

“Every once in a while God allows you to stub your toe as a kind reminder to be grateful for the miraculous body attached to it.”

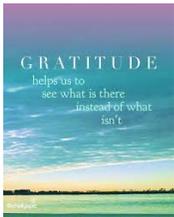
- Richelle E. Goodrich

With all the negativity right now, I'm doing my best to help you stay positive. While things are definitely getting better, you'd never know it if you turned on the news. So personally, I'm trying to unplug a little more so I don't get sucked into all that negativity. As I try to focus on the positive, I realized that it is possible to turn the lemons into lemonade. We've all gone through tough times and as I've discussed before, those help us become resilient. Something else that helps with resilience is gratitude. By practicing gratitude, we can learn to find the bright light when we're lost in darkness. Last month I asked you what brings you joy. This month, I'm asking you to practice gratitude. We can't get better at anything if we don't practice. This probably seems like a tall order right now, but I promise you, it'll be worth it. If you need help getting started, please contact me.

Yours in health,

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Can Practicing Gratitude Change your Life?



"Thank you," are two little words that mean so much, yet often go unsaid. Many of us tend to take things for granted and I'm no exception. When my son was younger, I expected him to say *"thank you"* when I took him to school so he didn't have to ride the bus or when I drove him 30 minutes to basketball practice because he didn't want to play for our town's county team. But when he remembers to open the door for me or take out the trash without my prodding, I often forget those two little words that mean so much to me. So if you're like me, you can probably do a better job of expressing gratitude.

I recently learned that a woman with whom I grew up, died suddenly. She left behind a heartbroken child and husband. The news of her passing, in addition to losing someone I loved, have been grim reminders that all we have is today. Tomorrow isn't promised to any of us. There's an old saying: *"Live every day as if it were your last, for one day it surely will be."*

Are you living as if today will be your last? I doubt it. We tend to get so caught up in "life" that we forget to actually live. This is especially true today. There's so much hysteria surrounding this "unknown enemy", it's becoming harder. Instead of being grateful for what we have, we're pessimistic because it seems easier. But the reality is, negativity isn't easier. Did you know it takes only 2 muscles to smile but 11 to frown? That should tell you everything you need to know.

We often take people and things granted. If we stop doing that and instead, become appreciative, we can make a huge difference in people's lives. I found a website that was the first online Gratitude Challenge, which brought together 11,000 people from 118 countries. The kindspring.org website has

an online portal that includes a start-up kit designed to help groups begin their own gratitude challenges. What an amazing idea! It made me wonder how I could show more appreciation to the people in my life. With life so hectic, it really is easy to forget.

Gratitude can take many forms, but like I said earlier, to get better at something we have to practice. But that takes time and energy and maybe we just don't have enough. Sometimes, it's easier to complain and focus on the negative than it is to take joy in or even notice the positive. My dad used to say that we must learn to *"accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative."* As a kid, I'd just roll my eyes. But now that I'm older and (hopefully) wiser, I understand what he meant.

If you begin to practice gratitude, you'll learn to recognize and appreciate how people, including complete strangers, can help make our lives better. Gratitude is a small act with a tremendous payoff. The recipient appreciates knowing they helped make a difference. But the person who expresses gratitude is the one who gains the most. Remember the old saying *"it's better to give than to receive?"* That holds true for emotional gifts too.

Life can sometimes feel as if nothing is going our way. We've all been to that dark place and it's often hard to escape once we're there. I learned that the hard way this year, when I lost someone I loved. He was stuck in a very dark place and couldn't see the light that I knew was at the end of the tunnel. We've all been there, whether we want to admit it or not. As for me, if I ever find myself in that awful dark place, what helps bring me back into the light is sitting in a quiet place and making a list of everything for which I am grateful. My list always starts with my son and my health. Those are easy and obvious. But sometimes, I have to dig deeper to find the less recognizable things around me for which I'm grateful. This is similar to the "What Brings You Joy" list I asked you to make last month. But it's also different. Believe it or not, you can actually be grateful for things that don't bring you joy.

I've learned that sometimes, we have to go through heartbreak and tragedy for a greater purpose. The reason is because what we learn from the experience will allow us to help someone else survive something similar. A perfect example is when I lost my dad. Up until then, I'd never lost anyone I loved. My heartbreak was indescribable. None of my friends had lost a parent, so no one knew what to say or what to do to help me through it. It was like being stranded on a deserted island all by myself with no hope of rescue in sight. But somehow, I managed to escape...and survive. Then five months later, my best friend, who is more like a sister, lost her mom. She was as close to her mom as I was to my dad, so I knew her pain all too well. My loss taught me how to help her. Believe it or not, I felt grateful that I had the ability to help her because of the loss I'd suffered. I couldn't have done that if I hadn't lost my dad.

So stop for a few moments and think about it. For whom or what are you most grateful? Make a list of AT LEAST 10 people or things. Once you have your list, look it over. Is there anyone on it to whom you can express your gratitude? Who would benefit from a kind word? If you know someone, find a way to let them know. You'll both be glad you did. Not only will you make **THEIR** day, but you'll be surprised by how good **YOU** feel.

From this day forward, try to express some form of gratitude to someone each and every day. We've all been through bad times, but even in those times, there are still blessings everywhere. Sometimes, and especially now, when our lives have been completely turned upside down, you just have to look a little harder to find those blessings. By practicing gratitude, you really can change your life, and even the life of someone else, in a positive way. Have a wonderful and gratitude-filled month.