

Wholeness

Weekly Biblical reflections for looking after our Wellbeing

Reflection 2: Living a life of Gratitude

'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.'

Philippians 4:8-9

It can be really easy to get stuck on the negative can't it? It's sometimes so much harder to spot the good things, and focus on them. This verse is really clear 'if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things'.

It's not only the Bible that says this; positive psychology is the scientific study of human flourishing, and has been defined as the study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals, communities, and organisations to thrive.

'In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships'ⁱ

So how can we practically use positive psychology and what the Bible says?

The verse says we need to practice whatever we have learnt from Jesus and seen Jesus do. This was obviously written to people who were physically around Jesus, so what can we do? Firstly, look around you, who is in your life that follows the example of Jesus – people who are wise, grateful and loving; we can learn from them and follow their example. We can also read in the Bible about Jesus, how he treated people, how he responded to situations. Practice it like them and then the God of peace will be with you.

Emotional Wholeness means appreciating what you have. People working in advertising and marketing base their work on 'If you don't have product X life isn't as good' - this is known as the hedonic treadmillⁱⁱ and is not just linked to material goods, it could be linked to things like 'I'll be happy when I get married' or 'I'll be happy when I have my next child.'

However, when you are grateful for something it is like you are receiving it for the first time – you then don't need more.

When we look at the feeding of the 5000 parable it's interesting to note Jesus doesn't ask for more – he gives thanks and breaks the loavesⁱⁱⁱ. He then feeds many more people than should be possible; Paul's letters in the New Testament are also full of gratitude. It feels like a principle may be coming through.

Studies have shown that regularly listing things we are grateful for impacts our mental wellbeing in a positive way. It's important to mention people go through terrible situations in their life including, grief, hardship and loss and we are not talking about being grateful for these situations. How can you be grateful for these things? But while we will not be necessarily grateful *for* the situation we can try and be grateful *within* it. So 'if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things'.

Use the questions below to help you reflect:

- What are you grateful for? Maybe make a choice at the end of each day to list 3 things you are grateful for that day – note how it makes you feel
- Who are you grateful for in your life? Maybe write them a letter
- Who is in your life like Jesus? Can you learn from them?

Prayer

Father we thank you that we have many things in our lives to be grateful for. Help us maintain a life of gratitude by following your Son's example. Thank you that in doing this you promise to be with us.

Next week: Living a life of Hope

ⁱ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/in-praise-of-gratitude#:~:text=In%20positive%20psychology%20research%2C%20gratitude,adversity%2C%20and%20build%20strong%20relationships.>

ⁱⁱ <https://positivepsychology.com/hedonic-treadmill/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 14:19