

Discussion Guide

Date: 11/22/2026

Sermon Title: Will being grateful make me happier?

Scripture: Romans 1:8-12

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER:

Gracious and loving God, we come together today with grateful hearts, or perhaps hearts that need to be reminded of all the ways you are at work in our lives. Open our eyes to see your goodness. Help us recognize the people who have encouraged us, the opportunities you have placed before us, and the blessings we sometimes take for granted. As we explore your Word, teach us what it means to lead with gratitude. May our thankfulness move beyond words and become a way of living, serving, encouraging, and loving others. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

BIG IDEA:

Gratitude is more than a feeling; it is a spiritual practice that shapes how we see God, how we see others, and how we lead. When we cultivate a grateful heart, we become more attentive to God's grace, more generous toward others, and more connected to the community around us. As we conclude our WILLING AND ABLE leadership series, we consider an important question: What kind of leaders are we becoming? Paul offers us a compelling example. He regularly begins his letters by giving thanks, recognizing God's work in the lives of others before addressing their challenges or shortcomings.

Paul reminds us that Christian leadership begins not with what we lack, what we need to fix, or what we hope to accomplish, but with an awareness of God's grace already at work. Gratitude doesn't mean ignoring life's difficulties. Rather, it means learning to recognize God's presence and goodness even in the midst of them.

GETTING STARTED: THE PRACTICE OF GRATITUDE

Before reading Scripture, consider these questions:

1. When you hear the word gratitude, what comes to mind? Is it something that comes naturally to you, or something you have to be intentional about?
2. Think about a person who has made a meaningful difference in your life. Have you ever told them how grateful you are for their influence? What made that relationship meaningful?
3. Do you think grateful people are generally happier people? Why or why not? Is happiness the result of gratitude, or does gratitude help us experience happiness differently?
4. What makes gratitude difficult in today's world? How do comparison, busyness, disappointment, or unmet expectations affect our ability to recognize what we have?

Transition: Gratitude is easy when everything is going well. But Paul teaches us something deeper. His gratitude is rooted in God's grace and his relationships with others, not simply in his personal circumstances.

SCRIPTURE STUDY: ROMANS 1:8–12

Read Romans 1:8–12 together (NRSVUE).

Paul begins his letter to the Christians in Rome by expressing gratitude for their faith. What is particularly interesting is that Paul has not yet visited this community, and many of these believers are people he has not personally met. Yet he is thankful for them, prays for them, and longs to be with them. Paul's gratitude is not simply a polite introduction. It reveals something about his understanding of Christian leadership and community.

BACKGROUND AND OBSERVATIONS:

- Paul begins with thanksgiving. In many of his letters, Paul begins by thanking God for the people receiving his letter. He intentionally recognizes God's work in their lives before addressing the challenges they face.
- Gratitude is directed toward God. Paul doesn't simply congratulate the Roman Christians for being good people. He gives thanks to God for the faith that is evident in their lives.
- Gratitude leads to prayer. In verses 9–10, Paul connects his thanksgiving with his ongoing prayers for the community. His gratitude is active, not passive.
- Leadership is mutual. Perhaps the most important insight comes in verse 12. Paul acknowledges that he wants to strengthen their faith, but he also expects to be encouraged by theirs. Even an apostle like Paul recognizes that he needs the faith and encouragement of others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What stands out to you about Paul's opening words in Romans? Why do you think he begins with gratitude rather than immediately addressing the needs or challenges of the church?
2. Paul gives thanks for people he has not personally met. What does this teach us about recognizing and celebrating God's work in people beyond our immediate circle?
3. Look at verses 9–10. How does Paul's gratitude move him toward prayer and action? What is the difference between simply appreciating someone and actively investing in their life?
4. In verse 12, Paul describes being mutually encouraged by one another's faith. Why is this an important understanding of leadership? What happens when leaders recognize that they also need encouragement, support, and the gifts of others?
5. Think about the people you lead, serve alongside, work with, or share life with. How intentional are you about expressing gratitude for the ways God is working through them?
6. What might change in our families, workplaces, ministries, and relationships if we began by looking for what is good and giving thanks before focusing on what needs to change?

Consider this: Paul demonstrates that gratitude is not simply something we feel; it is something we practice. He notices, names, and gives thanks for God's work in others.

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor Clayton compares the church to a cardiac rehab program, suggesting it exists to build spiritual strength and develop lasting holy habits rather than simply to be attended and checked off a list. In what ways does your current engagement with your faith community reflect a genuine commitment to long-term spiritual growth rather than routine obligation?
2. Paul begins nearly all of his letters with an expression of gratitude, and Pastor Clayton points to this as a foundational spiritual practice. How might beginning each day by naming three things you are grateful for reshape the way you perceive your circumstances and your relationship with God?

3. The sermon notes that gratitude triggers the release of serotonin and dopamine in the brain, suggesting that God designed human beings to flourish through thankfulness. What does the alignment of neuroscience and spiritual practice reveal to you about the nature of God and how we were created to live?
4. Pastor Clayton describes a church member who prayed about a difficult decision and found clarity within 24 hours, not through an obvious sign but through an ordinary conversation. How does this kind of subtle divine guidance challenge or confirm your understanding of how God answers prayer?
5. Pastor Clayton observes that Paul catches himself mid-sentence in Romans, shifting from what he wants to give to what he hopes to receive mutually. What does this moment of self-correction reveal about Paul's understanding of Christian community and the humility required to truly belong to one?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION:

1. The people who are best equipped to help you are often those who have struggled with the same things you are facing. How does shared struggle and vulnerability within a church community create a kind of spiritual accountability that formal programs or classes alone cannot provide?
2. The three practices highlighted -- gratitude, prayer, and mutual encouragement -- are presented not as occasional religious acts but as daily disciplines that form the shape of a soul-healthy life. Which of these three do you find most difficult to practice consistently, and what might that difficulty reveal where you most need growth?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of your grace and for the countless ways you are at work in our lives. Forgive us for the times we have become so focused on what we lack that we have failed to recognize what you have already provided. Forgive us when comparison, busyness, disappointment, or our own expectations have kept us from seeing your goodness. Teach us to live with grateful hearts. Give us the humility to understand that we need one another and that our faith is strengthened through the encouragement and witness of those around us. As we conclude this WILLING AND ABLE series, remind us that leadership is not simply about what we accomplish, but about who we are becoming in Christ. May our gratitude shape the way we lead, the way we serve, the way we encourage, and the way we love. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

You can choose to practice one or more of these ways this week in responding to your discussion and study today.

1. Notice God's goodness. Each day, write down three things for which you are grateful. Be specific.
2. Thank someone who has made a difference. Send a note, text, or make a phone call to someone whose encouragement or influence has shaped your life.
3. Practice generosity. Identify one way you can share your time, resources, or gifts with someone who needs encouragement or support.
4. Change your perspective. When you catch yourself complaining or comparing, pause and identify something for which you can give thanks.
5. Encourage someone. Find someone who needs to know that their presence, faith, or contribution matters.