

Better Parenting: What if We Extended the Thanksgiving Tradition for the Entire Year?

By Sonia Spackman MA, MFT

Being grateful for those who light up your life. Albert Schweitzer, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, once said, "At times our light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person, each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted a flame within us."

Ask yourself, who has encouraged or strengthened you when you were down? Who in your life deserves gratitude for supporting you when you needed it most? Make a list of the important people and benefits in your life. What your life would be like without those benefits or people?

Being thankful for a new chance. Each day we are given the chance to make a difference in this world. Grateful people don't take others for granted. They don't assume that people should treat them well or do things for them. They don't feel they are entitled to more for any reason.

Sometimes we get so focused on our 'rights' that we forget to appreciate what we do have. Having an "attitude of gratitude" keeps us aware of appreciating things in our everyday life.

Sometimes we might complain because our day isn't what we hoped. But when we are having a good day – do we appreciate it?

Frustrations come from unmet

expectations but an attitude of thankfulness results in finding joy in life no matter what comes our way.

Gratitude affects kids. Kids who watch grateful parents learn to be thankful. Studies have shown that these kids who feel and act more grateful tend to be less materialistic, get better grades, set higher goals, complain of fewer ailments and feel more satisfied with their families, friends and schools than those who don't.

When to express your gratitude. It is obvious that gratitude should be given when someone does you a favor or buys you a gift. But there are times we usually take things for granted rather than be thankful. For example:

When the kids are behaving. You might think, "But kids should behave!" Showing thankfulness for their good behavior will promote more good behavior.

When someone does a job well. I have tracked down a manager and reported when a clerk treated me well. One woman leaves soda and snacks on top of the garbage can for the garbage man, now - who would think of doing that?

When friends or family do you a favor. We can easily overlook close family or friends when it comes to being grateful. Notice when they do kind things and show appreciation.

How to express your gratitude. There are many ways to say "Thank You" but

the best ways are those that are personal. Make a sugarless dessert for someone who is diabetic. Edge your neighbor's lawn when you do yours. Surprise the kids with ice cream sundaes. Give your spouse time to do what he or she enjoys best. My sister-in-law cleaned my house while I was at work one day. Another friend got someone to bring us a load of wood just before a snowstorm. Bring some goodies to the librarian who is sweet to your kids.

Track your gratitude. Studies show that keeping a gratitude journal can reduce depression. My husband and I have a "Gratitude Journal" where we list the blessings we have received. When we go back and read these entries it lifts our spirits. Studies also show that people who do this have a positive outlook about the future.

Benefits of gratitude. Researchers say gratitude will improve our health. It is no secret stress can make us sick and is linked to several leading causes of death. Studies show that those who have gratitude as a personal trait have an edge on the not so grateful when it comes to health, especially stress. There are studies linking optimism to better immune function, outcomes for people with serious health problems and those preparing for surgery. Thankful people are less likely to be depressed, envious, greedy or alcoholic and more likely to sleep soundly and take care of their health.

Gratefulness in the face of loss. Even in the face of a tremendous loss or tragedy, gratitude is possible. Gratitude in the aftermath of 9/11 helped some people avoid suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Cultivating gratitude and thankfulness.

Often people who have higher optimism have faced losses and tragedy early in life, suggesting that adversity can promote growth over time. But you don't have to wait for a tragedy to grow feelings of gratitude you can start right now. **Change your negative thoughts from what you don't have to positive thoughts about what you do have.** Sometimes we spend way too much time being negative. I see people focusing on what they don't have; the right body, the right job, the right mate, etc. It makes our lives more difficult and it has a bad effect on the people around us.

Talk to yourself in creative, positive and grateful ways. Saying "Thank You" isn't hard for most people. But acting grateful - that takes more work. You might have to change your thinking for that to happen. Look for small things to be grateful for. If you are facing a challenging situation, try to see the ways this may benefit you eventually. For example, coping with difficult people in your family, on your job or in your neighborhood can improve your patience and understanding with effort. Rather than seeing you're 6 year old as a cranky, irritable problem you might reach a conclusion that your child is tired and needs rest. Don't fret if people don't thank you and make excuses about not thanking you. Don't sweat the small stuff in life.

In closing, try these things for yourself. What's the alternative? Gratitude is the best approach to life.

References: Dr. John H. Skiare, 2006, LifeScript, Healthy Living for Women, 2011, Robert Emmons, Ph.D, Researcher, UC Davis, 2011, Wall Street Journal, 2010.

Friends Help With Fundraiser



Left: Stan Zook with Kari Titus
Above: Liz White, Sheril McWhirter and Lynn Shaw love Kari Titus!

On November 11 friends, family and other community members joined the Titus family and gathered for a sit down dinner to help raise funds for Kari Titus, who is battling cancer. Billed as the "We Love Kari Titus Fundraiser," the dinner was held at Black Bear and included

lasagna, salad, bread and apple crisp. Reservations were taken for five seatings starting at 5:00 PM, and friends and family served the meals and drinks. Winners for raffle prizes were drawn throughout the night. Kari Titus was able to be on hand for the entire evening, visiting with guests.

Banks-Vernonia Linear Trail Wins 'Project of the Year'

Washington County's Department of Land Use and Transportation is pleased to announce that the Oregon Chapter of the American Public Works Association (OR APWA) has recognized a transportation project managed by the department. OR APWA selected the Banks-Vernonia Linear Trail Extension and Trailhead project as its Transportation Project of the Year. The award recognizes quality, innovation and cooperation among the managing agency, its partners, consultants and construction contractors.

Evaluation criteria included public outreach efforts, environmental design considerations, timely completion, and overall safety factors. The project completed the final two-thirds of a mile of the 21-mile Banks-Vernonia State Trail, extending it to the City of Banks. The trail provides pedestrians, bicyclists and equestrians with a pleasant and safe travel route. In conjunction with the trail project, the County also managed construction of the Banks Trailhead parking area.

This project represented a collaborative effort between Washington County, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, the Oregon Department of Transportation and the City of Banks. The \$1.4 million trail project was funded by a Federal Transportation Enhancement Grant, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) administered by the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Oregon Parks and



Recreation Department, and Washington County. Carter and Company was the primary contractor.

The project commenced construction in May 2010 and was completed in October 2010. The Project of the Year award was presented to County Engineer Gary Stockhoff and Project Manager Matt Meier on October 20, 2011 during the OR APWA Fall Conference in Redmond. It was to be presented to the Board of County Commissioners at their regular board meeting on Tuesday, October 25, 2011. Chairman Andy Duyck said "This project presented a unique opportunity for several jurisdictions to pool resources to successfully deliver a regionally-significant recreational transportation enhancement."

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