

## Counting Your Blessings Promotes Health

Can you smell the aroma of that plump turkey baking? Today is Turkey Day! It is the day to eat until we are ready to burst as we celebrate with friends & relatives. It is the eve before Black Friday as we prepare for the big hunt at the local stores. For others today is Thanksgiving, a time to truly ponder their blessings.

As I tossed ideas in my head for this Thanksgiving health article all sorts of things came to mind. Maybe I could write about the stress of holiday meal planning! Maybe I should write about the ways families can learn to better get along at the gathering! Maybe I should write about the dangers of overeating or overspending! Scratch that! How about an article on the health benefits of an attitude of gratitude?

Having an attitude of gratitude is more than simply being thankful on Thanksgiving Day. An attitude of gratitude requires that we daily focus on our blessings regardless of the circumstances. It is a learned way of life. Often this attitude seems unnatural. As a society we have accepted being grumpy and complaining as a way of life.

We become like the ungrateful Israelites which Moses led in the desert for 40 years. We have things to be thankful for but instead we concentrate on what we don't have or what we have lost. We then have to go around life's mountain again until we can develop an attitude of gratitude. Many American's stay in the desert of ungratefulness much of their lives and worse yet they expect us to stay there with them.

I spend many counseling hours teaching people the art of gratitude. Clients are encouraged to regularly journal in a blessing journal. Sometimes they are encouraged to do something for someone less fortunate or to simply make someone else's day brighter. Some of these clients would be stuck with their "stinking thinking" otherwise. These attitudes determine how they interact with everyone in their lives and how they think about themselves. Negative emotions impact stress levels, depression, cardiovascular health and immunity. Sometimes these negative attitudes are life threatening.

In our local hospital psychiatric program patients are given an exercise of listing 25 things for which they are thankful. Initially this exercise is hard for many. It has been a long time since they have focused on being thankful. They have been stuck in the pain of their circumstances way too long. Patients have to learn to develop an attitude of gratitude for any healing to begin taking place. They must learn to see things of value in their lives apart from their problems. Otherwise, life is seen as not worth living and the suicidal ideations continue.

Having an attitude of gratitude does not mean that we forget about the devastating pain and loss that we sometimes feel. It just stops that loss from totally consuming us. Gratitude allows us to focus on a bigger picture which has to include some blessings. Sometimes we have to push ourselves to find these blessings. One of my heroes, Corrie Ten Boom, author of the Hiding Place, actually learned to be thankful for fleas which helped her survive a Nazi concentration camp and promote the gospel of Jesus.

Learning the attitude of thanksgiving is especially critical in our country today. As things change, it is difficult to not become overwhelmed with doom and gloom. As parents I encourage you to cultivate the attitude of thanksgiving in your families. Help your family to develop a long list of blessings which you review regularly. Set an example of an attitude of gratitude. This attitude may sustain them in difficult times and make beautiful days even brighter. Remember as the song goes . . . count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.