

GENERAL PROGRAM THANKSGIVING

DISCIPLES WOMEN



2011

Authored By:

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Thanksgiving

Purpose:

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." I Thessalonians 5:16-18 In light of the exhortation to "Give thanks in all circumstances," to set an environment where we can open our hearts to gratitude in every life situation through naming, savoring, celebrating and sharing our blessings from God.

Suggestions for the Leader:

Spiritual Preparation: Prepare by considering the following questions (alone and with others from your group/family): When and where do I feel MOST able to give thanks? What do those moments have in common? When do I feel LEAST able to give thanks? What happens when I do anyway? When I don't? How is my gratitude significant to God? What difference does it make to God if I say "Thank you" or not? What changes in my heart when I express my thanks and appreciation to God or to another person? What effect does my gratitude have on my family, my co-workers, my church family, my world? Is the world any different when I am gracious and grateful or not?

Lesson Supplies: paper & pen for each person, a Bible, a box or basket for the paper slips The following printed on separate slips of paper-repeat as necessary to have one for each person:

- When and where do you feel MOST able to give thanks? Why?
- When do you feel LEAST able to give thanks? What happens when you do anyway? When you don't?
- Name someone in your life whom you think of as being defined by gratitude or thankfulness. Why?
- How is our gratitude significant to God? What difference does it make to God if we say "Thank you" or not?
- Describe a time when you received an expression of gratitude or

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appreciation that you were not expecting? Why was it memorable to you?

- What changes in our hearts when we express thanks and appreciation to God or to another person?
- What effect does our gratitude have on our family, our co-workers, our church family, our world? Is the world any different when we are gracious and grateful or not?
- Besides Thanksgiving, describe a time you have experienced that is set aside especially for gratitude. What makes it special?

Worship Supplies:

- Printouts of Psalm 77:1-15, Philippians 1:1-11, Psalm 98 and some readers. Each is fairly long so you may want to break them up into parts.
- Printouts of "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart, " "Now Thank We All Our God," "We Are One in the Spirit" or "Somos Uno," and "For the Beauty of the Earth" or "For the Fruit of All Creation."
- Three empty baskets

Lesson Setting:

If it is feasible, hold this lesson in the church kitchen or in your kitchen, around a table. If not, set your area to feel like a kitchen. Have coffee/tea brewing, fresh fruit on the table or something baking (not just a candle--something the participants will enjoy later). Use a homey table cloth, dish towels, napkins & kitchen appliances to decorate your area. You can also set the space as getting ready for an elegant feast if this will be meaningful and accessible to your group. Make sure the space is warm enough without stifling.

Worship Setting: If feasible, set your worship space in a more open area, still warm and inviting, still using homey sights & scents like a kitchen cloth, fresh fruit or flowers on the table. Place a cross and a candle on the table. Set chairs in a circle around a central table. Place your three empty baskets at the

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outer edge of the group or circle. Use a variety of chairs if possible so people can get comfortable. If only folding chairs are available, you may want to bring some cushions or rolled towels to allow people to get comfortable. Make sure everyone has room to stretch arms out full length.

Please Note: Communion would work well with this Program if you want to use it. Just place your Prayers of Thanksgiving, Words of Institution and Sharing of the Elements after the Third Basket.

Refreshments: Since so much of our annual Thanksgiving celebration is defined by food, and this lesson is too, the refreshments can be a source for conversation. After, reading the lesson, consider what foods your congregation identifies with hard times, with good times, with plenty and with need. How can the meal, snacks or dessert served at this program contribute to the environment through scents, sights, tastes & sounds? How can the food call to mind the ways in which God is with us in good times and bad? Will a certain food be significant for us? Will intentionally choosing not to eat be meaningful? Do we need health food or whole food or comfort food or indulgence or abstinence at this program to fully open ourselves to gratitude?

Introduction:

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." I Thessalonians 5:16-18 When we remember and celebrate the blessings we experience, we open ourselves to the further gifts of gratitude. But not everything that happens in our lives seems to deserve thanksgiving. There are difficult, terrible times that we must be honest about. Nonetheless, the call of scripture is to give thanks in those times as well. Not only is saying "thank you" a polite and respectful response to a generous creator for the good in life; it goes much deeper. Giving thanks in a deliberate and intentional way reminds us how precious we are to God in all times. Having space in our lives for gratitude realigns us with the One

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who creates, redeems and inspires us, no matter what is happening. By giving credit to God, we gain fresh perspective on our own lives and their significance to God. Today's program sets an environment where we can open our hearts to gratitude in every circumstance through naming, savoring, celebrating and sharing.

