

**Introduction:**

- Today is part 4 in our series on Cultivating A Heart of Gratitude.
  - We introduced gratitude and began the process of cultivation: Choose to be grateful, recognize the gift and giver, appreciate the gift, express gratitude.
  - Week two we saw that gratitude comes from a heart of humility. Pride is road blocker to humility. If we do not have humility then we will think that the gift is something we deserve or are entitled to.
  - Week three: We look at the topic of beauty and gratitude. Beauty leads to appreciation and appreciation leads to gratitude.
  - I hope you have been faithful to your gratitude journal. Personally it has been impacting my own heart. Since Thanksgiving is this Thursday, I thought I would share the following with you.
- When a man volunteers to do the BBQ the following chain of events are put into motion:
  - The woman buys the food.
  - The woman makes the salad, prepares the vegetables and makes dessert.
  - The woman prepares the meat for cooking, places it on a tray, along with the necessary cooking utensils and sauces and takes it to the man who is lounging beside the grill—ice tea in hand.
  - Here comes the important part:
  - THE MAN PLACES THE MEAT ON THE GRILL.
  - The woman goes inside to organize the plates and cutlery.
  - The woman comes out to tell the man that the meat is burning. He thanks her and asks if she will bring another ice tea while he deals with the situation.
  - Important again:
  - THE MAN TAKES THE MEAT OFF THE GRILL AND HANDS IT TO THE WOMAN.
  - The woman prepares the plates, salad, bread, utensils, napkins, sauces and brings them to the table.
  - After eating, the woman clears the table and does the dishes.
  - And most important of all:
  - Everyone PRAISES the MAN and THANKS HIM for his cooking efforts.
  - The man asks the woman how she enjoyed 'her night off.' And - upon seeing her annoyed reaction – concludes that there's just no pleasing some women. Gratitude recognizes the gift and the giver of the gift.
- I want to talk about the rewards of gratitude this morning. Gratitude has rewards. Or there are benefits to having a grateful heart. Another way of saying this: Gratitude has a greater quality of life reward/benefit.
- Luke 17:11-ff.

**I. Gratitude Has Powerful Character Benefits**

- A. People of gratitude are less self-centered. Because gratitude recognizes the gift given and the giver of the gifts they think about others mores. Humility considers others more than it does itself.

- B. People of gratitude are less materialistic. Gratitude helps us to recognize what we have and this can lessen our need to want more.
- C. People of gratitude are more positive in life.
  1. People who count their blessings and give thanks for them are naturally more positive.
  2. If you focus on something good someone did, how can you think negatively?
- D. People of gratitude are usually more spiritual.
  1. When you are grateful to God, you are giving thanks continually and this opens more doors of spiritual discovery of God's activity in your life.
  2. You grow spiritually when you recognize someones else gifts and talents.
- E. People of gratitude are have more self-esteem. They feel God about themselves. They are grateful to God for having given them:
  1. a new identity
  2. a new name
  3. a new start.

## II. Gratitude Has Powerful Emotional Benefits

- A. Grateful people are happier people. It is a fact of life and of the Word of God. Those who have cultivated a grateful heart are happier. Happiness is wonderful! Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, ranging from envy and resentment to frustration and regret. Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., a leading gratitude researcher, has conducted multiple studies on the link between gratitude and well-being. His research confirms that gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.
- B. Grateful people have happier memories because gratitude is able to appreciate both gift and giver of gift.
- C. Grateful people are more relaxed because they have trained the heart to recognize the good in the midst of difficult situations.
- D. Grateful people bounce back quicker and with greater strength than ungrateful people.
  1. Those that have more gratitude have a more pro-active coping style, are more likely to have and seek out social support in times of need, are less likely to develop PTSD, and are more likely to grow in times of stress.
  2. Recognizing all you have to be thankful for – even during the worst times of your life – fosters resilience. If your heart is filled with appreciation for all that you have and for those who care for you, you'll be prepared to face adversity, when it comes, with courage and dignity.
- E. Grateful people are less envious. Because they are less selfish they are able to celebrate others victories, prosperity, and increase.

