

Creating A Gratitude Muscle

Air Dates: August 1-5, 2022

Day One

It always amuses me to see how science often catches up with the Bible. Recently I read an article entitled “Gratitude Rewires Your Brain.” When I saw the title, I thought, *Well, yeah—that’s been a Bible truth for ages.*

In 2014 a physicist wrote, “We are now entering the golden age of neuroscience. We have learned more about the thinking brain in the last ten to fifteen years than in all of previous human history.” So, in studying the brain, these scientists are discovering how God created us, and how living in harmony with his principles improves all parts of our lives, including our brains—how we think!

This article goes on to say that being grateful is far more significant to our mental health and well-being than we may realize. Studies have shown that performing simple gratitude leads to better sleep, improved interpersonal relationships, less stress and even reduced physical pain. The article concludes that “the more practice you give your brain at feeling and expressing gratitude, the more it adapts to this mind-set...a sort of gratitude ‘muscle’ that can be exercised and strengthened.”

I love this thought of creating a gratitude muscle. I’ve often talked about building your spiritual muscles, and you do that through God’s Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, etc. So, I think it would be very helpful for all of us to be intentional about creating a gratitude muscle.

If you want to rewire your brain with gratitude and create a gratitude muscle, there are some specific and easy things you can do to make this happen. Let’s begin with the Scripture that tells us to build this gratitude muscle:

Colossians 2:6-7: So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Your faith will be strengthened as you grow that gratitude muscle!

Day Two

Someone has said that gratitude is for mental health what vegetables are for physical health. Now, hopefully you enjoy eating vegetables because you know that they are absolutely necessary if you want to have good health. Sometimes you may eat vegetables just because you know they are good for you, even if that particular veggie is not your favorite—right?

Well, the same is true for your mental health, if you want to create a gratitude muscle. You learn to be thankful for everything and at all times because it’s good for you. You may not feel thankful, but you can still intentionally think about and talk about all you have to be thankful for.

It’s interesting that thankfulness and its variations show up in the New Testament 71 times and it is always a directive of Scripture. For example:

- “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1Thessalonians 5:18).
- “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).
- “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

It’s not a suggestion; it is a spiritual exercise. Something you do intentionally.

In the Old Testament there are about 102 times that thankfulness and its variations occur, and you are no doubt aware that the Psalms are full of thanksgiving. Just one example:

Psalm 9:1-2: I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.

So, here is one suggestion you can practice today in order to develop your gratitude muscle. **Avoid complaining about anything today—nothing!** Instead, verbalize thankfulness today out loud. Look around you—what do you see that you are thankful for? A beautiful day? Your child? A friend? Good food? Just look around you and verbalize your thankfulness for what you see. Maybe even count the number of times you say, “Thank you for. . .” whatever you see. That should keep you busy all day, and you will be strengthening your gratitude muscle.

Day Three

It has been proven scientifically that gratitude produces very positive effects, creating a culture of gratitude which can encourage others to also be thankful. So let’s develop a gratitude muscle—putting practices in place in your life that cause you to focus on all you have to be thankful for.

The Bible long ago established our need for gratitude. Do you remember that in the Old Testament the people of Israel gave thank offerings? Interestingly, the thank offering was a free will offering (Leviticus 22:19), meaning that even under the law, God did not require his people to be thankful. He always longed that thank offerings would be the spontaneous response of the hearts of his people to his goodness.

Do you remember the story in the Bible when Jesus healed ten lepers? Leprosy was a horrible disease in that day, and to be cured of it was almost unheard of. So, when Jesus healed these ten lepers, you would think they would be extremely thankful. But how many of those ten lepers returned to thank Jesus? Here’s what Luke tells us:

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” (Luke 17:15-18)

How could the other nine never even bother thanking Jesus for their freedom from leprosy? But then I ask myself, how many times have I taken the blessings of Jesus for granted and failed to give him thanks and praise for what he has done?

Here’s my challenge: Think of one time when the Lord has done something wonderful for you, and even though you may have thanked him before, this time **write your thanksgiving on paper**. Put it in your journal, type it from your laptop—whatever works for you. But the important thing is to take time and put your words of gratitude in writing to God. Remember, gratitude rewires your brain, but more importantly, it develops your gratitude muscle.

Day Four

Creating a gratitude muscle is an area that all of us can grow in, and it will bless you as you develop that gratitude muscle more and more. The secular world has discovered that grateful people experience more joy in life and are more fun to be around. But here's the thing: becoming grateful is not easy because it isn't natural. We must cultivate this gratitude muscle.

You know, just saying the words "thank you" does not make you a grateful person. It may just be a polite phrase you've learned to say, and you can say it automatically without much thought. In fact, the world's definition of thankfulness is feeling pleased or being conscious of a benefit you've received. In other words, it could be all about you.

In order to develop a Christ-honoring gratitude muscle, you must express your gratitude to God for who he is, and then when you're truly focused on how blessed you are to know God, that thankfulness should overflow from you to everyone around you. Then you'll be blessing others as you have been blessed.

So, biblical gratitude is acknowledging the giver even more than the gift. Gratitude is developed and strengthened through praise, through knowing God better and better, through many different ways. We read in Colossians 3:16:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Let—or allow—the message of Christ dwell among you richly. That takes effort; that takes planning; that takes time. This is what strengthens our gratitude muscle; we do it through fellowship with others, we encourage each other, we sing praise—and all of it done with gratitude in our hearts. Is that how you worship God—always mindful of how blessed you are because of Jesus?

Here's my challenge to help you increase your gratitude muscle: **Find a fellow believer and thank God together**, or sing a song together, or in some way encourage each other to be thankful. Do it on the phone, on zoom, on Facebook – whatever is available, but give thanks to God today with at least one other person.

Day Five

I've been encouraging you to develop a gratitude muscle. I mentioned that the scientists are just now discovering that gratitude rewires your brain. But the idea of gratitude is not new; it's not something that these scientists have just thought of. It's been a biblical truth since time began.

But does it seem particularly difficult to be thankful in our world today? We hear all kinds of bad news every day, and we have struggles of our own to deal with as well. It's easy to say that we should be grateful, but how can we do this in our upside-down world?

Well, this is where we have an incredible advantage as followers of Jesus Christ. Actually trying to develop a gratitude muscle won't work unless you have something to be thankful for—something that is not affected by the circumstances of this world or of our lives. Gratitude works when it is true response of a creature to a Creator.

I have a final suggestion to help us develop this gratitude muscle. **How about a gratitude journal**—a place where you consistently keep a record of all you have to be thankful for. Even if you journal already, use a separate gratitude journal and on a regular, if not daily basis, write down at least one thing you are grateful for. There is great benefit in putting it in writing.

Developing this gratitude muscle will be one of the most game-changing things you can do for yourself and for the glory of God. But you will have to work at it. You will need to consistently exercise this gratitude muscle, which means you'll need daily reminders to be a thankful, grateful person. It will re-wire your brain; it will change your attitude; it will improve your health; it will improve your relationships—everything in your life will be so much better if you will make a commitment to develop and improve your gratitude muscle. I encourage you to start developing your gratitude muscle.