

# The GRATITUDE Vaccine

## Building Up Immunity to Life's Threats

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it not only physical threat but also widespread adverse mental and emotional effects. Social scientists and mental health experts tell us that GRATITUDE is a key contributor to personal happiness, emotional resiliency, and mental wellbeing. But being and staying grateful is not easy or automatic, especially when life is hard. Choosing to be grateful is a discipline of the mind and spirit. We will look at some core truths for which to be grateful.

The owner of a restaurant chain said this on the news recently: *"No one was prepared for this"*. He was lamenting the fact that the dramatic changes to business and social life came upon us all like an unexpected tsunami. In truth, we were all unprepared in so many ways. However, if you were to look at it in another light, you could observe that many people were prepared in other ways. One could argue that Christians had advanced preparation, a kind of immunity, for so many of the mental and emotional side effects of this global crisis. It certainly is not because we are better, but because we are blessed—given favour by God's mercy and grace—and are benefactors of the tremendous advantages of being part of God's family.

**Two Purposes:** This group Bible study and discussion is designed for us to first consider these profound blessings and then express our gratitude to the Blessor, our great God and Saviour. It is also hoped that this personal and group exercise, this discipline of choosing gratitude, will help each of us to look at our current personal situations (health, home, work, relationships, finances, future) through the lens of our Christian worldview and live each day in a posture of gratitude.

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. John 1:16

### GROUP DISCUSSION

Consider the following core blessings, their related Scriptures [see handout], and some amazing implications (*since this is true, it follows that...*) Discuss each briefly, then have one person thank God for that blessing and move to the next one.

### SIX BLESSINGS UNIQUE TO CHRISTIANS that immunize us against (within) hardship and uncertainty

1. We have a personal relationship with our Creator-Redeemer. (*It follows then that...*)
  - We are loved by our heavenly Father who guards our steps and numbers our days
  - We are safe and live in the security of knowing our sovereign Creator and sustainer is in control of all things
  - John 1:12-13; Romans 5:8; Galatians 4:6-7; Colossians 1:15-17
2. We have God's special revelation, the Bible, that tells us the story of reality, the Truth.
  - We have answers for many of life's big questions regarding deity, origin, purpose, evil, history, death, future
  - We have wisdom for how to live under the authority and direction of the Good Shepherd
  - John 1:14; 14:6, 26; 16:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17
3. We have a wellspring of comfort, peace and joy that is incomprehensible and inexhaustible.
  - We have assurance knowing that we have an unlimited supply of divine grace, sympathy and understanding
  - We have contentment and joy that supersedes any trial or tribulation
  - John 14:27; 15:11; Philipians 4:6-7; 12-13
4. We have an ever-present help in time of trouble.
  - We are never alone, but are accompanied by God Himself in the midst of danger and trouble
  - We need not fear anything in all of creation because we cannot be separated from the love of God
  - Psalm 46:1; Romans 8:35, 37-39; Hebrews 4:16
5. We have hope—a certainty about the future (the promises and plans of God).
  - We have absolute confidence about whatever lies ahead, in this life and in the one to come
  - We have certain promises of things to come from the One who knows the future
  - John 14:1-3; Romans 8:28; Colossians 3:4; 1 John 3:2
6. We have a family, the loving support of trusted spiritual friends.
  - We have friends—loving relationships in the body of Christ that comfort, encourage and challenge us
  - We have this small group of loyal traveling companions to journey with us on the Way
  - John 13:34-35; Romans 12:4-5,10; Hebrews 10:24-25

**Cautionary Note:** In no way do we want to suggest that this crisis is "no big deal" and that millions worldwide, including us Christians, are not being profoundly affected by it. So while we consider the many reasons we have to be thankful for God's salvation, presence and protection, we will also be 1) realistic about the gravity of the situation, and 2) sensitive and compassionate to those who are experiencing grief, loss, anxiety, hardship and uncertainty.

## LEADER'S GUIDE

### The Big Idea:

This study is designed to help your group members turn their eyes upon all the amazing ways we Christians have been blessed, and prepared, by God—for such a time as this. Our faith gives us a certain immunity to the side effects of this crisis.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- make sure that everyone has printed copies of the Scriptures and the Guide
- get everyone involved: ask someone to open in prayer; assign others to read paragraphs one, two, and three
- Leader: read and further explain the instructions under Group Discussion
- assign six people to read each of the Six Blessings, and their related Scriptures
- ask someone to pray a prayer of thanks for each blessing, then move on to the next

### SIX BLESSINGS:

Here are some (optional) questions which can promote discussion and relevance

1. How can this staggering reality that we are loved, saved and in a personal relationship with God, fortify us in a time of extreme challenge and uncertainty? How is it impacting you right now?
2. How does reading your Bible (your own copy of the revelation of God's person and plan!) provide you with certainty?
3. Share an experience you have had of God's incomprehensible peace.
4. Share a time when the assurance of God's ever-present help strengthened you during a trial or hardship?
5. How does knowing how human history—and your story—will end help you in times like these?
6. How has this group prepared ("immunized") you for this crisis? How can we support one another in practical ways right now?

### SUMMARY:

Here are some final thoughts (which you could cut and paste into the chat bar if you wanted, or send to your group later).

- Gratitude is a choice—a spiritual discipline—to exercise multiple times each day
- Gratitude will protect us from forgetting, or taking for granted, the quantity and quality of blessings we have in Christ
- Gratitude, consistently practiced, will protect us (and others!) from many negative thoughts and emotions
- Gratitude glorifies God, and may be the most powerful witness we have to draw others to Christ

### APPLICATION:

- Print these sheets and give them to someone to encourage them
- Start each day this week meditating on one of these blessings per day
- Ask God to guard your heart and lips from complaining, and to give you a heart overflowing with gratitude