

Gratitude

Intro

Welcome back to session two - this session we are going to discover how being grateful helps our wellbeing!

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Question

Following last week’s session - how did you find trying to be more mindful, and notice when you were anxious during the week?

What is the best thing that has happened to you since we last met?

Gratitude

Gratitude can be defined as “ The quality of being thankful, readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness” Oxford Dictionary.¹

Having a grateful mindset has a powerful influence on our outlook. It shifts our focus to the positive things we are grateful for. It actually helps us feel more positive emotions, have better sleep and feel more connected to others.²

Expressing gratitude can lead to greater happiness and better mental health.³

Gratitude is powerful - it has the power to change our lives!

Discussion

Philippians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition with **thanksgiving** present your requests to God. And the **peace** of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally brothers and sisters 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.”

The apostle Paul tells us to approach every situation with thankfulness. Last week we looked at reducing our anxiety - how does adding in gratitude when we are anxious help us?

Paul says that when we bring our anxiety to God, and add in gratitude to the situation, we will experience peace - have you ever been able to put this scripture into practice - what happened?

How easy do we find it to be grateful, when times are hard?

Mark 1:15

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

The word 'repent' in the New Testament Greek is 'metanoia' - it means to change our mind. How does knowing that Jesus is always with us, and his kingdom is close, enable us to challenge our anxious thoughts, and bring about grateful thoughts instead?

To change our thinking to be more grateful takes time and practice - we are not hard wired to be grateful. It is a choice we need to make daily. We each have the ability to change our minds and our focus to gratitude. When we do this we generate new perspective and thoughts and this can lead us to be in a place where we can help others.

Activity

Spend some time thinking on your own about a situation that you found frustrating or annoying. Write a short description of what happened.

Now revisit the situation - this time have a think about if there is anything positive about the situation, or any good that has since come from it and write this down underneath. Don't worry if you find this difficult, or can't think of anything, simply the practice of trying to find things to be grateful for is a good start!

There can often be positives in even negative situations. It is helpful to train our brains to think about these things, rather than just focusing on the negative.

What are the Benefits of Gratitude

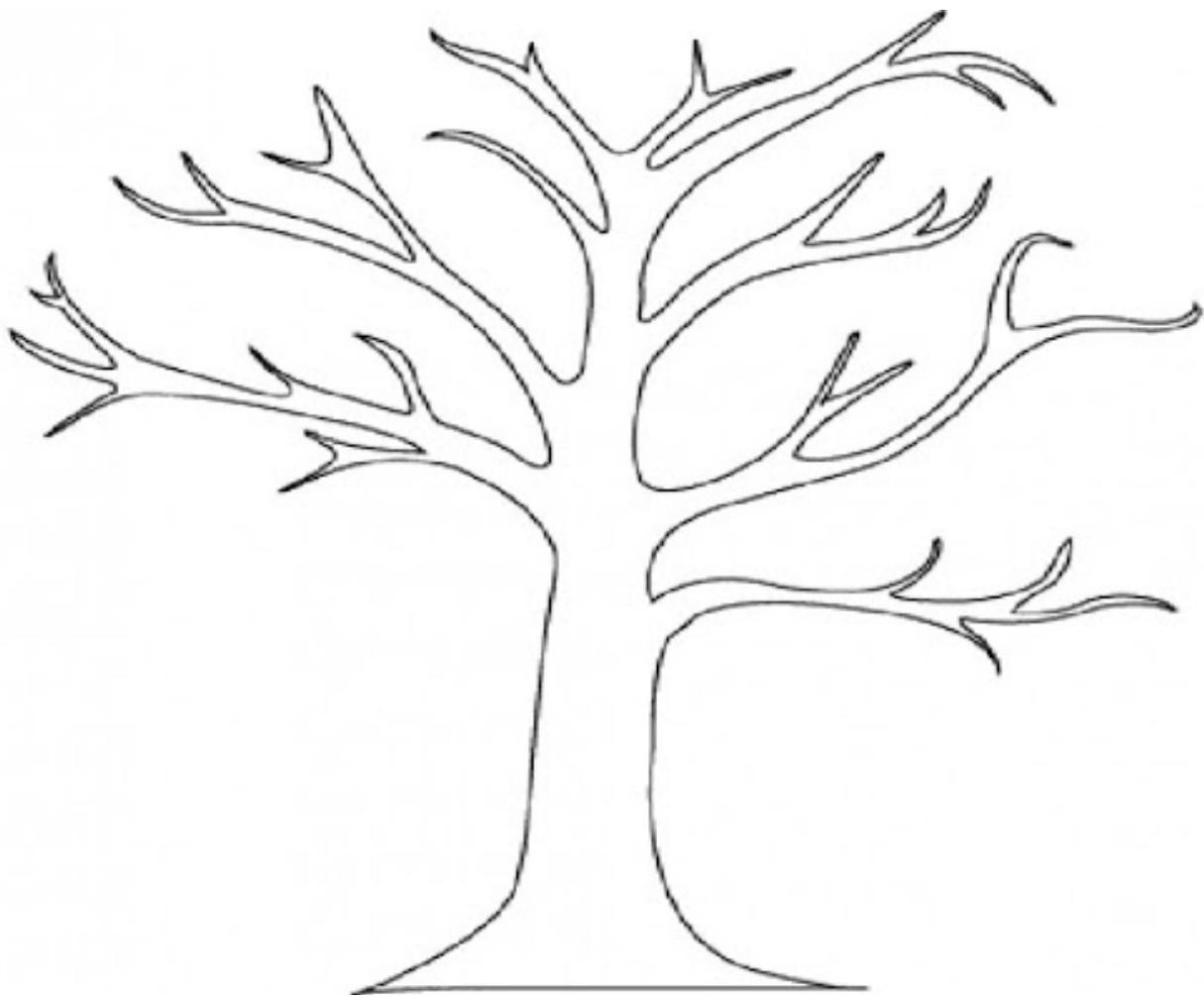
Spending time each day, and week being grateful can have a huge impact on our lives, even in difficult seasons - here are some more benefits of learning to practice being grateful:

