

The Benefits of Gratitude

by Ocean Robbins

It's true: Our world is pretty messed up. There's certainly no shortage of justification for disappointment and cynicism.

But what are you grateful for? It's a question that could change your life.

Recent studies have concluded that the expression of gratitude can have profound and positive effects on our health, our moods and even the survival of our marriages.

As Blair and Rita Justice reported for the University of Texas Health Science Center, "a growing body of research shows that gratitude is truly amazing in its physical and psychosocial benefits."

In one study, Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D. of the University of California at Davis and Mike McCullough of the University of Miami randomly assigned participants one of three tasks. One group kept a journal in which they were told to briefly describe five things they were grateful for that had occurred in the past week, another five recorded daily hassles from the previous week that displeased them; and the neutral group was asked to list five events or circumstances that affected them, but they were not told to focus on the positive or on the negative. Ten weeks later, participants in the gratitude group felt better about their lives as a whole and were a full 25 percent happier than the hassled group. They reported fewer health complaints, and exercised an average of 1.5 hours more.

If you've forgotten the language of gratitude, you'll never be on speaking terms with happiness.

In a later study by Emmons, people were asked to write every day about things for which they were grateful. Not

But the results showed another benefit: Participants in the gratitude group also reported offering others more emotional support or help with personal problems, indicating that the gratitude exercise increased their goodwill towards others, or more technically, their "pro-social" motivation.

Another study focused on adults with congenital and adult-onset neuromuscular disorders (NMDs), with the majority having post-polio syndrome (PPS). Compared to those who were not jotting down their blessings nightly, participants in the gratitude group reported more hours of sleep each night, and feeling more refreshed upon awakening. The gratitude group also reported more



satisfaction with their lives as a whole, felt more optimism about the upcoming week, and felt considerably more connected with others than did participants in the control group.

Perhaps most tellingly, the positive changes were markedly noticeable to others. According to the researchers, "Spouses of the participants in the gratitude group reported that the participants appeared to have higher subjective well-being than did the spouses of the participants in the control group."

There's an old saying that if you've forgotten the language of gratitude, you'll never be on speaking terms with happiness. It turns out this isn't just a fluffy idea. Several studies have shown depression to be inversely correlated

to gratitude. It seems that the more grateful a person is, the less depressed they are. Philip Watkins, a clinical psychologist at Eastern Washington University, found that clinically

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depressed individuals showed significantly lower gratitude (nearly 50 percent less) than non-depressed controls.

Apparently, positive vibes aren't just for hippies. If you want in on the fun, here are some simple things you can do to build positive momentum toward a more happy and fulfilling life:

1. Keep a daily journal of three things you are thankful for. This works well first thing in the morning, or just before you go to bed.
2. Make it a practice to tell a spouse, partner or friend something you appreciate about them every day.
3. Look in the mirror when you are brushing your teeth, and think about something you have done well recently or something you like about yourself.

Sure, this world gives us plenty of reasons to despair. But when we get off the fast track to morbidity, and cultivate instead an attitude of gratitude, things don't just look better—they actually get better. Thankfulness feels good, it's good for you, and it's a blessing for the people around you, too. It's such a win-win-win that I'd say we have cause for gratitude.

*Making a difference
makes you happy.*

surprisingly, this daily practice led to greater increases in gratitude than did the weekly journaling in the first study.

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## Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity: A Reunion

Faithful readers of our newsletter will remember the Foundation’s contract with the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving to present workshops in May and October 2010 on “Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity.” Held at Camp Christian and Central Christian Camp, respectively, the interactive workshops focused on congregations, stewardship and giving as a

way of life. These events comprised a year-long program for Oklahoma Disciples churches with the objective of helping transform the culture of giving within their congregations. (Additional information specific to those seminars can be found in our December 2010 and Summer 2010 newsletters, online at <http://www.okdisciplesfoundation.org>.)

On September 15, 2012, the Foundation will sponsor a follow-up reunion for participants in the 2010 workshops at First Christian Church in Edmond. This forum is open to clergy and laypersons

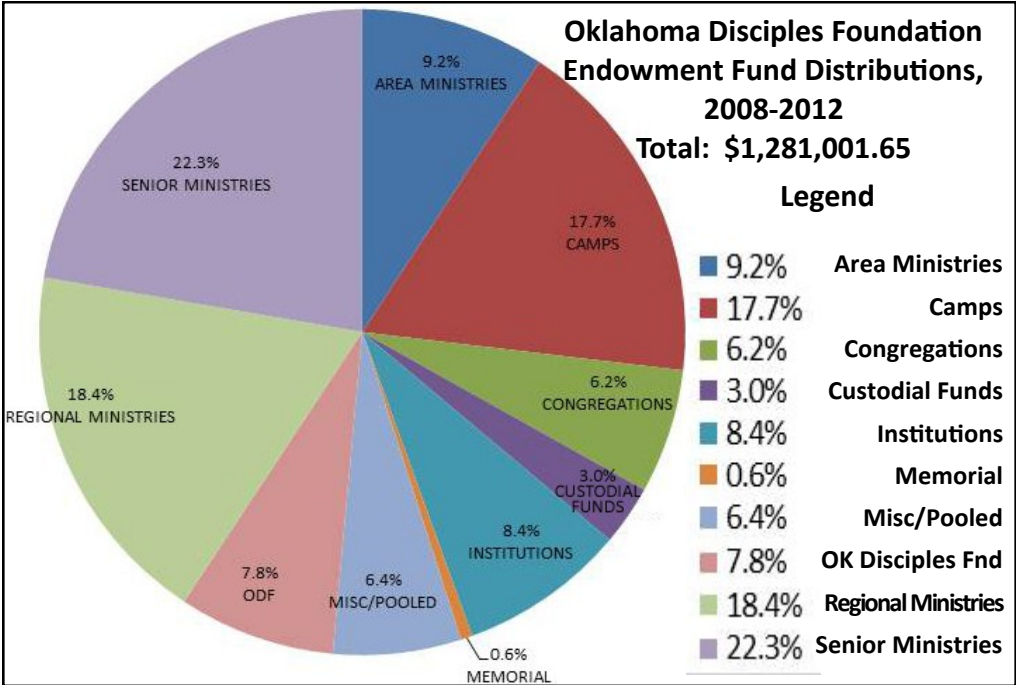


of any church interested in the “practical tools and ways to acquire and encourage the living of a generous life in response to a generous God.” The facilitator will be Bruce Barkhauer, the Minister for Faith and Giving for the Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church.

Bruce has led congregations in Ohio and Indiana in achieving high levels of financial support for local and global missions and he now shares his experience across the life of the whole church.

Rev. Barkhauer brings a biblically based understanding about stewardship combined with theological integrity and weds them to all aspects of faithful living.

For more information, contact Kyle Maxwell, [kvm Maxwell@okdisciplesfoundation.org](mailto:kvm Maxwell@okdisciplesfoundation.org) or 405.525.6530.



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