

grat·i·tude n. the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness

We are **commanded** to give thanks in **ALL** things. It's easy to be thankful for the good things and see them as blessings. But many times the not so easy things are seen as negative – even curses- and instead become what we complain about.

It would have to be an intentional choice to see these things too. We complain OR are thankful ... but can't do both at the same time. Are we aware of the power this choice unlocks in our life and marriage? Life is constantly throwing us opportunities to make this choice - daily times of being offended, unappreciated, mistreated, misunderstood, etc... Do we truly trust that God is our vindicator, do we fully trust that He works everything together for our good and His glory? How we answer these questions, our perspective of things and realizing our response is 100% our choice alone is a powerful thing. Choosing to be truly thankful for ALL things is a choice and it begins with learning how to cultivate an attitude of gratitude!

Simply being grateful for what we have is an attitude that seems to have been lost in our modern world. Most people are so bound up in wanting more – and in focusing on what they see as lacking in their life – that they never stop to take a breath and realize what they already do have. But simply changing your awareness and focus – from what is wrong with your situation to what is right about it – will have a profound effect, not only on yourself, but on your marriage as well. In fact, if you take just this one concept that we are talking about here, and apply it to your marriage, then the differences it will make to your relationship with your spouse may astound you.

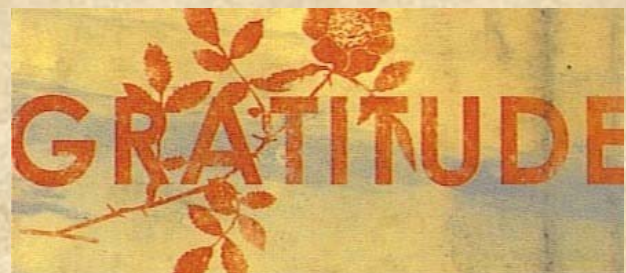
The truth is that whatever you focus on grows. No matter where you are in your marriage you DO have things to be grateful about, and if you spend some time thinking about those things – rather than all the things that you're not happy about – then you're going to find some positive changes will begin to happen.

The fact is that you do have a LOT to be grateful for in your marriage – if you CHOOSE to see it. If things aren't going too well then you need to start focusing on the good things rather than the bad things. When problems arise in a relationship, most people spend all of their time trying to 'fix' the problems, thinking, "Well if I can just stop this from happening, then we will be happy again". The reality is that when you focus on what is wrong with your marriage, you keep finding more things wrong.

When you focus instead on what is GOOD about your marriage interesting things start to happen. You have a more positive attitude – which is going to make your spouse far more willing to engage with you and deal with any issues the two of you might have. But equally importantly, you're going to see more good things in your marriage – things you truly can be grateful for – than you thought were there. Things will not only look better but they will GET better.

"Gratitude is the memory of the heart"

~ Jean Baptiste Massieu



An Attitude of Gratitude

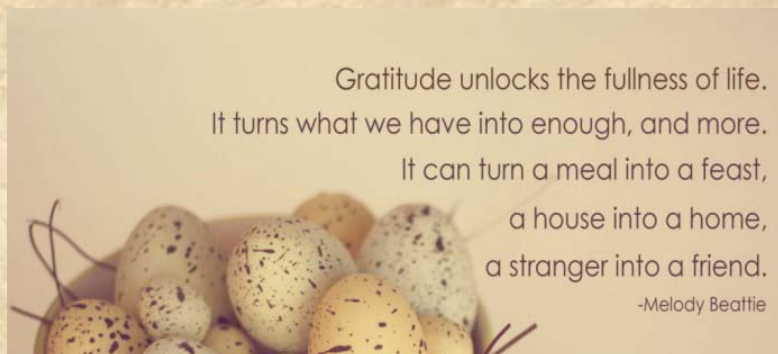
1. Catch your spouse doing something right- and say something- How many times do you ignore the good, but point out the bad? Doing this can feel like criticism and like you are focused more on the negative. Reinforcing something positive you see your spouse doing will likely result in them doing it more. It's a win-win!

2. Practice an “At Least” mentality- Finding an optimistic lens in life can help life look a lot better. When we have an “at least” mindset, we are switching our thoughts from the negative to find any tiny positive we can. For example, “It is so cold” can shift to, “At least I have this warm jacket and gloves to help!” Doing this with your spouse can look like this...“He is too busy at work, but at least he will get his bonus check to pay for our great vacation next month!”

3. Say thank you more- even for the little things- Yes we are adults, but ALL of us need a thank you for the things we do. This helps your spouse know you don't take them for granted. All of these are simple and only take a couple seconds. Remember to be specific about what you are thankful for. It means more than just a simple thanks.

Here are some suggestions to say or write in a note:

- Thanks for taking out the trash.
- I appreciate all your hard work around the house to make it look nice.
- That was a great meal, thank you for taking the time.
- Thank you for your help with the kid's homework or bedtime tonight.



Hindrances to Gratitude

You may struggle with thanking your spouse when they don't seem to be thankful for all you do. But don't let the resentment trap keep you from choosing to do it anyway. If you start the gratitude cycle in your relationship, it will probably come back around to you! And regardless, God will only be holding you responsible for your behavior.

Many times we focus on what we do not have in our relationships versus what we do have. Why is it so hard for us to practice an attitude of gratitude and positivity—especially in our marriages? One reason may be that scientists have found that the brain has a negativity bias. We tend to have Velcro for negative experiences, but Teflon for positive ones, so we often dismiss the positive aspects of our marriages while vividly remembering the negative ones.

