

How Gratitude Can Change Your Life,

By **Marelisa Fabrega**

If the only prayer you say in your life is 'thank you,' that would suffice. – Meister Eckhart

Gratitude means thankfulness, counting your blessings, noticing simple pleasures, and acknowledging everything that you receive. It means learning to live your life as if everything were a miracle, and being aware on a continuous basis of how much you've been given. Gratitude shifts your focus from what your life lacks to the abundance that is already present. In addition, behavioral and psychological research has shown the surprising life improvements that can stem from the practice of gratitude. Giving thanks makes people happier and more resilient, it strengthens relationships, it improves health, and it reduces stress.



Research Shows Gratitude Heightens Quality of Life

Two psychologists, Michael McCollough of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, and Robert Emmons of the University of California at Davis, wrote an article about an experiment they conducted on gratitude and its impact on well-being. The study split several hundred people into three different groups and all of the participants were asked to keep daily diaries. The first group kept a diary of the events that occurred during the day without being told specifically to write about either good or bad things; the second group was told to record their unpleasant experiences; and the last group was instructed to make a daily list of things for which they were grateful. The results of the study indicated that daily gratitude exercises resulted in higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, optimism, and energy. In addition, those in the **gratitude** group experienced less depression and stress, were more likely to help others, exercised more regularly, and made greater progress toward achieving personal goals.

Notice and Appreciate Each Day's Gifts

People tend to take for granted the good that is already present in their lives. There's a gratitude exercise that instructs that you should imagine losing some of the things that you take for granted, such as your home, your ability to see or hear, your ability to walk, or anything that currently gives you comfort. Then imagine getting each of these things back, one by one, and consider how grateful you would be for each and every one. In addition, you need to start finding joy in the small things instead of holding out for big achievements. Another way to use giving thanks to appreciate life more fully is to use gratitude to help you put things in their proper perspective. When things don't go your way, ***remember that every difficulty carries within it the seeds of an equal or greater benefit.*** In the face of adversity ask yourself: "What's good about this?", "What can I learn from this?", and "How can I benefit from this?"

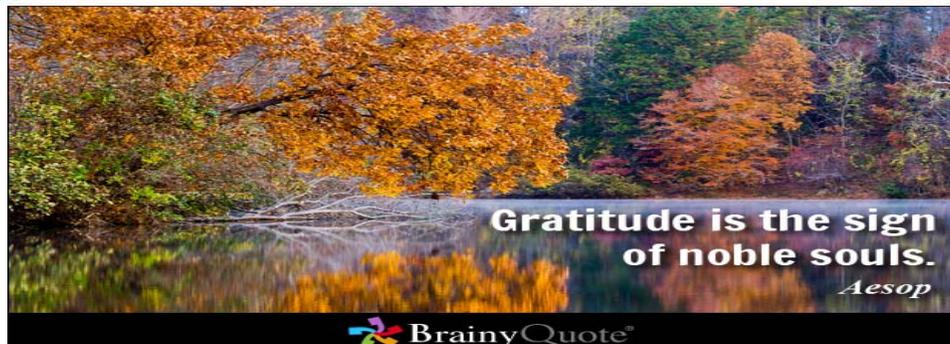
There are Many Ways to Practice Gratitude

A common method to develop the practice of gratitude is to keep a gratitude journal, a concept that was made famous by Sarah Ban Breathnach's book "Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude". This exercise basically consists of writing down every day a list of three to ten things for which you are grateful; Last year millions of people took the challenge proposed by Will Bowen, a Kansas City minister, to go 21 days without complaining, criticizing, or gossiping.

Conclusion

Once you become oriented toward looking for things to be grateful for, you will find that you begin to appreciate simple pleasures and things that you previously took for granted. ***Gratitude should not be just a reaction to getting what you want, but an all-the-time gratitude, the kind where you notice the little things and where you constantly look for the good even in unpleasant situations. Today, start bringing gratitude to your experiences, instead of waiting for a positive experience in order to feel grateful; in this way, you'll be on your way toward becoming a master of gratitude.***

IT IS NOT HAPPY
PEOPLE WHO ARE
THANKFUL. IT IS
THANKFUL
PEOPLE WHO ARE
HAPPY.



A Thanksgiving Story

*A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which said: "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat. A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words. Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy. That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy realized the same man had returned, and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?" The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way." I wrote: "Today is a beautiful day but I cannot see it." Both signs told people that the boy was blind. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign told people that they were so lucky that they were not blind. Should we be surprised that the second sign was more effective? Moral of the Story: Be thankful for what you have. Be creative. Be innovative. Think differently and positively. When life gives you a 100 reasons to cry, show life that you have 1000 reasons to smile. Face your past without regret. Handle your present with confidence. Prepare for the future without fear. Keep the faith and drop the fear. **The most beautiful thing is to see a person smiling. And even more beautiful, is knowing that you are the reason behind it!** Happy Thanksgiving to all!*