

[No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at tbeachhead@comcast.net. Thank you for taking the time—Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.]

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP.** BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! **Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 11/24. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.** I include each of the passages mentioned in full, to facilitate the enjoyment of these notes. Footnotes are not meant to distract. This week's footnotes include:

1. [On the ministry of Compassion First](#)
2. [On rejoicing with gratitude](#)

*****Important:** At the very [end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were mentioned in this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week. ***

Richie introduced a new song built from a very old song. Look up

Psalm 118: [21](#) *will praise You,
For You have answered me,
And have become my salvation.*

[22](#) *The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief capstone.*

[23](#) *This was the Lord's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.*

[24](#) ***This is the day the Lord has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.*** (NKJV)

1. What do you see?
2. Where does the psalmist's praise begin? Is the praise spontaneous, or is there a real cause to praise?
3. What does it mean to praise someone? Give an example. Praise the person beside you.
4. Has the Lord ever answered you as the psalmist describes it here? Do you have a testimony?
5. Who is the stone rejected by the builders? Who are the builders?
6. Why would they reject him? (If they are constructing with stones, what must each stone do?)

7. What happens when the stone does not fit the builders' design (yet)?
8. Have you ever rejected a boss or an elder who then stepped into leadership and surpassed all expectation?
9. Why is that marvelous? When the capstone is finally installed what does that say of the building?
10. Did you ever connect verse 24 with verse 22? Why is it a good day when the Lord makes it full of surprises?

Do you know anything of the ministry of Compassion First? Do you have a testimony? You'll find more [below in the first footnote](#).

Pastor Mark began by saying, "In a world that is filled with many distractions, difficulties and noise, cultivating a heart of gratitude could even feel counter-intuitive."

1. Why?
2. What do you have to be grateful for?

He said, "We live in a rapidly changing world of new technologies and new systems and yet we can get tired just trying to keep up with everything that is changing around us. But there is something scripture tells us that is so foundational even science has taken steps to catch up with what the scripture says." (He added, "I love it when science tries to catch up with scripture.") "It tells us that a life of gratitude has physical and mental benefits. So we are looking at cultivating a heart of gratitude."

1. Have you heard this?
2. What have you heard?
3. Look up Proverbs 4: [20](#) *My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.*

[21](#) *Do not let them depart from your eyes;*

Keep them in the midst of your heart;

[22](#) *For they are life to those who find them,*

And health to all their flesh. What do you see? Have you considered these verses before?

4. How literally should you take this passage? Explain.

Pastor then prophesied, "We are going to leave here today convinced that if you lead a life of gratitude, you will not be the same."

1. What happened after you left on Sunday, or after you heard the message?
2. What is the cost of neglecting gratitude?
3. Pastor cited studies that claim, "Ungratefulness can lead to higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress." Do you have a testimony?
4. Where is the struggle with/against gratitude the most pronounced in your own experience? Where is it most visible today?
5. What is the fruit of ungratefulness? How will gratitude change the climate we're in, heading into Thanksgiving?

Pastor pointed out that we're living in a culture where anxiety and stress are at an all-time high, so, "maybe our own ungratefulness is manifesting itself in this way. Maybe the way to counter this is to act with some gratitude." Pastor quoted a work from the Greater Good Science center out of Berkeley, CA, (<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>) that says that those who practice gratitude show a greater resilience, and a marked reduction in the levels of the stress hormone cortisol. The study also found that those who maintain a "gratitude journal" have 25% increase in energy and optimism.

1. Do you have a testimony?
2. Have you ever kept a gratitude journal, or known someone who does?

Look up 1 Thessalonians 5: [15](#)See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. [16](#)Rejoice always, [17](#)pray without ceasing, [18](#)in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1. What do you see?
2. Discuss the contrast between the behavior in the beginning of verse 15 with the behavior Paul calls for in verse 16.
3. Which is easier for you?
4. Have you ever prayed to God to know His will for you and for your life?
5. What does Paul say it is? Did God allow Paul to bring the answer to your prayer?
6. Is this answer clear enough? What is missing?
7. What does it mean to "...rejoice always?" To "...pray without ceasing...?"
8. Pastor says, "Praying without ceasing means keeping your heart connected to God." Does that help?
9. How do you give thanks when a marriage is really struggling or when finances are in the tank? Do you have a testimony?
10. Take a moment to pray this through, for you and for others you know who are struggling.

Pastor Mark says, "I'm not claiming this is easy. I'm saying this changes everything, it is transformative, when you begin to give thanks in all circumstances." He emphasizes, "It's not a magic potion."