## III. Gratitude Strengthens One's Relationship and Social Life

- A. Gratitude opens the door for more friendships. Ie. People do not like hanging around Eeyore's. Gratitude, because it builds others up with 'thanks', opens up more conversations. Negative people do not open up healthy conversations. Gratitude opens the door to more relationships. Not only does saying "thank you" constitute good manners, but showing

appreciation can help you win new friends, according to a 2104 study published in *Emotion*. The study found that thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek an ongoing relationship. So whether you thank a stranger for holding the door or you send a quick thank-you note to that co-worker who helped you with a project, acknowledging other people's contributions can lead to new opportunities.

- B. Gratitude makes for healthier marriages. Where appreciation abounds glad hearts abound. Where appreciation abound people are more willing to give and to serve.
- C. Gratitude is an act of kindness. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit and when we live with grateful hearts people see us as kind. Again, it opens doors for friendships and deeper relationships.
- D. Gratitude builds deeper relationships.
  - 1. Where gratitude is genuinely shared trust is built. If someone has to be on guard all the time, it is hard to grow deep relationally. But gratitude brings walls down creating a safe environment, leading to deeper relationships.
  - 2. Gratitude strengthens relationships by making the thanker and the giver each more aware of their responsibility for the other's well-being.
- E. Gratitude opens up a richer social life. Ie. Bees are attracted to sweet things.
  - 1. Gratitude reduces aggression. Grateful people are more likely to behave in a prosocial manner, even when others behave less kind, according to a 2012 study by the University of Kentucky. Study participants who ranked higher on gratitude scales were less likely to retaliate against others, even when given negative feedback. They experienced more sensitivity and empathy toward other people and a decreased desire to seek revenge.

#### IV. Gratitude Leads to Better Health (all of these are from medical studies done on gratitude).

- A. Gratitude results in less sickness. "*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.*" (Proverbs 17:22, NLT) Ie. You'll smile as you give gratitude for a favor done, and the doer will smile back. Laughter and smiles extend life and promote good health.
  - 1. Gratitude reduces levels of stress by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Stress in turn has been shown to disrupt healthy body functioning (e.g disrupting the hypothalamic-pituitary axis, the immune system, our sleep, etc...).
- B. Gratitude encourages pro-health behavior like exercising and paying attention to health risks. Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and they report feeling healthier than other people, according to a 2012 study published in *Personality and Individual Differences*.
- C. Gratitude leads to better sleep because gratitude reduces stress.
  - 1. Writing in a gratitude journal improves sleep, according to a 2011 study published in *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*. Spend just 15 minutes jotting down a few grateful sentiments before bed, and you may sleep better and longer.
- D. Grateful people are more energetic. Gratitude and vitality are strongly correlated - People who are grateful are much more likely to report physical and mental vigor.

E. Grateful people live longer. There are no studies on gratitude that confirm this but there are multiple studies on optimism and positive thinking that result in longer living.

1. *“Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”* (Exodus 20:12, NLT)

#### V. Gratitude Has Potential to Increase Your Career

A. Gratefulness makes better managers and better employees.

1. Criticism comes all too easily to most, while the ability to feel gratitude and express praise is often lacking. Remember gratitude builds trust, evokes happiness and opens the door for conversation.

B. Gratefulness improves networking because the trust element is higher. Those who are grateful are more likely to help others and also to receive help from others. Gratitude often makes mentors want to help because they like having their time, wisdom, and experience appreciated.

C. Gratitude improves decision making abilities. When we are appreciated with gratitude we work harder to make the right decisions for others.

D. Gratitude increases productivity. How?

1. Those who are insecure have difficulty focusing because many of their mental resources are tied up with their worries.
2. On the other hand, those who are highly confident are able to be more productive, because they can direct more of their focus towards their work.
3. le. Parable of three stewards: the one who was afraid buried his talents.
4. le. Jesus and the sermon on the mount: Do not worry, worrying will not add another day to your life, but it will eat up time that is to be devoted to today. Mt 6:27

#### Conclusion:

- A thankful heart is more than a good idea; it's the will of God for his people. *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- True thankfulnes should be a mark of God's community. Look at the way of life exhibited by the early church: *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved* (Acts 2:46-47).
- The best defense against holiday stress is a happy heart. A thankful heart is a heart awake to God's goodness.
- With all the benefits of gratitude that we have covered today and built upon over the last four weeks. We should be starting to become that community!