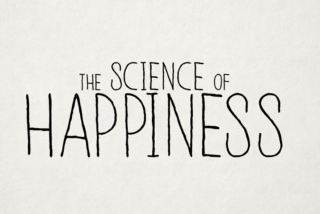
**Gratitude**

Begin by reading Psalm 136. See if you can recognize the Bible story that the psalm writer is remembering through their words of gratitude.

* Why do you think the psalm writer is expressing gratitude to God? What do they seem most grateful for?

How many times a day do you express gratitude to others? Let’s see if you can make a list of actions you can take to express gratitude to someone. Go!

Now, watch this 7 min video on the science of gratitude: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38sz6CZat9M>

What did you notice about how the participants expressed gratitude to people in their life? What were some of the reasons they were grateful for that specific person?

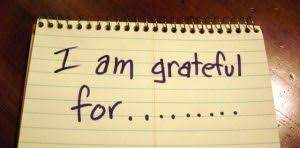
Let’s dive into some scripture. Read through Philippians 1:3-11. The writer is a man named Paul who was one of the earliest leaders in the early church. Paul didn’t exactly have Facebook messenger at the time, so he wrote letters to people and to communities of Jesus followers. Paul was traveling all over the place while he was alive, visiting these communities and sharing the Gospel story with people. Sometimes that got him into a bit of trouble – sometimes even landing him in prison.

In this letter to the Philippian church, Paul is actually writing from prison. And yet, he begins his letter with gratitude. Does that seem like a strange thing to express while you’re imprisoned? Paul wasn’t just ignorantly optimistic, but he was still able to express gratitude for the kindness of the Christians in Philippi because they were visiting him in prison.

* Can you remember a difficult time in your life where you didn’t feel a sense of happiness? When you look back on that season of your life now, are there any things you are able to find gratitude for?
* How do you find yourself acting when you are not feeling thankful? How does that affect the people around you or who you interact with on a daily basis?
* How do you imagine you could develop an attitude of gratitude in your life? What is one thing you could try out to help you grow in gratitude?

Does gratitude change us immediately? Probably not. We live in a culture that often offers quick results to the things we see as (or are) problems in our life. There are all kinds of “cures” being peddled through advertising about weight loss and dieting. Pills that can help you lose weight instantly or special dieting plans making bold promises. The truth is, to become healthier we probably need a variety of eating and exercising practices that will help with our health (ie. there isn’t a magic fix).

We could say the same thing about gratitude. It takes practice and consistency and doing it few times isn’t going to magically change your life. In fact, some days can be really hard to think of things to be grateful for.

* Even on your worst day where it seems like everything is going wrong or things feel dull, what are three simple things (like really simple) that you could be grateful for?

Practicing gratitude doesn’t mean we are naively optimistic and don’t ever think about the hard or bad stuff in our life or the world. But it can and does shape our overall well-being, whether we practice it or not ☺

Try using this fill-in the blank prayer as a way to express gratitude even in hard times:

God, even though:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I am still grateful for:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you. Amen.

1. Why do you think the psalm writer is expressing gratitude to God? What do they seem most grateful for?
2. How many times a day do you express gratitude to others? Let’s see if you can make a list of actions you can take to express gratitude to someone. Go!
3. What did you notice about how the participants expressed gratitude to people in their life? What were some of the reasons they were grateful for that specific person?
4. Can you remember a difficult time in your life where you didn’t feel a sense of happiness? When you look back on that season of your life now, are there any things you are able to find gratitude for?
5. How do you find yourself acting when you are not feeling thankful? How does that affect the people around you or who you interact with on a daily basis?
6. How do you imagine you could develop an attitude of gratitude in your life? What is one thing you could try out to help you grow in gratitude?
7. Even on your worst day where it seems like everything is going wrong or things feel dull, what are three simple things (like really simple) that you could be grateful for?