1. How is this, in fact, a tonic?
2. Review what James says in chapter 1: [2](#)Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds, [3](#)because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. [4](#)Allow perseverance to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. What do you see?
3. Why is this counter-intuitive? When you see a trial coming, what do you think?
4. What, according to James, is actually coming your way? How can you be sure?
5. What is your role in hastening "maturity (Greek: perfection) and continual success?"
6. How does a lack of gratitude "...close our eyes to God's blessing and make our trials seem insurmountable?"
7. Explain Proverbs 13:[12](#)[Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.](#) How does gratitude prevent heartsickness? Does hope in God ever disappoint? Explain.
8. Pastor Mark quoted Psalm 23. Recite it.
9. Now, look at what Isaiah says in chapter 43: [1](#)Now this is what the LORD says—He who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine! [2](#)[When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you go through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched; the flames will not set you ablaze.](#) What do you see? What are the circumstances here? Do you see anything to rejoice over in the circumstances?
10. Look again? Are there waters in these verses that are dangerous and troublesome? Are there fires? Will you be pass through them, or are they avoidable? And what are you to **know** as you are passing through them?
11. What is the reason to give thanks here? Water? Fire? Or His presence?

12. Paul asks this question in Romans 8:[31](#)*What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* Look at the above verses from Isaiah 43 and answer Paul.
13. Paul continued: [32](#)*He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all things?* Answer him. What will God withhold from us?
14. He continues asking questions: [33](#)*Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* [34](#)*Who is there to condemn us? For Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that was raised to life, is at the right hand of God—and He is interceding for us.* What do you see? What is your answer?

The focus of our thankfulness:

Look up Ephesians 5: [18](#)*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to reckless indiscretion. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.* [19](#)*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord,* [20](#)*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1. What do you see?
2. Why is it right for Christ's body to give thanks to the Father in Christ's name?
3. Why is being filled with the spirit the cure for getting drunk on wine? Explain.
4. Pastor gave us his version of speaking to each other in spiritual songs. Explain what you think Paul is talking about.
5. Pastor says, "This is about a heart attitude." Explain.
6. What does Paul say we are giving thanks for? Explain.

Pastor says, "When we have a heart of gratitude it's really easy for us to brag on what God is doing, regardless of our circumstance."

1. Do you agree?
2. How does this work? Do you have a testimony?
3. Verse 20 above states that our gratitude is focused on God the Father. Explain.
4. Look at the passage [from Isaiah 43](#) above again, and state why our focus should be on God the Father. What is His intention towards us?
5. Comment on Paul's choice to emphasize thanksgiving at the end of these letters we just looked at?
6. What role does rejoicing play in thanksgiving? Is it possible to give thanks without joy?
7. Mark says you have to start giving thanks during "normal" times so that when you get to a difficult time, you're prepared and equipped to acknowledge, "This is a difficult time," and begin to seek a strategy to move on. How does that work?
8. How important does this training become? What do we know lies ahead? (What do you suspect lies ahead?)
9. Mark says, "When our gratitude is focused toward God it acknowledges Him for every good thing in our life." Explain.
10. He says, "Thanksgiving shifts the focus from what we lack to what He has already provided." How does this help? What are your thoughts?
11. He continues, "When you look at a loss, not as so much of a loss, but the next step toward what God's doing, you begin to suspect that you are about to see something spectacular in the midst of your pain." Do you have a testimony?

12. He says, "It shifts from what we don't have to what we do have, namely, a relationship with the Father in heaven Who is loving us, who is working and who providing." Go back again to Isaiah 43, above, and state what the Lord told Isaiah to tell us. What is He doing?

Look up 2 Corinthians 4: [13](#) *And in keeping with what is written: "I believed, therefore I have spoken," we who have the same spirit of faith also believe and therefore speak, [14](#) knowing that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in His presence. [15](#) All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is extending to more and more people may overflow in thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*

1. Describe Paul's attitude in trial.
2. Who benefits from Paul's perseverance?
3. How has the church over the millennia benefited from Paul's perseverance? Explain.
4. Why were these words written? What do his words do to encourage us?
5. How have Paul's words extended grace to more and more people as he said? How often does this happen?
6. How do your words encourage others? What would happen if you began to speak to others with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs?
7. Have you ever thanked God for Paul's words? How did Paul's simple act of writing letters to his friends bring ever increasing glory to God?
8. Can you do this? What would it take?

Mark says the end of the matter comes to this, "to walk in that grace. You walk in the ability to say, 'God I don't have it all figured out. I don't control these circumstances at all, but what I *can* do is approach every circumstance with a heart of gratitude toward you, My Father, Who sees, Who knows and Who works in the middle of those difficulties to make something beautiful out of something that is not beautiful."

1. What do you see in this?
2. How is something eternal produced through something that is only temporal?
3. What do you know of "praise" vs. "grief?" Which will last forever, and which gets wiped away? Explain.
4. Pastor says, "I've had to practice this. Gratitude does not come naturally." How is gratitude supernatural?

Pastor points out, "The world feeds off of negativity, off of the latest news, the bickering and the fighting. The negative was always easier to talk about."

1. Which is easier for you to talk about?
2. What would happen if we caught someone doing something right, and talked about it? Have you ever tried?
3. Look again at Philippians 4: [8](#) [Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think on these things.](#) What if you decided to speak only on these things? What would change?

Pastor quoted author Melody Beattie who said, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow."

1. What do you see? Do you agree? Do you have a testimony?
2. What changes when you practice thanksgiving?

3. Pastor says, "A heart of thanksgiving doesn't change our circumstances. It changes us." Explain.
4. He continues, "God is all about redemption, renewing and restoration." Why would thanksgiving begin **before** the actual restoration, and when everything seems so old?
5. Why does faith have to be the substance of things hoped for, and not the result of the things we see?

