

GRATITUDE AND SERMON JOURNAL

WHAT'S ESSENTIAL?

November 22 – December 26, 2021

Name: _____

Dear Church,

The purpose of our Gratitude and Sermon Journals is to help us connect with the Lord through daily prayer and study. Furthermore, we want to help connect others to the church. **This journal returns to our usual format:** Monday's reading is the sermon text for the next Sunday. All daily readings support the Sunday sermon. Some, including Discipleship Communities and prayer groups, use their journals to discuss the texts and the Sunday morning sermon. Asbury is deeply rooted in Scripture and tradition while also being relevant for today. To overlook the wisdom of the past can restrict our growth and insight. This Gratitude and Sermon Journal looks back at Scripture and the teaching of the church for application today.

Tom

Small Group Discussion Questions

About 70 small groups gathered weekly to discuss our book study on “The Magnificent Story.” Consider using this journal to continue to meet together or create a new group for Advent. Our faith is about Helping Others Follow Jesus. This journal provides a mutually blessed way for you to do this.

Below are some general questions your small group may use for discussion each week:

- Review the key Scripture(s).
- Review the key point(s) from the sermon.
 - How were you encouraged?
 - How were you challenged?
 - What questions did it create?
 - What convictions did it bring?
- What was the pastor asking of you, even expecting you to do in response?

Scripture Readings

WHAT'S ESSENTIAL

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

- 11/22 Matthew 6:25-34
- 11/23 Matthew 16:24-28
- 11/24 Matthew 19:16-30
- 11/25 Luke 22:14-30
- 11/26 John 3:1-15
- 11/27 Acts 1:1-5
- 11/28 Matthew 6:25-34

THE LOWLY

- 12/13 Luke 2:8-20
- 12/14 Psalm 103:20-22
- 12/15 Psalm 148
- 12/16 Isaiah 6:1-7
- 12/17 John 17:1-5
- 12/18 Ephesians 3:14-21
- 12/19 Luke 2:8-20

THE WILLING

- 11/29 Luke 1:26-38
- 11/30 Luke 1:39-45
- 12/1 Luke 1:46-56
- 12/2 Luke 1:5-25
- 12/3 John 2:1-12
- 12/4 John 19:16-27
- 12/5 Luke 1:26-38

THE GIVERS

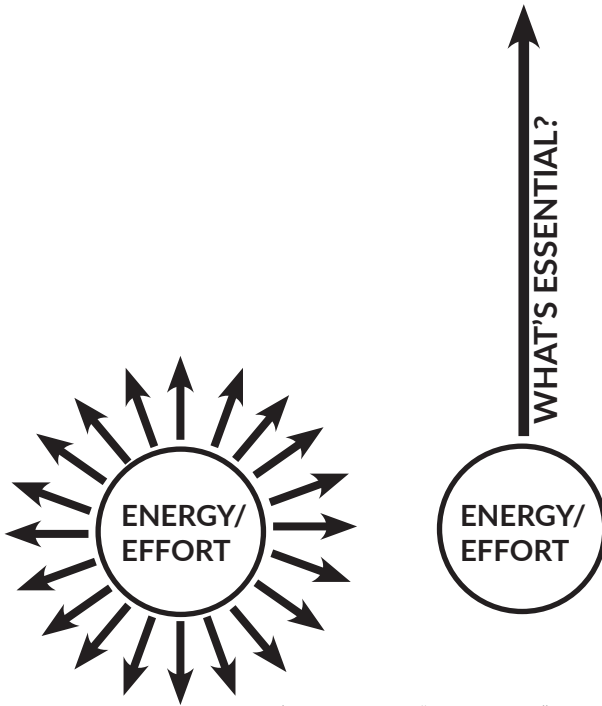
- 12/20 Matthew 2:1-12
- 12/21 Matthew 3:13-17
- 12/22 Matthew 21:33-46
- 12/23 Acts 10:34-43
- 12/24 Hebrews 1:1-4
- 12/25 1 Peter 1:10-12
- 12/26 Matthew 2:1-12

THE OVERLOOKED

- 12/6 Matthew 1:18-25
- 12/7 Zechariah 4:1-10
- 12/8 Matthew 2:13-18
- 12/9 Matthew 2:19-23
- 12/10 Luke 2:1-7
- 12/11 Luke 4:16-30
- 12/12 Matthew 1:18-25

What's Essential?

