

THE ART OF GRATITUDE

Thanksgiving is the season to practice the art of gratitude. This is not automatic. Ask a parent - teaching a child to say thank you is a rigorous exercise.

“Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you...” we read in the bible. Gratitude, then, is part of faith. God sees it as important to our souls. So how do we get better at giving thanks?

Here I want to introduce an expert on gratitude. Dr. Stacy Eltiti is Associate Professor of Psychology at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. She has a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology from the University of Essex in the UK. The following are some of her observations. (Taken from a podcast: *Thinking Biblically - Conversations on Faith and Culture*)

Gratitude is an antidote to anxiety. Anxiety is the opposite of gratitude. When you're worrying about things going on in your life and you're focusing on the negative that in turn makes you more and more anxious. Some anxiety research suggests that shifting people’s attention to look for the good makes people less anxious. This relates to gratitude - is focusing on what is good - which helps people overcome anxiety.

Gratitude is related to all sorts of good things in life. So it helps you physically by reducing stress. It helps you mentally - people who are more grateful tend to be less depressed. It helps you professionally; you're a better colleague when you engage in gratitude. And interpersonally, people who are grateful tend to just be more humble and more self-aware and just kind people in general.

Another benefit is that it strengthens the bonds you have with others. So if you are thankful to God and you think about all of the wonderful blessings that you have in your life and the good things that He’s done, that then is going to strengthen your relationship with God and build that relationship up.

Gratitude is not ignoring the bad things in life. Rather it means transforming the mind to be oriented to look for the good, the joy, the beautiful in the midst of the struggles.

A way to make a time of thanksgiving more meaningful and less shallow is to add a “Why” after you say “What” you are thankful for. Why are you grateful for mom, or why are you grateful for school?" and to really flesh out the reasoning behind it. Because then when we hear the "Why?" behind it, then we learn more about that person, and what truly is it about this object or this person that they're thankful for.

One last suggestion by Dr. Eltiti. It has the possibilities of becoming a new tradition at Thanksgiving for some of you readers. She calls it a **gratitude tribute** where somebody writes a gratitude letter that focuses on, "I'm grateful for you, and this is why I'm grateful for you", and reads it to the person. What a gift.

I can't help but believe that expressing gratitude in that way touches our souls and deepens our love. No wonder gratitude is at the heart of God's will! Happy Thanksgiving.