Lesson:

I have long been fascinated by the fact that many of our most celebrated Thanksgiving foods can be traced, not to times of rich extravagance and plenty....but to times of need, starvation and want. Many of the traditional recipes we use this time of year were developed as a way of stretching a small amount of food to feed a lot of people. The ingredient lists include bits and pieces of foods that would otherwise be thrown away. The purposes of these recipes is to make a little go a long way and to use every single bit without waste. These foods tell a story of the lean years, the years when we did not have quite enough to go around, but somehow, we celebrated anyway. We found something to be thankful for in the tough times as well.

Take mincemeat pie for starters. Now, I am not a fan of this delicacy but it is intriguing. It's original instructions instruct us to heavily spice and preserve all the bits and pieces left over at the end of butchering time to be saved for later use. Scraps and scrapings of meat and fat made up the rich base for this pie. The raisins and the rum and the cinnamon were added in for flavor & preservation, and used sparingly.

Then there is stuffing or dressing, depending on where you live. There are as many ways to make this hearty, carb loaded side dish as there are families to give thanks. But how does it start. Stale bread. It's the heels, the hardened ends and the crusts and the left over bits of bread that inspire this recipe. They may appear dry and wasted but they are brought back to life by broth from the meat that is cooked and set aside. Then these

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crumbs are seasoned with spice, herbs, veggies, even oysters, cheese, nuts. No one, tasting a family's treasured recipe would think "Ick! They just served me stale bread!" But that's where it started. That's where bread pudding got it's start as well. And let's not even get started on meat loaf, ham loaf, and turkey soup!

Even in our most extravagant and abundant years, our Thanksgiving feast speaks of the lean years, the starving years, the skinny times.

When Martin Rinkart sat down in 1636 to write the verses of "Now Thank We All Our God," it was not an extravagant, abundant year. His country was reeling from the Thirty Years War. And this was not just any kind of war; it was a religious war, in which church group battled against church group. Whole families, whole villages had been wiped out, destroyed and devastated in the name of God and for the sake of a belief about the nature of God. As his world awoke from the nightmare of those times, Martin Rinkart tried a different approach. Instead of declaring WHAT God was up to or trying to speak for God about WHY things were the way they were, he spoke about WHERE God was. And in the midst of everything, even the trouble and the horror of war, Martin Rinkart knew, somehow, with all of his being, that God was right there. The Creator stood with the creation. The Redeemer had not abandoned the redeemed. The Inspirer still breathed in the inspired...and the uninspired would be able to draw another , deeper breath. God was still with them all, friend or foe.

"Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices, who wondrous things hath done, in whom our world rejoices; Who from our mothers arms, hath blessed us on our way; with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today."

Thanksgiving is about gratitude and giving thanks. It is not limited to the good times, and it never has been. Giving thanks changes the grateful heart. It is a point of transformation for all of us who open heart and mind and voice and hand to express what it means to us to have received the gifts of God: life, love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, belonging.....but always, always, no

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matter what....the greatest gift....to live in the presence of God.

Worship:

Call to Thankfulness

Leader: Rejoice always! Pray continually!

People: Give thanks in all circumstances!

Leader: This is God's will for us.

People: In all times, all places, all situations!

Leader: This is God's will in Christ Jesus for each of us.

People: We will give thanks!

--from I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Song: "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart" Chalice Praise

Prayer: God who created this very moment, Redeemer of our present situation, Spirit who breathes in the here and the now, hear our prayers. We offer you our whispered thanks. Hear it slip out of our souls like a feather caught on a breath. We know that you can grasp what we cannot say aloud but say so softly to you today. We trust you to treasure our most silent thoughts. We offer you our spoken appreciation. Hear it sing out like clear bell tones on fresh, cold air. We know that your heart rings with enjoyment when you hear what we can say, and do say as only we can say it. We trust you to consider our articulated thoughts.

We offer you our singing gratitude. Hear it dancing down melodies like rain rolling down the edge of a leaf. We know that you dance with us when our hearts make such happy music. We trust you to savor our singing thoughts. Amen.

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The First Basket: God's History of Love Alive

Scripture Reading: Psalm 77:1-15

Thought: Faced with a difficult challenge, the Psalmist's faith in God wavered, but the Psalmist appealed to the past and remembered miracles. As we think of this present moment in our lives, what past miracles of God's love do we remember?

