Northern Illinois District
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

A ~~Moment~~ Lifetime of Gratitude

Have you ever considered the definition of gratitude? Is it an action where we say "thank you"? Or an attitude we put on during different seasons like Thanksgiving? Maybe gratitude is an emotion, something we feel when we witness a stunning sunset. Gratitude is sometimes used as a way to deal with a difficult moment, as a way to shift our focus.

In reality, gratitude carries a variety of meanings, and even moreso, a host of positive implications for our wellness. Studies show that "acts of gratitude can be used as a therapeutic complement for treating anxiety and depression and can increase positive feelings and emotions in the general population" (Diniz). In other words, being grateful feels good and can actually help treat mental health needs. What a simple, yet powerful habit!

Science has a way of confirming what God has already revealed in Scripture. The Holy Spirit intimately understands the impact of gratitude on our mental well-being, inspiring the apostle Paul to write about it in Philippians 4:5 – 7:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Thanksgiving, or gratitude, accompanies prayers for the anxious heart, and in all situations. Why? When we focus on what God has given us, we root our future in His previous generosity. God is a good God who has already given us so much.

Stop and consider the fact you are breathing, you have access to food, and you are able to read this message. You likely have clothes on your back, and a place to keep you warm. Those are just a few of the many gifts you experience everyday from our good God.

Better yet, we have merciful promises in Scripture, all "yes" in Christ! Promises reflecting His faithfulness to creation to keep the seasons turning and to never again flood the earth. God promises He is with us always, to the end of the age. He hears our prayers, forgives the repentant, and adopts us as His own.

We even have the "not yet" promises we eagerly await the fulfillment of...His second coming, a new heaven and earth, and fully restored bodies. The best is yet to come!

God has given us much, so why would He stop now? Our future is secure with a trustworthy God. It feels good in our bodies to recall the gifts of our Father. Gratitude can help shift our mental state from scarcity to "enough". That's the kind of gift worth practicing beyond the moment of Thanksgiving and stretching into a lifelong habit!

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Want to develop or sharpen your habit of gratitude? Try these simple ideas:

- Say thank you to a co-worker or family member for something they do that you appreciate. Take it one step further and write them a note!
- Sit in a joyful moment. The next time you experience joy or happiness, really take it in with your entire body. Notice how it feels before you rush onto the next moment.
- See if you can notice one ordinary thing in your day. Thank God for the ordinary things, like your soft blanket, or the taste of your toothpaste. Start seeing the goodness abounding around you!
- Attach gratitude to something you already do. For example, everytime you stop at a stoplight, say a quick prayer of thanks for something. Or whenever you open a door, find a quick moment for gratefulness.

Diniz, Geyze, et al. "The Effects of Gratitude Interventions: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *PubMed Central*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 11 Aug. 2023, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10393216/.