



Links Players

The Gateway of Appreciation & Gratitude

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. (Matthew 26:26-28 ESV, emphasis mine)

Fatigue mixed with adrenaline pushed me along. Four days of rain delays and soggy fairways led to Hiromi Kobayashi and me standing on the 18th tee for a playoff.

This is my chance to win my first LPGA Tour event. I hit a good drive and adequate layup on the par 5. I picked a perfect lie since we could lift, clean, and place the ball. A slight breeze brushed against my face.

"I don't want to be short. I think I need to grip a nine iron." Nick agreed.

The ball compressed off the sweet spot. Dumbfounded, I watched my ball sail over the flagstick and dive-bomb into the water surrounding the backside of the green. Hiromi birdied, and I lost the playoff.

The sting of disappointment ran alongside my extraordinary appreciation and gratitude as I left the course. Appreciation for feeling alive in my body again. Gratitude for the opportunity to play and compete on the LPGA Tour. I had felt lifeless the prior three months since my mother's passing from cancer.

Appreciation and gratitude are similar and different. In his book *The Joy Switch*, Chris Coursey calls appreciation "packaged joy." I like how Brent Stromwall defines appreciation, "Appreciation is noticing and experiencing the good and beautiful aspects of life in a relational and personal way. Appreciation is something that we feel in our bodies—it has an effect (www.odigos.llc/post/joy-by-design)." We share appreciation to be relational with God and others.

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful for an experience, a thing, or an act of kindness towards us. Gratitude must be cultivated and is a way we form an attachment to God.

The practice of appreciation and gratitude activates and helps grow an area in the right hemisphere of our brain called the joy center. James Wilder, author and speaker says, "Relational circuits in our brains open us up to a relationship with God and others. Nothing opens those circuits as much as gratitude." A Jesuit priest states, "It's not joy that makes us grateful; it's gratitude that makes us joyful." Appreciation and gratitude increase our capacity for joy.

Directly faced with suffering, Jesus gave thanks and refused to relinquish his joy. Practicing appreciation and gratitude may not remove our pain or suffering, but it will help us bear our pain and suffering like Jesus, "...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...." (Hebrews 12:2).

How might you consider practicing appreciation and gratitude today?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for how you have intricately created our brains to be relational through appreciation and gratitude. Help me offer my appreciation and gratitude in real and tangible ways today.

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Tracy Hanson

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