

“Gratitude Creates Joy”

*Psalm 118:24 & 136:1, Ephesians 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18a, Hebrews 12:28, Proverbs 17:22
& Colossians 3:15 & 17*

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Prayer for Understanding Loving God fill us with your Spirit, your breath, your abundant life. Open our eyes to beauty, our ears to harmony, our hearts to love, our minds to wisdom and our souls to joy. Speak to us through your love letter to us the Bible and through one another. Amen

Practicing gratitude creates joy. Scripture implores us to practice gratitude, to be thankful. One of the most repeated lines of scripture is: **Psalm 136:1 ESV “Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.”** The Apostle Paul said: **Ephesians 1:16 ESV “I do not cease to give thanks...”** and implores us to **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18a “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances;”**

Numerous studies reveal that practicing gratitude is the key element to joy. Psychologist Shawn Achor explains how gratitude shifts our brain from scanning and focusing on the negative to scanning and living the positive. Shawn’s research has revealed, the lens through which your brain views the world shapes your reality. If you change your lens, you can become more joyful. Our external world is not a predictor of our joy levels. Your circumstances are a predictor of only 10 percent of your joy. How your brain processes your circumstances accounts for 90 percent of your joy. Practicing gratitude has the potential to make you 90 percent joyful.

Shawn was telling a school about research that has found that 75 percent of job success is predicted by optimism levels, social support, and ability to see stress as a challenge instead of a threat. The school replied we already know that so we have a wellness week every year where we cover depression, violence, bully, eating disorders, and drug use. Shawn replied just so you know that is not a wellness week, that is a sickness week. You have outlined several negative things that may happen. You have not talked about the positive. The absence of disease is not health. We get to health by reversing the formula for joy. Many follow a formula of, if I work harder then I will be more successful, then I will be more joyful. Shawn explains that this formula is scientifically broken and backwards. The problem is every time your brain has a success you change the goalpost of what success looks like. You got good grades, now you have to get better grades, you achieved a financial goal now you must achieve a bigger financial goal, you achieved your sales target now we are going to raise your sales target, you got this area of your home refurbished, now you got another project you must get done, you have grown in loving like Jesus, now you need to love even more like Jesus. If joy is on the opposite side of success, your brain never gets there. We have pushed joy over the cognitive horizon as a society, because we think we have to be successful to be joyful. Our brains work in the opposite order. If you raise somebody’s joy in the present, then the brain experiences what we now call a joy advantage which is your brain at positive performs significantly better than at negative, neutral, or stressed. Your intelligence rises, your creativity rises, your energy levels rise. Shawn has found in the workplace every single business outcome is improved by a grateful, joyful person; superior productivity, more resilient, less burnout, less turnover, greater sales. Your brain at positive is 31 percent more productive than your brain at negative, neutral, or stressed. You are 37 percent better at sales. Doctors are 19 percent faster, more accurate, at coming up with the correct diagnosis when positive instead of negative, neutral, or stressed. Which means we can reverse the formula. If we can find a way of becoming positive in the present, then our brains work even more successfully. Dopamine floods into your system when you are positive. Dopamine creates joy and turns on all of the learning centers in your brain. Shawn’s research has uncovered ways to become more positive. You can rewire your brain to work more optimistically creating joy in just two minutes per day done for 21 days in a row. The most effective is to write down three new things that you are grateful for every day. In just 21 days your brain will start to retain a pattern of scanning the world not for the negative but for the positive first. Journaling about one positive experience you have had over the past 24 hours allows your brain to relive it. Exercise teaches your brain that your behavior matters. Meditation enhances your brain’s ability to focus on the one task in the present. Random acts of kindness, such as writing one positive email or text of gratitude when you open your email or pick up your phone. All of these practices of gratitude create joy. When you train your brain with these practices, you reverse the formula for success and joy. By practicing

gratitude every day, you will become more joyful, more successful and create ripples of joy that make everyone around you more joyful. You control 90 percent of your joy. Gratitude creates joy.

Hebrews proclaims: **Hebrews 12:28** “**Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful.**” The Apostle Paul writes: **Philippians 4:4-8 NLT** “**Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Do not worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank God for all God has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. God’s peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. 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.**”

When I first starting hiking, I was grateful for the wonder and majesty of creation which filled me with joy. Then there was a season when hiking yielded little joy. The reason was my mind wanted to know what I missed on the trails I did not hike. My mind tracked how far I hiked in an hour and wanted to go faster and further. I researched hikes to find the best view, the most unique view. I hurried to get to these views. In that season, hiking yielded less and less joy. In the next season, joy returned when I practiced gratitude giving thanks for what I was experiencing.

At the end of the day, I am striving to shift from lamenting all the things I did not get done on my to do list to gratitude for the things I did do. I strive to find one positive news story that I can be grateful for every day. I meditate on a positive phrase of scripture. I recall one wonderful encounter with someone.

I sometimes fall into joyless funks where my mind views everything as half-empty. Gratitude lifts me up and fills me with joy. Sometimes I read my joy file where I keep emails, and cards from people who have thanked me. Sometimes I read past entries from my gratitude journal. Sometimes I go for a hike. Sometimes I do something fun with Leslie. **Psalm 136:1 ESV** “**Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.**” **Colossians 3:17 ESV** “**And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.**”

Melody Beattie wrote: “Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. Gratitude turns what we have into enough and more. Gratitude turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. Gratitude can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.” Melody goes onto explain that a daily gratitude journal will transform the quality of your life beyond your grandest expectation. Daily writing down something you are grateful for will fill you with joy and will help you become more content and more creative. Some days are brutal, on these days look for basic gratitudes such as, your bed, food, the sun, your senses, God’s love for you.

Brene Brown has found that one must be grateful to experience joy. Small things can bring great joy when savored. Identify what you are grateful for each day. Write your gratitude in a journal. Tell another what you are grateful for about them. Gratitude is a practice like exercise to get results you must do it.

Proverbs 17:22 ESV “**A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.**” **Colossians 3:15 ESV** “**And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.**”

Ten percent of your joy is your circumstances. You control 90 percent of your joy. If you do not already have a gratitude practice, then everyday writing one thing you are thankful for will significantly enhance your joy. Gratitude creates joy. In the next three minutes of silence write down three things you are grateful for in your gratitude journal.

I challenge you to set aside two minutes each day to add to your gratitude journal. If you already have a gratitude journal, then take two minutes to write and send a note of gratitude to another. If you are already doing both of these, then illustrate your gratitude or meditate on your gratitude. **Psalm 136:1 ESV** “**Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.**” **Psalm 118:24** “**This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad!**” Amen