

Giving Thanks to God and Having Hope

Jerry Truex; January 1, 2017

A. Introduction

Today we begin a new year. This is a good time to look back at the previous year and to look forward to the coming year. So today is sharing day."

In a moment, I will ask for volunteers to share about:

1. What are you thankful for in 2016?
2. What are you hopeful for in 2017?

While you are thinking about how you might respond, here are a few comments about the importance of giving thanks and having hope.

B. The importance of giving thanks

1. Thankfulness to God

Psalm 100:4. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. (NRSV)

This verse imagines the people of Israel ascending Mount Zion and entering the Temple. And how were they to enter the gates of the Temple? They were to enter expressing thanksgiving, singing praises to God, blessing God's Name.

The Temple no longer exists, but Jesus taught us that we can enter the God's Temple at anytime and anywhere we want (John 4:20-22), because we are the Temple of God and the Spirit dwells within us (1 Cor. 3:16)

That means we can enter the "Temple" of our hearts and minds when we express thankfulness to God, sing praises to God, and bless God's Name. These activities orientate our mind and heart toward God.

When we give thanks to God, we turn toward God and away from our pettiness. When we give thanks to God, we turn away from the trivial pursuits of the world, away from the trivial cacophony and clamor of television, social media, and the talking heads.

Definitions:

Thankfulness = adjective; feeling or showing gratitude; it is the awareness of a benefit; thankfulness concerns a receiver and a giver

Gratitude = noun; a state of being thankful

Example: "We are grateful (noun) and to express that means to be thankful (adjective)."

Thankfulness helps us to recognize God working in our midst, even when life is difficult. Thankfulness cultivates divine or spiritual wisdom—we become “detectives of divinity.”

2. Thankfulness is a sacrifice

Psalm 50:14. “Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God” (NLT).

Again, this verse imagines the Temple where animal sacrifices were made. Sacrifices in the Temple were called *qorbanot*, which comes from the root Qof-Reish-Beit (קרב), which means “to draw near.” Sacrifices draw us near to God.

But now, it is not animals that are sacrificed, but our time and effort to thank God.

If you think about it, a sacrifice is an act of giving up something we want to keep. Why is giving thanks to God a sacrifice? What are we sacrificing when we give thanks to God?

We are sacrificing our self-centered egos and turning toward God, trying to see from God’s perspective, not the self-centered pursuits of our ego. Thanksgiving is one mechanism that helps us to lose our false self.

Mark 8:35. For those who want to save their life [false self] will lose it [true self], and those who lose their life [false self] for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it [true self]. (Mar 8:35 NRS)

