

“Appreciation for Health!”  
(Images Removed - Avoiding Possible Copyright Infringements)  
by  
Rev. James C. Ramsey

Texts: Psalm 147:1-7  
Colossians 3:12-17

Preached: 5/26/19

[IMAGE – mental health awareness]

This morning I conclude our focus on Mental Health Awareness. I want to encourage an “Appreciation for Health.” Upon hearing that, it might sound like I’m advocating that we pay more attention to our overall fitness, which would not be a bad thing.

[IMAGE—Pumpkin on head]

But my real intention is to emphasize that how appreciative we are affects our health, that being thankful actually makes us feel better, that being grateful really fends off illness, that adopting an attitude of gratitude creates well-being for us...That’s not just my opinion, but the result of many scientific/psychological studies:

Here are seven “Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude”

[IMAGE – healthy brain]

1. Gratitude is healthy for your brain. Being thankful and recognizing things you are thankful for helps to reroute brain patterns to be more positive.

[IMAGE – stress relief]

2. Gratitude relieves stress. When you are thankful in the midst of difficult situations, your stress level lowers, thus keeping the production of cortisol in balance.

[IMAGE – emotion boost]

3. Gratitude boosts your emotions. Even during difficult times – your mood can be improved by thinking about what you are thankful for over what you are struggling with at the time.

[IMAGE – relaxed man]

4. Gratitude can decrease pain levels. A study conducted on gratitude versus burdens revealed that some of the study participants reported having less pain after a mindset shift to the grateful.

[IMAGE – restful sleep]

5. Gratitude can facilitate better sleep. Sleep is always difficult when our burdens are heavy and we have so much to process in our minds – however, when we focus our minds to being thankful, restfulness comes more easily.

[IMAGE – jaunty cap]

6. Gratitude is known to reduce anxiety and depression. Both anxiety and depression thrive when our minds are caught in negative thought patterns. When we break those patterns by being thankful and averting our thoughts to lighter, grateful thoughts, feelings of anxiety and depression can lessen and even dissipate.

[IMAGE – older woman working out]

7. Gratitude can increase your drive to exercise. It seems that being more grateful in general causes one to want to care for oneself better...being thankful for your health and the body you have, no matter what state it's in currently...being grateful to be alive...helps to put exercise and movement into motion.

[IMAGE – Gratitude compass]

This is one subject, the benefits of gratitude, where science agrees with religion! There are a myriad of biblical texts urging God's people to be thankful!

[IMAGE – writing in scroll]

The Apostle Paul admonishes nearly every church he writes to be thankful. He wrote this to the Thessalonians: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Over and over, the Psalmist instructs, in one form or another:

[IMAGE – Sing to the Lord]

<sup>7</sup>Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; What makes you sing with thanksgiving? It's good to count your blessings...to remind yourself how privileged you are...and then let the

gratitude flow out of you. There is a popular belief that you wait for something to be thankful for and then, you give thanks. The problem with that idea is that you find yourself waiting all the time. None of us need wait to be thankful. We have been blessed. We could be, should be, thankful right now, for what has already happened.

[IMAGE – bad day at the computer]

Maybe you are having a rough time lately...things don't seem to be going your way...you have a lot of stress in your life. It makes it hard to be thankful...yet you can always go back to the basics...simple things, things we take for granted, everyday things are blessings...would be huge blessings to some in our world...clean water, indoor plumbing, reliable electricity, a secure home, food in your pantry, a regular income, a school to go to, medical coverage...you get the idea.

[IMAGE – friends]

But you don't have to be thankful for things...what about people in your life? Those who have helped you along the way...someone who was exceptionally kind to you...one who loves you unconditionally...

[IMAGE – Schweitzer]

The great theologian and Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Schweitzer once said: "At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lightened the flame within us."

[IMAGE – grateful for this day]

Can we be people of appreciation – grateful for each day and the blessings inherent in them?

Author Melody Beattie suggests, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more...it turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity. It makes sense of our past, it brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow."

[IMAGE – grateful flower]

A recent mental health seminar Pastor Jo and I attended suggested simple, practical tips. One suggested strategically placing a "gratefulness trigger." Anyone can do it – it's an easy way to remind yourself to be thankful. You place a picture or object somewhere in your house or office or even in your pocket. It's a reminder only you know about which will help you to feel grateful each time that you look at it. It could be a picture of

your favorite person, mountain or beach. It might be a small sea shell or polished pebble in your pocket to help anchor and ground your feelings of gratitude.

[IMAGE – children’s sermon]

Kids, of course, can teach us older people how to be thankful. A minister colleague in Minnesota tells the story of a children’s chat he was doing around Thanksgiving: He started by reminding the gathered children of all the blessings God has given us for which we should be thankful. Then he asked them, “What are you thankful for?” One girl answered, “My family.” Another said, “My home.” Then little Joey piped up, “I’m free!”

The minister marveled that a 3-year-old would be able to conceptualize the idea that our freedom is something for which to be thankful. “Very good, Joey,” he exclaimed. “You’re thankful that you are free!”

[IMAGE – three year old]

Just then that minister saw out of the corner of his eye his wife who was trying to get his attention. She pointed to Joey, and then held up three fingers. It was then that he realized little Joey was holding up three fingers and was saying he was 3 years old! “I’m free!”

[IMAGE – Washburn U veterans]

Even though that’s not what Joey was saying...surely on this weekend we can pause briefly to give thanks that we are free. Men and women have served for us, sacrificed for us, are doing so as we speak, in this country and all over our world.

[IMAGE – Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial]

We might reflect on those who have paid the ultimate price, given their lives to win our freedom, in the world wars and in Korea, in Vietnam, and in many other places, Iraq, Afghanistan...we might reflect and give thanks.

[IMAGE – happy people quote]

What’s your thankfulness quotient? Bump it up a few notches and improve your physical, mental and spiritual health! Begin your day with appreciation and end it with gratitude. Before you fall asleep have a conversation with yourself and God. Think or pray about what touched you this day...who or what inspired you?...what made you smile?...what’s the best thing that happened?...and give thanks.

[IMAGE – Piglet and Pooh]

Paul’s advice to the Colossians works for us, too -- let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

I conclude with compelling words from Henry Ward Beecher. He was a Congregationalist clergyman, as well as a political and social reformer in the mid-1800s. He said:

[IMAGE – fingers in sand]

If one should give me a dish of sand and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes and search for them with my clumsy fingers and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it and now would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction.

The unthankful heart, like my fingers in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find in every hour, some heavenly blessings. Only the iron in God's sand is gold!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.