

Discipleship 2008
Building a Prayer of Thanksgiving

The *L & S Jesus Christ*, which is a DiscipleShip, is ready for boarding. All aboard, who are going aboard. As disciples of Jesus, we embrace and assist in spreading the teachings of Jesus. We continue our year of building discipleship with a third lesson on prayer, as we build a Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Prayer, that time when we focus all our thoughts on the One True God, Creator of all that was, is, and will be, remembering God's goodness and mercy, God's strength and authority. Prayer, a time when we speak openly and honestly to God, while taking time to listen to God, to wait patiently for God's word of instruction. Prayer, whether in private or public, a time when we can be with God, seeking God's perfect will for our lives.

We are using the acronym ACTS, which stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. We are using it to help give us a richer and deeper understanding of prayer and our need for prayer. Just as the Apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing, we have been encouraging each other to pray. Throughout the last two weeks, many have been gathering to be in prayer. I give thanks to God for their witness and testimony. And I pray more of you will continue to join in the opportunity of growing in Discipleship.

Two weeks ago, we defined adoration as an act of worship, as profound love and highest regard. Though we may never come to fully understand the magnitude of all that God is, we can offer God words of praise and adoration. We can spend time in prayer allowing ourselves to offer love back to the One from where our love comes.

Last week we talked about confession. We learned confession is more than the public recitation of a creed or statement of faith. It is the living out of that belief in our everyday lives, remembering no Christian should be called a hypocrite. When that time comes and God checks in on us, we want to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

We discussed how confession is an act of disclosing our sin before God, admitting responsibility for having wronged God, or any part of God's creation. We discussed how other Christian denominations, Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran and even the Wesleyan tradition of United Methodists teach and practice confession.

We learned other faith traditions, Judaism, Buddhists, Islam and Hindu, all teach and understand the need of confession, the need to admit one's wrong doings.

As part of pondering the sinful state of the world, I asked what might happen if all humanity spent more time in confession, and especially those who abide by any one of these faith understandings. I concluded, if nothing else, we would have less time to sin.

Confession is Scripture based and taught as part of our understanding of who we are as Disciples of Christ. Last week in worship, as a congregation, we took time to offer silent confession. Some of us spent time at the kneeling rail. When we pray with a broken and contrite heart, knowing the soul is unable to fix itself, seeking to honestly repent of our sin and be reconciled to God, to neighbor, to self, God in Christ Jesus is faithful to forgive. Last week as we studied confession, we reminded ourselves of our confession . . .

Jesus the Christ is the only one who paid the price for our sin. As Disciples of Christ, let us continue to pray without ceasing for God's grace, that the world be reconciled to God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God.

And speaking of thanks, this week we continue to build on our understanding of DiscipleShip as we discuss thanksgiving. And what is thanksgiving?

November 24th might be one response. Although for Christians, thanksgiving should not be reserved for an American holiday. For who God is, for what God has given us, for what God has done, for what God can do, giving thanks to God should be done every day. So, as we have done before, let's define the word.

Let us start by breaking it down. Thanks and giving.

Thanks can be defined as gratitude, "grateful feelings or thoughts." Thanks has a deep sense of appreciation. As when someone, having received something good says, "My heart is full of thanks." Thanks can be defined as "an expression of gratitude,"ⁱ as when someone sends a thank you note. Thanks, gratitude, is appreciating something good, a gift, an opportunity, a favor, a lesson on confession.

The word giving is a little more complex. It comes from the word give, which can be understood and used in many different ways: To pass, to pledge, to confer. "To place in the hands of; pass: *Give me the scissors*. To offer in good faith; pledge: *Give me your word*. To bestow, especially officially; confer: *The Bill of Rights gives us freedom of speech*."ⁱⁱ Too bad the Bill of Rights didn't include the concept of speaking in love. When I did my research on the word give, there were at least 50 different expressions on how the word could be used.

For our purposes today, let us define giving as "making a gift of."ⁱⁱⁱ A gift can be defined as "something that is bestowed voluntarily and without compensation."^{iv} Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm going to give you this car for \$56,000." Now, they may think they're giving you a good deal, but they are not gifting you anything. They are selling you something. That is not a gift. Gift giving is something that is bestowed voluntarily and without compensation.

Now, if we combine thanks and giving, we might come up with a definition for thanksgiving something like *voluntarily bestowing an expression of gratitude without expecting restitution, or willfully offering a demonstration of appreciation looking for nothing in return.*

Sounds pretty good, a little wordy maybe, but good. And after sharing words of adoration for your God and openly and honestly confessing your sin with and from a broken and contrite heart, can you imagine a prayer of thanks with that understanding, *O loving and gracious God, I kneel before you, knowing my sin is not hidden from you. And I voluntarily and willfully offer this demonstration of appreciation, this expression of gratitude looking for nothing in return, without expecting restitution.*

Now, I know we believe God can understand even the most complex thoughts of our hearts and minds. But if we were to offer God a prayer of thanksgiving like that, I have to wonder if God would say, "What! Child, you need to get real, fast."

In our time of prayer, in our time of reverent petition and honest confession to God, when we come to a time of giving thanks, we may indeed want to make a long list of all the things we are grateful for. When it comes time to give thanks, with honesty and humility, a deep understanding of thanksgiving, for what God has done for us is necessary . . .

. . . a simple thank you will do.

O God, we give you thanks for all that you have given us; the life we live, the air we breathe, water we drink, food we eat, friends we know, family we have, gifts we use. We give you thanks for being our God, for offering us new life in the gift of salvation through your son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And we give you thanks for the opportunity to remember his gift as we come to celebrate a Great Thanksgiving. Amen.

Benediction - Thanksgiving should not be reserved for an American holiday. Giving thanks to God for who God is, for what God has given us, for what God has done, for what God can do, should be done every day. This week as you go from this place, build on your understanding of prayer through the Adoration, Confession and Thanksgiving. Amen.

ⁱ <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/thanks>

ⁱⁱ http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/give:_ylt=AIAA13PauW206gRJGPqA3XOsgMMF

ⁱⁱⁱ http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/give:_ylt=AIAA13PauW206gRJGPqA3XOsgMMF

^{iv} http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/gift:_ylt=AkPA13E4Ym2WAbDNsAAWlr2sgMMF