

Neuroscience, Gratitude, and the Gospel

Scripture used: [Psalm 23](#)

OVERVIEW

Pastor Tilden spoke on the theme of gratitude in this Thanksgiving weekend sermon. Exploring the intersection of science and faith, he shares how neuroscience is confirming the teachings of the Bible about gratitude. His prayer for us is that the true story of Jesus' love would be real in our hearts and lives, that we would be able to experience God's assurance, so that we could say – as David does in the Psalm – that “goodness and mercy would follow us all the days of our lives and that we would dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

KEY POINTS

1. **Comparisons** - In the first few verses of Psalm 23, we learn that gratitude is essential to joy. We all know people who have far more than we do, and yet struggle with gratitude and joy, and the reverse is true as well; we know others with far less who have joy and peace in abundance. Pastor Tilden introduced us to Brother David Steindl-Rast, a man whose life by most standards, as a Benedictine monk, has foregone what many of us seek after to bring joy – personal wealth, career, and family. Yet at almost the age of 97, his life is rooted in gratitude. He lives the statement, “It is not joy that makes us grateful, it is gratitude that makes us joyful.”
2. **insights of Science and our Faith** - An article from the Mayo Clinic on gratitude demonstrates the huge impact gratitude has on our lives, including improved sleep, strengthened immunity, decreased depression and anxiety, and more. And yet, gratitude is incredibly hard to sustain. Drawing from insights from a podcast entitled, “The Science of Gratitude” from the Huberman Lab, hosted by Dr. Andrew Huberman, a Stanford neuroscientist, Pastor Tilden shared the most effective way to evoke strong gratitude for long term effect is when we immerse ourselves in a story or narrative where a person demonstrates love, sacrifice, and generosity in saving or rescuing another with three components:
 - a) Someone is in desperate need
 - b) Someone intervenes with radical sacrifice and love
 - c) There is a changed outcome
3. **The Biblical Response** - It's not an accident that our brains are wired to experience gratitude from a narrative; God made us this way so we could respond to the ultimate, true story of His saving love for us! Psalm 23 is a perfect reminder of the outline of the Gospel. The beginning of Psalm 23 reminds us of Jesus, who said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” ([John 10:11](#)). The middle verses remind us that Jesus is with us in the dark valley (see [Matthew 1:23](#)), and that we remember the table He prepared for us every time we take communion, which also reminds us that God upholds us in the face of our enemies and has promised that nothing can separate us from His love ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). Because of what He has done, we too can say, like David, that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever ([Psalm 23:6](#)). The best science to date confirms that our neurochemistry is attuned to respond to the gospel with lasting, sustainable gratitude. We are literally made for God's love.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - What is the most recent thing in your life that you have been deeply grateful for? What tends to make gratitude hard in your life? What has helped you to sustain gratitude?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Read [Psalm 23](#) together. A traditional Christian understanding of Scripture allows us to read the entire Bible as “pointing to Jesus”, even if the original intention of a passage may not have been specifically about Jesus, because Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love and the pinnacle of God's saving work. In this light, what associations do you see in Psalm 23 and the ministry of Jesus? What parts of Psalm 23 do you identify with? How does Psalm 23 “point to” Jesus' saving love?
- 3) **DO** - Pastor Tilden offers three “Gratitude Practices” to stimulate gratitude for lasting change:
 - a. Reflect on Psalm 23 a few times a week, for 5 minutes a day, allowing it to remind you deeply of the way that God loves us and saves us through Jesus.
 - b. Be intentional about using a favorite worship song in the same way, to remind you of the story of God's love in your life, and the difference it has made for you.
 - c. Make it a priority to attend and engage at church, either in person or online. Being present in a corporate context connects us deeply to God's story and stimulates gratitude!

Join us next Sunday as Pastor Hurmon begins our Christmas series, “Make room!”