

Christian Psychotherapist Explains How True Gratitude Impacts Your Health and Well-Being

The phrase “attitude of gratitude” has become so familiar that it’s now a cliché, especially as we celebrate Thanksgiving. But is there an attitude of gratitude, and what impact does it have on our lives? Psychotherapist and licensed mental health counselor Dr. Scott Bush believes gratitude can play a major role in our mental health, happiness and even our spiritual health, particularly in the chaotic season in which we find ourselves today.

“There is definitely a psychological aspect of gratitude,” Bush says. When a person doesn’t have gratitude, he says, “it affects their happiness greatly. You see, happiness and gratitude can be confused, but they are very different. Happiness has to do with things,” he says.

Bush gives the example of an imaginary horizontal line as if it were a yardstick in front of you about three feet off the ground. “A person’s default is that happiness line,” he says. “And let’s say they get a raise at work, and so then they are very happy. And so it’s like the graph goes up a little bit ... off of the yardstick, and then it defaults back to the yardstick. And so people have this standard about how happy they really are.

“And let’s say then they get demoted,” Bush says. “And then what happens is their happiness can go down. But then it defaults back to that happiness line. And so the happiness line is called ‘hedonistic adaptations.’”

But here’s where gratitude comes in, Bush explains, “The

height of your happiness line actually depends on the gratitude. So when someone has an attitude of gratitude, and on purpose, they look for things to be grateful for. Many people will create a gratitude journal or a gratitude log. Some people will verbalize it out loud. It's much better to verbalize it out loud or write it down than just to think about it.

"And what happens when they share those things that they're grateful for, it produces a perspective of joy," Bush says. "And when someone has this perspective of joy, it actually increases their happiness line. And so their default happiness actually gets higher, and so they are happier overall. That's why some people, they seem to be just happy people, and other people, they seem to be sad all the time. Usually, that has to do with how grateful they are. And are they verbalizing that gratefulness? Or are they writing that down in some type of a journal or log? And so if we decide we want to be happier, we actually have the key to increasing our happiness. And that has to do with that attitude of gratitude."

Bush also speaks to the coronavirus and its effects on our mental health. "Many times, we can get into a pattern of reactivity or negativity, and that can hold our attention. And it really stops us from seeing our entire experience. Especially in the season that we're in in 2020, there seems to be a lot of chaos ... a lot of things are out of control. And though God is still in control, it can seem like things are out of control, and so it can take our focus away of what He's doing right. And if we pause, and say, every day, 'What's going right in my life? What can I be grateful for?' It is so helpful for us as individuals."

Bush points toward a type of therapy called "solution-focused therapy" therapists use in counseling that focuses not on the problem or what's going wrong, but on what's going right. He says we can use this concept in addressing our current season of crisis. "As we look at our experience, balancing our

experiences, there are a lot of things that are going right in our lives," he explains. "There are a lot of things that are going right in the United States. There is a move that God is doing; folks are getting saved on the streets and in my offices. It is amazing what God is doing."

And Bush says taking the time to look at what we can be grateful for "can change the whole dynamic of our life and our attitude." For Thanksgiving, he suggests going around the table and having each person share what they are grateful for personally, as many families do. He also suggests each person share what they're grateful for about the person on their left or right until all have had a turn. "That makes it very personal; it makes it much more intimate," he says.

After Thanksgiving, Bush suggests continuing this pattern of gratitude, either writing down or verbalizing your gratitude every day. He says, "As you share those things out loud, it produces that attitude of gratitude, increases your joy and actually makes your life happier."

To learn more about gratitude and the incredible positive impact it can have on our health and well-being, listen to the entire episode of the *Strang Report* podcast at this link. And please share with your friends and family so we can extend our season of gratitude long past the Thanksgiving holiday. {eoa}