many people practice gratitude in their lives and find they are indeed changed. We want all people to live a more grateful life especially in their relationship to God.

## **PRACTICING GRATITUDE**

### **Day 1**

If you have a phone with a camera or a digital camera, carry it with you today and take a picture of anything that catches your eye with its beauty. At the end of the day, select the best five pictures you have taken. What attracts your eye to their beauty? Give thanks to God for the beauty of this world that surrounds us. Learn to be more aware of the beauty around you. Let it lift your heart.

### **Day 2**

Find a place to sit in a quiet place outside during the day. Spend 5 minutes and count all the different shades of color and all the different shapes that are before you. What would life be without color? What would life be if there were no shapes? Think about how important these two simple ideas are to the makeup of all you see around you. Give thanks to God for colors and shapes.

### **Day 3**

Sit in a quiet place and listen. Even in silence there are sounds. Count the number of different sounds you hear in your quiet place. What are they? What would life be without sound? Give thanks to God for all the sounds we are able to hear.

### **Day 4**

On a clear night, take time to sit beneath the stars. Try to count them. Try to imagine how big the stars are and how bright they must be in order to be seen considering the light travels trillions and trillions of miles. Feel the wonder of the vast sky and all the mysteries it contains. Imagine what a privilege that we might look up and see it all before us. Give thanks to God for the wonder of the universe.

### **Day 5**

Make a list of people who have the biggest influence on you in becoming the person you are today. How did they come into your life? What lasting affects did they leave with you. Remember a story involving these people. How did they influence your faith life? Give thanks to God for all the people who have been in your life and influenced you in a positive way.

### **Day 6**

Think about having a cold. Do you remember what it was like to lose your ability to taste? Do you remember your longing to be able to taste your food again? During the absence of being able to taste food, did you try to remember how good something tasted? Give yourself a treat and savor the flavor as you eat it. Give God thanks for the gift of taste and the foods you enjoy.

### **Day 7**

Pull out a photo album and look at the pictures of people, places and events. Think about all the stories and memories that are contained in them. Think about how many memories we have about our life that we rarely lift up in our minds. Our lives are always more full than we remember. Give thanks for all the memories we have that reminds us of a good and full life.

### **Day 8**

Go to a park or walk by an elementary school during recess and listen to the sounds of play and games. Observe the joy of young children doing what they were created to do and that is run, jump, and laugh, imagine and be carefree in their play. Does it make you want to be a kid again at least for a moment? Let it remind you of a time when play came so naturally. Why did we lose that ability? Give thanks for this moment of joy given by children playing around you.

### **Day 9**

Peel an orange or a banana, slice an apple or a pear, cut up a watermelon or cantaloupe, eat some grapes or blueberries, or take a bite of your favorite fruit. Tastes good, doesn't it? And you didn't have to add anything to it, or cook it, or change it. It was good just as God made it to be. Just think. This is how God created you to be. God loves you just as you are. Give God thanks for who you are and what God created you to be.

### **Day 10**

Listen to your favorite song on your stereo, mp3, or computer. Think about why you like the song so much. Is it the story? Is it the melody? Does it have "a good beat and you can dance to it"? (This is for American Bandstand fans of the past.) What feelings does it stir in your heart? What memory does it call to mind. Enjoy the song, the feeling, the memory. Give thanks to God for the gift of music that touches the soul.

### **Day 11**

As you lay down in your bed at the end of a long day, take note how good it feels to have a place to rest in quiet and in peace. Take note of the how good it feels under the security of a warm blanket that covers you. Now imagine how many people in the world have no bed, no blanket, no bedroom or even a roof over their head. Do you ever think of your bed as a blessing? Give thanks to God for the opportunity to sleep in comfort and in peace.

### **Day 12**

As you go about your day, think about how many things you do every day that depend on electricity. What if you flick a switch and the lights don't turn on? What if you open the door to your refrigerator and there is no cool air to keep food fresh? What if you pick up your phone and find it is not charged! What if we had no electricity? What in your life would not work or exist? Think about how much effort it takes to build and maintain a system that allows us to not even think about our electricity? Do we appreciate those who work and maintain something so essential? Give God thanks for the gift of electricity and how it makes our lives better.

### **Day 13**

As you are driving, biking, walking, carpooling or whatever method you use to get to work spend some of that time thinking about your job. How would your life change if today you found out it was the last day. What benefits do you garner in life because you have your job? What would be at risk if you lost it? Even if it is a difficult job, it is still worth being grateful for it. Give thanks to God for your work and pray for those who want to but can't.

### **Day 14**

Watch a comedy on television, read the funny pages in Sunday paper, or share stories with someone who makes you laugh. How does laughter change your mood in that moment? What do you notice about yourself when you are laughing? They say "Laughter is good for the soul." Give thanks to God for the gift of laughter and those who make you laugh.

## **Day 15**

Who is your best friend? Think about the special relationships that you have with others. What are the most important relationships you have? What do they bring to your life? How are you a better person because of these important relationships? Make a list and give God thanks for each person and ask God to bless them in their lives.

## **Day 16**

When you turn on the faucet today to get a drink of water or for cooking or for a shower or bath, think about those who have to carry jugs and containers great distances to community wells and carry the heavy vessels home. They have to do this each day, day in and day out. We turn a valve and good clean water comes out. When you turn on the water today, give thanks for clean water, an essential for life itself.

## **Day 17**

All of us have had to wait in the doctor's office. It seems like such an inconvenience. But what if in the middle of an appointment the doctor got up and walked out because he had another patient and had to keep on schedule? Maybe the person before you has an unexpected hardship that requires more time? So would you rather have a doctor spend the needed time for your appointment or the allotted time? Maybe the next time it will be you who requires more time. Give thanks to God for doctors who make patients needs not a schedule their top priority. Pray for patience in waiting. Give thanks for your doctor.

