

Gratitude this Memorial Day

We experience it, express it and expect it--gratitude that is. Presently it should have an even stronger focus this Memorial Day Weekend as we remember those who have and are serving our country. Each of us this weekend should demonstrate our gratitude for their sacrifice and service that keeps America a land of free and a home of the brave. How wonderful if gratitude for those who serve could remain a stronghold, a worthy pursuit more often than just Memorial Day Weekend.

We should all aspire to have an attitude of gratitude for the blessings in our lives. But what exactly does that mean? Is emphasizing gratitude within our daily lives much more than simply saying thanks? The answer is a resounding yes.

We begin by looking around us and becoming fully aware of our senses; take a deep breath. You can start your gratitude journey by being thankful for your life--just as it is today with its attributes and challenges. The gifts of the senses are extraordinary--do not take them for granted. As E.E. Cummings wrote, "The eyes of my eyes are opened." Be certain your eyes are open literally and figuratively. Seeing, smelling, hearing, touching and tasting are astonishing gifts. Imagine life without the luxury of possessing these abilities.

As you continue your journey of gratitude, be cognizant of all that exists in your life that brings you contentment and happiness. Relationship with God, family members, friends and your self are indeed cause for thankfulness. As the popular saying states, "No one is an island." Be aware and grateful for all the connections with other people you experience each day.

As you strive to open "the eyes of your eyes," give your life a thorough glance. Are your basic needs met with enough food, clothing, regular paychecks and a home? Are there dreams you cherish that make your feet dance and your spirit sing? Do you enjoy good health, wellness and well-being? Can you walk, talk, see, hear and move your body? Even if you have limitations, what grace do you daily experience? How about all those family members and friends whom you love and who love you? Are you thankful for what you have and what you don't have? How can you expect more when you do not appreciate what you already have? After considering these probing questions, you most certainly can find at least one and most likely many reasons for rejoicing. A French proverb reminds us that "Gratitude is the heart's memory." Take a moment to recall all those people and events that have taught you about gratitude, those who have inspired, encouraged and believed in you. Now with whom can you share these same gifts of charity? How can you return the favor? Look around--there are plenty of folks who need inspiration, reinforcement and especially thanks.

Melody Beattie states, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates vision for tomorrow."

An enlightening experiment is to record your daily gifts--people, things, activities, events, animals, nature, etc.--that cause you to be grateful. Recently gratitude journals have gained popularity in our culture. Try a journal for one week and most likely, you will be pleasantly surprised at how many reasons you have to be thankful each day. Start with at least five "gratitude's" and you should soon see that number growing.

As you develop an attitude of gratitude, noticing reasons for being thankful becomes as natural and routine as brushing your teeth. As you invite and welcome more opportunities for gratitude into your life, your heart and your mind, you should experience a wonderful alteration in your overall attitude toward life.