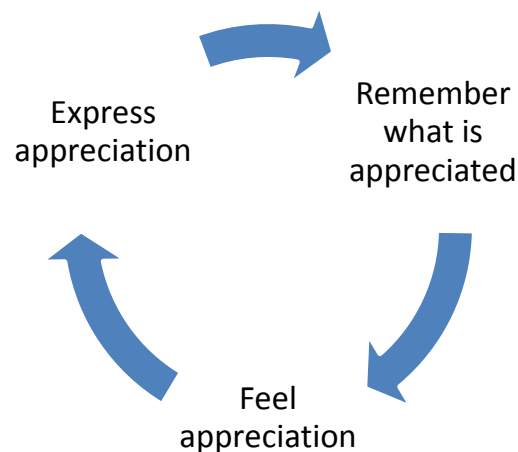


The power of Interactive Appreciation

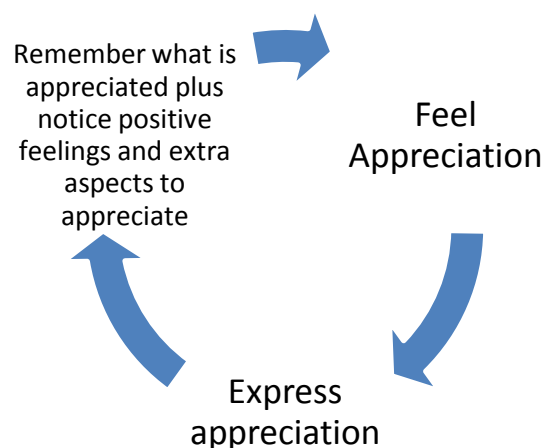
The practice of appreciation or gratitude is common today. It involves; remembering or perceiving what one is grateful for, feeling appreciation and to some extent, in one way or another expressing it.



This is just the beginning because people can engage in this for some time so it is better to represent it as a cycle: (start top right)



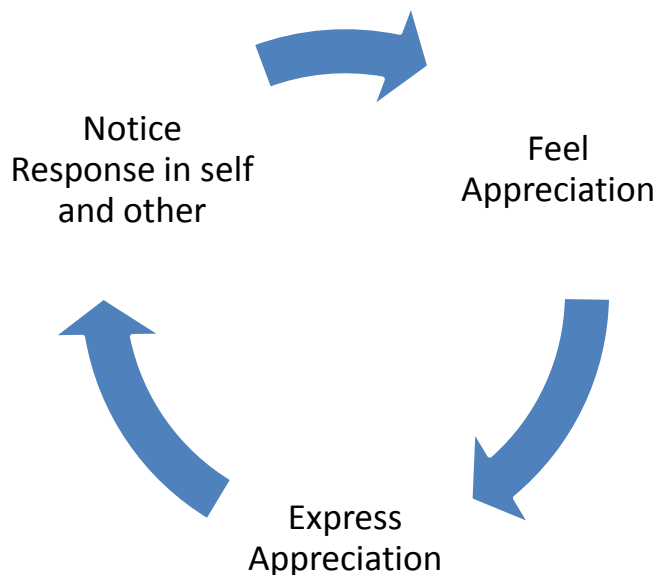
Now as people get into the space of actively appreciating a couple things often happen. Firstly they can start feeling more positive as they go. They may also appreciate this. The other is they may notice more to appreciate about what they were already focussing on. So if we extend our graphic it looks more like this.



So in choosing to sustain appreciation a person is finding more aspects to express appreciation about and may include appreciation of the positive responses they are having in themselves due to the activity. In a sense they are interacting with themselves as they notice their own responses to appreciation. Even in simple sustained appreciation there is a sense of interaction. Let's put some more steps in to represent this:



Now in this example the response one is noticing is in oneself, yet it could also be the response we notice in someone else receiving our appreciation. So while we are expressing our appreciation in the presence of another we could be noticing their response and appreciating that as well. Putting that into a cyclic diagram looks something like this.



