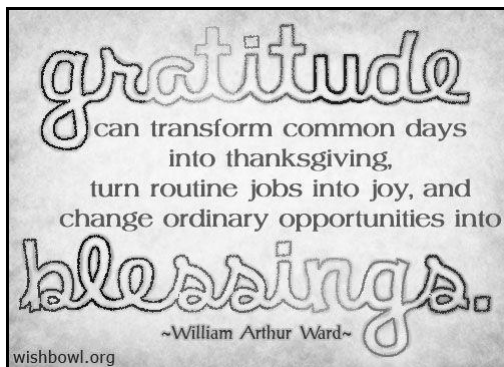


THE SCIENCE OF GRATITUDE



Scripture:

Psalm 100:1-5

¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. ²Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

³Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

⁵For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Matthew 6:25-33

Jesus is speaking (commanding).

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



The following video was played for the congregation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxYviFt4RAY>

A summary of today’s passage from Matthew is: rather than worry, we should be grateful and trust God for our lives. Jesus asks, “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” In fact, science has proven, if you worry, you are taking days off your life span. And just this past

April, the science journal called *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* published an article on how gratefulness, the opposite of worry, affected the lifespan of people suffering from heart failure. Dr. Paul Mills, the author said, "We found that more gratitude in these patients was associated with better mood, better sleep, less fatigue and lower levels of inflammatory biomarkers related to cardiac health."

The study looked at people who had developed a heart problem, like having a heart attack, but who did not have other typical symptoms (shortness of breath or fatigue).

The researchers wanted to help them avoid getting worse. Once heart disease develops symptoms, the chances of death are five times higher. So the researchers asked patients about their spiritual well-being and how grateful they were in everyday life.

They defined gratefulness as “noticing and appreciating the positive aspects of your life.”

Dr Mills said, “We found that spiritual well-being was associated with better mood and sleep, but it was the gratitude aspect of spirituality that accounted for those effects, not spirituality per se.”

GRATITUDE JOURNALING

Some heart patients were specifically asked to write down three things they were grateful for each day. They did this over a period of eight weeks.

Dr Mills explained the results: “We found that those patients who kept gratitude journals for those eight weeks showed reductions in circulating levels of several important inflammatory biomarkers, as well as an increase in heart rate variability.”

They concluded: “A more grateful heart is a more healthy heart, and that gratitude journaling is an easy way to support cardiac health.”

Surprised? How many here have done gratitude journaling before? How many might start today?

A THANKSGIVING GUESSING GAME

In my family, we have a Thanksgiving guessing game. First we write on a piece of plain paper, like a post it note, what we are grateful for in a few words, but we don’t put our name it. We keep it anonymous.

Then we put it in a little bowl, mix them up and pass them around the table to pull one out and read. Then we all guess who wrote that particular gratitude, such as: “I’m thankful we could all be together.” That’s a typical grandma gratitude.

Reading the notes causes lots of laughter because we usually guess wrong and we keep guessing until we guess the right author of the

gratitude. My favorite gratitude note from the past was, “I’m thankful I am not the turkey!”

ANTHROPIC PARTICULARITY

To really stump your family this year, I suggest you write on a gratitude note, “I am thankful for Anthropic Particularity.”

Let me explain. In the book, *Theology in the Context of Science*, John Polkinghorne, a physicist and a pastor, describes what he calls “Anthropic particularity,” which means especially designed in a way that promotes human life. In fact, our universe has been endowed by our creator with properties that enable life. But not every planet is capable of producing life. No other planet but earth in our galaxy can sustain life as far as we know.

Even though there are some planets with stars warming them like ours, some estimate that the “Galactic Habitable Zone” is less than ten percent of the galaxy. Earth happens to be in the habitable zone. There are over one-hundred-billion galaxies in our Universe. Our Milky Way galaxy happens to be in the ten percent that is potentially habitable based on the way water is sustained, light and heat is generated and the radiation level is not too high.

Reverend Dr. Polkinghorne adds that “for a universe to be capable of evolving carbon based life it has to be a very particular specific kind of universe.” Its laws of nature and the forces needed for sustaining living beings (Anthropic Particularity) must have specific strengths lying within very narrow margins.

Otherwise, carbon-based life could never have been able to evolve anywhere in cosmic history. Even the origin of carbon itself, which is the central element you are made of, is miraculous. Carbon is the biochemical basis of life. So if no carbon was made when the big bang happened, then you would not be here. Carbon was made in the interior furnaces of the stars that were created by the Big Bang.