When an Asbury member, Mary Jo Barnes, gave me a book she said, “*This book will change your life.*” She was right. That book, “Essentialism,” has changed my thinking and behavior. A simple drawing with two circles on page 6 quickly explains the difference between an essentialist and a non-essentialist. It is tempting and easy to spend most of our time on trivial matters. An “essentialist” examines what is important, eliminates the noise, and shapes their life in following what matters most.



(Adapted from “Essentialism” by Greg McKeown)

Probably more than any other person, it was General George Marshall that led the Allies to victory in World War II. He was THE person in charge of the Allied war effort in World War II. He had huge responsibilities, but Marshall simplified his organization and focused on a single major issue at a time. He knew how to reduce clutter. When one issue was resolved, he moved to the next major problem. He said “no” to most things. By doing so, he could concentrate on this question: “*What is most important now?*” (The General Marshall story is from the book, “A World without Email” by Cal Newport.)

Jesus is our model. His central message on earth was to announce that the kingdom of God was at hand. He organized His life and ministry around this theme. He was direct about this topic. Possessions were not His focus. When asked about following Him, Jesus replied, *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”* (Luke 9:58) In contrast, the rich, young ruler who investigated following Jesus was also an essentialist. Money was his priority, not the kingdom of God (Luke 18:18-30).



Whether it is Jesus, Paul, John Wesley, or General Marshall, those who achieve have a singular focus. They keep the main thing the main thing. Jesus is an essentialist, but He is also THE ESSENTIAL. He IS the “main thing.” His name is THE name above every other name. Yet, he turned things upside down to inaugurate God’s kingdom. The lowly are exalted. The marginalized are received. Women, children, outcasts, and sinners are loved, welcomed, and accepted. Not only will we look at Jesus’ favorite topic, the kingdom of God, we will look at how His coming made underdogs, like Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, essential characters in His magnificent story. We will read how the wise men, who came to give (like Jesus), also found their place in the story. All of these were willing to play their parts, no matter how big or small. In the kingdom of God there are no non-essential people.

WHAT'S ESSENTIAL?

November 22 – December 26, 2021

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Monday, November 22, 2021

Matthew 6:25-34



Matthew 6 is the middle chapter of the “Sermon on the Mount” where Jesus taught about following Him. HE is the one who invites us to find meaning in life through Him. When we do that, other things just seem to find their place. Trivial Pursuit is a great board game, but trivial pursuits are no way to live. As C.S. Lewis put it, “Aim at heaven and you get earth ‘thrown in.’ Aim at earth and you get neither.”

After Thanksgiving, we can continue to give thanks as we move into a new season. “Advent” comes from two Latin words, ad (toward) and venio (coming). Advent is literally “coming toward” Christmas. In church history, Advent was a type of “mini-Lent.” Christians would fast and pray to prepare their hearts for Jesus.

By definition, we really can have only one priority. A priority is THE thing before all other things. We have to make trade-offs to pursue what matters most. If we focus on the spiritual narrative of God’s kingdom during this season, many of the frustrations and disappointments of December go away. Furthermore, January will be a more pleasant experience if December does not financially stress us. Paul is clear on this: *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* (Romans 14:17) Jesus allowed us to enter His magnificent story so we can share His abundant life with others. Life is relational. A follower of Jesus lives into the kingdom of God in three ways. Our communion liturgy says it: *“Let us be one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.”*



APPLICATION: Your Advent challenge is to memorize Matthew 6:33: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* If the kingdom of God is our focus, the next verse is an appealing result: *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”* (Matthew 6:34) Non-essential things can dominate so easily. Non-essential matters make us hurried, rushed, stressed, in-debt and neither successful nor productive. Advent is an excellent opportunity to flip the script. We can be on an adventure pointing and re-directing to a better way. This happens when we allow Jesus to be Lord of all.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

Matthew 19:16-30

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Thursday, November 25, 2021

Luke 22:14-30

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Friday, November 26, 2021

John 3:1-15

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Saturday, November 27, 2021

Acts 1:1-5

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Sunday, November 28, 2021

Matthew 6:25-34

Sermon Notes:

Monday, November 29, 2021

Luke 1:26-38



Mary is one of the greatest people in the Bible. We don't worship her, but let's not dismiss or ignore her, either. This young woman did not volunteer for such a major disruption to her life. The angelic announcement was shocking. She was not prepared to be the mother of the Messiah. She was "greatly troubled." She "tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be." The angel reassured her with what angels always tell people, "Do not be afraid." The angel's kind and favorable greeting helped her remain calm. Mary listened and asked, "How can this be?" After all, she was a virgin. The angel comforted her with the "Comforter," the Holy Spirit, "one called alongside to help."

