

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

# The DEVO

MARCH 22 - 26, 2021

LENTEN SERIES 2021  
FEB 21 - APR 4

# New Rhythms



# MONDAY

## 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

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We are to “*give thanks in all circumstances.*” This includes the ordinary things of life which we so easily take for granted. For instance, I had two friends who were in good health who died in their sleep by heart attacks. Now, when I wake up in the morning, I say, “Thank you, Lord, that I am alive!” I had another friend who was seriously afflicted with arthritis. Before he could get out of bed in the morning, he had to go through a two-hour stretching routine. Now, when I jump out of bed in the morning, I say, “Thank you, Lord, that I can easily get out of bed!” When our house heating system broke down, we had to go two days without heat. Now, I often say, “Thank you, Lord, that our heater is working.” Another time, I was moved to tears while vacuuming our living room carpet when I said to myself, “Thank you, Lord, that I have a house to clean!” To give thanks in all circumstances means to not overlook the ordinary things of life.

Giving thanks in all situations will help to change our focus. Instead of concentrating on our troubles, thanksgiving redirects our attention to God. For instance, a little over a year ago, my wife was experiencing stroke symptoms which required hospitalization. In the emergency room within a short period of time, she was given an EKG, X-ray, blood work, and a brain scan. I was very grateful for the quick attention that she received. Since she had to stay overnight, I was grateful for the large attractive room where she was placed. Then, our three sons, their wives, and seven grandchildren all arrived at the same time. As I looked around

the room filled with our family of fifteen, I was stirred to thank the Lord for giving us such a loving and caring family. Instead of dwelling on my wife's stroke, thanksgiving changed my focus to the Lord.

## QUESTIONS

In the midst of the ordinary activities of daily life or when going through trials, where is your focus?

# Lenten Practice

Take your journal or a sheet of paper and sit with God for 10 to 15 minutes and ask Him to show you some ways that He has shown up in your life and circumstances this last year. Write these down and then spend some time thanking God.

# TUESDAY

## Philippians 1:12-18

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We are to have thankful hearts even in painful times. Paul's imprisonment resulted in the believers becoming bolder in preaching the Gospel. His pain brought more gain for the Lord. The Lord often allows trials to come into our lives in order to advance His cause. Therefore, we can be thankful in troubled times even when we do not see the immediate benefits.

The Vietnam War is one example; it resulted in many deaths. What good came out of it? Vietnamese "boat-people" fled to surrounding countries where many heard the Gospel and were saved. When I was in Hanoi, Vietnam, 2018, I was teaching a marriage seminar with Vietnamese pastoral couples. Out of the fifteen pastors who were attending, six of them were saved in refugee camps in Hong Kong. Multiply this picture throughout Vietnam. Today in the churches in Vietnam, there are those who were saved when they were refugees from the war. The pain of the war resulted in gain for the Kingdom. Therefore, we can be thankful even in troubled times.

Another example is Laos, a Communist-controlled country where Christians are severely persecuted. I was teaching in a Bible school in Asia where ten Christian leaders from Laos were students. When I asked, "Have any of you been imprisoned for your faith?" Three out of the ten students from Laos raised their hands. One man was impris-

oned for a year. A woman was jailed twice—once for one month for conducting a Christian funeral and a second time for one year for leading a Christmas service. The third man was incarcerated for twelve years. During his imprisonment he led several to the Lord and disciplined them. When these new disciples were released from prison, they went out and planted churches. The pastor was using the prison for evangelism, discipleship, and church planting.

An older Laotian pastor told me that Christianity has grown faster under Communism than before. The Lord allowed the Communist takeover to advance the Gospel. We can be thankful in trying times because God is at work advancing His cause.

## QUESTIONS

What can help you have a thankful heart during your difficult times?

# Lenten Practice

Take your journal or a sheet of paper and sit with God for 10 to 15 minutes today. Reflect on God's character. Write down as many words as come to mind that describe the greatness and excellence of God. Thank Him for how these bring hope into your life.

# WEDNESDAY

## 1 Peter 4:12-19

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We are to give thanks in all circumstances, even in times of suffering. We are not to be surprised when trials come; instead, rejoice that we participate in the sufferings of Christ. In Acts 5 the apostles were arrested, flogged, and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus. They rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Christ. We are to give thanks and rejoice when we have to suffer for Christ because we can participate in His sufferings.

Esther Ahn Kim, a teacher in Korea during World War II, provides another example of rejoicing in sufferings. During the Japanese occupation of Korea, she was imprisoned for six years by the Japanese for her Christian faith. Before a large crowd she had refused to bow down to worship the Shinto gods; she was arrested and imprisoned for six years. However, her determination and fortitude never diminished. She won many of her fellow prisoners to Christ by her example.

In Esther Ahn Kim's autobiography, *If I Perish*, she writes, "For us, it was a joyous blessing to have been born in such a place and for such a time. I realized that it was because of this persecution that I was able to truly experience God's presence and trust His promises. (53) ... I was going to live each day and each hour joyfully, creating fun and being happy that everything was a plan from God. (122) ... I looked forward to being persecuted and tortured for His sake as a trial of my faith. (145) ... I had been living for this purpose. My love for my Savior was finally going to be proved. (157) ... Lord, I long to die for You, because I love You more than

anything or anyone else in all the world. (159) ... How I would thank God for this suffering. (160) After five years in prison and facing execution, she wrote, "I had no regrets for my long imprisonment. Life had been wonderful! Death would be even more marvelous!" (243) Esther Ahn Kim rejoiced in her sufferings.