- **Is there some “Velcro” you have been holding on to? Make an effort over the next month to let it go.**

A Case Study about Daniel and Larissa

By all accounts, Larissa is stingy with her praise. She knows this about herself. In her mind, saying “thanks” or “I appreciate what you did” to her husband Daniel is unnecessary. When questioned about the kind of husband Daniel is, Larissa quickly acknowledges that he’s a good husband and a good father, but then she adds, “But he’s only doing what he should be doing.” Like many of us, Larissa has certain relationship expectations and standards that are non-negotiable. Daniel “should” do certain things as a husband because Larissa expects it. But Larissa is confusing two potentially separate issues: You can expect certain things from your spouse and you can still appreciate the fact that your expectations are being met.

Larissa’s appreciation stinginess arose out of fear—she was afraid without even realizing it, and her fears caused her to withhold emotionally. For Larissa, gratitude was equated with overly indulging the other—an unnecessary emotional feeding that was child-like in her mind. She feared that to give in this way would open up an emotional neediness in her husband because he would want greater amounts of her expressed appreciation once he experienced it. If she gave to Daniel emotionally through expressions of gratitude, he would require increasing amounts of her attention, and she would be totally drained of her emotional resources. So rather than open this emotional Pandora’s box, Larissa kept her gratitude bottled up. These unwarranted fears robbed both her and her husband of the closeness they yearned for from each other.

- **Do you have any blocks to expressing gratitude or appreciation toward your spouse?**
- **If you hold back emotionally like Larissa, what issues might be behind your gratitude deficits?**
- **Are you ready to make the conscious effort to express appreciation for the small actions your partner does that you are thankful for?**



At some point during the night find a random person that you do not know and tell them something great about your spouse. Make sure your spouse hears your praise as you honor them publicly.

The Gratitude Exercise

Think about someone who exercised even when he didn’t feel like working out. Maybe he felt too tired or weak or stiff or simply not in the mood, but he pushed through the lethargy and made it happen. What was the result of pushing himself to do something that was good for him? I’m guessing that after the workout, he felt better about himself—maybe he felt a sense of accomplishment, more content or peaceful, maybe he even felt a bit more able to face the challenges of the day.

Like a physical workout, you might have different reasons not to regularly exercise your gratitude mindset—legitimate complaints and hurdles that are making life and your marriage really tough. When stressed and hurting, when it feels like life (and your spouse) is just being way too unfair, gratitude is probably the last thing on your mind. But what if (despite how you might feel in a particular moment) you pushed yourself to start a gratitude exercise program—a regularly scheduled workout that challenged you to reflect on all the small (and seemingly insignificant and overlooked) ways in which you are blessed?

The Beginning of Gratitude

1. When it comes to gratitude, think small.

It's easy to be grateful when your love surprises you with a new car or a dream cruise, but grand gestures such as these are usually few and far between. Instead, focus on the small things you feel grateful for: the way s/he smiles, when your partner lets you sleep an extra half hour while s/he takes care of the kids, when your mate stops to pick you up your favorite Starbucks drink...you get the point.

2. Feel the appreciation *before* you express it.

You can begin to lose your partner's trust if s/he senses that your words of gratitude are inauthentic. Remember, it is your feelings of gratitude that will stay with them long after your last spoken words of gratitude.

3. Don't expect anything in return.

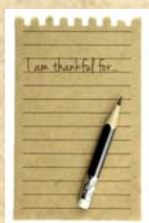
The gift of gratitude is in the act of sharing your feelings. When you anticipate or expect something in return (like reciprocated words of appreciation), you dilute the benefits of gratitude. Be selfless when you express your appreciation.

4. Don't express gratitude when your spouse/partner is upset with you about something.

There's a time and a place for everything, including gratitude. Expressions of appreciation when your partner is upset or angry with you can feel invalidating to your partner (since what you're saying is so contradictory to what s/he is currently feeling about you). Resolve any current conflict or pressing issue before expressing your gratitude.

5. Gratitude is a mindset rather than a one-time event.

When couples hear about the benefits of gratitude, they frequently make the mistake of poor follow-through. For instance, they might keep a gratitude journal for a few days or weeks but then revert back to rarely communicating appreciation. To overcome this problem, think of gratitude as a mindset, a way of being and a way of viewing the world rather than an isolated, special event to do on a particular occasion. Persevere in your commitment to making these life-altering changes. Finally, be patient and allow the benefits of gratitude to slowly take hold of your relationship.



Write a Gratitude List

What qualities of your spouse are you most grateful for? Simply open your gratitude journal, set a timer for 5 minutes and start writing away. Don't edit your list. Just write as fast as you can listing all of the things you love and are grateful for about your spouse. Really push to get specific. After making your beginning list, share them with each other.

The All In Marriage Gratitude Challenge

Most research suggests that it takes about 21 days to form a new habit. In an effort to develop the habit of gratitude, we challenge you to accept The All In Marriage Gratitude Challenge. Every night, in your gratitude journal write 3 things that you appreciated about your spouse that day. Also, read over some of your past entries. Then share at least one of these with each other. Pray that God continues to develop your obedience to be thankful in ALL things. Ask Him to use this obedience to transform your new habit into a grateful heart. Thank Him for the growth you have already seen in this area and for the strength and power that He has given you to finish this race well!



Post pics, comments & growth tips on the Gratitude GDE page at www.facebook.com/AllInMarriage.