Becoming a parent is disruptive. Having a baby, a calling or a major life-change causes us to enter a discernment process. We must evaluate our choices. What used to be important may be less so now. Mary's relative, Elizabeth, experienced this too. Elizabeth's son, who became "John the Baptist," was Jesus' forerunner. Mary and Elizabeth became mothers for the first time, but even more so, they became vital to God's magnificent story.

An essentialist asks, "Where should I put my limited resources today?"

Mary's response to the unbelievable news was one of faith and obedience. Verse 38 says it so well, "And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'"

The Lord used a host of people to make it possible for Jesus to become flesh and blood and move into the neighborhood. He needed a family to birth, nurture, teach, and provide for Him. As such, Mary had a unique relationship with Him, and an essential role in Jesus' life. Mothers are to do that for their children. Mary is an amazing model. Because she was willing to be used by God, she answered with her own unique response. The kingdom of God is made of people willing to serve and follow Him.



APPLICATION: What do you think God saw in Mary that He chose her to be the mother of Jesus? What can we learn from her willingness to serve God in such a radical way? What is God calling you to do? Are you willing to be used by God? What is your essential role to help others follow Jesus?

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Luke 1:39-45

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

THE WILLING

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Luke 1:46-56

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Thursday, December 2, 2021
Luke 1:5-25

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

THE WILLING

Friday, December 3, 2021

John 2:1-12

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Saturday, December 4, 2021
John 19:16-27

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Monday, December 6, 2021
Matthew 1:18-25



Mary gets the spotlight in the Gospels, and rightfully so, but as one of Peter Mayer's songs goes, "*Keep walking, Joseph, you're part of the plan.*" Joseph is often overlooked. He is more or less "the forgotten man." The news that his young betrothed was pregnant was earth-shattering (they were formally engaged in a legally binding ceremony—like they were already married). The initial news was a dark night in Joseph's soul. He took a disruptive moment in his life and found a way to play a critically important role in the magnificent story.

Zechariah 4:10 states, "*For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice...*" A small thing to one person may be a big thing to someone else. Just because a contribution is relatively small, does not make it trivial. Joseph was an essential character in the story—he just didn't get as much press as Mary.

Many men feel intimidated by women about spiritual things. Yet, the story could not have happened without Joseph. An essentialist asks, "*What's the highest contribution I can make today?*" Joseph worked quietly behind the scenes. Although he is hardly mentioned in the Gospel narratives, he played a key role. He provided for and protected Jesus and His mother. Joseph did the small things well. I love Josh Wilson's song, "*Dream Small.*" He sings, "*Don't buy the lie you've got to do it all. Just let Jesus use you where you are. One day at a time. Live well. Loving God and others as yourself. Find little ways where only you can help. With His great love, a tiny rock can make a giant fall. So, dream small.*"



APPLICATION: Joseph considered his options carefully. The answer came to him in a dream. How do you think Joseph became an essentialist after his dream? How can you create space to hear from the Lord and discern His will for you? When have you felt overlooked? How do you feel about being called to fill a small role in a big way? Last week we focused on Mary and mothers. What can you do to encourage and speak into the lives of men and fathers during Advent?

THE OVERLOOKED

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Zechariah 4:1-10

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

THE OVERLOOKED

Thursday, December 9, 2021

Matthew 2:19-23

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

Monday, December 13, 2021
Luke 2:8-20



The world changed when Jesus came and brought the kingdom of God near to us. Heavenly angels revealed the glorious news to the least likely people in Judea: shepherds.

This announcement to such a rag-tag group was counterintuitive. Working with stubborn and stupid sheep was not an intellectual challenge. While some good shepherds existed, like David, many had the reputation of not knowing the difference between “thine” and “mine.” Shepherds were smelly outcasts with a dirty job. The ceremonially unclean shepherds were prohibited from worship at the Temple. But the Lord gave them in a unique honor in His magnificent story.

