

Scientific research has shown some truly incredible results in the area of thankfulness and gratitude. Being thankful can have physical and psychological benefits that rival exercise and medication, and have the additional benefit of strengthening relationships and social connections. Let's do something healthy for ourselves and others this week by adopting some practices that bring glory to God.

Day 1

Meditate

The bible tells us that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is hard to believe just how important this is, but research continually verifies the bible's account of the necessity of right thinking. It is not enough to do good things, but we must want to do good things as we do them. Many times in our lives we are tempted to tyrannize ourselves into right behavior, but this can have a profoundly negative effect on our mental and physical health. When I was a child growing up as a preacher's kid, I was often witness to people doing the right thing because of duty, being guilted to serve or guilted others into service. I had a family member who would often mutter under their breath their disdain for doing the service they were required to do, and it seemed very unhealthy to me. Scientific research confirms that this is, indeed, very unhealthy. Serving others and being served, and the gratitude that follows, can be very beneficial to our physical and mental health, but only if we engage in it willingly, even joyfully. In order to do that, we must meditate on the goodness of the good service we are called to, and not focus on the effort or inconvenience that it causes. We must learn to be wholehearted in our service, as well as whole hearted in our gratitude to receive the benefits that God desires for us.

Verses: Joshua 1:8, Philippians 4:8, Isaiah 26:3

Prayer Topics: Heart, Intention, Willingness

Day 2

Schedule

It is profoundly interesting to me that thankfulness, and the benefits that come from it, must be exercised in community. We might like it if we could derive all the benefits that gratitude has for us by simply making a list of things we are thankful for and thanking God for them, but this is not the case. We must serve others by genuinely thanking them for what they have done for us, and we must serve ourselves by serving other people so that they have something to thank us for. If you are not in a position where you have opportunities to regularly serve other people, it is important to start to schedule works of service in your life. Volunteering at a retirement home, helping a neighbor, or finding ways to minister at the church are vital to our physical and mental health. They make us more connected to others, reduce our fear and anxiety, and decrease tension. They make us more open to others, make us less guarded, and increase our ties to our communities. As we schedule these times of service into our calendars, it is important that we keep a positive attitude about these opportunities so that the benefits are not lost on us. It is also important that our gratitude to others be genuine and from the heart for it to benefit them or us. Make time to serve, because God knows what he is doing in calling us to serve one another.

Verses: 1 Peter 4:10, Galatians 5:13, Mark 10:45

Prayer Topics: Serve Who, When & Where

Day 3

Speak

It is truly fascinating to me that the most powerful gratitude practice is to be thanked by others. Rather than seeing this as a sign of self-centeredness being embedded in the way our brains function, it is an opportunity to see community and service to others as an essential part of thankfulness. We serve others by being genuinely grateful for their acts of kindness and service to us, and nothing is better for them than to be thanked by us from the heart. In addition, we must serve each other by being helpful in various ways in order for them to genuinely thank us from their hearts. It is important to understand that you cannot trick your brain. If we all sat in a circle thanking each other for non-existent or trivial things it would have absolutely no positive effect on our health. God created a system that is resistant to hacking. What does work, however, is for us to put away our shyness and give voice to our gratitude for the numerous things that we do for one another. In our modern society, we are largely self sufficient and do not often require the help of others. We must let others know of our needs, be looking for ways to serve each other, and be prolific with our thanks.

Verses: Colossians 3:15-17, Ephesians 5:20, Psalm 100:1-5

Prayer Topics: Honesty, Gratitude, Joy

Day 4

Listen

Another aspect of thankfulness that is unexpected is the significant role that stories play in the health benefits of gratitude. Listening to stories of service to others, of the benefits that it has given to others, of the sacrifices made and the gratitude that ensues is very healthy for us physically and mentally. It is not a surprise, then, that God told Israel to write down the stories of his service to them, and that they were to tell these stories to their children and the following generations. We cannot be grateful on our own, but instead find ourselves embedded in communities of thankfulness. We identify with those people in the stories, we share in their blessing, and are benefitted by what God has done for them, and by what they have done for each other. Find some stories of God's blessing today, or find some stories of other people serving each other that touch you emotionally. Think of these stories day to day. Listen for these stories as you go about your life and pay attention to them. They will bring you a blessing that is unexpected but real.

Verses: Proverbs 2:2, Matthew 11:15, Proverbs 1:33

Prayer Topics: Shared experiences, Community, Awareness

Day 5

Tell

In order for the community to hear stories of service and thankfulness, someone must tell stories of service and thankfulness. Can you tell any of these stories? Do you tell these stories? Will you tell these stories? It may not seem like it, but you are blessing the whole community when you tell stories of how God or other people have served and blessed you, and you express publicly your thanks for them. In addition, it may be helpful to remember that when you face your fears and do something that scares you willingly, your mental and physical health benefit. So, if you are afraid to tell your story you get a double benefit, if you will face that fear and tell it. When will you tell it? What will you tell? Make a decision today to not stay silent.

Verses: Proverbs 16:24, Psalm 19:14, Isaiah 55:11

Prayer Topics: Confess, Spread, Contribute