

What We Focus On Gets Stronger and Stronger

Only a pre-existing 'attitude of gratitude' (as opposed to any state of resentment or entitlement), a deliberate choice of love over fear, a desire to be positive instead of negative, will allow you to live in the spacious place we describe as 'peace'. (Richard Rohr)

Do you ever stop to investigate what you tend to focus on the most as you go through your daily life? If you are anything like me, you may spend quite some time each day thinking about the news, the weather, or other people's behaviour. If we are really honest with ourselves, we may also realise that we spend at least some time each day thinking angry, judgemental, resentful or fearful thoughts about the news, the weather, other people's behaviour etc.

But those of us who love to have a good rant about the crazy world in which we live need to remind ourselves that moaning and groaning too much is really bad for our long term health and well-being. Our habitual thoughts and feelings play a key role in determining how we perceive the world around us, and how we perceive the world around us in turn plays a key role in determining our long-term well-being.

In other words: what you focus on is what you get.

You can probably spot this more easily in others than in yourself. For example, you may know someone who is always complaining about their partner or their family who never seems to be happy in any of their relationships. Or you may know someone who is always focussing on their many health problems who never seems to get any healthier.

Of course, the opposite is also true. You may know someone for example who has a serious health problem, but they never complain about their health and seem to lead a full and happy life despite their illness or disability. Similarly, you may know someone who seems to be happily married to a partner who – to all intents and purposes – seems to have very little to recommend them.

I think what is going on here is that what we focus on with our habitual thoughts and feelings just goes on getting stronger and stronger within us until seeing the glass as either half empty or as half full comes naturally to us.

For the first half of my life, I was most definitely a 'glass more than half empty' kind of person. But then, after years of psychotherapy and a sudden spiritual awakening in my late 40s, I have spent the second part of my life consciously training my mind to think more positively by deliberately focussing on all that is well with me and our world. I have also kept connecting to my loving, intuitive heart and tuning into a deep heart-centred knowing that life is meant to be truly wonderful.

So now, I no longer have to make such a conscious effort to feel incredibly grateful each day for all the wonderful blessings that wing their way to me. It feels so natural to me to say 'Thank You' for all the blessings that I have received each day before I drift off to sleep each night.

Now that Gloria is finally fully recovering from smashing her wrist to pieces last August and then suffering a mini heart attack last November, I can reflect back on the last year of our lives and wonder just how we managed to get through such a challenging time with relative ease.

The conclusion I have come to is that our long standing practice of being grateful for everything that happens in our lives really stood us in really good stead as we went twice through the purgatory that is A&E and then coped with the subsequent surgical procedures that Gloria had to endure.

OK, I definitely lost it the once whilst waiting for hours and hours to find out the results of a test to see how badly Gloria's heart was damaged. However, apart from that big blip, I stayed pretty calm and positive during month after month of accompanying her to A&E, visiting her in hospital, and then caring for her at home as she slowly recovered from her surgeries.

As we went through this pretty challenging time, I just kept pausing regularly to give thanks for all the help and support we were receiving. At one point for example, Gloria received so many bouquets of 'get well soon' flowers that our house looked like a florist shop! Even now, I still stop from time to time to send a wave of heartfelt gratitude to all the NHS staff who looked after Gloria with such exceptional skill and compassion.

The pretty challenging time we had in the second half of 2022 really brought home to me that the more I pause briefly, but regularly, to give thanks for all

that I already have, the more fantastic people and events seemed to come into my life as if by magic.

However, whilst I do believe in miracles, I don't believe in magic. I am now convinced that in order to live a truly fulfilled, abundant and joyful life, we need to focus on all that is already going well for us and to give genuine thanks for all that we already have - even if our personality-self still insists that he or she needs much more of something or something completely different in order to be truly content and at peace.

So here is the nub of this message: focussing on all that is well with us day by day is an incredibly effective way to transform our whole life for the better. But as usual, I really, really do not want you to trust my word on this. So please try out this life-transforming practice for yourself as April unfolds in all its early spring glory.

Each day of April, please just pause for a moment or two early in the morning and late in the evening to focus on all the blessings in your life. If perchance - and I sincerely hope you do not! - you do have one or two really difficult or dark days, still pause and find something to be grateful for - such as the soft toilet paper in your bathroom or the soft bread in your bread bin.

If you feel tired, unwell or in pain at any point this month, please do your best to focus on a part of your body that still feels energised, comfortable or pain free. If you notice any anxiety about the state of your finances, focus on everything that you own and marvel at how much stuff you have accumulated over the years. If a close friend or a relative starts to annoy you at any point, just pause and remember something lovely they once said or did in the past, or pause to remind yourself how difficult their life is at the moment and then send them a brief, but heartfelt wave of gratitude or compassion.

On the other hand, if you find yourself having an exceptionally good day at some point in April, please do not get so excited that you forget to pause and say a big THANK YOU for all that is going so right in your life that day. If a friend or a loved one offers you their support at some point, however small their kind gesture may be, do not forget to focus on this act of loving kindness for a moment or two at the end of your day.

Saying 'Thank you!' on a regular basis for all that is going right in our life may sound like a pretty simple thing to do. But I promise you that the more you focus on all that is well with you day in and day out, the more your life this spring will no longer feel like a dreary trudge through a cold, boggy, landscape, but much more like a walk in the park – a park that is filled with the most uplifting spring sights, sounds and scents that you can possibly imagine.

Peggy Foster
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