

Fitness and Thanksgiving: Declarations of Thanks for the Works of Art We Live In

Thanksgiving, as the name makes clear, is a day to reflect on the blessings we're most thankful for. For the Pilgrims back in 1621, they gave thanks for an abundant harvest.

Over 100 years later, George Washington made the holiday official, proclaiming it "a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God." Today, surrounded by good company and a great feast, we typically reserve a few moments before the big meal to recognize the major "favors" of God in our lives, namely our freedom, our family, and our friends.

But what about our bodies?

Being in the fitness industry, and having researched and written about health and wellness for over 10 years now, I am convinced that our bodies are, sadly, among the things for which we are *least* thankful. Think about how much we hear ourselves and others groan and complain about the way we look, the way we feel, the way we don't look and feel like so and so. Think about all the TV programs we watch, books we read, and gear we buy, all in hopes that they will be the golden ticket that will thrust us through the door of sky-high self-esteem and sunny satisfaction. Think about the fact that the cosmetic industry rakes in \$55 million annually.

I wonder what would happen if we were to, this Thanksgiving, consciously think of and give thanks for the things we appreciate about our bodies.

It's a compelling notion, isn't it? It sounds good, doesn't

it? But would we really feel genuine as we named parts of ourselves that we're fond of and not completely disgusted by or displeased with? Or would we feel like we're merely going through the motions, engaging in a fruitless exercise that will leave us no more thankful for the present state of our bodies than we are for the rowdy crowds of Black Friday? There's only one way to find out.

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!

Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it" (Ps. 139:13-14, NLT).

I took some time recently to consider what the Psalm 139 passage above means when it describes us as "wonderfully complex" and "marvelous." Afterward, I was amazed by just how short those two terms fall of adequately describing these unparalleled machines we do life in! Words utterly fail to convey the beauty and precision, the awe and delicacy, the majesty and genius with which our bodies were created. It's my prayer that somewhere within the following paragraphs, you begin to feel grateful for your body and moved to praise the One who knit it together and called it to life.

"The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4, MEV).

Before I get started with my Declarations, let me ask you this: What are you doing right now?

If your answer is "nothing," you are mistaken ...

Right now, even though you may appear to be idle, countless incredible events, each necessary for your survival, are taking place inside you. For one, your heart is beating. If you're in average physical condition, it beats between 60 and 70 times per minute, 93,000 times per day, 655,000 times per week, 34 million times per year, and 2.4 billion beats in the

average lifetime. What's so mind-blowing about this is that, most of the time, the heart fuels itself, paces itself, repairs itself, and alters itself in response to lifestyle changes, with no conscious effort on your part.

In addition to your heart, right now your liver is detoxifying your blood, your brain is storing away information, cells are being formed while other cells are destroyed, and energy is being used and produced. So the next time someone invites you out and you really don't feel like going, you can honestly tell them, "Sorry, but I'm busy," ha!

I, for one, am thankful for the following regarding the body God's given my soul to reside in:

1. I'm thankful for a wonderfully complex *brain*.

- The brain consists of approximately 100 billion neurons (nerve cells) which gather and transmit signals.
- Your brain, when awake, generates enough electricity to light a lightbulb.
- The brain does not feel pain because it has no pain receptors.
- There are about 100,000 miles of blood vessels in the brain.
- New neurons continue to be made throughout life in response to mental activity.
- Information can be processed as fast as 268 miles per hour.
- In a lifetime, your brain's long-term memory can hold as many as 1 quadrillion (1 million billion) separate bits of information.

American author and biochemist, Isaac Asimov, said that the human brain is "... the most complex and orderly arrangement of matter in the universe." As you read this, your brain is signaling your eyes to automatically adjust the focus and aperture. We humans are not the product of chance or haphazard

construction. German-American rocket scientist and aerospace engineer, Wernher von Braun, stated, "Certainly there are those who argue that the universe evolved out of a random process, but what random process could produce the brain of a man or the system of the human eye?"

2. I'm thankful for a wonderfully complex heart.

In the time it took you to read the section above, approximately 1.5 gallons (6 liters) of blood passed through your heart. Did you know that the human heart's blood vessels are not just straight-through tubes? They are helical, meaning they have a slight twist to them. This gentle corkscrewing makes your blood flow more evenly, minimizing damage from turbulent flow. This smooth flow also encourages the production of health-promoting protective substances. God's attention to the human heart is nothing short of amazing!

