

WE TELL OUR STORIES



PRACTICING GRATITUDE by Amanda Sorena

In early 2018, during our Tuesday Moms Bible Study, Julie Ellerbrock handed out color slips of paper wrapped with a bright gold bow and issued us all a challenge – write down your daily gratitudes and put them in a jar. On New Year's Eve, read them aloud as a family. I have always liked the *idea* of practicing gratitude daily, but had been terrible at follow through. I vowed to be different this year. I bought a jar and set it on the kitchen counter with the hopes that mere proximity would serve as an adequate reminder. I'll admit I struggled some in the beginning. I would consider scribbling being grateful for "family," or "coffee," or "beautiful days." Not bad, but not exactly introspective. I decided to push myself to dig a bit deeper past the general stuff to the real nitty-gritty, everyday moments we often forget to mark as the good stuff.

It wasn't that suddenly there were more aspects in our lives to be grateful for. The hard stuff still happened. I still yelled more than I wanted to. The laundry didn't go away. Dinners still needed to be made, bills paid, and deadlines met. If anything, I learned that when you stop treating gratitude as some sort of special thing reserved for holidays and big events, and start looking for it in your everyday, there is a perspective shift that is profound and meaningful. Everyday, no matter what, there is always something worth writing down. Trust me.

On New Year's Eve, we sat down as a family and took turns reading the colored slips of paper aloud to one another. I could see a trend as we read through all of the items. Big things still made the list, but the little, everyday things seemed more striking. Our son staying in his bed all night after weeks of sneaking into our room at 3 a.m. Dance parties in the kitchen. Dinners with friends. Singing along to the radio in the car. Kids taking tamiflu with no complaints.

St. Luke's has declared 2019 the "Year of Gratitude" and is encouraging all of us to write down a note of thanks each day. Consider this your own personal invitation to grab a jar and fill it up. I promise at the end of 2019, you'll be grateful you did.



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We have a church app! Search *St Lukes UMC Houston* to download from the app store.

ST. LUKE'S FIVE HABITS

WE STUDY THE BIBLE



1 Thessalonians 5:15-22 ¹⁵ See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

Sermon Notes

The Always Imperatives

First in the Series, *The Year of Gratitude*

January 6, 2019

Dr. Tom Pace preaching

1. The impact of gratitude
2. The objects of gratitude
3. The cultivation of gratitude (the gratitude thanksgiving cycle)
4. 365 intentional expressions

Write 365 thank you notes or other expressions of gratitude, one each day, offered for what someone has done or who they are. These expressions should be beyond expected common courtesy.

Possible next best steps for you

- Begin writing thank you notes today!
- Sign up for the book study *Choosing Gratitude: Your Journey to Joy* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss. To sign up, visit the Connection Center or go to StLukesMethodist.org/groupfinder

Key Verse for the Week

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

Do you have a disposition of gratitude, or do you have to work at it? What do you hope a discipline of thanksgiving will bring about in your own life?

WE PRAY

Sunday, January 6

Dear Lord, as this new year begins let me look back at last year and celebrate all my accomplishments. And when I remember the hard times, disappointments, and hardships, let me see where you were with me and grew me. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. I am now filled with new hope knowing that you will be with me through it all. Amen.

Monday, January 7

O Lord, how good and pleasant it is when your people live together in unity! Heal the divisions in our city; bind up the rifts in our country; bring us together as one people. Amen.

Tuesday, January 8

Thank you, God, for the joy we feel when surrounded by family. The time we have with each member is fleeting. Help us to cherish each and every moment that we are able to spend with loved ones. We praise you for those opportunities! Amen.

Wednesday, January 9

Dear God, with a new year comes new opportunities. Open our

hearts to be ready to share your power and your love with others. Nudge us with the Holy Spirit to be ready to respond and share our faith. Strengthen our awareness of the needs of others and lead us daily to serve. Amen.

Thursday, January 10

Lord, we pray for those who are struggling with addiction; may they find freedom from their struggles in 2019. God give them the strength to seek the help that they need and the courage to face their addiction. Amen.