## QUESTIONS

What reasons for rejoicing can you find for the present challenges you are facing?

# Lenten Practice

Today find someone to unexpectedly gift with a coffee, gift card, flowers or thank you note? What sorts of things tend to encourage your thankfulness: praise songs, worship, time with friends, giving and receiving gifts? Plan ways of incorporating these into your life on a regular basis.

# THURSDAY

## Romans 5:1-5

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We rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character and hope; therefore, we give thanks even for our painful times. One example of how sufferings producing good is how God uses conflicts in marriage to build a stronger marriage. Conflicts bring problems into the light and help couples face their issues instead of denying or avoiding them. Conflicts provide an opportunity to break old, ineffective patterns. Conflicts help couples better appreciate the differences between themselves. Conflicts give a couple opportunity to extend grace to each other, to express care, empathy and love. Conflicts can help restore unity and oneness. Therefore, we can rejoice and give thanks for marriage conflicts.

An example of trials producing perseverance and hope can be seen in the life of James O. Frazer, a pioneer missionary to China, 1886-1938. As a newly-arrived missionary to China in 1908 at the age of 22 with China Inland Missions, he pioneered evangelism among the Lizu tribe in the province of Yunnan. After eight years of labor, he saw scant fruit. The few converts he had quickly reverted back to demon worship. He was discouraged and planned to write a letter to his field supervisor requesting a transfer to another field. He decided to make one last trip to say goodbye to his Lizu contacts. During this final farewell tour, he discovered that many Lizus in several villages had become Christians. There were even new converts in some villages where he never visited. After seeing this miraculous harvest, he decided to stay. (Eileen Frazer Crossman)



Frazer labored for twenty-eight years in China; at age fifty-two, he died of malaria and was buried there, leaving his wife and three small children. During his years of ministry among the Lizus, he created the Lizu alphabet and translated portions of the New Testament. He planted many churches and taught them to be self-supporting. Today, over ninety percent of the Lizus are Christians. After eight years of scant results, God brought forth much fruit through Frazer's labors. God uses sufferings to produce perseverance. (Crossman)

## QUESTIONS

What benefits can you see coming out of the trying challenges you are facing?

# Lenten Practice

Take your journal or a sheet of paper and sit with God for 10 to 15 minutes. Note all the "abundances" God has given you. Next to each abundance write what it means to you to have a God who interacts and intervenes in your life. Say thank you to God every hour today for at least one thing, telling God what it has meant to you.

# FRIDAY

## James 1:2-4

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In everything we are to give thanks because we know that God will bring blessings out of even the pains of life. Therefore, we are to rejoice when facing trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces perseverance, which in turn leads to maturity in our faith.

Adoniram Judson, pioneer missionary to Burma, 1813-1850, provides a good example of one who had to persevere for many years before seeing fruit from his labors. He suffered many painful losses in his thirty-seven years in Burma. He was imprisoned for seventeen months, where at night he had to sleep with his feet tied to a bamboo pole elevated above the ground to prevent his possible escape. He had to labor perseveringly for six years before he saw his first baptism. (Vance Christie)

Besides not seeing results in his ministry, he suffered numerous grave family losses. His wife and three children died from tropical diseases. He remarried and had eight children through his second wife. Heartbreak again stalked his footsteps; his second wife and three of their eight children died from tropical diseases. He married a third wife and had two more children through her. Again, sorrow overshadowed him; his third wife and one child died from diseases. How could a person endure such a chain of heart-rending losses? (Christie)

Judson persevered for nineteen years before he began to see the Spirit moving in a powerful way. Strangers would come to his door and inquire whether he was the man who could tell them how to find God. Many Burmese were receiving Christ, and churches were being planted. He translated the Bible into Burmese, which is the translation still in use today in Myanmar (formerly called Burma). He laid the foundation for the Baptist denomination in Burma. In 2001, there were 3700 Baptist churches with 618,000 members. His perseverance despite crushing obstacles allowed him to complete the task for which God had called him. (Christie)

## QUESTIONS

The challenges that you are facing may be God's preparation for you to complete the tasks for which He has called you. How can you become more alert to what He is doing in your life?

## Lenten Practice

Write a letter of thanks to someone who has touched your life in the past year, the past month, the past week. Be mindful of your tendency to make comparisons that result in feelings of dissatisfaction or entitlement. Practice abstaining from comparative statements. Ask someone to bring it to your attention when you do. When you notice yourself doing this, purposefully take a breath and give thanks to God.

## Sources:

- Esther Ahn Kim, *If I Perish* (Chicago: Moody Publishing, 1977).
- Eileen Frazer Crossman, *Mountain Rain: A Biography of James O. Frazer, Pioneer Missionary of China* (Highlands Ranch, CO: Davidson Publishing, 2001).
- Vance Christie, *Adoniram Judson: Devoted for Life* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013).
- Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

