

Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude



One thing I know for sure
is that gratitude sets us free!

How often do we begin our mornings in a place of doubt, disbelief, or uncertainty, which often translates into a loss of energy? What if there was a definite way to begin your day energized, with a smile on your face? Sounds too good to be true? Well, try this on for size...gratitude!

No matter what kind of day you are anticipating, whether it be one filled with stress or joy, rest assured that reminding yourself of why you are blessed and have so much going for you is just a thought or a visualization away. Waking up with gratitude is a habit that you can choose to create in your life, starting today. We clean our body with a morning shower, so why not clean our spirit with a daily dose of appreciation? How about taking it one step further and being grateful for our bodies? Someone once said, "Why not love your body, you have been sleeping with it your whole life!" Funny, true, and a good reason to be grateful, wouldn't you say?

At this very moment, you can exercise your greatest power as a human being—your power to choose—by choosing to bring to the forefront of your mind reasons to be grateful. Maybe you are simply grateful for reading this magazine or appreciative of the person that recommended it to you. Have you just finished eating a meal? How about giving thanks for all the people who contributed to producing and delivering that food to you? Did you have milk with your breakfast? Consider silently giving thanks for every aspect of that milk—the cow that produced it, the farmer who milked the cow, the bottlers, truck drivers, and grocers who all contributed to your having it! Do you think I am overdoing it just a bit? Perhaps that is because this is a new way of thinking, and the mind fears change. One thing I know for sure is that gratitude sets us free!

Gratitude is a matter of the heart, not a matter of the mind. When you choose to be in a place of gratitude, your mind may attempt to reject it by telling you that it is pointless, that you are not being productive, that it will not work or help you with your life, etc. Just let the movie of your mind play out and return to the area of your heart. When you are residing in your heart, you only know how to be grateful for everything that is evolving in your life. When you have learned to distance yourself from your mind and realize that your heart is leading the way, your mind begins to serve you in a positive manner. It will then fill your life with unlimited imagination and creativity. Take a moment to think about young children who always seem to be in a place of gratitude. They open up a gift and, rather than immediately playing with the exciting toy inside, they become more intrigued with the wrappings and the simple box in which the gift came. Some may say that a child does not know any better, to which I would respond that they do know better (the *value* of the toy), they just don't think as adults do. Always remember, the mind *thinks* and the heart *knows*.

As I write this article, I can choose to focus on the pile of bills to my right as a "negative," wondering if I have enough money in the bank to pay for everything, or I can choose to have an attitude of gratitude for them. Now your mind really wants to reject this whole concept, right? Rather than focusing on what those bills are taking from my life (primarily money from my bank account), why not focus on what is behind them? Behind every invoice is some type of service or product that was delivered to me. Let's see: I have two car payments, a cable bill, a landscaping bill, an electric and gas bill, a mortgage payment, and a pretty big credit card bill

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that primarily reflects a recent vacation that my family took to Disney World. It is obvious that all those bills cost me something, but on the other hand, what were the payoffs? A home to live in, cars to get us around, and hanging out with the kids, Mickey Mouse, and Goofy. Needless to say, the payoffs far outweigh the costs!

What I find so fascinating about the topic of gratitude is that it really means something different to each and every individual. It really has nothing to do with race, religion, or economics. Ask a child what he or she is grateful for, and simply sit back and smile as he or she talks your ear off for the next half hour. This little angel will tell you how grateful he or she is about practically everything in his or her life. Then, ask a teenager what he or she is grateful for and be sure not to blink, because you may miss the response! I am partially joking here, but there is also some truth to this. Many teenagers don't really want to be bothered with gratitude. They are beginning a phase of self-discovery and are focused on what the world means to *them*. This does not mean that they are completely devoid of gratitude—remember, there is gratitude within all of us—but it shows that many teenagers do not take the time to focus on all the good things they have in their lives.

When many teenagers head off to college, they quickly revert back to a place of gratitude. Maybe for the first time in their lives, they realize just how much their parents did for them and provided them with. Perhaps they miss those wonderful meals that simply “appeared” each night, the lovely fragrance of fresh clean laundry, or even that somewhat organized room where things could be found in a timely manner. Many students have an awakening of gratitude, usually during the first semester away at college, often coupled with great emotion. Sons and daughters are on the phone with their parents, crying tears of joy and tears of sorrow. Both can be indirectly linked to

gratitude—the tears of joy are for all their parents have done to help them reach those defining moments, and the tears of sorrow represent the acknowledgment of all that has been done for them, which they now must learn to do for themselves!