Friday, January 11

Father God, I pray that you would help me with my ever growing anxiety; give me peace about the things that I cannot control. Help others who struggle with anxiety as well so that we can face tomorrow. In your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, January 12

Lord, we give thanks for all the blessings and abundance bestowed upon us in this country. And, we pray that all children are not hungry anywhere in the world and that we in our country learn to respect each other.

Service of Prayer and Healing

First Wednesday of every month | February 6 | 7-8 p.m. | Chapel

Rev. Thomas Harper will lead this time of prayer and communion where we ask God for spiritual and physical healing for ourselves or a loved one.

So many ways to pray...

- ♦ Write your prayer request on one of the leaves found in the pew rack
- ♦ Visit the interactive prayer wall: StLukesMethodist.org/prayer
- ♦ Call the prayer line: 713-402-5088

Fervent Prayer Partners: Do you have something that is weighing heavy on your heart? Are you in need of one-on-one confidential and consistent prayer? A Fervent Prayer Partner is a prayer team member who will communicate and pray with you via email as you go through this difficult time. Contact Rev. Thomas Harper at tharper@stlukesmethodist.org.

We are here for you! If you or someone you know needs prayer, a hospital visit or contact from a minister, call Rev. Bill Denham at 713-402-5156.

WE MAKE FRIENDS

Tapestry Players presents *Little Women*

Friday-Saturday, January 11-12 | 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, January 13 | 2:30 p.m.
Come and see the musical adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic 1869 semi-autobiographical novel, a Civil War story of love and family. Directed by David Gow with musical direction by Sid Davis. General admission tickets \$20 / Student tickets \$15 with valid ID. Purchase online or at the door. TapestryPlayers.org/littlewomen

GriefShare: Spring 2019 | Tuesdays beginning January 15 | 6:30 p.m.

Hines Baker Room | Led by Reverend Bill Denham

Going through the valley of grief is a difficult journey, but working on and leaning into the grief is worth the investment. Cost \$35

Register: Shelley Quillin 713-402-5033 or squillin@stlukesmethodist.org

DivorceCare: Spring 2019 | Tuesdays beginning January 15 | 6:30 p.m. | ES309

DivorceCare is a friendly, caring group of people who will walk alongside you and help you face challenges and move toward rebuilding your life after divorce. \$35. Email Susan Silvus: ssilvus@gmail.com.

Book Study | *Choosing Gratitude: Your Journey to Joy* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Sundays, January 20-February 24 | 4-5 p.m. | ES306

Led by Rev. Katie Montgomery Mears

True gratitude is not an incidental ingredient in the Christian's life. It's a crucial one. It's a grace-infused commitment each of us chooses... and it's totally worth it! We will read and discuss, "Choosing Gratitude: Your Journey to Joy" and be challenged and equipped to live a life based on thankfulness for the freedom Christ has provided. Cost \$10. Register: StLukesMethodist.org/groupfinder

The Joy of Discipline: Discovering intimacy with God through inward spiritual practices | Sundays, January 20-February 24 | 4-5:30 p.m. | ES301

Led by Rev. Thomas Harper

Join us for six weeks as we study, explore, and practice four inward disciplines so that you may know the joy and freedom of a more balanced life and closer relationship with our creator. Register: StLukesMethodist.org/groupfinder

WE GIVE OURSELVES AWAY

in generosity and service.

Stephen Ministry training classes begin today

Stephen Ministers provide high-quality, confidential, Christ-centered care to people who are hurting. Is God calling you to serve as a Stephen Minister? Think about it.

Pray about it. 50 hours of professional training is provided.

Contact Rev. Bill Denham: 713-402-5156.



Gratitude is the Christian response to God. It is the primary motivator for the life of a Christian. It is the flavor, the aroma, the glow that pervades the way we can live each day. But gratitude is not just something one feels; gratitude must be practiced. The more we practice gratitude, the more we experience it in our hearts. And the more we feel it inside, the more we express it in the way we live. So during 2019, the folks of St. Luke's will be practicing gratitude throughout the year. We will hear four sermons on gratitude sprinkled throughout the seasons. We will share testimonies on gratitude, and we will practice it by challenging each member of the congregation to write 365 thank you notes. Be sure to pick up a "starter kit" as you leave the Sanctuary this morning.