The Lord delights in showing off in weakness. Look at these verses: *“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”* (Romans 8:26) *“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* (1 Corinthians 1:25) *“I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”* (1 Corinthians 2:3-5) *“It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”* (1 Corinthians 15:43) *“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 11:30) *“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* (2 Corinthians 12:9) A baby at Christmas and a crucified Savior raised at Easter are the ultimate expressions of God stooping on our behalf. This fits His M.O.—the lowliest of people are counted as essential in His kingdom.



APPLICATION: When have you seen lowly people exalted?

When has this happened to you? When have you seen people filled with arrogance (like King Herod) put in their place? 1 Peter 5:5 says, *“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”* How can you relate to feelings of weakness? How have you encountered the power of the Lord?

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Psalm 103:20-22

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Isaiah 6:1-7

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Ephesians 3:14-21

- What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

Monday, December 20, 2021
Matthew 2:1-12



I love how 1 Peter 1:10-12 ends: *“Things into which angels long to look.”* I would not swap my modern conveniences for a more primitive era, but it would be thrilling to look at some of the great moments in the Bible. What would it have been like to watch Moses besting Pharaoh, David zonking Goliath, Elijah calling fire down from heaven, or Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem? Seeing firsthand the miracles of Jesus—walking on water, feeding the 5,000, the transfiguration, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the day of Pentecost—would have been transforming. However, the events of the Christmas narrative would have been unforgettable, too: the annunciation to Mary, the angels scaring the daylights out of the shepherds, and the wise men worshipping with their gifts. I love that bumper sticker: *“Wise men still worship Him.”*

We always give when we love someone. We can give without loving, but we simply cannot love without giving. John 3:16 reminds us that God gave His Son, out of His love for us. Paul said, *“When I was a child, I thought like a child... when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”* Mature people are humble and generous. We see both traits at the heart of the Wise Men’s gifts. The kingdom of God is built on a spirit of giving, which is God’s nature. We see the opposite response from King Herod. There is a *“time for everything”* (Ecclesiastes 3) including receiving and giving, but the greatest joy comes when we have a surplus of substance and heart.



APPLICATION: What are you giving this Christmas? Will you evaluate Christmas more in terms of what you got or what you gave? There is nothing wrong with receiving, as there is a time for everything. However, Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* It took me a long time to understand that—but in the second half of my life, I’ve gotten the message.

How are you cultivating wisdom, a heart of worship, and a spirit of giving? How can you give more of your heart, soul, mind, and strength to the Lord and to your neighbor in 2022?

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?



What do Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men have in common? Jesus was the essential person in their lives. For Mary and Joseph, it was an ongoing, lifetime experience. For the shepherds, it was a once-in-a lifetime moment.

The point is, there is NO magnificent story without Jesus. John 1:17 says, *“For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* The Old Testament, with all its background, history, leaders, prophets, kings, and priests, is essential or the New Testament has no context. However, without Jesus, all we have is the law. The law cannot save us—it only convicts us of sin. The law is part of our story but is incomplete.

Jewish people do not worship Moses, Muslims do not worship Mohammed, and Buddhists do not worship Buddha; yet these religions exist without worshipping their leaders. However, to remove Jesus, the chief cornerstone of our faith, makes the entire structure collapse. Jesus is not just another in a long line of prophets who came with a new revelation. He is superior in every way to the prophets and to the angels. He is the Son of God. When we have the best, there is no need to revert to an inferior.

“Long ago... the prophets. Now... his Son.” The text describing the nature of Jesus is mind-blowing. He is *“the heir of all things,”* the creator of the world, *“the radiance of the glory of God,”* the exact imprint of God’s nature, *“he upholds the universe by the word of his power,”* he made purification for our sins and is now seated at God’s right hand, *“much superior to angels,”* with a more excellent Name than theirs. Wow! If we take the Scripture seriously, we will never say Jesus was “just another religious leader” or just a “good teacher.” Jesus came to reveal to us the nature of the King in the kingdom of God.



APPLICATION: Everything in the Bible points to Jesus. He is not only an essentialist in the way He lived—He is THE ESSENTIAL. Memorize Hebrews 1:1-4. Let that concept penetrate your mind. However, the Scriptures are not merely for our minds, they are for our hearts, too. Ask the Spirit of Jesus to fill your mind and heart with affection for Him. Meditate on who Jesus is, what He has done, why He did it, and where His grace will take us. Make Him your Essential. Love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength... and your neighbor as yourself.

