

REMEMBER TO BE GRATEFUL



An eighteen-year-old woman once asked me, "If you had to pick just *one* piece of advice that you felt would make a young person's life better than it already is, what would it be?"

If I had to choose, I'd suggest putting far more attention on being grateful. This one simple attitude, "the attitude of gratitude," has the power to change your life.

Being grateful means thinking more about what you have and what's right with your life than about what's wrong, what's missing, what needs to be better, and what you don't have.

This strategy sounds very simple, but the truth is, it's much easier said than done. Since we live in such an achievement-driven world, it's very easy to fall into the habit of focusing on what's lacking in your life, on the deficiencies and problems.

For example, if you get 95 percent of the answers correct on an exam, the first question often is, "What about the other five?" When I've won awards over the years, the first question I was asked has almost always been, "What's next?" In fact, if you see or hear me on a talk show discussing *this* book, I'll bet you the person doing the interview will ask, "What's the next book going to be?"

We all know how tempting it is to focus on the flaws of our body

instead of what we like about it, or what's wrong with our parents, or our teachers, or our brain, or our skin, or whatever. If you do ten things in a day and nine of them go well, which one are you most likely to talk about during dinner? Almost always we choose to discuss the one thing that went wrong, the worst part of our day. It's almost like we've set ourselves up to be miserable. Our continual focus on what's missing, what's wrong, or how we need to be even better or get more done keeps us from being happy now.

As an experiment, try something new. Think more about what's *right* with your life than what's wrong. Start first thing in the morning by waking up and thinking about at least three things you have to be grateful for. If possible, write your answers down in a journal or on a sheet of paper. You'll be amazed at what will happen, how much happier you'll be, when you focus not on your imperfect skin, but on how lucky you are to have a functioning body; not on your mom's or dad's imperfections, but on how lucky you are to have someone who cares; not on what's wrong with you, but on something you like about yourself.

The other part of gratitude is the expression of gratitude to others. Just as you probably love it when someone tells you how much she appreciates you, others love to hear it too. Try, whenever possible, to remember not to take others for granted. Share your appreciation and gratitude. Say "thank you" and really mean it. Write thank-you notes when someone does something nice for you, or leave a nice message on his answering machine or voice mail, or send a thoughtful e-mail.

Expressing your appreciation will accomplish several things. First, it will heighten the joy of others—nothing means more to me than when one of my daughters (or someone else) lets me know that she isn't taking

me for granted, that she appreciates me or something I'm doing. And, second, remembering to express your gratitude will direct your mind toward what's going well, what's right with your life, what's being done for you, and what you have to be grateful for. The nice thing is, when you're looking for what's right, you're going to find more of it.

Believe it or not, if you'll try expressing your gratitude, it will be a truly eye-opening experience. As you get used to doing it, you're going to notice a world of difference in the quality of your life.

READ THE FINE PRINT



Monica was stressed out because a number of her friends weren't treating her the way she wanted to be treated. She told her counselor that she lived by the golden rule, which says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." She couldn't understand what was going on. After all, she was treating others exactly the way she wanted to be treated.

Her counselor suggested something to her that made a world of difference. She asked Monica to consider the "fine print" in her golden rule. "What do you mean by fine print?" she asked. Her counselor explained that sometimes we make automatic assumptions about things that are important to us but we don't even know we're doing it because it seems so obvious that everyone would see it the same way. It's so hard for us to see these invisible assumptions that it's a lot like "fine print."

She suggested to Monica that if you were to include the fine print, her golden rule might actually go like this: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you—and if you do, they will treat you well too." That last part would be nice, but it's not necessarily always true. Monica saw her attempts to be nice to others as a "contract," an automatic pay-back mechanism.