

SESSION 1

**Open Your Eyes to
God's Abundance**

Welcome

What is your view of thankfulness? Do you see it as, “Some people are just born thankful—and others aren’t”? Or maybe, “Thankfulness arises from blessing—the more you’re blessed, the more thankful you’ll be”? The truth is, thankfulness is a skill you can develop and improve on with practice. It begins with asking the Spirit of God to open the eyes of your heart, and you, in turn, pausing regularly to notice and reflect on God’s goodness and faithfulness in your life.

Many people choose to view life through the lens of deprivation, keeping a mental inventory of everything they don’t have and worrying that there won’t be enough for them. But a life with Jesus means looking through a different lens—a wide-angle one—where you notice everything you *do* have and increasingly learn to trust that God is actively providing for you, just as He has promised.

In this session, you will see the difference it makes to choose to view life through the lens of God’s abundance and to start living with His goodness in mind.

Connect

If you are doing this study with a group and any of the members don’t know each other, take a few minutes to first introduce yourselves. Then use the following questions to begin to connect with the session theme—and with each other:

1. *What is one thing for which you’re thankful to God?*

2. *How challenging would it be for you to come up with ten things for which you’re thankful? Why do you think it’s easy or hard for you?*

Experience

Read each of these devotions from *Jesus Calling* and then answer the questions that follow.

Bring Me the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Take nothing for granted, not even the rising of the sun. Before Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, thankfulness was as natural as breathing. Satan’s temptation involved pointing Eve to the one thing that was forbidden her. The garden was filled with luscious, desirable fruits, but Eve focused on the one fruit she couldn’t have rather than being thankful for the many good things freely available. This negative focus darkened her mind, and she succumbed to temptation.

When you focus on what you don’t have or on situations that displease you, your mind also becomes darkened. You take for granted life, salvation, sunshine, flowers, and countless other gifts from Me. You look for what is wrong and refuse to enjoy life until that is “fixed.” When you approach Me with thanksgiving, the Light of My Presence pours into you, transforming you through and through. *Walk in the Light* with Me by practicing the discipline of thanksgiving.

—FROM *JESUS CALLING*, APRIL 6

3. What was Eve's mistake that shifted her away from practicing thankfulness?

Three horizontal lines for writing.

4. What's wrong with focusing on what you don't have?

Three horizontal lines for writing.

5. What ideas about fostering greater thankfulness in your life do you gain from this reading?

Three horizontal lines for writing.

6. Name one practice you can incorporate into your life that will widen your lens to see things from God's perspective. What would help you acknowledge how He blesses and provides for you?

Three horizontal lines for writing.

Let Me teach you thankfulness. Begin by acknowledging that everything—all your possessions and all that you are—belongs to Me. The dawning of each new day is a gift from Me, not to be taken for granted. The earth is vibrantly alive with My blessings, giving vivid testimony to My Presence. If you slow down your pace of life, you can find Me anywhere.

Some of My most precious children have been laid aside in sickbeds or shut away in prisons. Others have voluntarily learned the discipline of spending time alone with Me. The secret of being thankful is learning to see everything from My perspective. My world is your classroom. *My Word is a lamp to your feet and a light for your path.*

—FROM JESUS CALLING, APRIL 29

Discuss

Read aloud the following passage from Genesis 2 and 3. The woman in the story is Eve, the man is Adam, and the serpent is Satan.

^{2:8} Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. . . .

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." . . .

^{3:1} Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

7. What did Satan claim would happen if Eve ate the forbidden fruit? What actually happened when she and Adam ate it? Explain.

8. How would thankfulness have changed Eve's thought process when she "saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye" (Genesis 3:6)?

Respond

9. What are the things in your life—the things you want but don't have, or that you don't want but do have—that threaten to deprive you of thankfulness?

10. How would applying an intentional "thankful perspective" affect your current situation?



11. Reread the passage aloud. Then take two minutes of silence, prayerfully considering how God might want you to further respond to what you have read in His Word. If you're meeting with a group, the leader will again keep track of time. Be open to sharing what came to you in the silence.

12. What was it like for you to sit in silence with the passage? Did soaking it in like this help you understand it better than before?

13. If you're meeting with a group or with a friend, how can they pray for you? If you're using this study on your own, what would you like to say to God right now?

Practice

The theme of each Scripture passage you will read this week focuses on widening the lens of your physical and spiritual eyes to be more thankful for God's abundance in your life. Read each passage slowly, pausing to think about what is being said. Rather than approaching this as an assignment to complete, think of it as an opportunity to meet with the One who loves you most.

Day 1

Read Ephesians 5:15-20. In this passage, Paul discussed the need to live wisely in the midst of evil days. What examples of wise living does he list?

Why is the practice of giving thanks for everything an example of wise and careful living?

How is the choice to look for God's abundance and give Him thanks the opposite of living foolishly?



Why are the practices of "always" giving thanks to God the Father and giving thanks "for everything" (verse 20) so important?

Ask God to help you grow wiser in the way you live by developing a consistent habit of thankfulness.

Day 2

Read Luke 9:16 and 22:17-19. Jesus had a habit of giving thanks over a meal before He distributed the food to others. Why do you think He did this?

