

How Gratitude Is the Key to a Healthier Life

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. Simply saying the word fills the air with the comforting aroma of my mom's homemade stuffing and floods my mind with images of orange-yellow leaves drifting down from treetops and forming crunchy piles underfoot. I can envision the gigantic Turkey Float making its way through Manhattan during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and hear the men of my family cheering on the Dallas Cowboys in the TV room.

But what if **Thanksgiving** was more than just a holiday revolving around festive parades, football games and the daylong activity I like to call "Gobble 'til you wobble"? What if it was more than an elaborate meal around which we say **grace** and thank God for the blessings of friends, family and freedom? What if we made Thanksgiving—or, in verb form, "giving thanks"—a daily exercise?

As it turns out, showing **gratitude** is more like exercise than we might expect. It offers a cornucopia of health benefits that can radically improve our mental, emotional and physical states. Here are a few reasons you should consider making "**Thank you**" a favorite phrase:

1. You'll Exercise More

In an experimental comparison, psychologists Robert Emmons and Michael McCollough found that those who kept weekly gratitude journals **exercised** more regularly and felt better about their lives as a whole. They were even more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to the non-journaling group.

Being **optimistic**, as many of you may know, is a biblical principle that teaches us to seek the good in life and to focus on it. Making a concerted effort to think on our

blessings and give thanks for them automatically places our hearts and minds in a position poised to exude life-altering **positivity**.

“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Phil. 4:8, NLT).

2. You’ll Have a Greater Sense of Well-Being

Emmons and McCollough also noted that grateful people experience higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction and vitality and lower levels of depression and stress. It’s pointed out that grateful people don’t deny or ignore the dreary aspects of life, but their thankful attitude overpowers unpleasant emotions and enhances positive ones.

Job was a righteous man who lost everything: all of his possessions, his health, even his 10 children and the faith of his wife who told him to “curse God and die.” But somehow, despite his physical suffering and spiritual affliction, Job lifted up his shaven, sore-covered head and steadfastly praised God. Even though his faith was challenged, it was never destroyed. After everything had been stripped away, he chose to say, “Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Because we’re told in chapter 1 that Job was upright and blameless when he had much, it’s safe to assume he was probably also a **thankful** man. Being grateful in the good times gave him faith to endure the hard times and place his hope—his very life—in God’s hands. We can likewise equip ourselves to weather life’s storms when we show gratitude while sailing on smooth seas, when we look up at the clear night sky and thank our Captain for His guidance, protection and provision.

3. You’ll Stop Comparing Yourself to Others

What is also interesting about Emmons and McCollough’s research is the striking evidence that grateful individuals

place less importance on material goods. The participants' weekly records of **gratitude** shifted their focus from possessions to personal goals and from anxiety to appreciation. The result was that they became less envious of others. They were even more likely to be more generous with their own possessions than their "less grateful" counterparts.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul began comparing himself to the other apostles, calling himself the least among them. He said he was not even worthy to be called an apostle because of his shameful past as a persecutor of the church. This unhealthy comparison swiftly comes to a halt when Paul's thoughts return to thankfulness:

"But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Paul remembered how **blessed** he'd been by the grace of God, and the burden of condemnation that had crept onto his shoulders quickly evaporated. When we replace words of self-pity with songs of praise and rebuke toxic thoughts of comparison with reminders of our righteousness through Christ, the roots of envy are suffocated and the fruits of the Spirit begin to blossom once again.

"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (Prov. 14:30, NIV).

This **Thanksgiving**, when you're gathered around the family and friends (and food!) you hold dearest, I challenge you to commit to carrying the spirit of gratitude and gratefulness with you, long after the holiday season has faded into the dawn of the new year. I challenge you to make thanksgiving a daily celebration of God's grace, an endless feast upon His eternal promises, and a constant chorus of thanks for the finished work of His Son.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever” (Ps. 118:1, NLT).

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