How will gratitude change your life

Pastor cited studies from Harvard Health that found that grateful people are not only happier but they're also healthier. He added, "It's amazing that our mental health and our physical health is related to a heart of gratitude. And because it's not natural and because it's not easy; because we have to put it into practice, we need to realize that the benefits outweigh by far the cost of not doing this. Spiritually speaking, we move from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. We are directing our heart to the right place."

1. What do you see in this concept?
2. What could you add? How is your own attitude of gratitude?
3. Can gratitude be practiced without God? Be honest, does that work? (Harvard says it does.)
4. Why is gratitude so much more effective for Christians who know personally Whom they are thanking? What's missing?
5. If God makes it to rain on the just *and* the unjust, why is it easier for the just? Is knowing Him the answer? What does His personal touch touch?
6. Going back to what James says above, does it help to know that your faith is being tried? (What does it mean to say, "The just shall live by faith.")
7. What do we have that others do not? How does the resurrection remind us that "...this too shall pass."
8. How does the assurance of God's promises trump the mere principles that Harvard Health expounds on?
9. How does it help to know God is very really with us through the waters and the fire?

Mark quoted Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred Christian pastor in Hitler's Germany who did not waver in the face of the Nazi regime, saying, "In ordinary life, we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

1. What do you see?
2. Have you ever visited friends in the third world, in Africa, for example?
3. How were you welcomed? What did you see? How can they be so gracious and hospitable to outsiders?

Practical steps:

Before enumerating the steps, Mark admonished us not to treat this as a list of self-help, power-of-positive-thinking principles. Treat this as God developing you through a relationship with Jesus Christ. When we realize that He is calling us to live a life of gratitude, we start by thanking Him.

- ◇ **Start a gratitude journal.** Write down each day three things that you are thankful for. Simple habits begin to train the brain to be what you intend it to be and to see what you intend it to see.
- ◇ **Pray with thanksgiving.** Incorporate gratitude in your prayer. Give thanks to the Lord. It's good to remember Who He is, and what He has already provided. Remember the good others have done.
- ◇ **Speak it out.** Tell your family, friends and co-workers that you appreciate them, and tell them why. Catch your neighbor doing something right and admirable and point it out with thanks. Think what warm, sincere affirmation does for you on a difficult day, and pay that gift ahead to others.
- ◇ **Sing and worship.** Paul told us to sing and make melody to God in your heart. Obey Paul's direction. Make gratitude a part of your worship. Sing out songs of gratitude...make them up.
- ◇ **Reframe your challenges.** Gratitude helps us see difficulties as opportunities for growth. Describe differently the difficulties you are facing. Say, rather, "God is working something really good." Say, as James does, "I will be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (Mark emphasized that this is not pretense, but promise. Notice, God has made this promise to us. He will also bring it to pass. We shine the light of God's promises into the darkness of our present trials. Review [Isaiah 43 again.](#))
- ◇ **Practice generosity.** Gratitude overflows into our giving, which in turn generates gratitude in others.
- ◇ **Pause and reflect.** Take time at the end of each day to recognize God's goodness toward you this day. This will make you aware of God's ongoing attention to your well-being and growth.

Mark ended reminding us that God's mercies are new every morning. "His love never fails. He is a strong tower to run to. He sees you and He loves you." Begin to imagine what you will look like when you have become mature, and complete and not lacking anything.

The Follow-up Application

1. Use the [SOAP journal studies](#) below throughout the week.
2. Keep a gratitude journal. Look again daily at the steps above.
3. List what you are most grateful for. Be thorough and include everything you use for comfort and rest.

Take the time to pray.

Scribe's Notes:

1. **On the ministry of Compassion First**—Compassion First works to minister to victims of child and human trafficking. Check it out. (<https://www.compassionfirst.org/>)
2. **On rejoicing with gratitude**—There is a recurring theme that develops throughout the scripture, especially where the songs of worship in the psalms and prophetic

exhortation is involved. Thanksgiving and rejoicing go hand in hand. You will not have the one without the other. Check out this simple search on BibleHub's concordance: <https://biblescan.com/search.php?q=rejoice+and+thanks> Now look at these verses: Philippians 3: *1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.* See how Paul repeats himself again in the very next chapter. Philippians 4: *4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* *5 Let your gentleness be apparent to all. The Lord is near.* Connect gentleness to joy and thanksgiving, and see the rich blend that is born. James 1, mentioned several times in the notes above, seals the importance of this principle: *2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Allow perseverance to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* The thankful rejoice. Your joy becomes the barometer of your gratitude.

For further study:

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP**... (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—What is God saying? / **P**ray—What is your response?) ...method to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Psalm 118:21-24
Tuesday: Proverbs 4:20-22
Wednesday: 1 Thessalonians 5:15-18
Thursday: James 1:2-4
Friday: Isaiah 43:1-3
Saturday: Romans 8:31-35
Sunday: Ephesians 5:18-20

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.