

Thanksgiving Sermon: **Neuroplasticity, Gratitude, and the 4:8 Principle**

Introduction: **The Power of a Thankful Mind**

- **Opening Thought:** Thanksgiving is more than a holiday; it's a lifestyle rooted in gratitude that can rewire our minds for joy and purpose.
- **Connection to Neuroplasticity:** Science shows that our brains are malleable. Neuroplasticity means our thoughts shape our brain's wiring—repeated thoughts create mental pathways. Negative thoughts can trap us, but gratitude can transform us.
- **Scriptural Foundation:**
 - [Philippians 4:8 \(NIV\)](#) - "*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, 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.*"
 - This verse is the cornerstone of Tommy Newberry's "The 4:8 Principle", which teaches us to focus on positive, God-honoring thoughts to reprogram our minds.
- **Purpose of Sermon:** Today, we'll explore how gratitude, grounded in scripture and supported by science, can reshape our minds and lives.

Section 1: Understanding Neuroplasticity Through a Biblical Lens

- **What is Neuroplasticity?:**

- The brain's ability to change, reorganize and adapt based on our thoughts, behaviors, and experiences by forming new neural pathways.
- Negative thought patterns (complaining, fear, bitterness) create destructive neural pathways, while positive thoughts (gratitude, faith, love) build life-giving ones.
- Our minds are like clay—gratitude molds them into shapes of joy. Our minds are like clay—gratitude molds them into shapes of joy.
 - I remember a time in 1985, when I was in Okinawa, Japan. I was walking with a “Navigator Missionary” and he described the Neuroplasticity process like water coming down the side of a mountain and how entrenched our thoughts or actions can be.

- **Biblical Parallel:**

- [Romans 12:2 \(NIV\)](#) - *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*
- God calls us to renew our minds, which aligns with neuroplasticity. We can “reprogram” our thinking to reflect His truth.
- Spiritual Application: Just as our brains can change, so can our hearts and attitudes when we intentionally practice gratitude.

- **Application for Thanksgiving:**

- Gratitude is a powerful tool to renew our minds. When we focus on God's blessings, we create new mental pathways that lead to peace and joy.

Section 2: The 4:8 Principle and Gratitude

- **Overview of "The 4:8 Principle" by Tommy Newberry:**

- Newberry emphasizes focusing on thoughts that align with Philippians 4:8—things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and praiseworthy.
- He teaches that what we think about shapes our emotions, actions, and ultimately our lives. Gratitude is a key practice in this process.

- **Gratitude as a Mindset Shift:**

- Newberry suggests that joy doesn't come from circumstances but from choosing to focus on God's goodness.
- Practicing gratitude rewires our brains to notice blessings rather than deficits.

- **Scriptural Support:**

- [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 \(NIV\)](#) - "*Rejoice always, pray continually, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*"
- Gratitude isn't optional; it's God's will. It's a discipline that transforms how we see the world.

- **Practical Tip:**

- Keep a "Joy/Gratitude Journal" to write down things you're thankful for daily. This habit aligns with neuroplasticity by reinforcing positive thought patterns.
- In studying this particular suggestion, I found it to be very inviting to just make a couple of statements like, "Today, I'm thankful that God has made his presence known, through an affirmation given to me by Lisa, my wife" OR "Today I'm thankful that I was able to finish working on the car."

Section 3: Gratitude Rewires the Brain for Joy

- **Scientific Insight:**

- Studies show that practicing gratitude increases serotonin and dopamine levels, the “feel-good” chemicals in our brains.
- Gratitude reduces stress and anxiety by shifting focus from problems to blessings.

- **Biblical Connection:**

- [Psalm 118:24 \(NIV\)](#) - *"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*
- Choosing to rejoice, even in tough times, mirrors the brain's ability to form new, positive pathways through gratitude.

- **Biblical Meditation - A way of rewriting the brain:**

- [Joshua 1:8](#) - *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*
- [Psalm 1:1-3](#) - *Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do, prospers.*
- [Psalm 63:5-7](#) - *I will be fully satisfied with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.*
- Notice the association of Meditating (rewiring the brain) has positive outcomes, such as: “having good success”, “making your way prosperous”, “I will be fully satisfied.”

Section 4: Gratitude in Action – Living a Thankful Life

- **Gratitude Impacts Relationships:**

- Newberry notes that focusing on the good in others (per Philippians 4:8) strengthens relationships. Gratitude helps us see people through God's eyes.
- [Colossians 3:15 \(NIV\)](#) - "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*"

- **Gratitude Fuels Generosity:**

- A thankful heart overflows into acts of kindness and service, reflecting God's love.
- [2 Corinthians 9:11 \(NIV\)](#) - "*You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*"

- **Can Gratitude Help You Physically?:**

- Did you know that gratitude can even help your body? Research shows that feeling thankful can reduce the urge to smoke and motivate people to seek help in quitting. When we focus on God's blessings, it doesn't just lift our spirits—it can lead to healthier choices, showing how powerfully God designed our minds and bodies to respond to gratitude. (1)

- **What Does a Grateful Brain Look Like?:**

- Science has taken a peek inside a grateful brain, and it's amazing! Studies reveal that when we practice gratitude, areas of our brain linked to happiness and reward light up. It's like gratitude flips a switch in our minds, filling us with joy and reminding us of God's goodness in a way we can physically feel. (2)

- **The Effects of Gratitude Expression on Neural Activity:**

- Researchers have also found that expressing gratitude changes how our brain works. When we say 'thank you' or write down what we're grateful for, it boosts activity in parts of the brain that manage stress and build positive emotions. It's proof that gratitude rewires our minds for peace, just as God calls us to renew our thinking. (3)

- **Notice how "the smart guys" agree with God.**

- Even to the point of showing how the brain physically lights up with gratitude present. This is an incredible verification of the truth of the scriptures.

Conclusion: A Thanksgiving Transformation

- **Call to Action:**

- This Thanksgiving, let's embrace the power of a grateful mind. Let's renew our thinking by focusing on what's true, noble, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).
- Commit to a daily gratitude practice—whether through journaling, prayer, or sharing thanks with others.

- **Thanksgiving Challenge:**

- This holiday, let's commit to "reprogramming" our minds. Instead of dwelling on what's wrong,
- **Pass out the index cards and pens** - write three things you're thankful for each day. Watch how this shifts your perspective!
- Invite the congregation to share one thing they're thankful for during the service or with a neighbor.
- 30-day Mind Renewal Plan
 - On my website, <https://Sermons.RandyStufflebeam.com>, I've included a "" that can be a life-changing experience.
 - It's a guide with daily gratitude prompts and scriptures to help renew your mind over the next month.

- **Closing Scripture:**

- [Psalm 100:4 \(NIV\)](#) - "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name."

- **Final Thought:**

- Gratitude isn't just a feeling; it's a choice that rewires our minds, aligns us with God's will, and fills our lives with joy. Let's make Thanksgiving a daily habit, not just a holiday. 🌱

- **Prayer:**

- Close with a prayer thanking God for His blessings, asking for help to renew our minds, and committing to live with gratitude.

Appendix – Research Links

1. A new study suggests that feelings of gratitude help reduce people's desire to smoke and encourage them to get help quitting.
 - https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can_gratitude_help_you_quit_smoking
 - <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2320750121>
2. What Does a Grateful Brain Look Like?
 - https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_does_a_grateful_brain_look_like
3. The effects of gratitude expression on neural activity
 - <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288932385> The effects of gratitude expression on neural activity