

# “Gratitude Creates Joy: Emotions & Engagement”

*Psalm 118:24 & 136:1, Ephesians 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18a, Hebrews 12:28, & John 15: Select Verses*

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**Prayer for Understanding** Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

Last week we explored how practicing gratitude creates joy. Spending just two minutes daily writing down gratitudes can make you ninety percent joyful. Gratitude is the prerequisite for joy. Even the smallest thing can produce great joy when savored. Scripture proclaims: **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 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.”**

Numerous studies reveal that practicing gratitude is the key element to one’s joy. Brene Brown agrees and has identified numbing as a diminisher of joy. Many people have sought to numb themselves from the pain of the pandemic, the sadness of the constant stream of negative news, the anguish of our politics, and the grief of loss. Grief accompanies every loss. Some losses are obvious like the grief of a loved one entering Life Triumphant. Some losses may seem trivial such as, not being able to eat at a restaurant you enjoy, the end of a television series, a tree you enjoyed, cut down. During the pandemic, everyone experienced a multitude of losses. It is healthy to name, acknowledge, and grieve these losses, instead of numbing, ignoring, or belittling a loss. When we numb the dark, we numb the light.

Some people numbed their emotions with busyness, noise, food, alcohol, and scrolling through social media, which can lead to a downward spiral of fatigue, sadness, and sorrow. Joy often becomes terrifying to someone who is frequently numbing their emotions. They are unable to live in the moment, to be present, to savor joy because they are foreboding that something bad is going to happen. Brene has identified that joy is the most vulnerable emotion. Your capacity for joy is related to your capacity for vulnerability. Grief, sadness, disappointment, and fear are sharp emotions that need to be acknowledged because if one takes the edge off of sharp emotions, they take the spark out of joy. “What ifing” is a joy suppressor. What if I get sick? What if there is a recession? What if an accident happens? Your body does not know if you are “what ifing.” It exhausts the body as if what your fear is actually happening diminishing joy. The antidote for “what ifing” is gratitude.

There have been numerous studies on people who are required to numb their emotions for their employment. We call this emotional dissonance. The EMT who is calm and focused in the midst of chaos. The flight attendant who is calm and reassuring as an engine fails on a plane. Studies have found that people who numb their emotions struggle to experience joy. They spend most of their time in the emotional middle, avoiding the lows and the highs. People who are required to have emotional dissonance at work will struggle, unless they make time after work to process their emotions. Joy increases when we acknowledge the low emotions, name them, and process them. Joy increases when we grieve our losses.

After Jesus was crucified, the disciples were grieving Jesus’ death, grieving the loss of their expectations, grieving the loss of this season of traveling with Jesus and each other. The disciples came together to acknowledge their grief, to cry, get angry, to process, to lament, to remember. Their “what ifing” filled them with fear. What if there is no resurrection? What if I cannot get a job? What if the religious leaders imprison, beat, or crucify me?

**John 20:19-20 NLT “That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” Jesus said. As Jesus spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!”**

One of the reasons the disciples were filled with joy was that they were not numbing their emotions. They were wrestling with the pain of the sharp emotion of grief, they were vulnerable; so when Jesus appeared, they had great emotional capacity for joy.

Do you have losses that you need to grieve? We live in a time of rapid change. Every change means something was lost. Even good positive change, that we need to do, means a previous way of being or doing is lost and needs to be grieved. Unresolved grief is a joy suppressor. Acknowledge loss. Be grateful for having had the opportunity to experience what you lost and be grateful that you will enjoy what you lost again in heaven.

Are you numbing your emotions? Numbing snowballs every hurt. Numbing merely pushes the pain into the future. Numbing suppresses joy. Be vulnerable. Acknowledge your emotion. Experience your emotions. Often the grieving are craving your joy to heal. Brene has talked to parents who have lost a child. They explained how they appreciate when other parents share pictures and stories of their living children. The found comfort in hearing the gratitude parents of living

children have because it acknowledges that they understand what they have lost. There is a universal fear of grief. Often one is afraid to be grateful and joyful around someone who is grieving. This creates another loss for the grieving. It is communal numbing. Brene found that the parents who lost their child craved people sharing the name of their lost child, sharing the stories. They craved people sharing about their living children. Sharing helps them to process their emotions, be grateful, and joyful.

Joy is fluid. Sources of joy will end. Grieve, let it go. Be open to new experiences of joy, curious as to the new delights God is giving you to joyfully savor. Joy is additive. The joy you have accumulated over your life expands your capacity for joy. Losses will still hurt; and accumulated joy gives resilience that allows perspective, enabling one to process their grief. One must be grateful to experience joy.

Another reason the disciples were filled with joy was they experienced the life of resurrection. Earthly death is a portal to everlasting life. We lose people we love for a season, then we will be reunited with them in heaven for eternity. God never loses anyone or anything. Love endures forever. Every goodness, love, and joy are resurrected and awaiting all of us in heaven. Every loss of every kind you have ever experienced is already found by God, awaiting you in heaven for you to enjoy again and forever. Hebrews proclaims: **Hebrews 12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful.”** Thankfulness, gratitude creates joy. The peace that God gives, the peace that surpasses all understanding, comes as we journey through the sharp emotions, through grief, to gratitude, joy, and abundant life.

Daily praying the examen creates joy. There are four steps:

1. Become aware of God’s presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray for it.

I call this the high low prayer. I name and acknowledge my low point. If it involves loss, I grieve it. I gratefully savor the high point of my day. I thank God.

Disengaging suppresses joy. Vulnerability is defined as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. Love and joy require uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. Theodore Roosevelt said: “It is not the critic that counts. It is not the person who points out how the strong person stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done it better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with blood and sweat and dust; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again. The credit belongs to the one who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, devotions; who spends their self in a worthy cause. Who at the best in the end knows the triumph of high achievement and who at worst, when they fail, they fail daring greatly.” Brene says, “If you are going to spend time in the arena, you will get your butt kicked.” The question is, will you reengage and keep trying, keep loving, keep rejoicing? Will you be curious? What happened. Why did I react that way? Curiosity is a super power that keeps us creating, learning, and asking questions. Curiosity increases our self-awareness. Brene says, “If something happens that overwhelms you with shame, the first thing you need to do is get back on your emotional feet.” Get into a quiet place and talk to yourself like you talk to someone you love. Self it is okay, you messed up. Give yourself a break. Then, reach out and talk to someone about what you are feeling. Shame cannot survive being spoken. If you own your story, you get to write the ending. If you do not own your story, then the story owns you. Part of your story is you are God’s beloved child. You belong to God’s family. You are good and enough, because you are created in the image of God. Therefore, engage, be courageous, be vulnerable, love extravagantly. Loving engagement creates joy. Jesus explains this in a parable. **John 15:Select Phrases NLT “I am the true grapevine, and God is the gardener. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. “I have loved you even as God has loved me. Remain in my love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!”**

The truth is you are God’s beloved child. You belong to God’s family. You are good and enough because you are created in the image of God, you are connected to God the source of all life, love, goodness, and joy. Be grateful for these truths. Remain in these truths. Do not tell yourself anything different, for that is disconnecting from God. Remain in these truths, remain in love, get in the arena and love, be grateful and your joy will overflow.

Gratitude creates joy. What are your gratitude practices? Perhaps experiencing all your emotions. Perhaps engaging with extravagant love. Perhaps celebrating that you belong and are enough. Perhaps writing in your gratitude journal every day.

**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**