

DALE AND SANDY LARSEN

# GRATITUDE

*Giving Thanks in Life's Ups and Downs*



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# GRATITUDE GOES BOTH WAYS

*Philippians 4:10-20*

**I**n her **Ask Amy** advice column, Amy Dickinson wonders if our society has a “gratitude deficit.” Recipients of wedding gifts, birthday gifts, and Christmas gifts fail to send thank-you notes or even thank-you texts or phone calls. Amy wonders, “Do people lack the emotional tools to understand the connection between receiving something (a gift, a kindness, a nice gesture) and expressing their thanks? Can people not comprehend the joy of connection when they close the loop by saying, ‘Thank you’?”\*

Even in a Roman prison, the apostle Paul had no gratitude deficit. He closed the loop with a warm letter to the Christians of Philippi thanking them for their generous gift and encouraging them in their faith.

**Group Discussion.** How is your gratitude affected when you receive a gift (whether material items, physical help, a special favor, or anything else) when it is given to you by

- a close friend?
- a family member?
- someone in less fortunate circumstances than you?
- your church?
- an anonymous donor?

What do you think makes the difference, if there is one?

**Personal Reflection.** How do you react when someone thanks you for a gift? Consider how you respond both inwardly (feelings) and outwardly (words and actions).

The church in Philippi was planted after Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Now he is imprisoned, probably in Rome (see Philip-  
pians 1:12-14). His colleague Epaphroditus has delivered generous gifts to Paul from the Philippian Christians. Paul writes to thank them and to encourage them in their faith. *Read Philippians 4:10-20.*

1. What words or phrases would you use to describe Paul’s outlook on life in this passage?

2. When have you shared Paul’s outlook on life, or something like it, and why?

3. Apparently there had been a gap in the Philippians’ material support for Paul (vv. 10-11). What is his attitude toward this interruption?

4. Paul said that he could be content in all extremities of circumstances, good and bad. How does he let us in on his “secret” of contentment (vv. 12-13)?

5. In verse 14, Paul returns to his gratitude for the Philippians. How have they proved themselves faithful supporters of Paul’s ministry (vv. 14-16)?

6. Paul tells the Philippian Christians, “Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account” (v. 17). What do you think he means by “credited to your account”?

7. Paul describes the Philippians' gifts in almost effusive terms (v. 18). When have you thanked someone in terms like these, and why?

8. Why can the Philippians' gift to Paul also be considered "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (v. 18)?

9. Paul brings his letter toward its close with profound assurance of God's provision not only for him but also for his letter's recipients (vv. 19-20). How might his assurance have affected the Philippian church?

10. When you have given generously and sacrificially, whether of material things or in other ways, how has the gratitude of others affected you?

11. Whom can you bless by expressing your gratitude, even if it is overdue? Make plans to express your thanks to that person (or group) this week. You might wish to use Paul's expression of thanks as a guide.



*Pray that expressing sincere thanks, both to other people and to the Lord, will become your regular habit.*

#### NOW OR LATER

Study Philippians 1:1-10, in which Paul tells the Philippian Christians, "I thank my God every time I remember you," expresses confidence of God's working in their lives, and offers heartfelt prayers for their growth in Christ.

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\*Amy Dickinson, "Ingratitude Has Reached Epidemic Proportions," ArcaMax, October 1, 2019, [www.arcamax.com/healthandspirit/lifeadvice/askamy/s-2279043?fs](http://www.arcamax.com/healthandspirit/lifeadvice/askamy/s-2279043?fs).

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