Interactive appreciation with another leads to Interactive Appreciation with God

By this point in time we are exploring not just appreciation but “interactive” appreciation. Yet this can be extended. The next level of interactive appreciation is to notice God’s response when we express appreciation to Him and begin interacting with Him. For many this is a completely new skill, however it is one that can be learned and when practiced brings great rewards. In the Immanuel Approach we practice interactive appreciation with other people, initially one on one, then we use that skill to practice interactive appreciation with God. The simplest key to this working is that we have to quieten enough, slow down enough, to perceive how God responds to our gratitude: we have to calm and notice. We teach people this core skill to people as we lead them through the Immanuel Approach.

When people learn the skill of interactive appreciation with each other and with God the possibility of deep permanent change opens up.

*The following is an excerpt from the writings of Jim Wilder originally written as a blog (December 4th 2014). It now appears in **Joyful Journey: Listening to Immanuel** (2015, pg 64) in answer to the question, Can I use “interactive gratitude” to create a new sense of normal?*

How to use “interactive gratitude” to create a new sense of normal

Do you wake up feeling anxious? Do pleasant experiences drift away quickly? If so, it might be because your brain considers that to be “normal.” Before we turn two years old, we develop a sense of “normal.” All sorts of factors can contribute to this development. For instance:

- If our family is depressed, depression becomes a part of our normal.
- If our parents are anxious, anxiety becomes a part of our normal.
- If those who raise us tend to get angry, anger becomes a part of our normal.

Before we can hardly talk, our brain has set these environmental feelings as the “normal” for our lives. Later in life we may struggle against an angry, worried, depressed or unloved sense of normal. Despite our efforts, our brain quickly finds its way back. We wake up miserable each morning, or return to our misery even after something positive happens. Without retraining our brain to a new normal that is exactly what will happen!

Three Steps to a New Normal

The first step to a new normal is learning to feel appreciation in my body.

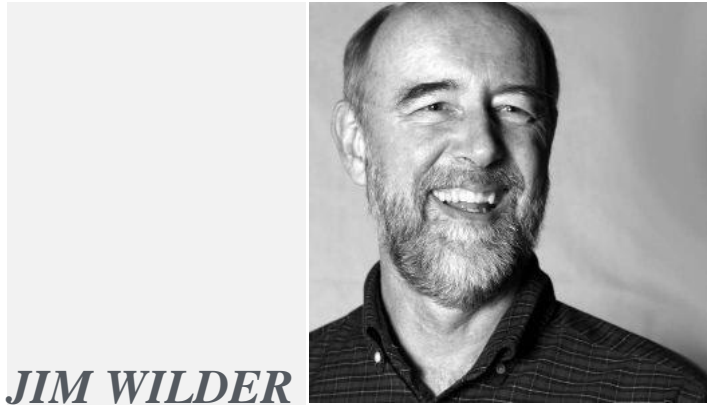
Appreciation, gratitude and thankfulness all work, provided I notice what they feel like in my body. Noticing the body feeling insures that the right parts of my brain are working together (prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate and insula). When my brain discovers that I can feel appreciation at will a new range of possibilities opens for me.

The second step toward a new normal is learning to sustain the feeling of appreciation until I can feel appreciation for five straight minutes.

To do this, I begin to collect a series of appreciation experiences and memories by giving them names like: island sunrise, morning coffee, Fido at lake, Julie’s birthday. Now I can keep my appreciation going longer by remembering one appreciation experience after another. When I can do this for five minutes, my brain realizes that I can feel this as long as I like.

The third step to a new normal comes by practicing five minutes of appreciation three times a day for a month.

Starting and ending my day with appreciation and throwing in a dose in the middle helps my brain realize, “I can do this all day.” The marvel is that our brain is a learning machine. Once it knows how to feel good, keep that good feeling going and have a good feeling any time of day it decides, “I’ll make this my new normal!”



JIM WILDER

Dr. Jim Wilder has been ministering since 1977 and teaching in the areas of trauma and addiction recovery, spiritual and emotional maturity, multi-generational community development, and the brain science of relationships. His understanding of both the theology and neuroscience of joy is foundational for healing, growth and life transformation.