

A Heart Filled with Gratitude

SCRIPTURE: 1 Chronicles 16:7-36

KEY VERSE: **O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.** —1 Chronicles 16:8

The Christmas Stockings

Each year at Christmas when we were visiting my in-laws, my mother-in-law, Amy, would prepare the Christmas stockings—one for each person, with his or her name marked at the top. Each stocking was carefully packed with candy and nuts and some random mechanical item. Throughout the year, she carefully collected unusual items for the stockings, little gifts meant to delight or amuse. I remember one year about halfway down the stocking contents, we discovered “flying monkeys”—little paper monkeys that came with a rubber band launcher. Soon the monkeys were flying in every direction across the living room! Of course, we did not receive flying monkeys each Christmas, but one thing was constant. In the toe of each stocking every year was an orange. My mother-in-law had grown up during the Great Depression when her family could not afford an elaborate Christmas. For her family, the orange in the toe of each Christmas stocking was something special, something to look forward to receiving.



Amy passed away in January 2010. Was the Christmas stocking tradition going to be lost with her? That fall our daughter announced that she was taking the Christmas stocking baton from her grandma Amy and would henceforth take charge of preparing the stockings. Not content to let the Christmas stocking tradition of her family get lost in the past, our daughter brought it forward into the present.

Each stocking is carefully prepared with each recipient in mind. And in the toe of each Christmas stocking is an orange—reminding us of generosity even during lean times!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What Advent or Christmas traditions have been passed from one generation to another in your family?
- Who in the family makes it happen each year? How does it enrich your experience of the special season?

† 1 CHRONICLES 16:8-12

- ⁸ O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- ⁹ Sing to him, sing praises to him,
tell of all his wonderful works.
- ¹⁰ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- ¹¹ Seek the LORD and his strength,
seek his presence continually.
- ¹² Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered.

Moving Day

This session's Scripture passage is set in the context of the Chronicler's story in which we are told how the newly rediscovered ark of the covenant was brought by David out of the obscure past into the present heart of the community once more. The occasion was filled with joy and hope expressed in worship with music and movement.

The ark had been left abandoned in a corner somewhere for many years. It was a reminder of God's work with the Exodus generation. The Chronicler was writing for a smaller group in less prosperous times who must have wondered where the great times had gone. And so, he tells the story of how King David, centuries earlier, went searching for God's presence, symbolized by the ark, and

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how he brought the ark into the center of the community in his time.

We know that we cannot really go back to the past. We cannot relive those times, but we can remember. We cannot travel back to the past, but we can carry the past forward into the present! Our daughter decided that she would honor her grandmother by bringing the Christmas stockings into the present life of our family to enhance the way we celebrate Christmas together. The orange in the toe of each stocking continues to bring joy, and it reconnects us with loved ones no longer physically present with us.

The author of Chronicles was writing for a group that no longer lived in the glory years of Israel. They lived after Solomon's temple had been destroyed during warfare. They lived after the exile of many Jewish families to Babylon and after a new world power, Persia, had allowed them to return. But what they returned to was not what they had left.

Our text weaves three psalms together—**Psalms 105, 96, and 106**—for the celebration that was described concerning the moving of the ark. The people needed to know that God was still with them. They needed to be reminded that what God had done for previous generations years ago was also for them. Although they were few in number those days, God's hand was still on them.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Can you think of a meaningful practice from your church's past that you would like to carry into the present? Whose help would you need to do this?
- If you are a member of a new church, what tradition would you like to begin?



Daily Bible Readings

WEEK 2: A HEART FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

December 2

(MONDAY)

*All Nations
Invited to
Worship God*

ISAIAH 45:20-25

December 3

(TUESDAY)

*Response
to God's
Generosity*

DEUTERONOMY
6:1-11

December 4

(WEDNESDAY)

*God's Saving
Deeds*

PSALM 105:1-15

December 5

(THURSDAY)

*God's Gracious
Compassion*

PSALM
106:40-48

problems. That was long before our time, however. By the time we were called to serve that church, we had the factory workers but no owners. We would sometimes hear members saying, “I don’t know what they are going to do about that!” And we would have to remind all of us, “In these times, *we are they!*”

Our text stressed the importance of owning responsibility for the community of God’s people—whether in times of plenty or in those times of reduced circumstances. Listen to **verse 13**: “**O offspring of his servant Israel, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.**” The author of Chronicles was saying to the people: “We are they now!”

The Importance of Seeking God

In **1 Chronicles 16:10** we read, “**Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.**” The importance of seeking the Lord was at the heart of the Chronicler’s message for his people. King Saul had not sought the Lord, and it led to the downfall of his reign. When at first David decided to bring the ark to Jerusalem without consulting God, tragedy struck. David then learned that he needed to seek the Lord. Then the project moved ahead. David decided on his own to build a temple for the Lord, and Nathan gave his approval. But God pulled David back and showed him that David must seek God’s will and God’s presence for the kingdom. That is, beyond his well-intentioned “what,” the king needed to find out *how and when* God wanted things to be done.

“In these times, we are they!”

The importance of seeking the Lord was at the heart of the Chronicler’s message.

Daily Bible Readings

WEEK 2: A HEART FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

December 6
(FRIDAY)

*God’s Forever
Covenant*
1 CHRONICLES
16:14-18

December 7
(SATURDAY)

*God’s Forever
Steadfast Love*
1 CHRONICLES
16:28-36

December 8
(SUNDAY)

*God’s Wondrous
Deeds for all
People*
1 CHRONICLES
16:8-13, 19-27

Look again at **verses 11-12**:

**Seek the LORD and his strength,
seek his presence continually.**

**Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered.**

This was a message the Chronicler knew was especially important for the people of his time living centuries after King David. The glory years were gone, but joy came in seeking the Lord! Likewise, we cannot go back to the past, but we can bring treasures from our past into the very center of our present life together.

This song that we read in **1 Chronicles 16** is known as “The Song of Asaph.” Asaph had been appointed by David as the choir director and chief musician (see **1 Chronicles 16:5-7**). The Chronicler was showing how music and praise and remembrance raise the level of joy in the community of faith, especially when we are living in those times between one age and another. Joy is always in season! **“Let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!” (v. 10).**

But we
can bring
treasures
from our
past into
the very
center of
our present
life together.

Now, as we move into the season of Advent and look ahead to Christmas, let us claim that joy this season!

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare him room,

And heaven and nature sing.

“Then all the people said ‘Amen!’ and praised the LORD.”

—1 Chronicles 16:36

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How do you seek God’s will in your life?
- When did you or your church seek God’s will before taking action?
- How was God’s will made known to you and others?