As we pass the first basket around the room, each person is invited to hold it for a moment and imagine placing a single word or object into the basket to represent your experience of God's presence in your immediate life situation. These may be whispered quietly or spoken aloud. Place the basket on or near the table.

Song: "Now Thank We All Our God" Chalice Hymnal

The Second Basket: God's Blessing in Our Fellowship

Scripture Reading: Philippians 1:1-11

Thought: Faced with a lonely moment, the Apostle Paul began to count his blessings in the form of his friends in the church at Philippi. As we think of this present moment in our lives, who else has God put here with us?

As we pass the first basket around the room, each person is invited to hold it for a moment and imagine placing a person or name into the basket to represent your experience of God's presence in another person. These may be whispered quietly or spoken aloud. Place the basket on or near the table.

Song: "We Are One in the Spirit" Chalice Hymnal "Somos Uno"

The Third Basket: God's Joyful Music in Creation

Scripture Reading: Psalm 98 Thought: Looking out on the world, the Psalmist sees cause to celebrate and invites all creation to join in. As we think of this present moment in our lives, how can we share our gratitude with our world?

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As we pass the first basket around the room, each person is invited to hold it for a moment and imagine a place, a view or a creature into the basket to represent your experience of God's presence in your immediate life situation. These may be whispered quietly or spoken aloud. Place the basket on or near the table.

Song: "For the Beauty of the Earth" Chalice Hymnal or
"For the Fruit of All Creation"

Graciously Sent Prayer of Dedication

(Someone near the table holds each basket as we pray) Loving, listening God, we hold three baskets here before you. We have filled them with whispers, silence, spoken syllables, shouts and songs. They are filled with our praise. They are bursting with our joyful sense of knowing that we are precious and beloved to you. They hold the signs of our appreciation that you are here, always have been, always will be, with us. Hear our gratitude and know, we love you, too. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Benediction Martin Rinkart Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us, With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us; And keep us all in grace, and guide us when perplexed; And guard us through all ills in this world, and the next!

Potential Service Projects Related to the Theme:

Thank You Notes: Does this program inspire you to think of people you know who could use a word of appreciation? With cards, stamps and a computer or directory, you could set up a Thank You Note station for people to write notes. You might want to target a demographic: teachers, social workers, nurses, firefighters, missionaries, service people, military, etc. Have someone who makes cards as a hobby put together some simple kits for people to take home with them.

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Build Them Up: Is there anyone at your church who is struggling, working really hard, facing a difficult challenge? Maybe it's an illness, a tough job or none at all, a family challenge or they have a child who is having trouble in school. Write down one thing you see them doing well. Then find a way to express your appreciation of their effort. A baggie with a Leggo block and an index card would be a good way to encourage people to pass this one on. You might use I Corinthians 15:58 and the Slogan "Building Each Other Up!"

Thanksgiving Dinner: Do something special for dinner this year--share it! Make up a "to go" plate for someone who cannot leave home. If possible, find out what his/ her comfort foods are and include at least one of them. But be sure to share your traditions too. Or, find a way to make sure that no one at church (or in your neighborhood) has to spend Thanksgiving dinner alone.

Appendix:

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Rinkart

Martin Rinkart (1586–1649) **Martin Rinkart**, or **Rinckart** (23 April 1586 – 8 December 1649) was a German clergyman and hymnist. He is best known for the text to "Now thank we all our God" (*Nun danket alle Gott*), which was written ca. 1636. It was set to music by Johann Crüger about 1647, and translated into English in the 19th century by Catherine Winkworth. Rinkart was a deacon at Eisleben and archdeacon at Eilenburg, where he was born and also died. He served there during the Thirty Years' War and a severe plague in 1637.

German pastor Martin Rinkart served in the walled town of Eilenburg during the horrors of the Thirty Years War of 1618-1648. Eilenburg became an overcrowded refuge for the surrounding area. The fugitives suffered from epidemic and famine. At the beginning of 1637, the year of the Great

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Pestilence, there were four ministers in Eilenburg. But one abandoned his post for healthier areas and could not be persuaded to return. Pastor Rinkhart officiated at the funerals of the other two. As the only pastor left, he often conducted services for as many as 40 to 50 persons a day— some 4,480 in all. In May of that year, his own wife died. By the end of the year, the refugees had to be buried in trenches without services.