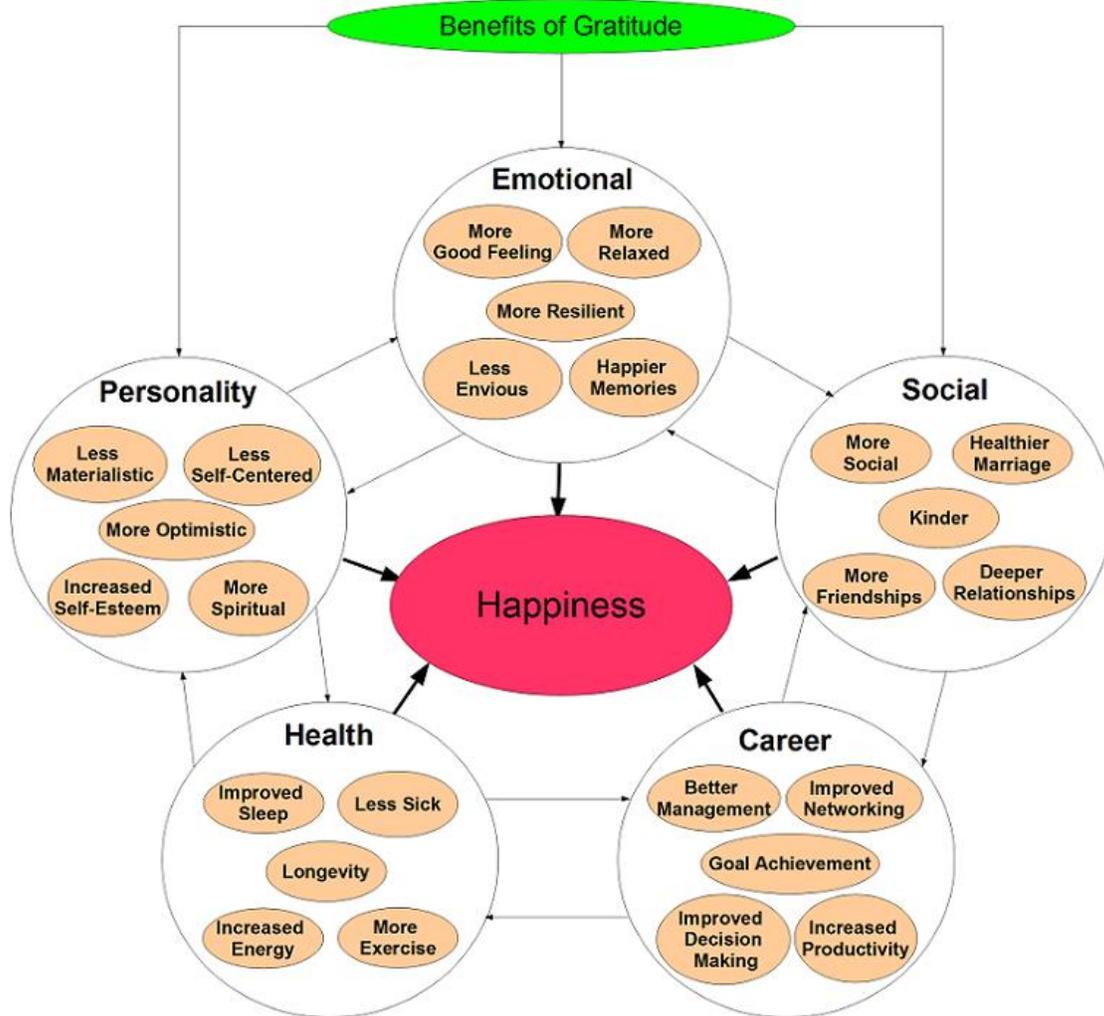
We are tempted to think that we should give thanks only when life is good to us. It is easy to give thanks when life is going smoothly. But when life is not going well, it is easy to hold back on giving thanks to God.

As a sacrifice, we might want to write a “thankfulness journal” every day — a daily sacrifice! — paralleling the ancient daily sacrifices in the Temple.

When we give this daily sacrifice of thankfulness, it helps us to see what God has been doing, what God is doing, and perhaps what God will do. We see how God has been blessing us, and that opens our eyes to see what God is doing now, will help you to receive God’s blessings now.

3. The benefits of thankfulness¹

There have been more than 40 research studies done on gratitude and all of them point toward substantial benefits for people who practice thankfulness.²



a. Makes us happier

Writing out a “gratitude journal” every day can increase your long-term happiness. On study showed that after 6 months of keeping a gratitude journal, people felt 10% happier than when they began.

b. Makes people like us

¹ <http://happierhuman.com/benefits-of-gratitude/>
² <http://happierhuman.com/the-science-of-gratitude/>

