

Growing Gratitude

Whether or not you're joining us for *The Other Half of Church* book group, we encourage you to join us in practicing gratitude this Lent. Identify where you are on the list below and start there. Only move on to the next step when you're ready.



First, List Gratitude Memories

Think of a memory in your life for which you are grateful. It can be big (the birth of a child) or small (a beautiful sunset). It doesn't matter, as long as you feel gratitude when you think about it.

- Give it a two- to three-word title (for example, "Dan and Dave," "Shining Goldfinch," "Balloon Soccer")
- In a quiet place, go back into this memory and relive it for a minute, like you are back in it
- Ask:
 - What did you feel in your body? May be "peace" or "lightness" (it doesn't matter what you feel as long as you feel something in your body)
 - What might God be communicating to you through the memory and the peace you feel? For example, God is with me and likes to share his beauty with me.

Next, Practice Gratitude for Five Minutes

1. Start compiling a list of grateful memories as described above. Each memory has two characteristics: 1) you feel gratitude in your body, and 2) you feel a connection with God in the memory. Eventually, you want a list of at least ten grateful memories.
2. Once a day, spend five minutes residing in gratitude using your list of grateful memories. It is mostly nonverbal. You are feeling a connection with God in your body as you relive memories of gratitude.

Note: Spending five minutes reliving memories without being distracted is difficult if you have never done it before. It will take you a while to be able to sustain the full five minutes without daydreaming or going off on tangents. Give yourself grace. You may be exercising a muscle in your heart that hasn't been used much. Use your list of memories during the five minutes. Some days a single memory will sustain you for five minutes. More commonly, you will need three to five memories to fill five minutes. When the gratitude of one memory starts to fade, go to another one on the list.

Once you can consistently sustain a solid five-minute state of gratitude, you are ready to start the Thirty-Day Joy Exercise.

Then, Practice the Thirty-Day Joy Exercise

1. Spend five minutes of gratitude three times a day. Do it first thing in the morning, at midday, and the last thing you do at night before going to bed. Do this for thirty days. Consistency is key.
2. Sometime during the thirty days, your brain will respond to this repeated exposure to gratitude. It will reset your default emotional state to joy. You will likely start to feel different when you wake up, and you will notice when you slip out of joy as you live your life. *Not feeling joy will feel abnormal to you.* You will want to return to joy as soon as possible.

Adapted from *The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation* by Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks. Published by Moody Publishers, 2020, pp. 218-19.