3. I'm thankful for wonderfully complex cells.

- 300,000,000 human cells die every minute. Though this is a large number, it is only a fraction of the cells that our body contains. Estimates have put the total number at 10 to 50 trillion.
- Our body produces 300 billion new cells each day. These are needed to maintain the body's functional "status quo" as well as to continuously repair and build new cells.
- If all of your DNA were stretched out, it would reach to the moon 6,000 times!

Your red blood cells, which *just happen* to be the ideal shape for transporting oxygen, are manufactured and destroyed at an incredible rate. Approximately 10 million red blood cells are made every hour, and an equal number are destroyed. If either supply or destruction becomes out of sync by as little as 1 percent, then life ends because blood gets so thin that oxygen transport is insufficient, or it gets so thick that it can no

longer circulate.

Blood clotting is similarly complex. This process is a coordinated function of at least 11 chemical factors. Should blood clot too readily, or should clots which are formed fail to dissolve, you die. Should it clot too slowly, again, the result is death. Our body contains hundreds of complex feedback loops whose precision and reliability are vital to life.

We don't often take time to think about it, but we tread a very narrow path where the smallest error produces death.

Are you thankful yet for this brilliant masterpiece you live in?

4. I'm thankful for wonderfully complex *internal organs*.

- The surface area of a lung is approximately that of a tennis court. (This large surface area makes it easier for the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide.)
- Scientists have counted over 500 different functions of the liver.
- The human body can survive the removal of the stomach or the spleen. It can survive the loss of 75 percent of the liver, 80 percent of the intestines, one kidney, or one lung.

5. I'm thankful for wonderfully complex *bones, muscles, and skin*.

- A block of bone the size of a matchbox can support nine tons (four times the weight that concrete can support).
- Ounce for ounce, our bones are stronger than steel, since a bar of steel of comparable size would weigh four or five times as much. A cubic inch of bone can, in principle, bear a load of 19,000 pounds, which is roughly five standard pickup trucks.
- And yet despite the fact that they're stronger than

- steel, 31 percent of our bones are composed of water.
- We use 200 muscles to take one step.
 - Skin is constantly shedding dead cells and renewing itself. We shed about 600,000 particles of skin every hour.
 - On average, we shed so much skin in a lifetime that by the time we turn 70, we'll have removed an entire small human (105 pounds), from ourselves.
 - In addition to our five senses, we actually have an extra meta-sense known as proprioception, which combines our brains' knowledge of what our muscles are doing with a feel for the size and shape of our body so we can know where the parts of your body are with respect to each other. It's how you can close your eyes and still easily touch your nose.

6. I'm thankful for wonderfully complex eyes.

- If the human eye were a digital camera, it would have 576 megapixels. In comparison, the Mamiya DSLR, which has 80 megapixels, retails at a whopping \$34,000.
- Experts estimate that the human eye can distinguish 10 million different colors.
- The human eye can only see a small fraction of a visual field at a time, so our eyes perform 2-3 saccades (quick, automatic eye movements) per second to complete a single complete picture.

7. I'm thankful that I'm *made in God's image*.

Genesis 1:27 says that God created us in "His own image." While evolutionary biology considers us nothing more than glorified apes, scientific research confirms that humans are vastly unique on many levels.

Only humans possess the ability to create and understand art. Man's capacity for abstract thinking also sets us apart from animals. By referring to unobservable events and changes, we

are able to formulate explanations for *why* certain things are happening.

We are also set apart from all other creatures by our ability to make moral judgments. We can discern between what is right and wrong. No animal models exist for human pride, shame, or guilt. A dominant male chimpanzee does not punish or prevent another chimpanzee from stealing food from another. Humans are unique in that we recognize wrongdoing and seek redemption. This is because we were created in the image of a holy and righteous God.

8. I'm thankful that my body has a *built-in soul and spirit*.

Perhaps what I'm most thankful for is that when this wonderfully complex body dies, my soul and spirit will go on living. And they'll do so in God's presence.

"Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24, MEV).

I'm thankful that while some people don't have eyes that see or ears that hear or hearts, cells, kidneys and brains that function properly, what is absolutely true and unchanging about every single one of us is we all have souls capable of being saved from sin and death.

The moment we confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be like the thief on the cross to whom Christ said, "you will be with me in Paradise."

Our sins past, present, and future are forgiven. Guilt and condemnation have no place in our lives. Death has lost its sting. The grave is without victory. We are declared "more than conquerors" through Christ, and nothing can separate us from His love.

I don't know about you, but those last thoughts alone provide me with enough thanks to fill an eternity of Thanksgivings, which leads me to a final declaration:

I'm thankful for a wonderfully complex *eternity* throughout which I will praise the One who gave His life to set us free.
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