

## Preparing For The Holidays

### Thankful in Tough Times - Week 1

**Philippians 4:6-7:** *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

The more thankful one is, the more there is to be thankful for. Those who keep their attention on God instead of problems will remain thankful even when life is tough.

**Philippians 4:4 NLT:** *Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!*

In our opening text we have four keys to surviving stress. They are very simple to say, they're a lot more difficult to apply.

#### 1. Do not be Anxious About Anything – verse 6

Worrying doesn't change anything. It's stewing without doing. There is no such thing as a born worrier. Worry is a learned response. The fact that worry is learned means it can also be unlearned.

**Matthew 6:34:** *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Don't worry about tomorrow. Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.

#### 2. Pray About Everything – Verse 6

If you use the time you spend worrying for praying, then you'd have the time to pray. If you pray instead of worry, you will have a whole lot less to worry about.

He says "in everything." Not just some things, but you should pray about everything.

**Phillips translation:** *"When you pray, tell God every detail of your life."* God is concerned about the big things and the small things.

**1 Peter 5:7:** *"Unload all your worries on Him since He is looking after you."*

#### 3. Have A Heart of Thankfulness in All Things

He says, *"When you pray, pray with thanksgiving."*

Whenever you pray, you should always pray with thanksgiving. If you cultivate an attitude of gratitude, of being thankful in everything, it reduces stress in your life.

**1 Thessalonians 5:18:** *“Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* It does not say, “Give thanks **for** every circumstance.” It says give thanks **in** every circumstance.

In every circumstance, no matter how bad it is, you can give thanks to God because:

- (a) You know He has a purpose bigger than the problem and
- (b) He will give you the power to overcome the problem,
- (c) You will grow through the experience if you allow it to help you grow.

Thankfulness in tough times begins with not being anxious, by taking everything to God in prayer and by having a heart of thankfulness in all things.

The true victories enjoyed in this life by believers are obtained through joyfulness, prayerfulness and thankfulness.

So the question is: What are you taking for granted? Gratitude is a stress reliever because it takes your focus off the problem and puts it on the positive things in your life.

#### 4. Think About The Right Things – Verse 8

**Philippians 4:8:** *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.*

Whatever you think about is going to come out in your life. The way you think determines the way you feel, and the way you feel determines the way you act. So he says if you want to change your life, you need to change what you’re thinking about.

**Proverbs 23:7:** *“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”* What do you think about most? What dominates your mind? Whatever you think about the most is what you’re becoming. We always move toward what we’re focusing on.

The key is Verse 7: *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

His peace will keep our thoughts and guard our hearts and minds.

**Group Discussion Questions:**

1. How does having a thankful heart help with anxiety and worry?

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2. How does prayer affect your thankfulness? Can you give us an example?

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3. Do you think it is possible to have a heart of thankfulness in all circumstances? Why or Why not?

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4. What do you think you take for granted the most in life? How do you think you can change this?

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## Preparing For The Holidays

### Thankful In Tough Times – Week 2

#### **Habakkuk 3:17-19**

*<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls— <sup>18</sup> Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup> The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.*

Life can be hard and sometimes it is hard to find something to be thankful for. Yet our opening text says it is possible.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:** *<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

This Scripture says it is God's will for us to be thankful in every situation.

Habakkuk vowed to thank God anyway! If Paul teaches us that we can be thankful in every situation, and if Habakkuk can stay thankful in the midst of his situation, then there is hope for us.

#### 1. Thank God He Doesn't Change

In our opening text (verse 17) we see that economic conditions may change, but God doesn't change.

**Hebrews 13:8:** *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*  
**Malachi 3:6:** *I am the Lord, I do not change*

The things that Habakkuk mentions are all things that are vital to Israel's economy. Yet in the middle of it all Habakkuk says he thanks God anyway.

The Scriptures indicate that economic conditions are prone to change. In fact, economic conditions may change but God is always the same.

#### 2. Thank God Even In Trials

Everything about life is fragile. Life itself is uncertain. The only people who don't have problems are those in the cemetery. If you have problems it simply means you are alive.

**Psalms 34:19:** *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.*

**John 16:33:** *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

**Tribulation** – pressure, oppression, stress, anguish, adversity, affliction, crushing, squeezing, squashing, distress.

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18:** <sup>17</sup> *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,* <sup>18</sup> *while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

The apostle Paul called his problems light afflictions. He said they last only for a moment. He was saying that they are subject to change.

