

WHAT ARE YOU GRATEFUL FOR? DEVELOPING AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

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What are you thankful for? Have you asked yourself that question lately? Most of us probably reflect on this only during the Thanksgiving holidays. For many who have been affected by the current economic situation, thinking about being grateful may be more difficult to do this year. However, perhaps now, more than ever, we should be focusing on what we are grateful for in our lives. It's easy to look at what you don't have, but that can bring feelings of frustration, disappointment, and even depression. By developing an attitude of gratitude, you begin to look at what you actually have, and you may be surprised to find that you have enough or perhaps *more* than enough!

These are some ways to develop an attitude of gratitude:

Start a "Gratitude Journal."-Before you go to bed each night, list 3-5 things you are grateful for from that day. The items you list should not only be possessions or "big" things. It can be having good friends, a job (even if you don't like your job, at least you're employed---many people aren't), family, your health, having certain skills, etc. You can even list things that are not "yours" such as a beautiful sunset or a clear day (be thankful you're not shoveling snow). Review the lists in your gratitude journal regularly.

Take the focus off of yourself.-It's easy to get caught up in what you don't have or what you are going through if you are faced with difficulties. Now, I don't mean to make light of whatever you may be dealing with, but just as much as there are those who are "better off" than you, there are certainly those who have it "much worse" than you. When you take the focus off of yourself and really look around you, you will realize that your situation may not be as bad (i.e., it could be worse) as you thought it was, or that you actually have a lot more than others. Taking the focus off of yourself may simply mean helping a friend in need or volunteering to help others less fortunate. Remember, no matter what your circumstances may be, there are *always* others who are less fortunate than you.

Be a "blessing" to others.-Along with taking the focus off of yourself, when you share what you have with others, this further promotes a sense of gratitude. Now, this is not simply about donating money, but rather giving of yourself whether it is your time (e.g., volunteering) or your "talents" such as lending emotional support to someone if you are a good listener, cooking meals for a co-worker or neighbor who may be ill, or providing childcare for a mother who is harried or stressed, etc. You can also go through your home and weed out possession that you no longer need or find useful. Donate these items to others. If you have children, have them go through their toys or games and encourage them to donate items that they have outgrown or no longer use to other children who may be less fortunate or don't have as much. By doing this, you also instill in your children a sense of gratitude and appreciation for what they already have in their lives. Get creative and be on the lookout for opportunities to bless others.

Remember to do these things regularly, not only during the holiday season. You may find that there are other ways to developing an attitude of gratitude.

“There shall be eternal summer in the grateful heart.” -Celia Thaxter

“If we take the time, no matter how crazy and troubled we feel, we can find something to be thankful for.” -Terry Lynn Taylor

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