

## **Pillars of Joy: Gratitude**

### **Psalm 107:1-15**

Lynne Pauer

June 6, 2021

Hi, I'm Lynne Pauer. I was asked to speak about gratitude, as one of the pillars of joy described in the Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. References to gratitude seem pretty common these days. Hearing about having "an attitude of gratitude" and gratitude journals are typical, and Thanksgiving is a whole holiday built around the idea of gratitude.

But we hear that gratitude makes us healthier and more joyful – it's good for us! However, when a suggested way to do this is to make daily journal entries this may feel like being a kid asked to write a thank you note. The Bible instructs us to be grateful and to give thanks – it says this many times and in many ways. Is there another way we can experience gratitude?

Recently, The New York Times ran a "Fresh Start Challenge" which suggested the practice of taking a photo of something we are grateful. Day eight of this challenge "Take a Gratitude Photo" by Tara Parker-Pope was to take a photo of something we are grateful for, "keeping an eye out for something that is beautiful or meaningful to you." The New York Times also asked that participants in this challenge submit one of these photos and tell them about the photo.

The author suggested that making an "effort to notice our surroundings or show appreciation for the people, places or things that make us happy...can lead to meaningful gains in overall happiness and well-being." One small study found that mindful photography can be a fun and easy way to savor everyday experiences and cultivate gratitude, and it worked just as well at improving wellbeing as keeping a gratitude journal.

Now, I had been taking photos of things I am grateful for, though I had not really considered this a practice of gratitude until after hearing about the New York Times challenge. I had been taking photos when out walking my dog in the morning, like if the view struck me as particularly beautiful or if the flowers on a tree against the blue sky really hit me just right.

I also like to take photos of things that move me or that bring me joy. Sometimes when I am deep down moved or grateful for something, I take a photo too. Like when my dog runs happy laps around the yard. And just before Easter, I was in the sanctuary picking up some flowers. This was after not having been in there for a year, and I was moved to take a photo. I felt a sense of gratitude that someone had taken the time to keep moving the cross toward the front of the sanctuary, just as in any normal Lent season, and it was joy in that discovery, and in the experience of being in our sanctuary again, that I took a photo. I've shared this photo here and some of the other photos I've taken when I was feeling a sense of gratitude. I've realized too that sometimes I think of it by another name...feeling a sense of joy, feeling moved, experiencing the beauty or peace of nature, or a sense of the Spirit moving.

So these things I'd been taking photos of, these beautiful things, or things I'd appreciated or felt moved by, I realized were an expression of gratitude for those things. I realized that an

expression of gratitude is really not a dry exercise. Rather, gratitude can be those things that move me deeply, an expression of the Spirit moving in me to experience joy.

I hope that you, too, can experience this sense of gratitude. Try taking a photo of something that moves you – something that brings you joy. Recognize this as a moment when God’s spirit is moving in you. Consider it a prayer. I pray that you may experience God’s grace and love each day in a spirit of gratitude. Amen.

## **Pillars of Joy: Gratitude** **Colossians 3:12-17**

Robert Langdon

June 6, 2021

Hello, my name is Robert Langdon. I have been attending First United Methodist Church for about twenty years. Tori Booker and I met here at Green Wood, where I am recording the video today. Our son, Nicolas, was also baptized here at Green Wood by Tim Ziegler.

I would like to thank Carol and Phyllis for this opportunity to speak during Lay Led Worship. I understand the focus this week is on gratitude. That topic seems pertinent after over a year of restrictions due to Covid-19. Everyone has been impacted in one way or the other. So what should we be grateful for in our lives when there have been so many disruptions? A few things quickly come to mind. Our health, family, jobs, online church! And, of course, Netflix. Tori and I have been lucky that no immediate family members have been sick, but not everyone has been as fortunate. We keep them in our prayers.

I have a job in sales. As you know, a sales person is supposed to meet with customers and encourage them to buy their products. I would typically drive or fly to conduct technical meetings and then take my customers out to lunch or dinner. Well, how do you do that when you are asked not to travel and all your customers are working from home? All I can say is that it has been a lot different with tons of phone calls and Zoom meetings. In other words, no more face to face visits and I spend a lot of time at home.

So for me, the biggest thing that I have been grateful for over the last year fifteen months is the outdoors. This means being able to take a walk with Tori after a long day of work – just to unwind. We are blessed with great sidewalks, trails and pathways here in Washtenaw County. It is so easy to get out in nature. Maybe a short walk around the block. Or two to three mile walk along Green Road. Or a ten to twelve mile bike ride to Washtenaw Dairy or DJs Bakery with Nicolas.

I mentioned being grateful for online church – but honestly, that feeling of appreciation goes deeper. I am very thankful for the creativity of the people at our church. They have provided some interesting content in the services and a variety of new options over the last year.

As most of you know, Beth Pascoe and Lisa Hesse started a walking group called Connected in Nature. Tori and I typically attend Sunday mornings two to three times per month to be outdoors, but also link up with friends that we no longer see at church. Creating this group was really thinking outside the box.

Even though I am grateful for the outdoors, I am disappointed to see so much trash on my walks. This includes plastic water bottles, food packaging, and so many different things. I think people take the environment for granted – even in Ann Arbor. People think that the trash will magically disappear and not harm our home. But as an engineer, I know that these things are designed to last as long as possible. Plastics are used in everything and their purpose is to protect the food, water and stuff we buy. They are not designed to break down or degrade sitting on the side of the road. Therefore, it is up to us to be a bit more thoughtful about how we manage our trash and call out a friend when they leave stuff behind for someone else to pick up.

I came across an article online last week from Madel Asuncion about gratitude. She mentions that we should focus on the present, accept the bad, and find something good in the situation and figure out a way to give back. I think this is a perfect way to live and also help me with the frustration I feel about the trash.

A couple years ago, we went to an IB program at Huron High School. The students had a number of poster presentations about something that interested them. Some were really good, others were just okay, but it gave the parents a change to talk to the students and learn something new.

One conversation that I remember well was with Kate Meader (from our church). She had a poster about how to help the butterfly survive in our changing world. This included being more thoughtful about weed killer usage and leaving some space for native plants. I still have the brochure she passed out and I used it last year as a guide to put some native plants in our garden. I was amazed to see everything come back this spring and can't wait to see if we have any visiting butterflies or bees in the next month.

So I am grateful for the outdoors, our wonderful environment and the people that are trying to make a difference in the world. Thank you!