



BUILDING JOY

through appreciation memories

This handout gives guidance on how to compile stories of appreciation to rehabilitate and/or strengthen our brains. This exercise can help train our brains to look for what is good in our lives and environments, feel appreciation for them, and then amplify joy with others. Neuroscientists have discovered the far-reaching effects that appreciation and gratitude have on our brains and lives. Their findings shed light on why it is a kindness of God to instruct us to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18). Feeling appreciation heightens our immune system, increases emotional capacity, calms us, positively impacts the brain for months, increases energy and motivation, and so much more. Extending gratitude toward God and others helps foster heart-to-heart connections that can create a place of belonging for all. When appreciation is felt and gratitude is expressed, our brains and communities grow their abilities to be full of joy and love rather than resentment and fear.

Tips for Building Joy through Appreciation Memories: PSALM 100:4, 1 THESS. 5:18 and PHILIP. 4:6-9

Throughout the next two weeks, write appreciation memories until you have 10 memories recorded. An appreciation memory is any memory you have that makes you smile. For each memory include:

1. *EVENT Title*
2. *BULLET POINTS*
3. *EMOTIONS*
4. *BODILY SENSATIONS*
5. *IDENTITY: What did you like about yourself in the memory?*
6. *IMMANUEL AWARENESS: Where was the Lord?*

For a more detailed outline of this process, see *Appreciation Memories 2* handout.

Tips

Throughout the next couple of weeks, continue the process outlined above for writing appreciation memories until you have 10 memories recorded. If you follow this practice two times a day, 5 minutes each time, for 30 days, you will be well in your way to pioneering well-worn paths to joy. Our right brains will learn that to experience joy, we can recall happy memories and invite Jesus to show us where He was in them. This process can eventually be utilized to help us find our way back to joy, even from the most upsetting type of emotions and distress. Here are a few more tips:

- Decide when you are going to set aside time each day to do this. First, utilize these 5 minutes to compile your list of memories. (Write them in story form if that is helpful.)
- After you have a list of 10 memories, use these daily moments to return to the memories and recall them. As the “flavor” of one memory may start to fade, go to a different memory. (Think in terms of a piece of gum, you notice when the flavor starts to fade.)
- Practice this until you are able to maintain at least 5 minutes of feeling appreciation. Then increase to 10 minutes.
- Although this may sound simple and easy, many people have actually found it difficult to begin. It can be helpful to find a partner to join you in the journey of creating a list of memories.
 - Ask a friend or family member to help you compile the list of memories and sit with you as you begin to record them.
 - Daily share memories with a friend or family member.
- After you have pioneered well-worn neural pathways to appreciation and joy, you can recall these memories in times of stress to help quiet your soul.

Ideas to facilitate joyful interactions with others:

Share your memories as a story with someone. This helps solidify the memory in your brain, trains you to tell stories, spreads joy to others, and models to their right brains how to tell stories and build relational connections.

- Say it autobiographically and weave the elements of the story into the narrative. Rather than listing emotions, bodily sensations, etc. after you “give the just” of the story.
- Use non-verbals such as voice tone, facial expressions, and hand gestures to help convey your experience
- Try to keep your story 3-5 minutes in length at first. Then reduce it to 2 minutes.
- Invite another to share something they are thankful for or a memory that makes them smile.
- Pay attention to emotions and bodily sensations that you experience as you or others share appreciation. Share with them the impact their appreciation and/or story has upon you.
- For more ideas in practicing gratitude and appreciation, conduct a google search on the topic.