

The Act of Thankfulness

[Photo: Dr. Farmer.jpg] **11/17/20** — The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines being thankful as “conscious of benefit received and well pleased.” This is the season of the year, more than any other, in which we ponder that for which we are most thankful. We often reflect on God and country, our health and freedom, and our family and friends. We Texans are so richly blessed that our lists of thankfulness can go on and on. But what about that act of thankfulness itself?

Harvard Medical School recently published an article which found, “In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness.” Researchers further found that thankfulness led not only to happiness, but also to higher levels of optimism, productivity, and positive feelings. Other researchers have found that thankfulness and gratitude unshackle us from toxic feelings and can lead to lower levels of depression and anxiety. While inconclusive at this time, still other researchers have found thankfulness to be associated with increased activity in the medial prefrontal cortex of the brain. These researchers believe that thankfulness may lead to improved mental health.

The act of thankfulness unquestionably has social implications on both individuals and organizations. Thankfulness may even have biological and physiological implications. With mounting scientific evidence on the positive characteristics of thankfulness, perhaps both social science researchers and organizational leaders alike should look for enhanced ways to harness the power of thankfulness. I know that when I think about how thankful and privileged I am to work with my respected colleagues and all of the wonderful stakeholders of Weatherford College, I feel increasingly motivated and empowered to improve the human condition.

We all occasionally write thank you notes or verbally thank people for various actions or gifts. Perhaps we should all strive to better cultivate gratitude and thankfulness on a regular basis throughout the year. I know that I should. What if we could replicate and extend those warm and fuzzy feelings of Thanksgiving thankfulness for a month, or an entire season, or even the whole year? What if we could collectively project all of those positive feelings beyond our immediate circles of influence to the broader community at large? I can't help but wonder if we could not collectively make our home an even greater community.

This Thanksgiving season, I am not only counting my many unmerited blessings as usual, but I find myself reflecting on the act of thankfulness itself. I find myself making a mental commitment to a more disciplined approach toward a lifestyle and mental mindset of continuous thankfulness. Perhaps John Milton said it best when he stated, “Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world.” Ironically, as I deeply ponder the positive attributes of a mindset of gratitude this Thanksgiving season, I find myself exceedingly appreciative for this heightened understanding of the act of thankfulness.

Tod Allen Farmer

President, Weatherford College