Do you regularly give thanks to God before you eat . . . or only some of the time? If this isn't yet part of your consistent practice, what affects it? Is it a failure to remember? Do you let your environment or who you're with influence you? Is it something else? Explore this.

What difference would it make if you gave thanks even over snacks, or when you brought groceries into your kitchen? Does that seem too extreme? Why or why not?

What are some other ways you could thank God, "whether in word or deed" (Colossians 3:17), more often as you go through your day?

Take a moment to gratefully acknowledge God for the food you have eaten today and for the resources He has given to you. Remember in prayer those who are in need in your world.

Day 3

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. In this passage, Paul discussed how your own generosity with what you have received from God can spark thankfulness in other people. Do you tend to think you have received abundantly from Him and can afford to be generous with others? Or



do you more often think you have barely received enough and can't afford to be generous? Explain your thoughts.

What leads you to see your situation in either of these ways?

How does a wide lens of abundance or a narrow lens of scarcity affect your choices about sharing your resources (your time, your talents, your treasures)?

What are a couple of ways you can practice greater thankfulness in your giving?

Talk with God about your sense of abundance or scarcity and ask Him to help you see His provision from His perspective.

Day 4

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-5. In this passage, Paul warned against the idea (among other things) that Christians should abstain from certain foods because they are religiously impure. What did Paul have to say about such teachings (verse 2)?

In refuting this belief, what positive things did Paul say about the abundance God has made available?

Why did Paul emphasize thanksgiving twice (verses 3-4)?



What do you think Paul meant when he said food is "consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (verse 5)? Why should that make us thankful?

In recognition of the truth that "everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (verse 4), thank God for the abundance of good things He sent your way today, naming them specifically.

Day 5

Read Daniel 6:6-10. During Daniel's time, a law was passed in Persia that no one could worship any god except the king for thirty days. Even though Daniel was a high-ranking official in the king's court, he chose to ignore the law. Why do you think giving thanks to God multiple times a day was so important to him?

What are some possible reasons that Daniel opened his windows "toward Jerusalem" when he did this (verse 10)? Why didn't he try to conceal his actions if he knew they were against the law?

Would you put off expressing thankfulness to God for thirty days if the law required it? Why or why not?

Read the rest of Daniel 6. What impact did Daniel's choice to continue thanking God have on his leader, the king? Imagine how your choice to (a) open your eyes to God's abundance and (b) recognize it with thankfulness might impact those around you.

Be intentional about setting aside at least three times during this day to thank God.



SESSION 2

**Guarding Against
Grumbling**

Welcome

The great enemy of thankfulness is discontentment, or feeling sorry for yourself. Sometimes this takes the form of overt anger. Often, it shows up as grumpiness or a negative outlook. At other times, it appears more like sadness or discouragement. In any case, this much is certain: if you carry around a spirit of discontentment long enough, you will begin to “leak” self-pity like a bag of rotting apples in the sweltering sun. And before you know it, you are putting a voice to it—by grumbling and complaining.

Grumbling is not godly sorrow. It’s an expression of resentment toward God for what He has allowed to happen in your life. Put simply, it’s blaming Him. In this session, you’re going to take aim at grumbling (as well as the discontentment that hides behind it) and ask God to help you guard—and then redirect—your heart through the practice of thankfulness.

Connect

1. *What does feeling sorry for yourself look like in your life?*

2. *In what situations are you most likely to succumb to grumbling and self-pity?*

Experience

Be on guard against the pit of self-pity. When you are weary or unwell, this demonic trap is the greatest danger you face. Don’t even go near the edge of the pit. Its edges crumble easily, and before you know it, you are on the way down. It is ever so much harder to get out of the pit than to keep a safe distance from it. That is why I tell you to be on guard.

There are several ways to protect yourself from self-pity. When you are occupied with praising and thanking Me, it is impossible to feel sorry for yourself. Also, the closer you live to Me, the more distance there is between you and the pit. Live in the Light of My Presence by *fixing your eyes on Me*. Then you will be able *to run with endurance the race that is set before you*, without stumbling or falling.

—FROM JESUS CALLING, FEBRUARY 23

3. *What makes self-pity such a dangerous trap for believers in Christ?*

4. *How does a daily practice of thankfulness to God protect you from self-pity?*

Let thankfulness temper all your thoughts. A thankful mind-set keeps you in touch with Me. I hate it when My children grumble, casually despising My sovereignty. Thankfulness is a safeguard against this deadly sin. Furthermore, a grateful attitude becomes a grid through which you perceive life. Gratitude enables you to see the Light of My Presence shining on all your circumstances. Cultivate a thankful heart, for this glorifies Me and fills you with Joy.

—FROM JESUS CALLING, MARCH 25

5. *What are some ways you can build up your defenses against grumbling and allow thankfulness to habitually temper your thoughts? How can such a mind-set keep you in touch with God throughout the day?*

6. *A grateful attitude can become not only a protection but also a grid through which you perceive life. Give an example of how this might work in practice.*

Discuss

Read aloud the following passage from Exodus 16. The Israelites had formerly been slaves in Egypt, doing hard labor and making bricks to build a city. When the people cried out to God, He sent plagues against Egypt until Pharaoh allowed them to leave. The Lord then appointed Moses, along with his brother, Aaron, to lead the people out of Egypt. As the story picks up in this passage, the Israelites are crossing a desert region on the way to the fertile land that God promised to give them.