- People who practice gratitude have better coping skills and experience less stress.⁴
- People who practice gratitude, are often more satisfied with life, and experience more positive mood and feelings.⁴
- Gratitude actually helps us feel more positive emotions, have better sleep and feel more connected to others.²
- When we express our gratitude to others, it can lead to stronger relationships, which means more people close to us who can support us when we face difficult times.⁴

Question: What other benefits of gratitude can you think of?

Activity - Gratitude tree

Draw some leaves around the branches on the tree below - in each leaf write one thing you are grateful for - it could be specific to today, like the weather, or something you have done well today or be more broad such as your health, or friends, or God's love. Once you have finished your tree you may want to share it with the others in the group.



Discussion and Close

How might we make practicing gratitude a regular part of our daily life? Here are a few suggestions - which ones do you think you will try this week?

- Morning coffee gratitude: Start our day by thinking about what we are grateful for. Give thanks to God to his love, his provision and protection.
- Grace - Give thanks before meal times. A time to pause to be mindful and to feel blessed.
- Try to see the benefit even in difficult situations. See problems as challenges. Ask yourself what is good about the situation? What can I learn from this?
- Share your appreciation with others - write a gratitude letter to someone who has helped you or is a positive person in your life.
- Gratitude journal- write 10 things every day we are grateful for. These could be worded as prayers of thanks to God, or simply as a list.

Next Session

In the next session we are going to continue thinking about changing our minds and our lives, by taking more control over what we think. This week why don't you try:

- Actively finding things to be grateful for, especially when you realise you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed, or sad
- Regularly practising one of the ways of being grateful listed above
- You could even start your own gratitude journal, and list each day up to ten things you are grateful for - to help you there is a sheet over the page you can use to get you started with your first gratitude journal.

Prayer

This week you might like to close by saying a prayer together:

Thank you Jesus for the hope found in you. Thank you that you have set me free. I thank you that everything good comes from you, for everything good in my life.

Help me to be grateful in all circumstances and fix my eyes on you when times are hard, knowing that you have promised good things for my life.

Help me to go into each day trusting you and being filled with your love and peace. In Jesus name,

Amen

References

1. Oxford Dictionary. Available at: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/gratitude> - accessed 15th October
2. R A Emmons and M E McCullough Counting Blessing Verses Burdens: An Experimental Investigation into gratitude and subjective wellbeing in daily life. 2003. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* pg 377-389
3. Wong J, et al. Does gratitude writing improve the mental health of psychotherapy clients? Evidence from a randomized controlled trial. 2015. *Journal of Psychotherapy Research*. Volume 28 pg 192-202
4. Wood, A. M., et al., Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration, *Clinical Psychology Review* (2010), doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.005

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