### **Three Things to Remember:**

#### **1. The Lord is our Strength**

**Psalm 27:1:** *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

**Isaiah 40:31:** *But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

**Philippians 4:13:** *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

#### **2. God is for me**

**Romans 8:31:** *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

**Hebrews 13:5:** *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

#### **3. God is Always up to the occasion**

**Jeremiah 32:27:** *Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?*

**Numbers 23:19:** *God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*

Friends, let's remember **1 Thessalonians 5:18:** *In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* So no matter what the occasion brings, I'm going to thank God anyway!

**Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Life can be hard at times, yet Scripture tells us we can still be thankful. How do you remain thankful when life is hard?

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2. Even bad news can seem like good news if you keep the right perspective. What do you do to keep your perspective right in the midst of bad news?

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3. Of the three things to remember when trouble comes (the Lord is our strength, God is for me, and God is always up to the occasion), which do you struggle with the most? How can we help you?

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4. What are you most thankful for this Thanksgiving and why?

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**Happy Thanksgiving!**

## Preparing For The Holidays A Gift Worth Giving – Week 3

**Matthew 2:1-12:** *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” <sup>7</sup> Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” <sup>9</sup> When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. <sup>11</sup> And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.*

The beauty of Christmas is that it’s a profound message, yet so simply given.

Truths for daily living that we learn from the wise men:

### 1. These Gifts were Personally Given

These were wealthy people. They were from another country. They could have sent the gift. I guess I’m impressed by the fact that they really felt that they were on a mission and they personally wanted to bring these gifts to the Christ child.

### 2. These Gifts were Properly Given

It was more than just gold, Frankincense and Myrrh - it was a gift with worship, adoration, glory, honor and praise to Jesus.

### **A Grace Gift:**

The best way I can describe a grace gift is; it’s non-repayable. The gift of salvation is a grace gift. There’s no way I could ever repay.

An example of a grace gift would be a letter or a card you receive from one of

your children expressing how much you mean to them. There is absolutely, no way that you could ever give a gift back for the gift that you received.

A. It's impossible to measure the cost of this gift.

I don't know what we've done with Christmas, but we need to turn this thing around. We need to quit running down to the department store every time we think of somebody. We need to begin to pass on some grace gifts that will really last.

B. They're usually non-material.

1) Togetherness gift.

2) It could be a service gift.

It's doing something for someone that they could never repay you for.

**Luke 14:12-14:** *Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

The greatest gifts I've ever received are not gifts that have a price tag on them; they are grace gifts.



**Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Christmas for many has become all about the gifts given and received. How can we redeem Christmas?

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2. How could the giving of a Grace Gift change how we celebrate Christmas?

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3. Give an example of a Grace Gift that you will bless someone with this Christmas:

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4. Offer an idea for a Grace Gift project that our small group could be involved in to make a difference this Christmas.

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## Preparing For The Holidays A Gift Worth Giving – Week 4

**Matthew 2:1-12:** Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” <sup>7</sup> Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” <sup>9</sup> When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. <sup>11</sup> And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

### 5 Things the Wise Men Teach Us About Giving:

#### 1. Give an unexpected gift to someone.

The wise men teach us to give an unexpected gift to someone. No one is going to expect a wise man to give this gift. They're not Jews. Nobody would have ever said that Magi would come and work their way, literally, weeks and months to the place where Jesus was born to bring a gift -- no one expected that.

The best gifts are unexpected gifts. Maybe there has been someone that has touched your life in a wonderful way this year. Maybe God is tugging on your heart to do something for that person that they would never expect.

#### 2. Give a gift with genuine joy.

Richard Foster a well-known author wrote, "Giving with a glad and generous heart has a way of routing out the tough old miser within us. Even the poor need to know that they can give. Just the very act of letting go of money or some other treasure does something within us. That something is it destroys the demon, greed."

### **3. Give a gift that is personal.**

They gave this gift personally. They could have sent someone else on the long journey, but they decided to go themselves. What makes a grace gift great is that it was given personally.

### **4. Give a gift that will last.**

The gift that they gave that year is a story that has been told for two thousand years. People still know the gift that the wise men gave. Give a gift that will last.

There are two gifts that you can give at Christmas that will last forever:

- 1) The gift of good memories.
- 2) There's another gift that will last and that's a Godly heritage.

### **5. Give that gift now.**

Samuel Johnson said, "He who waits to do a great deed of good all at once will never do anything."

Keep short accounts. By that I mean don't be one of those kind of people that say that some day you're going to do something, some day you're going to love somebody, some day you're going to give something to someone, some day you're going to help someone. Do it today and don't delay.

**Group Discussion Questions:**

1. In this lesson we learned five things from the wise men about giving. Which one impacted you the most and why?

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2. Which one do you struggle with the most and why?

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3. How has this lesson changed the way you see gift giving?

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4. What will you do different now that you have heard this lesson?

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**Merry Christmas!**