While in our twenties, thirties, and forties, many of us become so busy working and raising families that it is easy to lose touch with our sense of gratitude. In other words, we become human *doings* rather than human *beings*. Whenever I fall into this world of busy-ness to the point that, occasionally, I find it difficult to “come up for air,” I am reminded of Mother Teresa. Many would say that she was a “human doing” most of the time, constantly serving others to improve their lives; others would describe her as a “human being,” fully present with whomever she came into contact. The truth is, she was both. Have you ever wondered how this magical angel, who brought new meaning to the word “giving,” had so much self-sustained energy? Gratitude! Mother Teresa spent an hour every morning, by herself, in meditation. She referred to this as her time to listen to God. Grateful for receiving His messages each and every day, she spent every waking moment transforming lives through love. At the end of each day, she prayed. This was her time to tell God how grateful she was to be able to serve others, and how grateful she would be if allowed to continue her work.

Considering how important we all know gratitude to be, why do we sometimes neglect to make it a high priority? Because we are not being present in the moment. We are either dwelling on something that has happened in the past or too preoccupied with something that may or may not happen in the future. When we are not fully present in the *now*, gratitude eludes us. By practicing present-moment awareness, we can reflect on the past with gratitude and even look toward the

future with gratitude in our hearts; the difference is that we are not allowing ourselves to dwell upon and be disturbed by one or the other. There is simply an understanding and acceptance of our past which has brought us to this very moment, and a knowing that we really have no control over the future; the best we can do is simply intend for something to happen and then let go. It was once said, "The past is history, the future is a mystery, and this moment is the gift or the present."

Find someone who has lost something or someone very dear to them. While there is a feeling of great sorrow, you can often find the "silver lining" of gratitude for what that person or thing meant to them. Sometimes you don't know what you have until it is gone. Take yourself back to that morning of 9/11 and the tragedy of the World Trade Center in New York City. Our minds were blown by what we saw. For many of us, the images and reports from witnesses were too much for our minds to handle, so we retreated to our hearts for comfort. "How can I help?" and "How can I serve?" were the words that most hearts were expressing during those challenging moments. How many people immediately contacted a friend or a loved one, trying to make sense of what was going on? How many people had family or friends within arm's length and immediately embraced upon hearing the awful news? For all the sadness and loss we experienced, we also moved to a place of gratitude for what we still had in our lives and for all that we still had to give to others. In any kind of adversity, gratitude will provide the safety and security within ourselves to move forward.

Think for a moment about a time in your life when you felt a great loss. While it was perfectly normal to feel a sense of grief, ask yourself what helped you to move out of that grief—did it have anything to do with gratitude? There is not one experience I have had when coaching a person who has lost a loved one where gratitude was not the key to helping that individual transition in the face of adversity. While reflecting upon the special moments we shared with our loved one, we invariably move to a place of gratitude. We cherish the moments we had with that person, and recalling many of the pleasant details associated with them brings a smile to our face. Gratitude does not erase the past; rather, it enhances it, giving us an opportunity to appreciate and learn from it.

We have discussed how gratitude affects children, teens, and people busy raising families and working for a living. The truth is that gratitude is important for everyone throughout all phases of life, including those who have been blessed to live very long lives. Even when, at a very advanced age, one may have lost the use of many bodily faculties, what is left? Gratitude! Take a few moments to talk to an "elderly" person about their "good old days." Just listen and watch them light up the room! While your mind may be telling you "how little" is left in this person's life, your heart will be filled with loving appreciation for the long and amazing journey that this soul has taken. While writing this, I am moved to gratitude as I remember an 85-year-old man I met in Hawaii who said, "Every day above ground is a happy and successful day." Ahhh, words to live by!



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Thank You...

This article is included in the latest issue of Pure Inspiration magazine (Spring 2008), which may be purchased as of March 4th, 2008 at Borders, Barnes & Noble, and other newsstand locations nationwide. Visit us on the web at: www.pureinspirationmag.com