Do you know that every carbon atom in every human being was at one time inside a star? We are all made of stardust. Literally, you are a star!

If the nuclear physics had been just a little bit different, there would have been no carbon based elements which means no people.

DARK MATTER AND DARK ENERGY

Your gratitude list should also include that you are thankful for dark matter. Dark matter holds the universe together as it expands because of dark energy. If it was not for dark matter holding it together, the universe would have exploded from the cosmic expansion. Everything is in perfect balance, including the dark matter and the dark energy in our universe. About one-quarter of the universe consists of dark matter, which releases no detectable energy, but which exerts a gravitational pull on all the visible matter in the universe.

Since both are dark and invisible, it is easy to confuse dark matter and dark energy. But their effects are different. Simply, dark matter attracts, dark energy repels. While dark matter pulls matter inward, dark energy pushes it outward. Dark energy makes up about sixty-eight percent of everything in the universe. Together dark energy and dark matter make up about eighty-three percent of everything in the universe. So when God pierced the darkness with the light of the Big Bang, that might reflect what the Bible means when in John 1:5 it says, "The light shines in the darkness and the dark has not overcome it." And in John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." God made the light. Jesus lights the way through the dark all around us.

Rob Bell explains this connection in his tour called *Everything is Spiritual*. Here is a short excerpt of how Reverend Rob explains the fine tuning God created to enable us to live on this amazing planet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofAnVnrvvB0>

SEVEN SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN BENEFITS OF GRATITUDE

You might also want to enlighten your Thanksgiving gathering this week with the Seven Scientifically proven benefits of Gratitude. (Be the opposite of Debbie Downer on Saturday Night Live.)

1. **Gratitude leads to more relationships.** If you say thank you to someone, they are more likely to seek an ongoing friendship.
2. **Gratitude improves physical health.** Grateful people have less aches and pains and they are more likely to take care of their health and exercise.
3. **Gratitude improves psychological health.** Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., a

leading gratitude researcher, confirms that gratitude increases happiness and reduces depression.

4. **Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression.** So ISIS needs a huge dose of gratitude. A 2012 study found that participants who ranked higher on gratitude scales were less likely to retaliate against others, even when given negative feedback. They experienced more sensitivity and empathy toward other people and a decreased desire for revenge.
5. **Grateful people sleep better.** Just take a few minutes to jot down a few things you are grateful for and you will sleep better.
6. **Gratitude improves self-esteem and performance.** A 2014 study found that gratitude increased athlete's self-esteem, which is an essential component to optimal performance.
7. **Gratitude increases mental strength.** It not only reduces stress, but it plays a major role in overcoming trauma. A 2006 study found that Vietnam War Veterans with higher levels of gratitude experienced lower rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

So when you go to the doctor because you can't sleep, you have aches and pains, and you are feeling depressed, the doctor should prescribe for you the habit of gratitude, many doses throughout the day.

Instruction to show thankfulness is old knowledge from the Bible: There is **Psalm 100** that many have memorized, and also:

Ephesians 1:16 Paul writes: I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

Ephesians 5:20 Paul again shows gratitude by saying: I am giving thanks always for all things to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts and be thankful.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

When we are thankful for dark matter or food or our family, our focus moves off selfish desires and off the pain of current sad circumstances in the world. Expressing thankfulness helps us remember that God has given us so many blessings! There are more stars in the universe than we can count!

GIVING, BELONGING AND GRATITUDE

Thankfulness, then, is actually healthy and beneficial to us. It reminds us that we belong to God, and that we have been blessed with many spiritual blessings: A chance to give, belong and be grateful, all three, which reflect on this sermon series we just completed: The Science of Giving, The Science of Belonging, and the Science of Gratitude.

I hope you will continue to be interested in discussing these three ways God blesses us. Without giving, belonging and gratitude, we would be very lost and depressed people.

So as we sing, *Let All Things Now Living*, let's think about how all things now living are carbon-based quantum miracles. And we are grateful we are allowed to live because our world was created in a delicate balance enabling the development of life by our wonderful creator and sustainer.

Everything is spiritual: the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, the stars, the moon, all are created by our generous light giving God. Amen.

Benediction:

Go into the world showing a gentle attitude toward everyone.

Be joyful and thankful! You are made of stardust!

Fill your mind with things that are good and praiseworthy.

And may the God who gives peace also give you a grateful healthy heart. Thanks be to God!

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen

Happy Thanksgiving!



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
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