¹ The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against

him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”⁸ Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

⁹Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

¹¹ The LORD said to Moses,¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.’”

¹⁷ The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little.¹⁸ And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.

¹⁹ Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.”

²⁰ However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. . . .

³¹ The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.

7. Under the Egyptians, the Israelites had been slaves who were beaten if they didn't meet their daily quota of bricks (Exodus 5:6–18). Once they were freed, however, they remembered Egypt in a different light. What did they now say about their time there (Exodus 16:3)? What attitude toward the past and the present do their words reflect?

8. Have you ever complained about the present in comparison with the past? If so, what did you complain about? If you're not typically a complainer, what are you sometimes tempted to complain about?

Respond

9. How did the Lord provide for His people in the desert? (Don't forget to consider the answers beyond the surface.)

10. Do you think it would be easier to be thankful for the Lord's provision if it fell miraculously from the sky every morning and you only had to gather it each day? Why or why not?

11. Reread Exodus 16:2–4. Then take two minutes of silence, looking for a sentence, phrase, or even one word that stands out as something God may want you to focus on in your life to help you guard against grumbling. If you're meeting with a group, the leader will keep track of time. At the end of two minutes, share your word or phrase with the group if you wish.

12. How might your grumbling "leaks" be transformed into an overflow of praise for God's sovereign help and care?

13. If you're meeting with a group or with a friend, how can they pray for you? If you're using this study on your own, what would you like to say to God right now?

Practice

The theme of this week's daily Scripture readings is how to not only guard against grumbling and complaining but also how to overcome it. Read each passage slowly, pausing to think about what is being said. Rather than approaching this as an assignment to complete, think of it as an opportunity to meet with the One who loves you most.

Day 1

Read Exodus 17:1–7. This story occurs right after the chapter in Exodus you studied this week, where God sent the miraculous manna to eat. Are you surprised the people so quickly returned to grumbling? Why or why not?

How understandable was their grumbling in this situation?

Why do you suppose God waited until the people were desperate before He provided water? What can we learn about God from this story?

Has God ever waited until you were desperate before He provided for you? Explain.

To help you turn away discontentment and protect against self-pity, write in a journal or on a separate sheet of paper three things for which you are thankful. Express to God

today how grateful you are for the specific, and perhaps even quiet, ways He provides for your needs.

Day 2

Read Numbers 13:26–14:9. In this passage, Moses sent twelve men into the Promised Land to survey it. The twelve returned with a unanimous report that the region was as fertile as God had promised—but ten of the twelve said the inhabitants of the land were too strong for the Israelites to overcome. Only Caleb and Joshua insisted that God would empower His people and give them victory. How did the Israelites respond to the surveyors’ report?

Why weren’t the people thankful that God was giving them a land that flowed with milk and honey? What are some indicators that they were carrying around a spirit of self-pity?

What did Joshua and Caleb see about the situation that the rest of the people did not? How did Joshua and Caleb’s attitude about God shape their assessment?



What are you tempted to grumble about today? How can you turn your complaints into praise?

Tell God today that you completely trust Him to lead you into a good place.

Day 3

Read Numbers 14:26–35. In this passage, God responded to the people’s grumbling about the difficulties of conquering the Promised Land. What did God decide to do? What do you learn about Him from this response?

God made an exception for Caleb and Joshua because they had spoken up in favor of going in to conquer the land. What does it tell you about God that He made this exception?

Have you ever faced the negative consequences of self-pity? If so, what happened?

Today, think about what God has given you to do and how you can respond to this task with trust and gratitude rather than fear and grumbling.

Day 4

Read Numbers 17:1–13. This story reveals what happened when the Israelites grumbled about the priesthood of Moses’ brother, Aaron. What did God do to show that He had chosen Aaron to be the high priest?

How was grumbling against Aaron’s leadership really grumbling against God?



How did the Israelites respond to the miracle of God (verses 12–13)? Why do you suppose they weren't excited and drawn toward God?

What does this show about the people's perceptions of God? How might this scene have been different if the people had developed a thankful attitude rather than one of self-pity?

As you think about this story, consider your own temptations to grumble. Has this story helped you in any way when it comes to your tendency to complain? If so, how?

Day 5

Read Matthew 20:1–16. Jesus told this parable to show how God rewards those who serve Him, whether they begin serving Him as young people and are faithful all their lives, or they come to faith late in life and serve Him for a short time. Why did those who worked in the vineyard from the first hour (verse 11) grumble?

Why did the owner of the vineyard reward each worker with the same payment?

Do you think the owner was unfair in doing this? Why or why not?

Think of the most notorious sinner you know. How would you feel if that person came to faith late in life and was given the same welcome into God's kingdom as you are anticipating?

If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, consider what you can learn from



SESSION 3



**The Gift of
God's Presence**