## **Day 18**

Break out a deck of cards, a board game, a movie to watch, a book to read, a quilt to sew or a scarf to knit. Think about these leisure activities and the pleasure you get from doing them. How would your life be less fulfilled without them? Give thanks to God for leisure activities that bless your life.

## **Day 19**

Find a place with the best unobstructed to watch the sunrise or set. Look deeply at the intense colors, pinks, oranges, reds, and purples blues. The mix of colors and clouds seem endless. Sit and take in the beauty of it all. Add a cup of coffee or tea, and a good friend, life is good. Give thanks for the sunset and sunrise in its fullest glory and for the beginning and ending of one more day.

## **Day 20**

Take a walk around The Square and examine the architecture and details. Many of those buildings were built using manual labor-no cranes, no power tools, and no technology. They were built with hands, legs, arms, backs and a lot of hard work. They were built to last. They are a witness to hard work and quality work. Walk through our Court House and examine the craftsmanship. Thank God for their work that we can still enjoy as a legacy to our history.

## **Day 21**

Think about the following question. How much is your eyesight worth to you? How much would you spend to keep from losing it? \$1000, \$10,000, \$100,000 or more? What would you sacrifice to keep your eye sight? Think about how much richer your life is because you can see. Give thanks for the gift of your eye sight.

## **Day 22**

Winter will be upon us soon. That means colder temperatures with snow and snow storms. Imagine a wintery stormy day with the winds howling and snow blowing and temperatures dipping to below zero. You are sitting in your warm house sipping on coffee, tea or hot chocolate. You feel warm and safe. Think about the many that are homeless. Give thanks for your home and heat that you will enjoy this winter.

## **Day 23**

Take a piece of paper and make a list of people you can count on or call if you need help and support. Who can you lean on in difficult times? Who will pray for you? Who will sit with you? Who can you lean on? Think about the hymn "Leaning on the Everlasting Arm" Sing it if you can. Give thanks to God for the sure strong arm of Jesus and pray for all those you have listed as those you can lean on.

## **Day 24**

As you go about your day, take notice of all the people around you who are going somewhere. Walking, driving, riding a bike, so many people and they are all going somewhere for some reason. Where and why? Yet we say God knows where and why people are on the go. God created us. God gives us talents and purpose. Where are you going today? Why? Give thanks for the gifts life and purpose.

## **Day 25**

Remember as a child laying on the ground and looking up at the clouds finding dogs, cats, dragons and an assortment of images. Remember the days where our child like imaginations were free to play and to see wonder in the world. Today stop and look at the clouds. Let your imaginations roam freely. What do you see? Give thanks to God for the gift of our imaginations.

## **Day 26**

When families gather the best part of the time spent together are the family stories. Stories about trips, creative ways we entertained ourselves as kids, the risks we took to find adventure, the moments we learned how important family was. Stories of aunts, uncles, grandparents, moms and dads, brothers and sisters. Stories that help us learn who we are. Take some time to recall the stories. Jot them down. What are your favorites? Share them with another family member. Give thanks to God for stories of family.

## **Day 27**

Fresh baked bread, bacon, fresh brewed coffee, a roast in the oven or a Thanksgiving dinner. They say what we taste is affected by our sense of smell. These are some of the smells we enjoy and cause us to anticipate something good. The smell of flowers, a spring rain, lilac bushes, a favorite perfume or cologne can trigger memories of days past. Think about what life would be without smell. Give thanks to God for the gift of our sense of smell.

## **Day 28**

Maybe it's a shot at the buzzer to win a basket ball game, or the arrival of a good friend you haven't seen in a long time, or the birth of a child, moving to a new home, the wedding, going to a concert of your favorite musician or favorite play, or favorite baseball team. There are many things that are exciting in our lives. But remember as a child, so many more things were exciting. Today is a new day of life. Nothing is guaranteed.

What unknown possibilities lie ahead of us today? Choose to be excited about life today. Give thanks for all the wonders we will encounter today.

### **Day 29**

“What the world needs now is love, sweet love.” Make a list of those people who you love. When was the last time you took stock of all the people in your life who you love and who love you. Give thanks to God for bringing these special loved ones into your life. Trust that they are all the love you need today.

### **Day 30**

Look at yourself in the mirror. You are a living, breathing, thinking, feeling, miracle. You are more than the cells you are made of. You are more than flesh and blood. You are God’s creation. You are the temple of God. You are a child of God. You are God’s own. Each day is unique. You will never be able to repeat this very moment again. Or as scripture reminds us, “This is the day that the Lord has made, rejoice and be glad in it.” Give thanks to God for the life you have and this day in which you have an opportunity to live it to its fullest.

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE DONE IT!**

If you have completed all 30 days, you have accomplished more than a lot have people have accomplished in the last 30 days. We hope you have enjoyed the variety of ways to be grateful.

Where do you go from here? One suggestion is to start a Gratitude Journal. Each day at the end of the day write 5-8 things from your day for which you are grateful. This discipline will help you be more mindful that each day there is something that has blessed you in some way whether large or small.

A second suggestion is an old practice. It is to have the first thought of the day and the last thought of the day to be about God. Maybe the first words you think could be “Thank you God for a new day.” The last words of the day could be just a simple “Thank You, God.” Believe that something good will happen to you each day and be prepared to give thanks to God. You will have surrounded your day with gratitude. You will be enfolded in the grace of God each day. Could there be a greater blessing? Could there be a better reason to be grateful? You have probably figured out the answer. No. God is sufficient alone.