

THE FIRST 15

Wednesday, November 27, 2024

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Today is Wednesday, November 27 and during the week of Thanksgiving we are exploring what the Bible says about gratitude and thankfulness.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed and Holy Lord God, in the morning my heart sings of Your faithfulness. I welcome Your gentle presence and rest in Your goodness. I breathe slowly and deeply, quieting the voices of my busy mind and listening for the message You have for me today. I pause to remember and count my many blessings. I rejoice with gratitude for Your steadfast love and faithfulness. You have given me so much and I am filled with thanksgiving. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11

REFLECTION

Today's scripture is from the introduction to Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, a vibrant city in northeastern Greece. Philippi was a persecuted church. This church was composed of a group of Christians who not only experienced opposition to their faith, but were in danger and even under threat of death. Philippi was the first Christian community in Europe. Paul traveled there with Silas around 49 A.D. and joined a group of Jewish women who were praying to God outside the gates of the city near the river.

When Paul preached the Gospel to them, a woman named Lydia heard the good news of Jesus Christ for the first time and converted to Christianity. Lydia was a wealthy widow, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a business woman, a leader in the community as well as a person of financial means. Lydia's baptism is considered to be the first in Europe. She began the first Christian church in Europe which met in her home. Almost immediately the fledgling congregation encountered resistance and in the book of Acts chapter sixteen, Paul and Silas were captured by the townspeople, stripped, beaten with rods, and imprisoned. After their release they left the church in care of Lydia and continued on their missionary journeys.

For four years the little house church grew under Lydia's preaching, teaching and leadership. The small faith community continued to thrive and grow, despite the persecution by others in the town and the dangers they encountered. Paul wrote his letter to them and in it he acknowledges their sufferings. He wrote the letter from jail, his own imprisonment in Rome. It is a letter that

offers courage and hope in the midst of trials, persecution and suffering. It is a letter that inspires the listener to have courage and joy even in times of difficulty.

Paul begins his letter, "I thank my God every time I remember you." He remembers the people he met in Philippi. Many strangers became dear friends. They ate together, talked together, worshiped together and grew a community of vibrant faith. Paul likely stayed in their homes and knew their family members. He thanked God for every single one of them.

That is our call to thanksgiving today - to remember the people in our life and thank God for every single one of them. Perhaps today it would be a good exercise to make a list, write down names in a journal or your notes app. Include everyone you can think of, family members, coworkers, neighbors, friends and church members. Make a big long list, take some time to remember them and thank God for them. I know a man who has the habit of writing down the names of everyone he interacted with during the course of the day and before bedtime he prays over the list of names, thanking God. I know a woman who prays while she folds the laundry and makes the beds, thanking God for each family member as she holds their piece of clothing in her hands or steps into their room.

Thanking God for the people in our life helps us see them from a new perspective and appreciate them the way God does. And just as Paul ended his letter to the Philippians with a prayer, this is also my prayer for you - "that your love for others may abound more and more. Amen."

Ask: When can I spend a few minutes today to thank God for the people in my life? How might pausing to be thankful and adopting a posture of gratitude change my relationship with a particular person?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy and blessed Lord, thank You for the many special people in my life. I am blessed with life-giving relationships and my heart is full of gratitude and thanksgiving. Thank You for beginning a good work in me. I am confident that Your grace will carry it on to completion. May my love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. May I be able to discern what is best with a heart of wisdom. Through Your grace may I be made pure and blameless filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to You all glory, honor and praise. Amen.