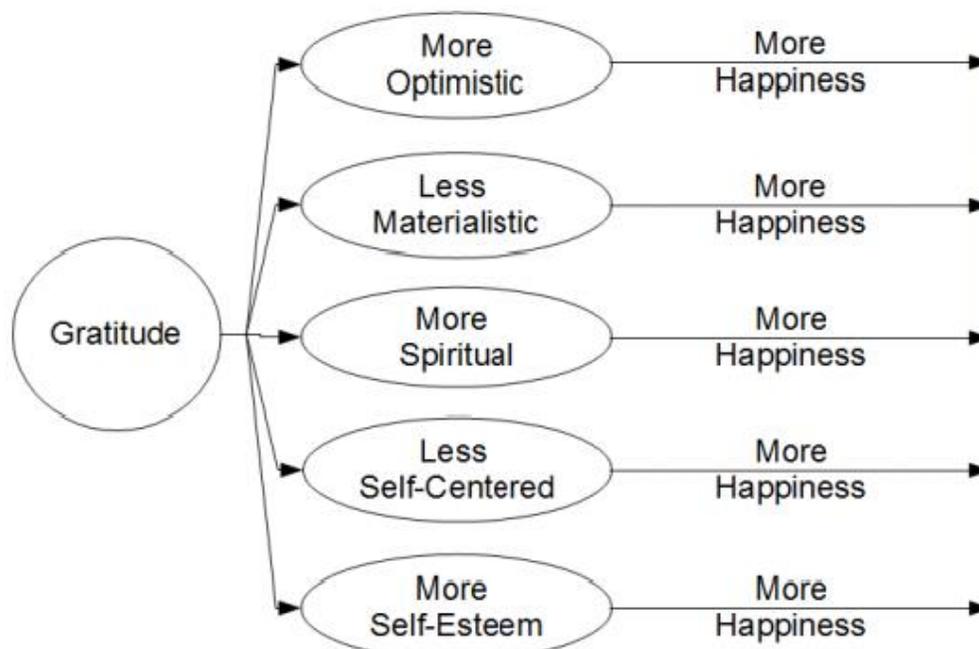
c. Makes us healthier

Studies show that gratitude reduces feelings of envy, makes our memories happier, lets us experience good feelings, and helps us bounce back from stress.³

Results1	Study	Date
Keeping a gratitude journal caused participants to report 16% fewer physical symptoms, 19% more time spent exercising, 10% less physical pain, 8% more sleep, and 25% increased sleep quality.	Counting Blessings Versus Burdens	2003
The emotions of appreciation and gratitude shown to induce the relaxation response.	The Grateful Heart	2004
A gratitude visit reduced depressive symptoms by 35% for several weeks; a gratitude journal lowered depressive symptoms by 30%+ for as long as the practice was continued.	Positive Psychology Progress	2005
Patients with hypertension were instructed to count their blessings once a week. There was a significant decrease in their systolic blood pressure.	Gratitude: Effects on Perspectives and Blood Pressure	2007
Gratitude correlated with improved sleep quality (r = .29), less time required to fall asleep (r = .20), and increased sleep duration (r = .14).	Gratitude Influences Sleep Through the Mechanism of Pre-Sleep Cognitions	2009
Levels of gratitude significantly correlated with vitality and energy.	Multiple Studies	Many

d. Strengthens our spiritual core

Practicing thankfulness also strengthen our personalities or spiritual core.⁴



³ <http://happierhuman.com/benefits-of-gratitude/>

⁴ <http://happierhuman.com/benefits-of-gratitude/>

C. The importance of hope

Isaiah 40:31. But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (NIV)

In this passage, Isaiah is encouraging a poor, downtrodden, remnant of Israel to return to Judah after exile after 40 years of captivity. They needed hope.

Hope keeps us energized and on a positive path. Studies have shown that hope improves our immune system, our physical and emotional health, and our relationships.

“Hope is not blindly expecting every positive thing to fall into your lap.”⁵ It isn’t blind optimism. Rather, hope is looking at our future realistically and, most importantly, looking at the positive things that can come from realistic expectations of our future.

Definitions

Hope = noun; feeling that what is wanted can be attained

Hope = verb; to believe that what is desired can be attained; to look at the future positively, to see the bright side of life, that will turn out for the best

To develop hope, remind yourself that “you can choose the way you view the future. You can look on the bright side or the dark side. You can choose to be hopeful.”⁶

D. Invitation to share thanks and hopes

1. What are you thankful for in 2016?

2. What are you hopeful for in 2017?

⁵ <http://thedaily meditation.com/why-is-hope-important-and-how-to-be-a-hopeful-person/>

⁶ <http://thedaily meditation.com/why-is-hope-important-and-how-to-be-a-hopeful-person/>